

# It Starts with the Heart

## Romans 2:17-31

**May Memory Verse:** Psalm 56:3 “When I am afraid, I put my trust in You.”

NOTE: Hold your kids and yourself accountable – say the verse to one another without looking! If you do, post a video and tag us so we can see it, too.

**Opening Activity:** Choose one or two that seem most appropriate for your children to start the lesson. Alternatively, feel free to work one or two into the lesson if your kids start getting antsy and losing focus (like ours do).

- Practice saying Psalm 56:3 together. Say it in funny voices, say it as loud or as quiet as you can. When kids express fear throughout the week, remind them of the verse and continue saying it together.
- Pray together as a family for any needs you have. Remember to thank God for what He is doing, too!
- Tell your kids you are going to think of a number between 1 and 10. Have them guess the number. If they get it right, ask how they knew. Talk about how we are the only ones who know what is going on in our hearts and minds, except for God. Let your kids take a turn choosing a number, too, and keep the conversation going with some of these questions:
  - Did anyone else know what number you picked?
  - Does God know what number you picked?
  - Why didn't you think about a color instead of a number?
- FOR FAMILIES WITH 2+ KIDS: Choose an easy task for your kids to do, such as putting their shoes away. Tell your kids, “I have a special job for you. [Child 1], you pretend to be really happy and cheerful while you do your job. [Child 2], you pretend to be really grumpy and upset when you do your job. Ready? [Explain the job and have your kids do it, pretending to be either happy or grumpy.]” After they've completed their job, ask these follow-up questions:
  - Who did their job?
  - Who did it with a happy heart?
  - Who did it with a grumpy heart?
  - Who do you think was a better helper?
  - Who do you think pleased God more?
  - Why do you think God was pleased with the happier heart?

“The Bible says that obeying only matters if our hearts are obeying, too. We can't fully obey with a grumpy heart.”

### Lesson:

- Provide a quick recap to your kids: “We are learning about the book of Romans, written by a missionary named Paul who loved Jesus. We have learned that we are called to obey, to belong to Jesus, and to be holy. We also learned about how Paul loved his friends in Rome and wrote them a letter because he wanted them to know about Jesus. We've talked a lot about making righteous choices, or good choices, instead of making bad or sinful choices. God rewards good or righteous choices and punishes bad or sinful choices.”
- Introduce the passage: “Today we are going to read Romans 2:17-31. Paul is talking about how obeying in our hearts matters more than obeying with our hands.”

- Read Romans 2:17-31, stopping to repeat verses, explain words, and ask questions, as appropriate for your kiddos. This is a long and winding passage, so focus specifically on verses 29-31 for this lesson.
  - Basically, it is not merely what we do that helps us know God more. It is what is inside our hearts. We could do all the right things, but if our hearts are prideful, lustful, angry, bitter, selfish, etc., then doing the right things does not matter. We are simply going through those motions for the wrong reasons.
  - This is a key concept for kids (and adults!) to understand: Obedience is not merely doing the thing they were asked to do. True obedience stems from a heart that is yielded to God and seeks to honor Him first.

Consider reading the passage in *The Message*, which uses contemporary slang to present scripture in a much more informal manner. It was translated from the original Greek and Hebrew but was written to connect contemporary readers to the text similarly to how the original audience would have felt. *The Message* is available on [www.BibleGateway.com](http://www.BibleGateway.com).

- Make it relatable through the story of Jonah:
  - “In the Bible, there is a story of a man named Jonah who (finally) obeyed God in his actions, but not in his heart. Let’s look at that story next.”
  - Briefly recap the story of Jonah: God told Jonah to go to Ninevah and preach. Jonah disobeyed and sailed in the opposite direction. A storm came. The other sailors tossed Jonah out of the boat after he admitted to disobeying God and causing the storm. God sent a giant fish to swallow Jonah. After three days, the fish spat Jonah onto the land. God told Jonah to go to Ninevah again. Jonah obeyed. He preached to Ninevah. But when the Ninevites repented, Jonah became angry in his heart.
  - Ask:
    - Do you think Jonah really wanted to obey God in his heart?
    - Did Jonah have a good attitude or a bad attitude about obeying God?
    - Do you think Jonah honored or pleased God with his actions?
    - Do you think Jonah honored or pleased God with his heart?
    - Which does God care about more – our actions or our hearts?
    - How do our hearts help us decide what to do?
      - This is a deep question. But talk about how if our hearts want to be obedient, our actions will reflect that or follow our hearts. Alternatively, if our hearts don’t want to obey, our actions and attitudes can never be fully good or righteous.
- Explain the Gospel: God created everything, including people. But the first people – Adam and Eve – chose to disobey God. Now, everyone sins with their bodies *and* in their hearts. The punishment or consequence for sin is death and separation from God forever. But God sent His son Jesus to earth so that we don’t have to be punished forever for our sins. Jesus lived a sinless life. He was put to death on the cross, taking the punishment of our sin and guilt. He rose to life three days later, showing that He won over sin and death. If we ask Jesus to forgive our sins, He will. Then we can know Him, be part of His family, serve Him, and spend eternity (or forever) with Him in heaven. Eternal life with Jesus is our reward for following and obeying Him.
- “Obedience starts in our hearts, not in our actions. This week, let’s look for ways to obey with our hearts, not just our hands.”
- Pray, then do a couple of the activities, as appropriate for your family.

**Activity Ideas:** These are designed for use at the end of the lesson or throughout to break up the “sitting still” if needed.

- Make an obedient heart craft. Cut a heart out of construction paper and write the word “OBEY” on it. Have your kids decorate the hearts, trace the words, etc. Talk about how we can choose to obey with our hearts *and* our actions.  
SUPPLIES NEEDED: Paper, Pencil, Scissors, Crayons, Markers, etc.
- Have a scavenger hunt! Have one of your kids find a bottle of bubbles and the other child find the bubble wand (or use two other things that go together, like a shoe and a shoelace, a matching set of socks or gloves, or a piece of paper and crayons). Talk about how one of those things is not any good without the other. A bottle of bubbles can only sit on the shelf or make a mess unless the wand is with it. However, when we work together, we can make something fun (bubbles!) that we can all enjoy. That’s like how when our hearts and our actions go together – when we have a good attitude and our actions are obedient – we please God. But when we have just one of those things, we are not going to please God. It start with our hearts.  
SUPPLIES NEEDED: Bubbles and Bubble Wand (or other items that go together)
- Print the heart activity sheet on the following page (or make your own).  
SUPPLIES NEEDED: Coloring page/White paper, Crayons, Markers, etc.

# OBEY FROM THE HEART

