

From Outlaw to Outstanding

The Story of John Perkins, Founder of Voice of Calvary Ministries

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Through this teaching aid your class will learn:

- God can remove hate from our hearts.
- God can fill our hearts with forgiveness.
- God wants all people to work together.
- God's love is powerful.

Background Material for the Teacher

John Perkins was born in 1930 in New Hebron, Mississippi during a time of great racial tension. As a child he picked cotton to help his family survive. When he discovered God's great love for him he developed a passion for spreading the Gospel and followed God down some surprising roads. Because of his success as a civil rights activist, John suffered threats, beatings and imprisonment. But he refused to give in to others' hatred. Instead he worked toward reconciling the races and providing equality and justice for all. He is an outstanding leader, not just in the black community, but in the nation.

Harambee (Huh-RAHM-bay) is a Swahili word meaning "pulling together." In Africa Harambee events are held to build cooperation and community. Through the lesson and

theme-related songs, games, activities and snack kids will learn to support and forgive each other no matter what their race or ethnic background. Kids will learn, as John Perkins did, that God created and loves everyone.

Memory Verse

Teach

What does it mean to forgive? (*To give up an unfriendly feeling toward someone who has been unkind to you.*) Maybe the person has hit you, or said something mean to you, or broken a promise. Forgiving someone who has hurt your body or hurt your feelings is hard, isn't it? Sometimes you want to make that person as unhappy as you are. That is called *getting even*.

But what does *God* want you to do? (*Read verse from Bible.*) Can you name three things God asks you to do instead of trying to get even with people? (*Be kind, tenderhearted, forgiving.*) God

has given you an example. He says you should forgive—"Even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you."

How does God forgive? (*Say dramatically.*) "Oh, since Jesus died on the cross for your sins I guess I'll have to forgive you." (*No.*) God loves you and wants to forgive you when you receive Jesus as your Savior. Does God say, "Well, I'll forgive you for that lie but I won't forgive you for stealing that candy"? (*No.*) God says in 1 John 1:9

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Teacher's Focus

Main Truth

God wants to give you a forgiving heart.

Teaching Objective

To show that despite the hardships a child faces God can give him a forgiving heart and use him for His glory.

Memory Verse

"And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you" (Ephesians 4:32).

Scripture Study

Ephesians 4:32; 1 John 1:9; Romans 5:8; John 3:16.

Suggested Songs

"Jump"—audio-enhanced PowerPoint visual on this CD along with a PDF of the sheet music.

"In Love's Circle"—audio-enhanced PowerPoint visual on this CD along with a PDF of the sheet music and teaching instructions.

He will forgive all our sin, if we confess it to Him.

God wants you to forgive others the way He forgives you—lovingly and completely.

It isn't easy to forgive like God does. You need help! If you have never asked the Lord Jesus to be your Savior, you can do that today. Then He will live in you and give you the *power* to forgive those who hurt you.

Drill

Divide into two groups. Have first group ask, "What does God want you to do to those who hurt you?" Second group replies with first part of verse—"And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another." Have first group ask, "How does God want you to forgive?" Second group replies with second part of verse—"Even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you." Change places and have second group ask the questions. Then let individuals volunteer to ask whichever question they choose and pick a volunteer to answer.

Lesson

Introduction to Perkins Family



The police cruiser rumbled down the dirt road in a cloud of dust on its way to the Perkins' shack. The angry sheriff snarled, "I know old Aunt Coot makes whiskey at her place. She's not smart enough to hide it from me forever. When I find it, I'm runnin' in that whole Perkins family!"

The sheriff hated the Perkins family, not just because they were breaking the law, but because they were different from him. His skin was light and theirs was dark.



"Rosie Lee!" hissed young John Perkins. "Hide! Here comes the sheriff." Rosie Lee knew exactly what to do. She and John dove for the nearest cover—a clump of thick bushes. The two cousins peeked out from the leaves, watching the sheriff kick at rocks and bushes, hoping to uncover Aunt Coot's stash of whiskey. The longer he searched, the madder he got.



"It's gotta be here somewhere!" he growled as he kicked the dust.

John and Rosie Lee smothered their giggles with both hands. "That stupid man is standin' right on top of the stash!" squealed John in delight. The sheriff had been outsmarted again!

The Perkins family were considered outlaws in their small Mississippi town of New Hebron. They were tough and always ready for a fight. But Grandma was tender with John and always ready to give him a hug. She had cared for him since his mother died when he was only seven months old. His father, Jap, had left John and his older brother, Clyde, to be raised by Grandma and her family. Four-year-old John did not remember his mama and hardly ever saw his daddy. *Someday I'll go live with my daddy*, dreamed John. *Someday*.

(No flashcard.)

In the meantime, John's days were filled with hard work. "Wake up, John," called Grandma each morning. "That cotton ain't gonna pick itself." After a small breakfast of gravy and biscuits, John headed to the fields to pick cotton

with his family. He was only four, but everyone was expected to help. The Perkins family did not own the cotton fields. The landowner paid them according to how much cotton they picked each day. Usually the pay was much less than it should have been so they felt cheated. Like all other black people in New Hebron, John learned to hate the white landowners.

John Loses His Dad

One night as John slept he heard a deep, soft voice calling him, "Baby. Baby, wake up." Then he felt the big strong arms of a man lift him and hold him tight. It was Daddy!

"I knew you would come," sighed John as he snuggled closer to his father's chest.

For the next few days, John followed his father everywhere. He did not even mind when his father called him Baby. It was so good to belong to someone—to be loved by his daddy. But John's joy did not last.

John sat silently on the cot as Jap gathered his belongings. He hugged his family, told them good-bye then started off through the cotton fields, down the railroad tracks toward town. But John sneaked quietly behind him.



John could not keep the tears from filling his eyes. Finally, he pleaded through his sobs, "Daddy, don't leave. Take me with you!" Startled, Jap turned to see his son had been following him.



"You get along home! You can't come with me. Here, get yourself some

candy.” Jap placed a few coins in John’s hand. But John did not want candy. He wanted to be with his daddy. As Jap continued on John continued, too.

When Jap noticed John again he broke off a twig from a nearby tree and swatted him with it. Jap was not meaning to hurt him, just make him turn around and go home. Jap knew the woman he was living with did not want children around so he chose to be with her instead of caring for his son. John’s heart ached with emptiness as he watched his daddy walk out of his life. John cried himself to sleep that night. He had lost his daddy forever.

Work vs. School

(No flashcard.)

Soon, though, a happy event took place. After years of listening to his cousins’ stories about school, John was finally old enough to go himself. *Oh boy, school!* thought John. *I guess I’ll learn my letters and numbers now.* In his excitement, he hardly noticed his hungry stomach.

Like many other black children in New Hebron, the Perkins cousins did not start school until late December after the whole cotton crop had been picked. That morning, they started their chilly five-mile walk to the school house before the sun came up.

“Hurry up, John,” urged Rosie Lee. “You’re gonna get some licks your very first day if you’re late.” Rosie Lee’s warnings and John’s excitement kept him going. But his interest in school faded in the coming weeks.

Happily for John, in just four months Uncle Bud said, “School’s out for you and Rosie Lee. It’s time to start workin’ the fields again.” The Perkins family needed everyone working so they would earn enough money for food. One cotton crop after another came until John was nearly grown.

His brother, Clyde, had been in the army for several years fighting a war in Europe.

Clyde Comes Home



“He’s here! Clyde is home!” shouted John one day as the bus pulled into town. The whole family greeted their soldier. Sixteen-year-old John proudly carried his big brother’s duffel bag. Clyde looked so handsome in his uniform decorated with awards for bravery. But the bravery and self-respect he gained in the army would lead to trouble at home.

(No flashcard.)

A few Saturday nights later, Clyde and John walked into town together and then went separate ways to meet their own friends. The fun ended suddenly.

“Come quick! Clyde’s been shot!” someone called out.

John and his friend ran to the rear door of the doctor’s office. It was true. There on the doctor’s table was Clyde, his stomach covered in bloody bandages. John stroked his brother’s cheek. “Don’t die,” begged John.

“You’ve got to get him to a hospital,” said the doctor.

The closest hospital is an hour and a half away! Clyde’s dyin’! He ain’t gonna make it, worried John.

John held Clyde’s head in his arms all the way to the hospital as Clyde tossed about in pain. “Clyde, you’ve got to live,” whispered John to his brother. But the gunshot wound was very serious and Clyde did die.

John found out the sheriff had shot Clyde for fighting back after being hit with the sheriff’s billy club. John’s heart was filled with hate! John’s grandma knew he would find a way to kill the sheriff, so she arranged to send John out of town. If the white men knew what he was planning they would kill him first.

On the train to California, clutching his lunch bag and a paper sack of clothes, John promised himself, *I’m never goin’ back! There’s nothin’ good in*

Mississippi and I don’t ever want to see it again.

A New Life in California

John’s life in the beautiful green hills of California was a dream come true. His willingness to work hard was rewarded by promotions, greater responsibility and higher pay. His happiness seemed complete when he married his sweetheart, Vera Mae, and started a family.



One Sunday, John’s oldest son, Spencer, tugged at John’s sleeve and said, “Come to church with me, Daddy.” Vera Mae had been raised in a church and loved God, but John’s family never went to church—except for summer revival meetings and funerals. Four-year-old Spencer insisted. He loved church and knew how much God loved him. Every evening before dinner he shared his weekly Bible verses.

“God loves you, Daddy,” said little Spencer with a cheerful hug.

God couldn’t love me, thought John. *I broke the law and I hate those white people in Mississippi who treated me so badly. Anyway, I don’t need religion.* But John knew there was something missing in his life. He tried to fill up that empty space with success, money and family but he kept feeling empty.

“Vera Mae,” said John, “we work hard and have a beautiful home. Our kids are great and we have the money I dreamed about as a child. But lately...I don’t know. Something is wrong.”



John could see how happy Spencer was when he memorized Bible verses and he knew Vera Mae had a strong love for Jesus, so he decided to read the Bible and go to church with Spencer. For the first time John realized the Bible was written to all people, not just white people.



He started to understand what the Bible meant when it said, “God commendeth [showed] his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us” (Rom. 5:8).

(No flashcard.)

God does love me, just like Spencer said! thought John. Dear God, I have broken the law and hated lots of people. I even wanted to kill some of them. Now I understand that You sent Your Son Jesus to be born a baby and grow up without doing anything wrong. He died on the cross and came alive again, taking the punishment I deserve for doing wrong things. I don't deserve Your forgiveness, but I am asking You to forgive me. Please, come into my life and be my Savior from sin.

The emptiness John had felt in his life was replaced with a new feeling—hunger! Not the hunger in his stomach like he had when he was a little boy, but a hunger to know God and His Word.



John began attending Child Evangelism Fellowship meetings where his hunger was fed. He learned more about God's wonderful plan for us as he studied the Bible and learned how to teach the truth to others. As John's faith

in God grew strong, he began seeing other God-hungry people around him. Many of them were children, so John and Vera Mae started a Good News Club in their home where they taught God's Word.

Some of the God-hungry people John noticed were young men like John had been: hate-filled law breakers from the South. Visiting these young men in their work camp gave John a sense that God could use him to help other young men avoid a life of crime and poverty. But following God in that way meant some big changes for John.

Back to Mississippi



One day John realized God needed him in Mississippi. “Are you crazy?” shouted his surprised friends. “You finally have a nice life! Why are you going back?” No one wanted John to return to the hard life in Mississippi. Many of his family had moved to California to escape hatred and poverty.

“God wants me to return to Mississippi. I can help other black people build better lives for themselves and show them how much God loves them,” answered John. “God loves those white people in Mississippi, too. They are as bound up in hate as I was and need to know how God can change their lives.”

John dreamed of a time when whites and blacks could work and worship together in peace. “The solution is not to return evil for evil, but to forgive each other for past wrongs and get to know each other,” explained John.

Do you think John knew our memory verse? I'm sure he did. Let's say it together. *(Have children stand and quote Ephesians 4:32.)*

John obeyed God's command to forgive. So the Perkins family set out for Mississippi. Would it be easy to go back to the place where people hurt

him? No. But this time God was with John and his family.

In the years that followed, John and Vera Mae held many Good News Clubs in their home in Mississippi. Those Bible clubs grew to include adults, both black and white. Then the adults formed a group called Voice of Calvary Ministries. Before long, John began to see something else that needed to be done.



“Vera Mae, the everyday needs and the heart needs of black people have to be met at the same time. People are still dying of hunger in the richest farmland in the country. And the children—they can't grow up and get good jobs without knowing how to read!”

The workers at Voice of Calvary Ministries joined John and Vera Mae in solving these problems. They started an after-school tutoring program to teach reading and math. They built a playground and gym to keep the young people busy and out of trouble. They helped get better housing for black families and eventually a farming program to provide better food.

At last, John's dream of whites and blacks working and worshipping side by side was beginning to take shape.

(No flashcard.)

But some whites did not think blacks deserved any rights or anything nice. As life improved in African-American communities, these white people got angrier and more violent. John became the target of their hatred. He and Vera Mae were threatened many times. Friends had to protect them as they slept. John was thrown in jail for nothing and beaten so badly he almost died.

Did all of that make John hate again? No!



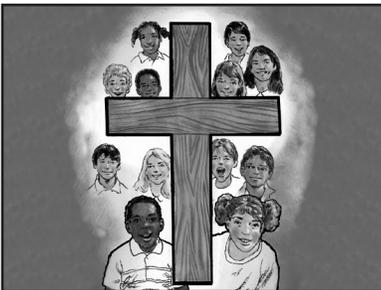
“Hate destroys,” said John. “God doesn’t see black faces or white faces. He sees people who need to know He loves them and will forgive them. God changed my life, so I know He can change others.” John never stopped preaching and living God’s message of love and forgiveness.

God used John to help many people and He made him a strong leader in America. John visited presidents in the White House. He traveled around the world and started several other ministries. One of them was named, “Harambee,” which means, “Let’s pull together.” That is what John wants for all of us, to pull together and not hold grudges or hate.

Application

Maybe you are like John and have had bad things happen to you. God does not want you to have a hate-filled heart. He wants to help you forgive others.

John does not take credit for his forgiving heart. He knows the power to forgive came from God. You can have that power, too, even though someone has hurt you badly. You can ask God to take away your anger and give you a forgiving heart. But first you must have God’s forgiveness for your sin.



God knew you before you were born. He knew you would break His rules—like “Do not lie, do not steal, obey your mother and father.” God, who is perfectly good, has to punish sin. But God is also love. The Bible says that God so loved the world—every person of every color and size, from all kinds of

families, rich or poor—that he gave His only Son, Jesus, to take the punishment for your sins (John 3:16). Jesus let wicked men nail Him to a wooden cross and there He bled and died on the cross to take the punishment for your sin. Jesus was buried but in three days God made Him alive again. Jesus is alive in Heaven today.

Now listen to God’s promise. “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life” (John 3:16). That means *anyone* who believes on the Lord Jesus will not be punished forever and ever but have everlasting life.



If you believe Jesus died for you and you ask Him to forgive your sin, He will not only forgive you; He will be with you forever—here on earth and someday in Heaven!



You can talk to Jesus right now like John Perkins did. If you want Jesus to be your Savior from sin pray quietly after me, “Dear Lord Jesus, I believe You died on the cross to take the punishment for my sins. Please come into my heart and be my Savior. Thank You for giving me everlasting life.”

Maybe you had asked Jesus to be your Savior before today, but you are angry at someone. You can ask God to forgive you by saying something like this, “Dear God, I have been angry at _____. I know now that it is a sin and it makes You unhappy. Please forgive me and give me a forgiving heart.” *(Give time for children to pray quietly.)*

If you prayed either of those prayers today, or if you have some questions, be sure to stop and talk to me at the end of class.

Resources:

Berk, Stephen E., *A Time to Heal: John Perkins, Community Development, and Racial Reconciliation*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, 1997.

Whalin, W. Terry, *John Perkins*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1996.

Mitchell, Jerry, “The Preacher and the Klansman,” *The Clarion-Ledger*, Jackson, Mississippi. March 1-13, 1998.

HOW TO LEAD A CHILD TO CHRIST

① Show him his **NEED** of salvation; that all persons are not going to Heaven; that no one in himself is good enough to go and the result of sin is forever separation from God (Rom. 3:23; Rev. 21:27; John 8:21, 24).



② Show him the **WAY** of salvation. Salvation is a free gift because the Lord Jesus took our place on the cross, was buried and rose again from the dead (John 3:16; Eph. 2:8; 1 Cor. 15:3, 4).



③ Lead him to **RECEIVE** the gift of salvation, even Jesus Christ, by trusting Him as his personal Savior (John 1:12; Rev. 3:20).



④ From the Word of God, help him find **ASSURANCE** of his salvation (John 3:36; Rev. 3:20; Heb. 13:5).

⑤ Lead him to **CONFESS** Christ (Matt. 10:32). This confession should be made to you, other workers, later to his friends and as circumstances permit, in a public church service.

