****

BIG IDEA

Real friends show each other grace.

***WEEK 2  
TEACHING GUIDE***

WHAT? What are we talking about today?

BIBLE

1 Timothy 1:12-17: Acts 9:1-19: Proverbs 17:9

QUESTION **| "Who was a real friend to you this week?"**

* Welcome back to Real, where we're talking about "real" friendships! To get us started this week, I thought we could take a second to give some shout outs to the people who were real friends to us this past week.
* **So how about you? Who was a real friend to you this week and how?**
* **INSTRUCTIONS:** Give a few students a chance to respond by sharing their stories.

DISCUSSION

* + **What's your favorite quality in a "real" friend?**
  + **What do you think some of the differences are between a real friend and a fake friend?**

QUESTION **| "When might friends need to have hard conversations?"**

* Right now, maybe you're thinking about a time when . . .
  + You had to speak up to a friend.
  + A friend had to speak up to you.
  + You wish someone had spoken up when someone was going off-track.
* Without sharing any personal stories or details, **what are some examples of times when friends need to have hard conversations like these?**
* **INSTRUCTIONS:** Give a few students a chance to respond.
* Whether it's because someone makes an unwise or dangerous decision, or someone hurts someone else, there are a lot of reasons why friends might sometimes need to have hard conversations with each other.
  + This is who we are as humans, isn't it? We tend to think selfishly, forget our actions and words have consequences, and end up hurting ourselves and others.
  + So what do we do when a friend is messing up? How should we react when a friend tells us we're the ones messing up? And what would it look like for us to show real friendship during moments like this?

**SO WHAT? Why does it matter to God and to us?**

STORY **| Talk about a time a friend had a hard conversation with you.**

* **INSTRUCTIONS:** Tell a story from your own life (or ask a volunteer or student to tell a story) about a time a friend graciously confronted you about something you had done or were doing. Maybe you did something to hurt someone else or maybe you were making a choice that was hurting you. Either way, share how the friend confronted you, why their approach was helpful to you, and what changed as a result.
* When we're the one being confronted, we sometimes try to minimize our problem. But in friendships, when we're making unwise making choices or behaving in ways that are hurtful, it has a ripple effect.
  + If you think your choices are only hurting you, they're not — they're hurting the people you love too.
  + If you've hurt a friend, you might think the problem is only between the two of you. But it's not — that hurt impacts the other people in your group of friends too.
* And on the other hand, when we think we might need to confront a friend for their behavior or choices, it can be pretty intimidating and confusing. Depending on the size of the issue, we might wonder . . .
  + "What if they don't listen?" If they don't agree with you or want to change, how might your friendship change?
  + "Is this big enough to end our friendship?" Letting go can feel like a major loss, especially if this friend held a special place in your life.
  + "How can we make things right?" Letting go of a friendship isn't always the only route! But figuring out how to move forward can be a challenge.

DISCUSSION

* + **When there's a problem in your friendships, are you more likely to confront someone, get confronted, or neither? Why?**
  + **Have you ever confronted a friend or been confronted by a friend? What happened and how did it end?**

DISCUSSION **| Defining "Grace"**

* In my friendships, I've been on both sides of this situation from time to time. Sometimes I was the friend who was really in need of grace. Sometimes I was the friend struggling to have grace for a friend who messed up.
* We're going to be talking about this word "grace" a lot today, so let's explore that word a little bit together.
* **INSTRUCTIONS:** Spend a few moments discussing the idea of "grace" together by letting students share and debate their thoughts. As they discuss, write key words, ideas, and examples on [sticky notes](https://growcurriculum.org/growstudents-real-amazon/) or note cards and display them on a board. Be sure students know there are no wrong answers for these questions!
  + **What do you think "grace" means?**
  + **When should you have grace for a friend?**
  + **Do you think it's ever okay for your grace for a friend to run out? Why or why not?**
  + **Do you think it's possible to end a friendship in a "gracious" way?**
* I think the simplest definition of "grace" is "giving someone a gift they don't deserve." That gift could be:
  + A second chance.
  + Kindness.
  + Patience.
  + Forgiveness.
  + Love.
  + Or all sorts of things!

SCRIPTURE **| Acts 9:1-19**

* You'll see the word "grace" a lot in the Bible. Sometimes it's an invitation for us to show grace to each other, but even more importantly, the Bible tells us the story of how God has shown grace to you and me.
* Let's take a look at a story in which a man named Saul was shown some pretty incredible grace — both by God and by a man named Ananias.
  + We can find Saul's story in the book of Acts, which is shorthand for The Acts of the Apostles. The stories found in this book are all about the actions the earliest followers of Jesus took to help spread Jesus' message after he left earth.
  + Saul, however, did not start off as someone committed to spreading the good news of Jesus. In fact, Saul was actively fighting the spreading of the gospel by imprisoning and even killing Jesus-followers.
  + Ananias, on the other hand, was a dedicated follower of Jesus. He knew Saul's reputation and probably saw Saul as one of his biggest enemies. But let's take a look at what grace can do.
* **INSTRUCTIONS:** Read Acts 9:1-19.
* There are a lot of things God could have done with Saul in this scenario. Saul could have been blinded forever, or killed, or imprisoned, or punished in some way. Instead, God gave Saul a mission, healed him, and made him a leader in the early church.
  + If you said Saul was unworthy of the grace and forgiveness God gave him in this moment, I wouldn't blame you. But that's the point of grace, isn't it? If we deserved it, it wouldn't be grace!
  + With each and every one of us (Saul included) God went first by showing us grace even when we didn't deserve it. But that's not the end of the story. Like we see with Ananias, God then challenges us to show each other grace in the same way.
* After this moment, Saul went from murdering Christians to following Jesus with his whole life. The grace Saul was shown impacted his life so much that he actually became one of God's greatest messengers. He eventually wrote much of what we now call the New Testament of the Bible. That's how powerful grace can be.

SCRIPTURE **| 1 Timothy 1:12-17**

* Many years later, Saul (who is also called Paul in other places of the Bible) wrote a letter to a man he was mentoring named Timothy. In that letter, he recounted some of the things he learned from his big encounter with grace.
* **INSTRUCTIONS:** Read 1 Timothy 1:12-17.
* When Paul experienced grace from God and Ananias, he didn't take it as a free pass to go and continue doing all the horrible things he had been doing. Instead, he was filled with gratitude. It changed his life.
  + Paul understood that as a recipient of God's grace, he had a responsibility to share that grace with others.
  + In the same way, when we recognize the grace that's been given to us, it becomes so much easier to offer grace to others when they mess up — especially when those people are our friends.
* No friend is perfect (and neither are you). But when someone has messed up or caused someone pain, **real friends show each other grace.**

**NOW WHAT? What does God want us to do about it?**

RESPONSE **| Take the Next Step**

* This week, I'm going to challenge all of us to do something difficult but so worth it: take a step toward grace. Whether you need to give grace, receive grace, or a little bit of both, take that next step today.
  + Send that text message.
  + Have that conversation.
  + Give an apology.
  + Offer some forgiveness.
* What your next step toward grace is depends on you, but here are a few ideas to get you started. Maybe you need to . . .
  + **ACCEPT GOD'S GRACE.** Have you ever had a moment like the one Saul had? Has God's grace ever transformed you from the inside out? If not, today is a great day to begin. Take a step toward Jesus for the first time and find out just how big his love and grace for you really is.
  + **EXTEND GOD'S GRACE.** Have you been holding a grudge against a friend because of something they did? Have you been avoiding or talking about someone because you don't agree with their choices? If so, what would it look like for you to give that person grace — a gift you're not sure they deserve?
    - You may not know how to forgive yet, but you can choose to be kind in the meantime.
    - You may not know how to forget what happened, but you can tell them how much you would like to keep moving forward.
    - You may not be sure what to do about your disagreements yet, but you can ask them to help you understand their perspective.
  + **COMBINE GRACE AND TRUTH.** Do you have a friend who is making choices right now that hurt them or others? A real friend is someone willing to do what's uncomfortable by telling the truth — but with lots of love, humility, and (of course) grace. If there is a conversation you've been avoiding or putting off, maybe it's time to have it.
  + **ASK FOR GRACE.** If you know you're the friend who's been messing up or causing hurt, maybe it's time for you to reach out and begin to make things right. It's scary to admit you were wrong or to ask for forgiveness, but it's what a real friend would do — and remember, no friend is perfect. Including you.
  + **GIVE YOURSELF GRACE.** Friendship is hard work. Owning up to our mistakes is hard work. Calling out someone we love when they're making a mistake is hard work. So as you learn to show each other grace, I hope you'll give yourself some too.
    - You're going to make mistakes.
    - You're going to say things you regret.
    - You're going to hurt or frustrate your friends.
    - You're going to fall short of what God wants for you.
    - And still, there is so much grace — more than you can imagine!
* **So what's your next step?** And what are you going to do about it?
* **INSTRUCTIONS:** Invite students to take out their phones and add a new one-hour event to their calendar (or set an alarm) called "Take the Next Step." If they already know what step they need to take, tell them to jot some notes in the note section so they don't forget what they want to do when they get that reminder. If they're not sure, they can use that time to reflect and then take a step.
* We said it last week and we'll say it again this week. Friendship isn't about being perfect — that's never going to happen. But when there is hurt, or mistakes, or unwise choices, real friends choose to do for each other what God has already done for all of us. **Real friends show each other grace.**

DISCUSSION

* + **Read Proverbs 17:9. When you're in a disagreement with a friend, do you think it's possible to talk about it with others without gossiping? Why or why not?**
  + **Are you struggling to show grace in any of your friendships right now? What would help you extend more grace to them?**
  + **This week, what's one step you're going to take toward more grace in your friendships?**