One New Family

Scripture Set on Judging, Division, Factions & Power

"Mercy wins over judgment" (James 2:13) • Shorthand: NF.1 – NF.17

ID	Topic	Scripture Passage
Part 1: How God Sees Every Person		
NF.1	Made in God's Image: Every Person Has Worth	Genesis 1:26-27; James 3:9-10
NF.2	God Shows No Favoritism	Acts 10:9-35
NF.3	We All Stand on Level Ground	Romans 2:1-4; 3:21-24; 1 Timothy 1:15-16
Part 2: The Sin of Ranking and Judging		
NF.4	The Log and the Speck	Matthew 7:1-5, 12
NF.5	Favoritism Is Sin; Mercy Wins over Judgment	James 2:1-13
NF.6	"I'm Not Like Him": Comparing Charges and God's Mercy	Luke 18:9-14; Matthew 12:1-8
Part 3: Factions, Politics, and Power		
NF.7	Biting and Devouring: Factions Are Works of the Flesh	Galatians 5:13-15, 19-26; 1 Corinthians 1:10-13
NF.8	When Peter Gave In to the Politics	Galatians 2:11-16
NF.9	Shot-Callers or Servants?	Mark 10:35-45; 3 John 9-11
NF.10	Love or Hate: There Is No Neutral Ground	1 John 2:9-11; 3:10-24
Part 4: Jesus Breaks Down the Walls		
NF.11	Jesus Touches the Untouchable	Mark 1:40-45; Luke 15:1-2
NF.12	Received When Everyone Feared Him	Acts 9:10-31; Philemon 8-18
NF.13	One New Family: The Wall Is Down	Ephesians 2:13-22; Colossians 3:11-15
NF.14	Seeing People the New Way	2 Corinthians 5:16-21; Matthew 5:9, 43-48
Part 5: Living It Out Inside		
NF.15	When You're the One Treated as Less	James 1:2-4, 19-22; 1 Peter 2:19-23
NF.16	Wise as Serpents, Gentle as Doves	Daniel 1:8-16; Matthew 10:16; Romans 12:17-21
NF.17	Honor One Another: A New Culture Inside	Romans 12:9-16; Philippians 2:1-4

Level 1 (this page) is the set itself. **Level 2** gives a key verse, background, and questions for each passage. **Level 3** is a deep dive for leaders and coaches. Use whichever level fits your group. Pairs well with Repentance (RP), Words of the Mouth (W3: gossip and slander), and Dangerous Desires (DD9: rivalry and factions).

Level 2: Study Helps

Each session uses the same pattern. **Look Back:** How are you? Did you obey and share last time? **Look Up:** Read the passage aloud, have someone retell it, then use the questions below. **Look Forward:** What will I obey? Who will I share this with? Pray for each other by name.

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PART 1: HOW GOD SEES EVERY PERSON

NF.1 Made in God's Image: Every Person Has Worth

Read: Genesis 1:26-27; James 3:9-10

> *"So God created human beings in his own image. In the image of God he created them; male and female he created them."*
> **Genesis 1:27 (NLT)**

What's happening

Before anyone had a charge, a race, a crew, or a reputation, God made every human being in His own image. That is where a person's worth comes from. James says it makes no sense to praise God and then curse people made in His image with the same mouth.

Discover

1. What makes a human being valuable, according to Genesis 1?
2. What does James say is wrong with cursing people?
3. Who do you find it hardest to see as made in God's image?

Obey this week

Pick one person you look down on. Each day this week, thank God that He made that person in His image, and pray for them by name.

NF.2 God Shows No Favoritism

Read: Acts 10:9-35

> *"Then Peter replied, 'I see very clearly that God shows no favoritism.'"*
> **Acts 10:34 (NLT)**

What's happening

Jewish believers did not eat with or enter the homes of Gentiles. God gave Peter a vision and told him not to call any person unclean. Peter crossed the line into Cornelius's house and saw God pour out His Spirit on people he had been taught to avoid.

Discover

1. What did Peter believe about Gentiles before the vision? What changed?
2. What did it cost Peter to walk into Cornelius's house?
3. Who are the "Gentiles" in your unit, the people you were taught to keep away from?

Obey this week

Ask God to show you one person you've treated as "unclean." Greet them with respect this week.

NF.3 We All Stand on Level Ground

Read: Romans 2:1-4; 3:21-24; 1 Timothy 1:15-16

> *"We are made right with God by placing our faith in Jesus Christ. And this is true for everyone who believes, no matter who we are."*
> **Romans 3:22 (NLT)**

What's happening

Paul says that when we condemn others, we condemn ourselves, because we do the same kinds of things. Everyone has sinned; everyone who is made right is made right the same way, by faith in Jesus. Paul called himself the worst of sinners. He had helped kill Christians, and he became the proof of how patient God is.

Discover

1. What does Romans 2:1 say happens when we judge others?
2. How is a person made right with God? Does the kind of sin change that?
3. Why do you think Paul called himself the worst sinner?

Obey this week

When you catch yourself thinking "at least I'm not like him," stop and pray: "Lord, I need the same mercy he does."

PART 2: THE SIN OF RANKING AND JUDGING

NF.4 The Log and the Speck

Read: Matthew 7:1-5, 12

> *"And why worry about a speck in your friend's eye when you have a log in your own?" … "Do to others whatever you would like them to do to you."*
> **Matthew 7:3, 12 (NLT)**

What's happening

Jesus says the measure we use on others will be used on us. He pictures a man with a log sticking out of his own eye trying to pull a speck out of someone else's. Jesus doesn't say "never help your brother." He says deal with your own log first, then you'll see clearly enough to help. Verse 12 sums it up: treat others the way you want to be treated.

Discover

1. What happens to people who judge, according to verses 1-2?
2. What is the order Jesus gives in verse 5?
3. If everyone on your unit lived by verse 12, what would change?

Obey this week

Name your log. Before you speak about anyone else's failure this week, deal with your own in prayer.

NF.5 Favoritism Is Sin; Mercy Wins over Judgment

Read: James 2:1-13

> *"There will be no mercy for those who have not shown mercy to others. But if you have been merciful, God will be merciful when he judges you."*
> **James 2:13 (NLT)**

What's happening

A rich man and a poor man walk into the church. The rich man gets the best seat; the poor man is told to stand or sit on the floor. James calls this sin, the same as breaking any other part of God's law. In a jail, the “seat” might be who you sit with at chow, who gets respect, or who gets left out because of a charge.

Discover

1. How does James describe the way people were treated in verses 2-4?
2. Why does James say favoritism breaks the whole law (vv8-11)?
3. What does verse 13 say wins over judgment?
4. Where do you see favoritism inside?

Obey this week

Give the “good seat” to someone who usually gets the worst one: a kindness, a greeting, your attention.

NF.6 “I'm Not Like Him”: Comparing Charges and God's Mercy

Read: Luke 18:9-14; Matthew 12:1-8

> *“I thank you, God, that I am not like other people—cheaters, sinners, adulterers. I’m certainly not like that tax collector!” … “‘I want you to show mercy, not offer sacrifices.’”*
> **Luke 18:11; Matthew 12:7 (NLT)**

What's happening

The Pharisee in Jesus' story compares his record to everyone else's and thanks God he isn't like them. That is comparing charges. The tax collector just begs for mercy, and he is the one who goes home right with God. In Matthew 12, religious leaders condemned Jesus' hungry disciples for breaking their rules. Jesus said they missed God's heart: He wants mercy more than religious performance.

Discover

1. Who was the Pharisee comparing himself to? What was he trusting in?
2. Why did the tax collector go home justified?
3. What does “I want you to show mercy, not offer sacrifices” mean for how we treat people with “worse” charges?

Obey this week

Stop ranking charges this week: don't ask about them, repeat them, or use them to place people. Pray the tax collector's prayer for yourself.

PART 3: FACTIONS, POLITICS, AND POWER

NF.7 Biting and Devouring: Factions Are Works of the Flesh

Read: Galatians 5:13-15, 19-26; 1 Corinthians 1:10-13

> *“But if you are always biting and devouring one another, watch out! Beware of destroying one another.”*
> **Galatians 5:15 (NLT)**

What's happening

Paul lists hostility, quarreling, jealousy, selfish ambition, dissension, and division right next to sexual sin and drunkenness. These are works of the flesh. In Corinth, believers split into camps: “I follow Paul,” “I follow Apollos.” Inside, it may be race, crew, or neighborhood. The Spirit produces the opposite: love, peace, patience, kindness.

Discover

1. Which works of the flesh in Galatians 5 show up in yard politics?
2. What were the Corinthians dividing over? What do people divide over inside?
3. What does the fruit of the Spirit look like between people of different groups?

Obey this week

Refuse one conversation this week that tears down another group. Speak a word of peace instead.

NF.8 When Peter Gave In to the Politics

Read: Galatians 2:11-16

> *"When he first arrived, he ate with the Gentile believers, who were not circumcised." Then, afraid of the group that insisted on circumcision, he pulled back and stopped eating with them.*
> **Galatians 2:12 (NLT, then paraphrase)**

What's happening

Even after his vision in Acts 10, Peter caved. When an influential group showed up, he stopped eating with Gentile believers because he feared what they'd think. Others followed him, even Barnabas. Paul confronted him face to face: this was not in step with the gospel. Peer pressure to stay with "your" people is not new.

Discover

1. Why did Peter stop eating with the Gentile believers?
2. What happened to the people watching Peter (v13)?
3. Why did Paul say this was against the gospel?
4. Where do you feel pressure to stay with "your" group?

Obey this week

Ask God for courage in one place where fear of your group keeps you from loving a brother or sister in Christ.

NF.9 Shot-Callers or Servants?

Read: Mark 10:35-45; 3 John 9-11

> *"But among you it will be different. Whoever wants to be a leader among you must be your servant."*
> **Mark 10:43 (NLT)**

What's happening

James and John wanted the top seats. Jesus said the rulers of this world lord it over people, but among His followers it will be different: the greatest serves. John warns about Diotrephes, a church leader who loved to be first, spread lies, and threw people out of the church. That is shot-caller behavior, even when it's dressed up as church.

Discover

1. How do the world's rulers treat people, according to Jesus?
2. What did Jesus say greatness looks like? What did He do (v45)?
3. What was Diotrephes doing to people (3 John 9-10)?
4. How can a Christian lead inside without controlling people?

Obey this week

Use whatever influence you have this week to serve someone with less power than you.

NF.10 Love or Hate: There Is No Neutral Ground

Read: 1 John 2:9-11; 3:10-24

> *“Dear children, let’s not merely say that we love each other; let us show the truth by our actions.”*
> **1 John 3:18 (NLT)**

What's happening

John says anyone who claims to be in the light but hates a brother or sister is still in darkness. Hating and shunning a fellow believer is not a small thing. God's children are known by love, and real love lays down its life and shares what it has. John also reminds us that the whole world lies under the power of the evil one (5:19). The yard's system is part of that world; God's family lives by a different one.

Discover

1. What does John say about someone who hates a brother or sister (2:9-11)?
2. How does John define real love (3:16-18)?
3. What does verse 3:1 say we are? How should that change how we treat other believers?

Obey this week

Show love by action, not words, to a believer outside your group: share something, help them, sit with them where it is safe to.

PART 4: JESUS BREAKS DOWN THE WALLS

NF.11 Jesus Touches the Untouchable

Read: Mark 1:40-45; Luke 15:1-2

> *“Moved with compassion, Jesus reached out and touched him. ‘I am willing,’ he said. ‘Be healed!’”*
> **Mark 1:41 (NLT)**

What's happening

Under the law, a man with leprosy had to live outside the camp and shout “Unclean!” so no one would come near him. Jesus could have healed him with a word. He touched him first. The religious leaders complained that Jesus welcomed sinners and ate with them. He did it anyway.

Discover

1. Why do you think Jesus touched the man before healing him?
2. What did the religious leaders complain about in Luke 15:2?
3. Who are the “untouchables” inside? How would Jesus treat them?

Obey this week

Do one act of compassion this week for someone others treat as untouchable.

NF.12 Received When Everyone Feared Him

Read: Acts 9:10-31; Philemon 8-18

> *“He is no longer like a slave to you. He is more than a slave, for he is a beloved brother, especially to me.”*
> **Philemon 16 (NLT)**

What's happening

Saul had arrested and helped kill Christians. When he met Jesus, believers were terrified of him. Ananias went anyway, and Barnabas vouched for him when no one else would. Years later, Paul sent back Onesimus, a runaway slave who had wronged his master, and asked Philemon to receive him as a beloved brother. The church was built by people who received those with the worst records.

Discover

1. Why were believers afraid of Saul? What did Ananias and Barnabas risk?
2. What did Paul ask Philemon to do with Onesimus?
3. What would it look like to be a Barnabas for someone inside?

Obey this week

Be a Barnabas: speak up for, encourage, or welcome one person whose past makes others keep their distance.

NF.13 One New Family: The Wall Is Down

Read: Ephesians 2:13-22; Colossians 3:11-15

> *"For Christ himself has brought peace to us. He united Jews and Gentiles into one people when, in his own body on the cross, he broke down the wall of hostility that separated us."*
> **Ephesians 2:14 (NLT)**

What's happening

The biggest wall in the first century was between Jews and Gentiles. A literal stone barrier in the temple kept Gentiles out. Paul says Jesus tore down that wall on the cross and made one new people. In Colossians, the old labels don't define us: Greek or Jew, slave or free. Christ is all that matters, and He lives in all of us.

Discover

1. What wall did Jesus break down, and how?
2. What labels does Colossians 3:11 say no longer define people? What labels would you add from inside?
3. What does Colossians 3:12-15 tell God's family to put on?

Obey this week

Pray with a believer from a different group, race, or charge this week, where you safely can.

NF.14 Seeing People the New Way

Read: 2 Corinthians 5:16-21; Matthew 5:9, 43-48

> *"So we have stopped evaluating others from a human point of view."*
> **2 Corinthians 5:16 (NLT)**

What's happening

Paul says that because Christ died and rose, we stop sizing people up by worldly standards: their record, their race, their reputation. Anyone in Christ is a new creation, and God has given us the ministry of reconciliation. Jesus calls peacemakers God's children and tells us to love even our enemies, the way the Father sends rain on everyone.

Discover

1. What does it mean to evaluate someone "from a human point of view"?
2. What has God given us to do (vv18-20)?
3. What do peacemakers do inside a place full of conflict?

Obey this week

Each time you meet someone this week, ask silently: “Lord, how do You see this person?”

PART 5: LIVING IT OUT INSIDE

NF.15 When You're the One Treated as Less

Read: James 1:2-4, 19-22; 1 Peter 2:19-23

> *“Understand this, my dear brothers and sisters: You must all be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to get angry.”*
> **James 1:19 (NLT)**

What's happening

Some people reading this are the ones being shamed, shunned, or pushed down. James says trials can produce endurance and maturity, and tells us to be slow to anger, because human anger doesn't produce God's righteousness. Peter points to Jesus, who was insulted and did not retaliate. He trusted the One who judges fairly.

Discover

1. What can trials produce, according to James 1:2-4?
2. Why does James say to be slow to anger (v20)?
3. How did Jesus respond when He was mistreated (1 Peter 2:23)?
4. Who decides your worth: the yard or God?

Obey this week

When you're disrespected this week, pause, pray, and choose not to retaliate. Tell your group how it went.

NF.16 Wise as Serpents, Gentle as Doves

Read: Daniel 1:8-16; Matthew 10:16; Romans 12:17-21

> *“Do all that you can to live in peace with everyone.”*
> **Romans 12:18 (NLT)**

What's happening

Daniel lived inside a powerful system that wasn't his. He stayed faithful without picking fights: he asked respectfully, proposed a test, and God gave him favor. Jesus sent His followers out like sheep among wolves and told them to be wise and innocent. Loving across lines inside takes courage **and** wisdom: no one should be put in danger, and staff rules still matter.

Discover

1. How did Daniel stay faithful inside Babylon's system without starting a war?
2. What does “wise as serpents and innocent as doves” look like inside?
3. What does Romans 12:17-21 say to do with evil done to you?

Obey this week

Ask God and a trusted leader for one wise, safe way to show love across a line this week.

NF.17 Honor One Another: A New Culture Inside

Read: Romans 12:9-16; Philippians 2:1-4

> *“Live in harmony with each other. Don’t be too proud to enjoy the company of ordinary people. And don’t think you know it all!”*
> **Romans 12:16 (NLT)**

What's happening

Paul describes a new culture: real love, outdoing each other in showing honor, sharing with those in need, weeping with those who weep, and spending time with ordinary people instead of chasing status. Philippians says to value others above yourselves and look out for their interests. This is how a church inside becomes a different kind of family than the yard.

Discover

1. List every “one another” action in Romans 12:9-16.
2. What does Philippians 2:3-4 say about status?
3. What would a culture of honor look like in your group? What would have to change?

Obey this week

As a group, agree on one practice of honor and start it this week (see Our Group Agreement).

Level 3: Deep Dive

For leaders and coaches. Read this before leading the set, and share what helps.

The Walls Inside

Jails and prisons run on an unwritten ranking system. People are placed above or below each other by charge, race, crew, neighborhood, and reputation. Shot-callers decide who sits, eats, showers, and talks with whom. People get labeled, shunned, extorted, and shamed, and believers get pulled into the same system and stop fellowshipping with brothers and sisters because of a charge or a group.

None of this is new. Jesus walked into a world full of the same walls, and He crossed every one of them.

The wall inside	The same wall in Jesus' day	Scripture
Ranking people by charge	"Sinners" vs. the righteous; tax collectors and prostitutes	Luke 7:36-50; 15:1-2; 18:9-14
Race and crew segregation	Jews and Samaritans; Jews and Gentiles	John 4:9; Acts 10:28; Ephesians 2:14
"Snitch" and traitor labels	Tax collectors seen as collaborators with Rome	Matthew 9:9-13; Luke 19:1-10
People treated as untouchable	Lepers forced to live apart and cry "Unclean!"	Leviticus 13:45-46; Mark 1:40-45
Shot-callers and control	Rulers who lord it over people; a church leader who threw people out	Mark 10:42-45; 3 John 9-10
Pressure to stay with your group	Peter pulling away from Gentile believers out of fear	Galatians 2:11-14
Shame as a weapon	A woman dragged out and publicly shamed	John 8:1-11

Key Words

Word	What it means	Where
***krinō* (judge)**	Can mean to discern or to condemn. Jesus forbids condemning, not thinking clearly.	Matthew 7:1; John 7:24
***prosōpolēmpsia* (favoritism)**	Literally "receiving the face": treating people by their outward status.	James 2:1; Acts 10:34
***hairesis* (faction)**	A chosen party or camp. It is the root of the English word "heresy."	Galatians 5:20
***dichostasia* (dissension)**	"Standing apart": splitting into rival sides.	Galatians 5:20; Romans 16:17
***katakurieuō* (lord it over)**	To dominate or control people from above.	Mark 10:42; 1 Peter 5:3
***philoprōteuō* (love to be first)**	Used only of Diotrephes: the drive to be number one.	3 John 9
***eleos* (mercy)**	James says mercy "boasts over" or triumphs over judgment.	James 2:13; Matthew 12:7
***mesotoichon* (dividing wall)**	The middle wall of separation that Christ tore down.	Ephesians 2:14
***kata sarka* (by the flesh)**	Sizing people up by human, worldly standards.	2 Corinthians 5:16

Judging or Discerning?

Jesus forbids condemning judgment (Matthew 7:1-5), but in the same chapter He tells us to recognize false prophets by their fruit (7:15-20). He also said to "judge rightly" (John 7:24), and Paul tells churches to deal with sin among believers (1 Corinthians 5:12; Galatians 6:1). The difference is in the heart and the goal.

Condemning judgment (forbidden)	Right discernment (commanded)
Looks down from above	Stands on level ground, log removed first

Condemning judgment (forbidden)	Right discernment (commanded)
Labels and writes people off	Names sin but hopes for restoration
Based on charges, race, reputation, rumor	Based on present fruit and the truth
Wants distance and status	Wants the person healed and safe, and others safe too
Spreads it in gossip	Handles it privately, the Matthew 18 way
Forgets its own need for mercy	Remembers “I need the same mercy”

The Hard Questions

What about people whose charges hurt children?

The gospel offers full forgiveness to anyone who truly repents (1 Corinthians 6:9-11; 1 Timothy 1:15). Paul had helped kill believers, and God made him an apostle. Shunning, mocking, or harming someone because of a charge is not the way of Jesus. At the same time, real love protects vulnerable people. Forgiveness is not the same as trust. Wise boundaries, like never placing someone in situations with children, are not punishment. They are love for everyone involved, including the person, and all three traditions agree on this. Be gentle: some people in your group were themselves abused, and these conversations can open old wounds.

What about someone labeled a “snitch”?

The yard's code and God's code are not the same. Scripture values telling the truth (Ephesians 4:25) and respects lawful authority (Romans 13:1-7). It also forbids spreading labels and rumors (Exodus 20:16; Proverbs 16:28). A believer doesn't join in branding anyone. Labels often come from rumor, not fact, and they get people hurt.

If I break the politics, I could get hurt. Do I just ignore that?

No. Jesus sent His followers out with wisdom (Matthew 10:16). He sometimes avoided places where people wanted to kill Him (John 7:1), and Paul escaped Damascus in a basket (Acts 9:25). Courage and wisdom go together. Start with small, quiet acts of love that don't put anyone at risk, pray for open doors, and talk with a chaplain or trusted leader. Never put someone else in danger to make a point.

Is it wrong to spend time with people from my own background?

No. Language and culture naturally draw people together, and the early church even appointed Greek-speaking leaders to care for Greek-speaking widows (Acts 6:1-7). The sin is hostility, contempt, ranking people, and refusing fellowship to other believers. Your group can be your people without being your wall.

Where the Traditions Agree

- **Every person bears God's image** and has worth that no charge or label can erase. The Catholic Catechism roots human dignity in creation in God's image (§1700). In Orthodox worship, the priest or deacon censes the people as well as the icons, honoring God's image in each person. Protestants hold that all are made in God's image and all stand equally in need of grace at the cross.
- **Judging others is spiritually deadly**, and mercy is the mark of God's children (Matthew 5:7; James 2:13).
- **The church is one family** across every human division (Galatians 3:28; Ephesians 2:14-22).
- **Love does not ignore wisdom.** Protecting the vulnerable and keeping healthy boundaries is part of love, not opposed to it.

> **VOICES FROM THE WHOLE CHURCH**
>
> **Abba Moses the Black** (4th century) was a former slave, gang leader, and robber who became one of the great desert fathers. When the brothers called him to judge a monk who had sinned, he walked in carrying a leaking jug of water (some tellings say a basket of sand). Asked why, he said his own sins were running out behind him where he couldn't see them, and yet he had come to judge someone else. The brothers forgave the monk. Moses is honored by Orthodox,

> Catholic, and many Protestant Christians.
>
> **St. Dorotheos of Gaza** (6th century) drew a circle with God at the center and people as lines running from the edge to the middle. The closer each person comes to God, the closer they come to each other. The farther from each other, the farther from God.
>
> **Dietrich Bonhoeffer** (Protestant), in *Life Together*, wrote that Christian community is not an ideal we build. It is a reality God has already created in Christ, which we receive with thanks. He later wrote some of his most famous letters from a Nazi prison.
>
> **Martin Luther King Jr.** (Protestant), writing about segregation from a jail cell in his "Letter from Birmingham Jail" (1963): "We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny."

Tearing Down Walls Inside: Six Steps

A simple process for a person or a group. Each step is easy to remember and pass on.

1. LOOK IN: The Log First

Read: Matthew 7:3-5; Psalm 139:23-24

Before we can help tear down walls, we have to see the ones we've built.

- Ask God: Who do I look down on? Whose charge, race, crew, or reputation makes me keep my distance?
- Ask: What does ranking people give me? (Safety, status, belonging, someone lower than me?)
- Ask: Where have I gone along with the politics out of fear, like Peter (Galatians 2:12)?

2. TURN: Repent of Judging and Partiality

Read: James 2:1-13; Luke 18:9-14

Judging, favoritism, and factions are sins to repent of, not just bad habits. Use the Repentance set (RP) and its Whole-Person Turn.

- Confess specifically to God and to a trusted believer.
- Pray the tax collector's prayer: "God, have mercy on me, a sinner."
- If you've spread a label or rumor about someone, stop, and make it right where it's safe and wise.

3. SEE: The Image of God in Every Person

Read: Genesis 1:27; 2 Corinthians 5:16; Colossians 3:11

Train your eyes to see people the way God does.

- Pray daily by name for one person you have looked down on.
- When a label comes to mind ("snitch," "chomo," a race or crew name), replace it in your mind with "made in God's image; someone Jesus died for."
- Ask before every conversation: "Lord, how do You see this person?"

4. CROSS WISELY: The Daniel Way

Read: Daniel 1:8-16; Matthew 10:16; Romans 12:17-21

Love across lines with courage and wisdom.

- Follow staff rules. Never put another person in danger to make a point.
- Start small and quiet: a greeting, a prayer, a shared verse, a book passed along, help with a letter.
- Use safe shared spaces: chapel, programs, classes, approved Bible studies.

- Talk with a chaplain or trusted leader before bigger steps. Let God open the doors.
- Count the cost, and don't cross lines to look brave. Do it to love.

5. BUILD: A New Culture in Your Group

Read: Romans 12:9-16; Philippians 2:1-4; Acts 2:42-47

A group of believers can become a different kind of family than the yard. Make it explicit with a group agreement (below), and practice honor every week.

- Read the group agreement together and have everyone agree to it.
- Mix where you safely can: pray in pairs across groups, rotate who leads.
- Celebrate every step of unity. Tell the stories.

6. ENDURE AND FORGIVE: When You're the One Shamed

Read: James 1:2-4, 19-22; 1 Peter 2:19-23; 1 John 3:1

If you're the one being pushed down, your worth comes from God, not the yard.

- Remember who you are: a child of God (1 John 3:1).
- Don't retaliate. Take it to God, and to your group.
- Forgive, even when they don't change (Matthew 18:21-35). Forgiveness doesn't mean staying in danger.

> **Care note**
> If you are threatened, extorted, assaulted, or pressured sexually, tell staff, medical, or the chaplain. Sexual abuse in custody can be reported under PREA (the Prison Rape Elimination Act). Reporting danger is not snitching in God's eyes. It is protecting life. If you are having thoughts of hurting yourself, tell someone right away.

Our Group Agreement

Read this together. Ask everyone in the group to agree to it.

In our group, we:

- Don't ask about, rank, or repeat anyone's charges.
- Don't use labels, gossip, or rumors about anyone, inside the group or out.
- Welcome anyone who wants to follow Jesus, whatever their race, crew, or record.
- Keep what's shared in the group private, unless someone is in danger.
- Handle conflict privately and directly (Matthew 18:15).
- Pray for each other by name every week.
- Look for ways to honor each other (Romans 12:10).
- Follow staff rules and never put anyone in danger.
- Keep wise boundaries that protect the vulnerable.

Weekly Heart Check

1. Who did I look down on this week? Why?
2. Did I ask about, repeat, or use anyone's charge or label?
3. Did I go along with politics out of fear?
4. Did I use power or pressure on anyone?
5. Who did I honor, include, or serve across a line?

6. Who do I need to forgive, or ask for forgiveness?
7. Who will I pray for by name this week?

Sources

- Holy Bible, New Living Translation. Key verses are quoted from the NLT (checked on Bible Hub). Lines marked “paraphrase” are summaries.
- Passages suggested by Jonathan Rusen: James 1:2-4, 19-22; 2:1-13; 1 John 2:9-11, 29; 3:1, 6, 10-11, 16-24; 5:19; Matthew 7:1-2; Matthew 12. Added from discussion: Matthew 7:1-5, 12; 12:7.
- *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, §1700.
- *The Sayings of the Desert Fathers*, Abba Moses.
- St. Dorotheos of Gaza, *Discourses* (on not judging one's neighbor).
- Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, chapter 1.
- Martin Luther King Jr., “Letter from Birmingham Jail” (1963).
- No Place Left Academy, *4 Fields* manuals, Levels 1–3.