

Virtue Workshop

Children, Youth and Adults Learning Together

Printable resources are included

Creators: Diana Metreaud and Ron Tomanio

Unconditional Love

General Introduction

This Material is designed for workshops/conferences, children's classes, families, and individual learning.

Unless we can make deep spiritual concepts understandable, we risk losing future generations to the distorted thinking of a deteriorating materialistic world..

Each spiritual concept explored includes activities specifically designed for groups of youth and adults and activities designed for children.

It is a method of group learning, based on the model of the oneness of humanity.

Everyone is a student, and everyone is a teacher. Our mission is not to provide exhaustive research and explanation of concepts for scholars. Our goal is to enable everyone to gain a basic knowledge of concepts indispensable for spiritual survival.

It is our hope that parents and teachers gathered in living rooms, backyards; in cities and villages, will use these spiritual concepts to improve the lives of children, youth and adults.

The writers, as members of the Bahá'í Faith, are guided by its teachings and principles. We have used language that allows the concepts to be accessible to the wider community. Reference is made to the sources of authority of the Bahá'í Faith. We are referring to the Báb, Bahá'u'lláh, 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Shoghi Effendi and the Universal House of Justice.

This material reflects the personal interpretations of the authors and should not be taken as authoritative.

Instructions

Materials listed in the Resource section of each activity, including images, should be carefully prepared. Images can be enlarged and are essential for presentation. If some of the materials listed are not available, facilitators may modify and adapt material to best meet the unique needs of different groups.

Activities for youth/adults may be completed in approximately one hour.

Activities for children are approximately twenty minutes to an hour in length.

Adult Activity #1

Another Brick in the “If” Wall

Document with text to be read aloud by participants. Facilitator may choose to use a projector.

Materials in Resource Section

Facilitator says: When we want to get to know another person, we try to find out what we have in common and where we differ.

Even in a close long term relationship, we eventually realize that humans are puzzling mysteries. We are all mysteries trying to relate to other mysteries. Learning to communicate is certainly a major challenge. If it is such a challenge relating to our fellow humans who have the same basic identity -- servants of God, how then can we communicate with God, who is a vastly different entity?

I can talk with a person from another country who does not speak my language. I can speak eloquently and with perfect grammar, but it won't make a difference. They will not understand what I am saying. I am going to have to learn their language or they are going to have to learn my language.

Likewise, we have to learn the language of God to be able to communicate with God. And in order to learn the language of God, we have to learn the alphabet of the language of God. The English alphabet is a,b,c etc. The alphabet of God consists of the attributes of God. Consider love, mercy, kindness....etc. as the letters of a new universal language. For example: “Love” could represent the letter “a” and “mercy” represent the letter “b”. The Divine attributes constitute the alphabet of God.

How each of us combines the “letters” -- the attributes of God -- in our own unique acts of service, becomes our own personal spiritual language. This is the spiritual language we can use to communicate with our fellow servants and with God.

Facilitator asks: participant to read the following in a loud voice:

“Reveal then Thyself, O Lord, by the merciful utterance and the mystery of of Thy divine being, that the holy ecstasy of prayer may fill our souls -- a prayer that shall rise above words and letters and transcend the murmur of syllables and sounds...”

- ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, Bahá’í Reference Library: A Selection of Bahá’í Prayers

Facilitator says: It is indispensable for us to develop our own spiritual language so that we can communicate with souls in all the worlds of God, where this is the only

language spoken or understood. Each of us must learn to "...transcend the murmur of syllables and sounds..."

To repeat: our commonality with God is that we share the same spiritual letters of a Divine alphabet. We love, we forgive, ... however, the difference between our ability to love and God's ability to love is contained in one three-letter word -- "**ALL**".

So many of the Bahá'í prayers give us an insight into the language of "All". "Thou art, verily, the **All** Loving; the **All** Knowing; the **All** Wise."

We can find no prayer that says that God is the Provider of Almost All mankind or is the Almost All Loving.

If we want to learn how to communicate with God, we must learn the language of God. God speaks the language of "All", "Unconditional" or "Oneness". This is the only language He can speak, because it is the only language consistent with His Nature. He is always the All-Wise God. He is the All-Powerful, the All-Knowing, always and with all people. This is the definition of being completely unconditional.

We do not have the same capacity to love as God does. We are not able to love unconditionally to the degree that He can. This does not mean that there is anything wrong with us. The best that we are capable of is to make a great effort to see all humanity as one. Be vigilant whenever we notice that we are beginning to create "us and them" divisions. These 'us and them' divisions could be based on race, nationality, political proclivities -- the possibilities are endless.

But what do we mean that this is the only language God can speak? Can't God do anything? Can't He learn a less lofty language?

Facilitator asks: participant to read the following in a loud voice:

When one of the authors was eighteen years old, he attended a youth class at Green Acre Bahá'í School. His teacher was Dr. William Hatcher, a professor of logic. Dr. Hatcher asked the class "Can God do anything?" The class unanimously responded "Yes, God can do anything."

Dr. Hatcher adamantly corrected his students' way of thinking. He asked "Can God change His identity? Can He become evil? Can He become a rock? Can God cease to be God?"

Immediately, the group realized the truth: God cannot change His Identity. And He can not perform an action that is inconsistent with His identity.

Facilitator says: There are times in our lives when we believe that God has turned His back on us. Sometimes we pray to God asking for a desired outcome. We pray that a sick loved one be brought back to health, and then the loved one passes away. We pray that we may get a certain job, and then we don't get that job. When this happens it is very common for people to lose their faith in the existence of God. Or we say "God didn't hear my prayer."

We commonly pray to God to give us an intellectual solution to a problem. Or we pray that He waves His magic wand and makes the problem disappear. We pray, expecting to hear God speaking to us in French, English, or Persian. We become disillusioned when we don't hear God answering us in the language that we expect Him to speak.

The spiritual language that we share with God is the language of the attributes of God. The answer we will receive from God will take the form of a spiritual attribute(s) that we need for that situation. The practical answer we desire, will flow from the attribute of God that is filtered through our own heart and mind. The answer we receive will be our own genuine voice. We have always had this connection with God -- a common language. This is the inner path we can use to address our every problem. As our understanding of our relationship with God matures, our requests of God will change. We will ask, "What is the spiritual attribute of God that I need to make the proper decision in this situation?" An attribute which is filtered through my heart and mind that I can translate into the words that I need to say and the acts I need to give and receive. I can now I discover my own unique, genuine voice.

The truth is that God has been waiting all our lives to help us deal with our tests and difficulties. If we are unaware of this inner path, we will believe God has ignored our prayers and we can lose our faith. God hears us and answers our prayers. God is incapable of turning His back on us. Everything that happens to us in our lives is an expression of God's love, kindness, justice... The problem is not that God does not know what to say to us. The problem is that we do not know how to hear the guidance that God is trying to give us every second of our lives.

We need to know that God speaks to us through the Prophets of God and not directly. The guidance we receive, even to very personal problems, is designed for the age we live in. This means that someone who asked a relationship question two thousand years ago, very similar to what a person asked yesterday, could receive very different answers.

However, this remains a constant: If we don't love God, His love can't reach us.

Facilitator asks: participant to read the following in a loud voice:

“O Son of Being! Love Me, that I may love thee. If thou lovest Me not, My love can in no wise reach Thee. Know this O servant.”

- Bahá'u'lláh, Bahá'í Reference Library: *The Hidden Words*: Part One: Arabic: 5

Facilitator says: It's not that God ever stops loving us. But, we can block the connection with God by our behavior. We can say to ourselves: “I can live however I want, and hurt myself and others and God will still have to love and forgive me.” It is true that God will still love and forgive us. But we make it impossible for His “love” and forgiveness to “reach” us if we turn away from Him and act in ways that are not in line with His will.

The voice of God is speaking the unconditional language of “All” love, “All” forgiveness, “All” kindness...

To talk to God, we must speak the unconditional language of “all”. We become increasingly fluent in this spiritual language as we interact with others, showing our unconditional love, kindness, etc. We can not decide to love some people and hate others. We are called to have constant love in our hearts for all people, unconditionally. How this love is manifested is dependent on each unique situation. Of course, it is not okay to open the cell door to a dangerous prisoner, because we feel love in our hearts. We should not allow this person to go free and create more damage. This would not be a true act of love.

Facilitator asks: participant to read the following in a loud voice:

“Kindness cannot be shown the tyrant, the deceiver, or the thief, because, far from awakening them to the error of their ways, it maketh them to continue in their perversity as before. No matter how much kindness ye may expend upon the liar, he will but lie the more, for he believeth you to be deceived, while ye understand him but too well, and only remain silent out of your extreme compassion.”

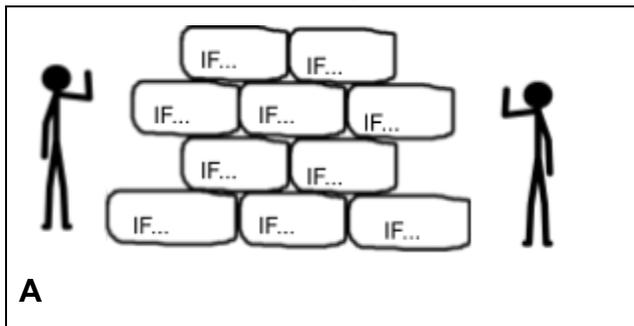
- Bahá'í Reference Library: *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*:138

Facilitator says: He is not saying that we should not **feel** kindness towards others. Sometimes not showing kindness outwardly, is actually the expression of kindness. This is because it does not encourage continued bad behavior in others.

If we feel hatred and despise someone, then our inner question to God becomes “How can I destroy this person?” We will get an answer, but it will not be coming from God. It will come from our misguided lower nature.

We know God speaks the language of “unconditional”. We also need to try to speak this spiritual language to the best of our ability when talking with God and with people. Let’s look at what happens when we instead put conditions on God and on our fellow servants of God.

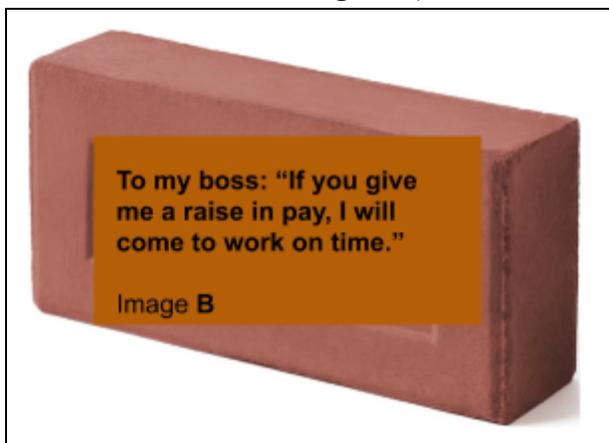
Facilitator shares: Image A with participants:



Facilitator says: Our “ifs” separate us from other individuals. Before we can unconditionally love God, we must first try to unconditionally love other people.

Let’s build an “If Wall” together.

Facilitator shares Image B (model “If” brick) with participants:



Facilitator says: We will start with this “if” brick: “If my boss gives me a raise in pay, I will come to work on time.”

Facilitator places this “if” brick at the base to begin the formation of a wall.

Facilitator places the other three model “if bricks” Images C, D, E: facing down on a table or on the floor in front of participants.

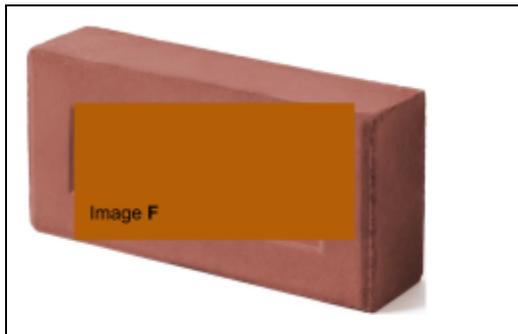
Facilitator says: Let’s continue building an “if” wall.

Facilitator selects: three participants to one at a time, pick up a brick, read text on brick aloud and then attach it to the “wall” to form the base for a traditional brick wall pattern.

Participants respond

Facilitator says: What are a few other common ifs we can think of? There are some blank bricks here. I would like to invite a few people who can think of other “ifs” to write them on on a blank brick and attach it to build up the wall.

Facilitator shares: Image F with participants:



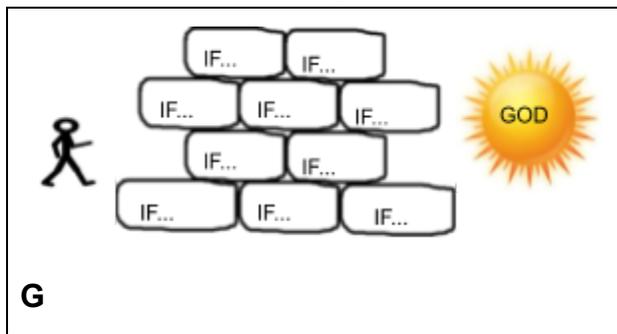
Facilitator places blank bricks (multiple copies of Image F): on a table or on the floor in front of participants.

Participants respond - Allow 2-3 minutes

Facilitator asks: a participant: to read aloud the ‘If’ statements on bricks which have been placed on the wall.

Facilitator says: When we interact using the language of “**conditional ifs**”, we create a wall of conditions between ourselves and our loved ones, friends and co-workers -- so many that we can’t see or reach each other.

Facilitator shares image G with participants:



Facilitator says: We have just seen how we create walls of separation between ourselves and others by putting unreasonable “if” conditions on our relationships. We also have to be careful not to put unreasonable conditions on our relationship with God.

We need to do our part in speaking the language of God -- the unconditional language of “All”.

When we put “if” conditions on God, we will be unable to connect with Him and He will be unable to connect with us.

We are going to continue building up our “If” wall. We will add some bricks showing some conditions we may put on God.

Facilitator places model “if bricks” Images H, I, J, K: facing down on a table or on floor in front of participants.

She directs four participants, one at a time, to pick up a brick, read it aloud and attach it to “wall” above the other bricks which have been previously attached.

Participants respond

Facilitator asks: What are a few other common “ifs” -- conditions we put on God?

I would like to invite a few people who can think of other ifs to write them on on a blank brick and attach it to keep building up the wall.

Facilitator places blank bricks (multiple copies of Image F): on a table or on the floor in front of participants.

Participants respond - Allow 2-3 minutes

Facilitator says: Let’s look at our “if” wall. Let’s see what conditions we have placed on our relationship with God.

Facilitator asks a participant to read aloud text on bricks with 'If' statements to God.

Participant responds

Facilitator asks: participant to read the following in a loud voice:

“We harm ourselves when we say to God: “I will love you if...” as in “if I get a promotion”, “if I find Mister or Miss Right”. Every time we put conditions on our relationship with God we add another brick to the wall that separates us from Him.”

Facilitator asks: a volunteer to read the following statement in a loud voice:

“We need to detach from all the conditions we place on our relationship with God -- all of our “if You do this for me moments”.

It's perfectly fine to pray for what we want. We just should not link our prayers to specific outcomes. Ask what we want of God, don't demand it. We shouldn't link our love of God and our belief in God with any of our personal desired outcomes “(ifs).”

Facilitator says: Wouldn't we like to be able to have a healthy unconditional relationship with God and with others -- our fellow servants of God? Don't we want to be able to see and hear God more clearly? Knowing how much damage we can do to ourselves, do we still feel so strongly about holding onto our ifs?

Facilitator says: Let's take a moment and reflect on this.

Pause for approximately 1 minute.

Facilitator says: Now, would anyone like to remove a “if brick” from the wall?

Participants will respond “yes”.

Facilitator invites participants: to go up to the wall and each choose an “if” brick to remove.

Participants respond

Facilitator says: For this activity, we removed our own and others' "if" bricks. In real life we can only remove our own "ifs"-- conditions we have placed between ourselves and God. We can't remove anyone else's "ifs"-- conditions they have placed between themselves and God.

When we try to remove someone else's bricks, all we do is hurt ourselves and damage our relationships with others. We can be a good model for others and give guidance when sought, but we are not in charge of anyone else's spiritual growth.

As we decide to embrace the oneness of mankind, we will need to dismantle our own "if" wall brick by brick.

Facilitator closing remarks:

Every "if" partially blocks our connection with God. The more bricks in our wall, the more blockages we create between ourselves and God. The bigger the "if", the more mortar we place between the bricks in the wall which makes the wall stronger. As we continue these destructive behaviors we block out more and more of God's light. Sooner or later, in this world or the next, we will need to remove all the bricks in our wall separating us from God.

An unconditional God has an unconditional identity all the time. He is God all the time. If we want to connect with God, we also must have an unconditional identity. Our unconditional identity is that of a "servant of God". Any other identity is an illusion and blocks our connection with God. This explains those times when we feel lost and separated from even the closest people in our lives. We need to feel a sense of urgency, about maintaining a real identity as a servant of God, all the time.

We will never be able to express unconditional love to the same degree as God can.

Unconditionally loving people takes practice. We begin with understanding and practicing conditional love.

This is a baby step. You do something loving for me and in return I do something that I think will express my love for you. We must practice with people. If we want to learn how to hike, we wouldn't immediately join a group that is leaving to climb Mount Everest. We would have to build up our strength and endurance by walking around our neighborhood. The same principle applies to learning how to love unconditionally. Begin with a single common interaction with another person. Someone opens a door for you because you are carrying bags. You do not know this person. You don't know anything negative about this person. The only thing you know about this person is that they opened the door for you. They weren't looking for a monetary reward or for you to open another door for them in the future. This is a good place to start practicing unconditional love. All you know about this person is their pure generosity at that moment. So it is very easy for you to feel 100% positive toward that person at that moment.

We find it so difficult to unconditionally love God, because we haven't tried to practice unconditional love with the people we meet on a daily basis. Doing these simple pure acts for people, like saying please and thank you; opening a door for someone, are the beginning steps to learning how to unconditionally love God. If we kept this thought in mind, it would dramatically change for the better, every day of our lives.

Only when we are successful trying to create unconditional relationships with others, will we be successful in trying to develop an unconditional relationship with God.

To the Facilitator and all participants:

The physical world has been created by God to teach us deep spiritual concepts. It is the hope of the creators of this activity that we all make the transition as quickly as possible, from being student participants, to being teachers, sharing these ideas with others. Spiritual concepts are the building blocks for an ever-progressing world civilization.

Please feel free to adapt this material to best meet the unique needs of different groups.

Adult Activity #2

“Another String on the “Grudge Balloon”

Document with text to be read aloud by participants. Facilitator may choose to use a projector.

Materials and Activity Set Up in Resource Section

If there is a larger group of participants, multiple balloons may be used.

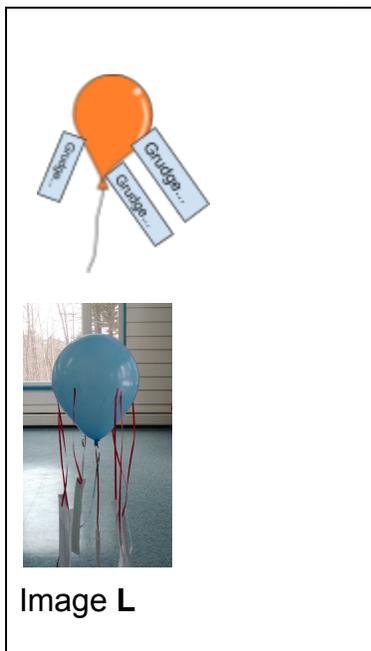
Facilitator says: What is a grudge?

Participants respond

Facilitator says: Holding onto grudges prevents us from holding onto people we love and from holding onto God. Grudges keep us from making a connection with the unconditional love of God.

We can create a “grudge” balloon with each grudge we hold against another person.

Facilitator: shares **Image L** with participants:



Facilitator says: Each string here represents a grudge.

Facilitator places: the three **severity level 1** strips on table or floor in front of participants.

Facilitator asks: three participants in turn to choose a string, read text on strip aloud and then attach string to the balloon with tape.

Facilitator places: the three **severity level 2** strips on table or floor in front of participants.

Facilitator asks: three participants in turn to choose a string, read text on strip aloud and then attach string to the balloon with tape.

Facilitator places: the three **severity level 3** strips on table or floor in front of participants.

Facilitator asks: three participants in turn to choose a string, read text on strip aloud and then attach string to the balloon with tape.

Facilitator asks: “What do you see happening to the balloon?”

Participants will say that the balloon is being weighed down.

Facilitator says: Each time a string is attached, the balloon draws closer to the earth. These are our “**grudges..**” attachments weighing us down.

Facilitator note: depending on the number of participants, additional helium-filled balloons may be used.

Facilitator says: I am sure we can think of other grudges that we can attach to our balloon.

I would like to invite anyone who can think of other grudges, to write them on on a blank paper strip and attach it to our balloon(s).

Facilitator places: weighted strings with blank text strips attached, on a table or on floor in front of participants.

Participants respond

Facilitator asks: What has happened to our balloon(s)?

Participants respond

Facilitator says: Every time we hold a grudge against an individual, no matter what they may have done to us, we not only create distance between us and them, but also between us and God. Each time we hold onto a grudge, we sink farther away from God. We sink down to the earth instead of soaring up into the spiritual worlds of God. When we have an intense negative feeling toward even one person, we also have created negative feelings toward God and everyone on earth.

Facilitator says: Let's all say "love" and "hate" at the same time on the count of three: One, two, three:

Participants will try, but will be unsuccessful.

Facilitator asks: volunteer to say the following in a loud voice:

Love and hate cannot exist together in one heart at the same time. The exact moment that we hate our worst enemy, is also the exact moment we hate the person we most love in the world.

Facilitator asks: Would we like to let go of our grudges -- our attachments to this world? Would we like to experience detachment?

Participants will respond "Yes".

Facilitator says: We will now physically sever our grudges by cutting the strings which attach them to the balloon(s). We will cut the strings above the text strip.

Do not cut the center string. We will cut this one last.

As each string is cut, the balloon will rise slightly.

Let's reflect quietly, as we let go of each grudge and watch as it drops to the floor.

Participants respond in turn

Facilitator asks volunteer to say the following in a loud voice:

As we let go of our grudges, our love ascends to God. We are happier. We feel safer. We feel loved and valued.

Facilitator note: When all participants have severed their attachments the balloon(s) will rise. Balloon(s) remain weighed down by a center string with weights attached.

Facilitator says: We have severed the grudges we have attached to the balloon(s). In our activity we may have cut our own or another person's string off our balloon(s). Can we really sever someone else's attachments? Can we get rid of another person's grudges for them?

Participants will respond: "no"

Facilitator says:

No we can't sever someone else's grudge attachments. We can help them. We can give them advice and support. We can even hand them the scissors. We each have to cut our own attachments to our own grudges. When we try to make someone give up their grudges, we only create additional grudges. There are differences between a grudge held by an adult and a child. The time lapse between thought and action is different. For kids it is almost immediate. "You took my toy -- Wham!" And it's all over. They are fast friends again. For adults, a grudge is an act of mental violence, that usually does not result in physical violence. But it is like a slow growing malignant tumor. It affects us physically, mentally and spiritually. We can actually think that we are hurting another person by holding a grudge against them. This may be true, but we are hurting ourselves more. The ultimate harm is that it keeps the grudge holder from drawing closer to God.

Now let's expand our discussion about grudges. We have explored examples of one individual holding a grudge against another individual. On a larger scale, grudges have a damaging effect on the world. Instead of damaging just two souls, whole groups of individuals and societies are damaged when they hold grudges against each other.

What are some grudges that societies have toward one another.

Allow 2-4 minutes for discussion

Facilitator - closing remarks:

It is comforting to believe that God always loves us and that He has not given up on us. God doesn't hold a grudge. He is always there for us and He will wait for us to come to Him. He is the All-Patient God.

Now, before we cut the last string weighing our balloon down close to the earth, I am going to write the beginning words of a prayer on our balloon:

Facilitator writes: on balloon(s) with a marker and says aloud: **"O God, guide me"**.

Facilitator says: A helium-filled balloon naturally wants to ascend to the heavens. This is what our soul yearns for. Our soul yearns to ascend to God.

As we cut the final string, imagine letting go of all our bad thoughts, our grudges, and moving closer to God. Let's be quiet and think about this happening for a minute.

Pause for 30 seconds.

Facilitator asks: participant to cut through center string.

Participant responds

To the Facilitator and all participants:

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Adult Activity #3

Document with text to be read aloud by participants. Facilitator may choose to use a projector.

Materials in Resource Section

Only if not continuing from prior Adult Activities:

Facilitator says: What is a grudge?

Participants respond

Facilitator says: Do we really want to go through life weighed down by our grudges? As we get older, our grudges weigh us down even more.

Facilitator asks: participant to read the following in a loud voice:

The person who is keeping me from God is me! It is not the person I hold a grudge against. When I hold a grudge against someone he or she becomes the most important person in my life. This person is most important, because It is my feeling toward him or her which is keeping me from getting closer to God. When we carry a grudge against someone, it is like we are carrying that person on our back for life. No wonder we are physically tired and emotionally worn out.

Facilitator says: We can also think about each grudge that we hold against another person as a heavy rock.

Facilitator asks: for 2 participant volunteers

Participants respond

Facilitator says: We are going to witness what happens to our volunteer as s/he increases the number of grudges she has toward others.

Facilitator places: pocketed-vest/apron on volunteer 1. She then places rocks on a table or on the floor in front of volunteer 2.

Facilitator says: Let's think of some common grudges a person can hold. Please share them one at a time with the group. Each rock here will represent a grudge. As each grudge is stated, volunteer #2 will put a grudge rock in volunteer #1's pocket.

Participants respond

Facilitator Closing remarks: If we knew the price that we have to pay to hold a grudge no force on earth could make us do it. We know backbiting is deadly to the soul. Even one momentary slip of the tongue causes damage. Holding a grudge for days, weeks, even years, is infinitely more damaging. Our harmful words and thoughts become heavy stones that we carry around with us forever.

The easiest mess to clean up is the mess we never made in the first place!

To the Facilitator and all participants:

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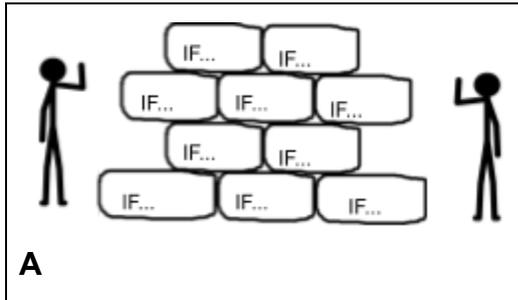
Please feel free to adapt this material to best meet the unique needs of different groups.

Children’s Activity #1

Document with text to be read aloud by participants. Facilitator may choose to use a projector.

Materials and Activity Set Up in Resource Section

Facilitator shares: Image A with participants:



Facilitator says: When we put an “if” on someone, we build a wall higher between us and we can’t see them or get to them.

Let’s build an “if” wall. We will use “if” bricks to build our wall. We will make a row across the bottom and then build up the wall.

Facilitator places four model bricks on a table or on the floor in front of participants.

Facilitator shares Image M with participants:



Facilitator says: This brick says: “I will be your friend only if you share your toy with me.” I have put an “if” condition on my relationship with my friend. I will put this “if” brick at the bottom to start our wall.

Facilitator places: brick on wall or poster to begin creating a brick wall.

Facilitator selects participant: to select the second model brick (**Image N**).

Facilitator reads or asks: participant to read text on brick.

Facilitator directs: participant to attach brick to wall.

Facilitator directs: two more participants to repeat the process with the remaining two model bricks (**Images O, P**).

Facilitator says: Our “ifs” keep us away from other people. They keep us from seeing them in the right way.

Can we think of other “ifs” we make put on our friendships?

We will write these on our blank bricks and use these to continue building our ‘if’ wall.

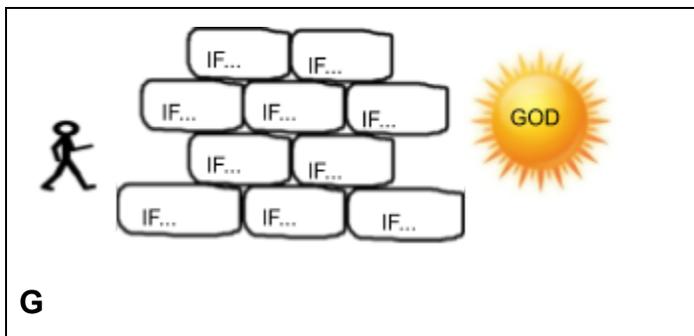
Facilitator places: multiple copies of blank brick template **Image F**, on table or floor in front of participants.

Facilitator note: Depending on age of participants, facilitator or group members may write if statements on blank bricks.

*Alternately, participants may share their ideas and they or Facilitator may simply write “if” on blank bricks and attach them to the wall.

Participants respond. “If Bricks” are added to the wall.

Facilitator shares: Image G with participants:

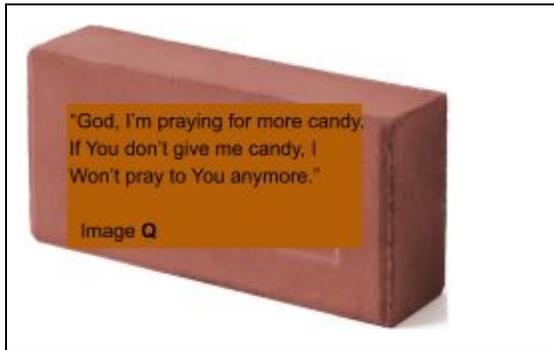


Facilitator says: We began building our if wall with ifs that we put on our family and on our friends. As the wall gets higher it is harder for us to see and reach other people.

We can also add bricks to build an “if” wall between us and God.

We have some more “if” bricks here. We will read the words on each brick and then add them to our wall. The higher the wall gets the harder it is for us to get closer to God.

Facilitator selects participant: to select the first model brick **Image Q**.



Facilitator reads or asks: participant to read text on brick.

Facilitator directs: participant to attach brick to the wall.

Participant responds

Facilitator directs: six more participants to repeat process, one at a time, with remaining six bricks - **Images R,S,T, U, V, W**

Facilitator says:

What other ifs can we think of that can keep us from getting closer to God?

We will write these on our blank bricks and use these to continue building our "if" wall.

Facilitator places: multiple copies of blank brick template **Image F**, on table or floor in front of participants.

Facilitator note: Depending on age of participants, facilitator or group members may write if statements on blank bricks.

*Alternately, participants may share their ideas and they or Facilitator may simply write "if" on blank bricks and attach them to the wall.

Participants respond

Facilitator says: Now would we like to remove the "ifs" -- the conditions we put on God and on our family and on our friends?

Would we like to take down our wall of "ifs"?

Participants respond: yes

Facilitator says: We will now take down the wall that keeps us apart from our friends and family and God.

Each of us will come up one at a time and remove a brick from the wall. We will put the bricks we remove on the floor to create a path. We will place two bricks next to make a double row path.

Participants remove bricks and place them on the floor creating a double brick path.

Facilitator says: We have taken the bricks away that created the wall. Our “if” bricks are no longer a wall between us and our friends and between us and God. We have created a path that we can now walk on to reach other people and to reach God. Now let’s all hold hands and walk down the path we have made together.

Participants respond

Children’s Activity #2

Document with text to be read aloud by participants. Facilitator may choose to use a projector.

Materials and Activity Set Up in Resource Section

If there is a larger group of participants, multiple balloons may be used.

Facilitator says: What is a grudge?

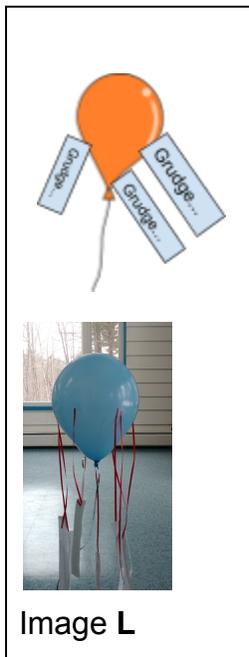
Participants respond

Facilitator says: Grudges are bad feelings about people that we carry around with us. They are like heavy weights that weigh us down. They are silly. For example: a grudge could be: “My sister played with my favorite toy and broke it! I will never play with her again! And I won’t talk to her for five years!”

Holding onto grudges against friends and people in our family stops us from holding onto people we love and from holding onto God.

We can create a “grudge” balloon by attaching strings with grudges written on them.

Facilitator: share image L with participants



Facilitator places: the 9 weighted grudge strings (see Resource section) on table or floor in front of participants. Each string here represents a grudge.

Facilitator says: We are going to pick up each string and read the words on the paper slip attached to it. Then we are going to attach it to begin creating our grudge balloon. I will start with grudge #1. I will read the words about the grudge and then attach it to our balloon.

Facilitator attaches: grudge text strip string #1 on the balloon with tape near the top of the string.

“My sister played with my favorite toy and broke it! I will never play with her again!”
Grudge #1

Facilitator selects participant: to select grudge # 2.

Facilitator reads or asks: participant to read text on paper strip.

Facilitator directs: participant to attach string to balloon with tape.

Facilitator directs: seven more participants to repeat process with remaining seven numbered grudge strings: **3,4,5,6,7,8,9**

Facilitator asks: “What do you see happening to the balloon?”

Participants will say that the balloon is being weighed down.

Facilitator says: Each time a string is attached, the balloon moves closer to the earth. These are our “**grudge..**” attachments weighing us down. They keep us away from other people. They keep us from seeing them in the right way. What other things make us mad at kids and other people? Can anyone think of other grudges that we can attach to our balloon?

Let’s be quiet for a minute and think about what makes us mad at other people.

Participants respond

Facilitator and participants discuss together.

Facilitator says:We will write these on our blank grudge strings and use these to continue building our grudge balloon.

Facilitator Note: Facilitator may write some of participants' stated grudges on paper strips and ask participants to attach these to the balloon.
Depending on age, participants may be invited to write their own grudges on paper strips and attach them to the balloon.

Facilitator places: weighted strings with blank text strips attached on table or floor in front of participants.

Participants respond

Facilitator asks: What has happened to our balloon(s)?

Participants respond

Facilitator asks: Now, would we like to let go of our grudges? Do we want to cut the strings and let the balloon rise -- let our souls get closer to God?

Participants respond: Yes

Facilitator says: Do not cut the center string. We will cut this one last.
As each string is cut, the balloon will rise slightly.
Let's reflect quietly, as we let go of each grudge and watch as it drops to the floor.

Facilitator directs: each participant, in turn, to sever a grudge from the balloon by cutting off a string above the text strip. As each cuts a string, the weighted text strip drops to the floor.

Facilitator note: When all participants have severed their attachments the balloon(s) will rise. Balloon(s) remain weighed down by a center string with weights attached.

Facilitator says: As we let go of our grudges, our love rises. We get closer to God. We are happier. We feel safer. We feel loved.

Facilitator says: We have cut the grudges we have attached to the balloon(s). In our activity we may have cut our own or another's grudge off our balloon(s). Can we really cut someone else's grudge? Can we get rid of another person's grudges for them?

Participants will respond: "no"

Facilitator - closing remarks:

No we can't get rid of someone else's grudge attachments. We can help them. We can give them support and love.

We each have to cut our own grudges. When we try to make someone give up their grudges, we only create more grudges.

Isn't it wonderful to know that God doesn't get mad at us? He doesn't hold grudges. He is always there for us and waiting for us to come to Him. He is always patient with us. A balloon naturally wants to rise up toward the sun. In the same way our soul, filled with love for everyone, wants to rise up to God.

Now before we cut the last string weighing our balloon down, I am going to write the beginning words of a prayer on our balloon:

Facilitator writes: on the balloon with a marker and says aloud: **"O God, guide me.."**

Facilitator says: Let's cut the final center string keeping our balloon(s) down close to the earth. As we cut the final string, holding our balloon down to the earth, imagine letting go of all our bad thoughts, our grudges, and moving closer to God. Let's be quiet and think about this happening for a minute.

Pause for 30 seconds.

Facilitator or participant: cuts center string above the attached weight.

Children's Activity # 3

Document with text to be read aloud by participants. Facilitator may choose to use a projector.

Materials in Resource Section

Only if not continuing from prior Children's Activities:

Facilitator says: What is a grudge?

Facilitator says: Do we really want to go through life weighed down by our grudges? As we get older, our grudges weigh us down even more.

The person who is keeping me from God is me! It is not the person I hold a grudge against. When I hold a grudge against someone he or she becomes the most important person in my life. This person is most important because it is my feeling toward him which is keeping me from getting closer to God. When we carry a grudge against someone, it is like we are carrying that person on our back for life. No wonder we feel tired and worn out.

We can also think about each grudge that we hold against another person as a heavy rock.

Facilitator selects: 2 participants to stand in front of group

Facilitator says: We are going to witness what happens to our volunteer number 1 when she/he feels she has grudges against other people.

Facilitator places: pocketed-vest/apron on volunteer 1. She then places rocks on a table or on the floor in front of volunteer 2.

Facilitator says: Let's think of some grudges we can have against other people. Please share them one at a time with the group. Each rock here will represent a grudge. As we name each grudge, volunteer #2 will put one grudge rock in volunteer #1's pocket.

Participants respond

Facilitator Closing remarks: If we knew how heavy the rocks would be and that we would be so weighed down and so uncomfortable, we would never pick them up in the first place. It's the same with our grudges that we hold against other people. We can hold onto a grudge for a long time. It is so tiring and painful. Having grudges keeps us feeling sad.

Let's not pick up grudge rocks and put them in our pockets. Let's be patient, understanding and forgiving with our friends. Let's not hold onto bad feelings about anyone.

The easiest mess to clean up is the mess we never made in the first place!

Let's take the heavy vest(apron) off of our volunteer and lift the heavy weight of the grudges s/he has been carrying.

Facilitator removes vest(apron) from volunteer

Resources:

Adult Activity #1

Materials:

large whiteboard or large piece of foam board set on free-standing easel

tape or adhesive strips

brightly colored markers

Images: A, B,C,D,E,F,G H,I,J,K

blank bricks **Image F**- if possible at least one blank brick for each participant

Adult Activity #2

Materials:

1 or more Basketball-size helium filled balloons (one balloon for each group of 10 participants if possible)

string/ribbon - two colors

medium-size metal washer weights (circle with hole in center) - enough for 9 model text strips and one for each participant if possible

pair(s) of scissors

paper Strips - Adult Grudge Strips **#1-9**

blank paper strips - if possible at least one blank strip for each participant

tape

markers or pens

thick width marker pen

Image L

Set Up for Adult Activity #2:

Attach a 90cm string/ribbon (bright color) to the bottom of a large helium balloon(s) with 2-3 washer weights to hold it down on the floor or table.

Cut three each of: 15cm strings, 30cm strings and 45cm strings (different color from center string attached to balloon).

Attach one washer weight to the bottom of each string

Attach paper text strips for "Severity Level 1" grudges to 15cm strings just above the weight

Attach paper text strips for "Severity Level 2" grudges to 30cm strings just above the weight

Attach paper text strips for "Severity Level 3" grudges to 45cm strings just above the weight

30 cm length strings/ribbons - with blank paper strips attached just above weight. - One for each participant if possible
Lay strings with strips out on table or floor

Adult Activity #3

Materials:

Rocks

If available: travel or fisherman's vest/travel vest or apron with numerous pockets

Or participant's own pockets

Children' Activity #1

"Another Brick in the If Wall"

Materials:

Large whiteboard or large piece of foam board set on free-standing easel

Tape or adhesive strips

Brightly colored markers

"If Bricks" - four model bricks **Images: A,G, M,N,O,P,Q,R,S,T,U,V,W**

Blank bricks **Image F** - if possible at least two blank bricks for each participant

Tape

Children's Activity #2

"The Grudge Balloon"

Materials:

1 or more Basketball-size helium filled balloons (one balloon for each group of 10 participants if possible)

String/ribbon -

medium-size metal washer weights (circle with hole in center) - enough for model text strips and one for each participant if possible

Pairs of children's safety scissors

Paper Strips - Children/Youth Grudge Strips **#1-9** in Resource section

blank paper strips

Tape

Thick width marker pen

Image L

Set Up for Children's Activity # 2:

Attach a 90cm string/ribbon (bright color) to the bottom of a large helium balloon(s) with 2-3 washer weights to hold it down on the floor or table.

Cut 30cm strings/ribbons - one for children's grudges # 1-9. (different color from center string attached to balloon).

Also cut enough strings for one per participant (different color from center string attached to balloon).

Attach one washer weight to the bottom of each string

Attach paper text strips to strings just above the weights

Lay strings with strips out on table or floor

Children's Activity # 3

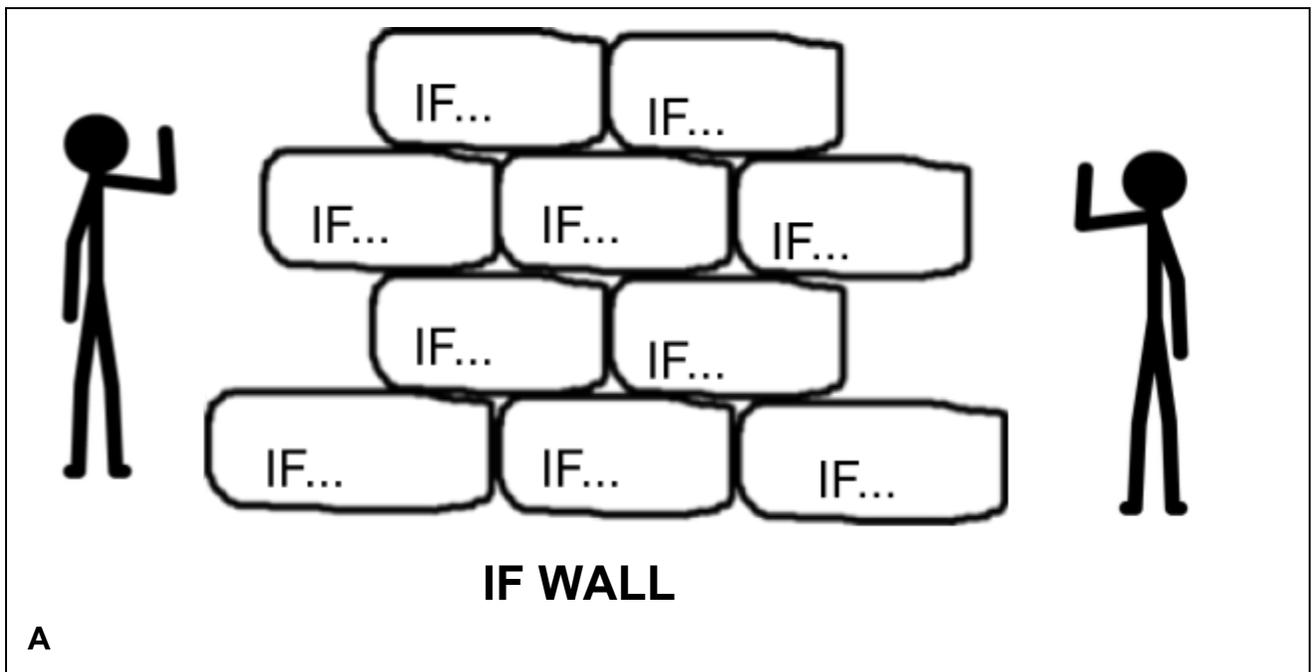
Materials:

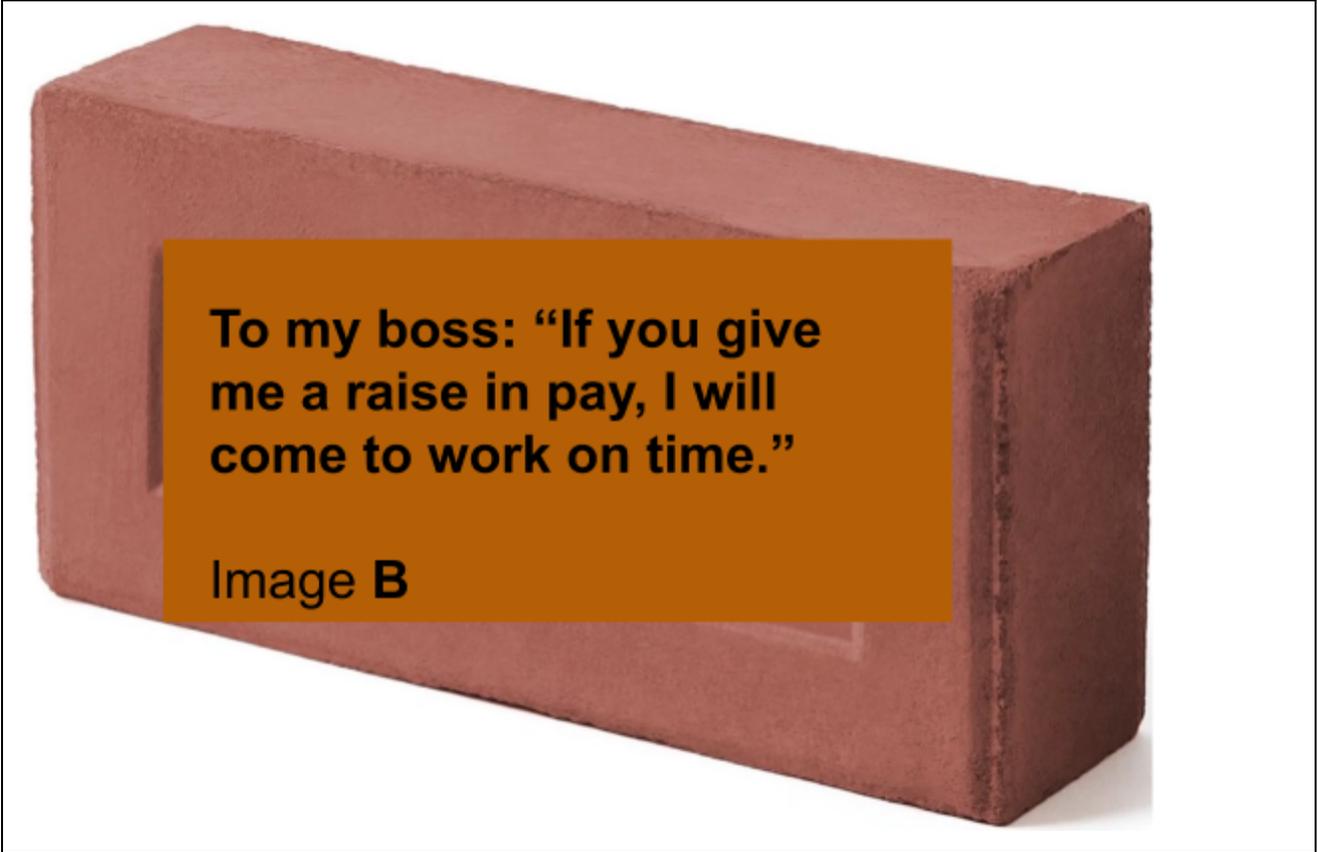
Rocks

If available: travel or fisherman's vest/travel vest or apron with numerous pockets

Or participant's own pockets

Images

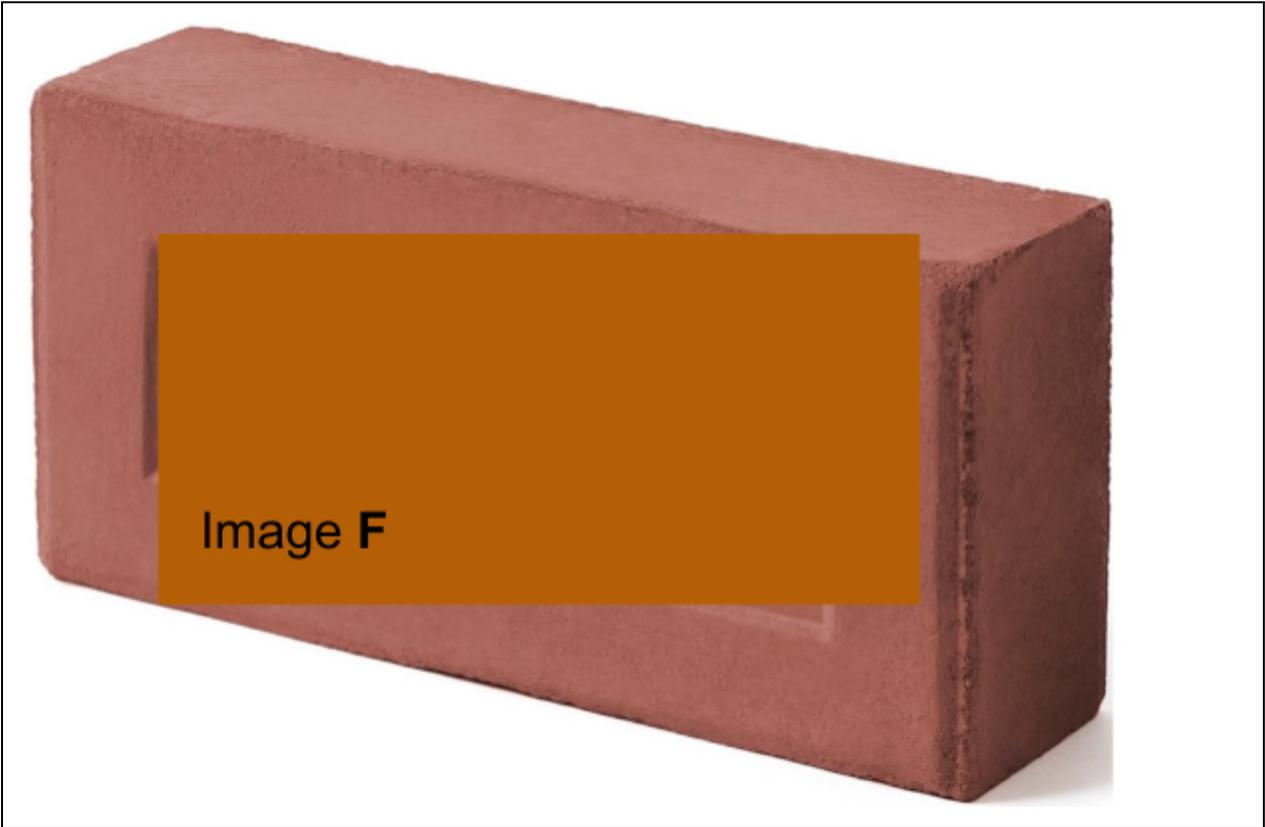


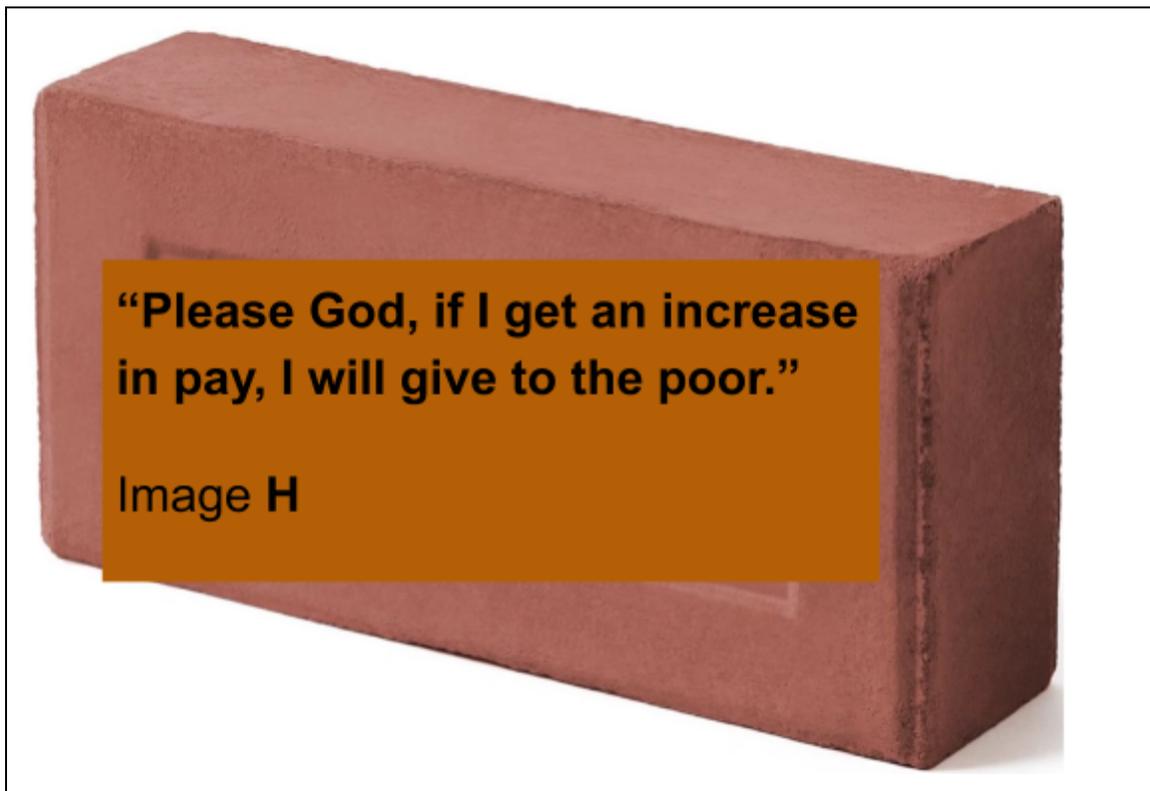
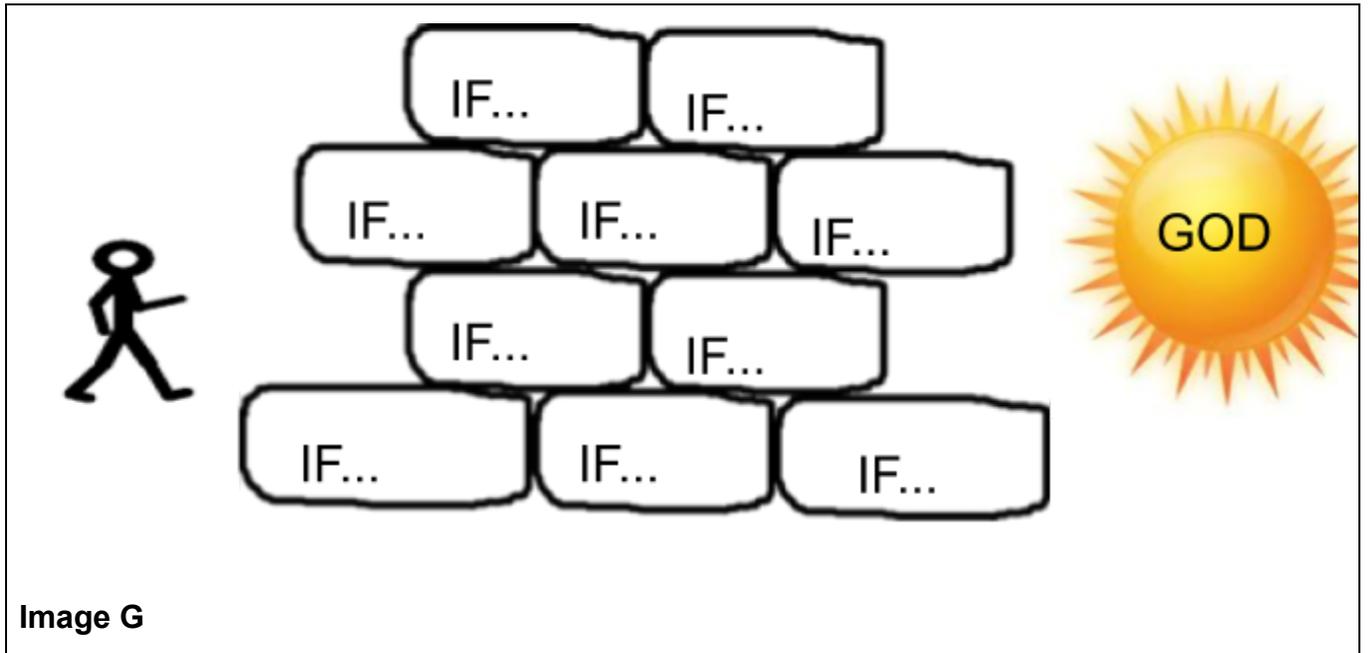


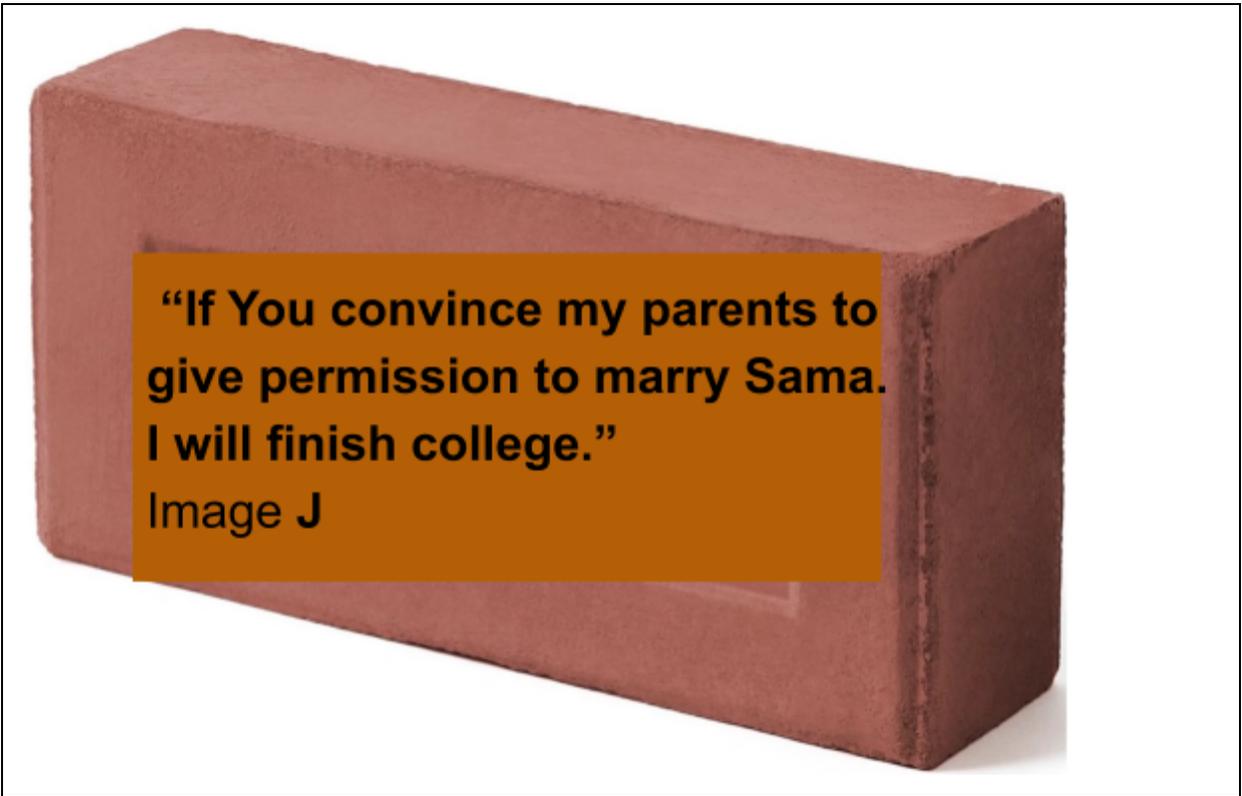
To my boss: "If you give me a raise in pay, I will come to work on time."

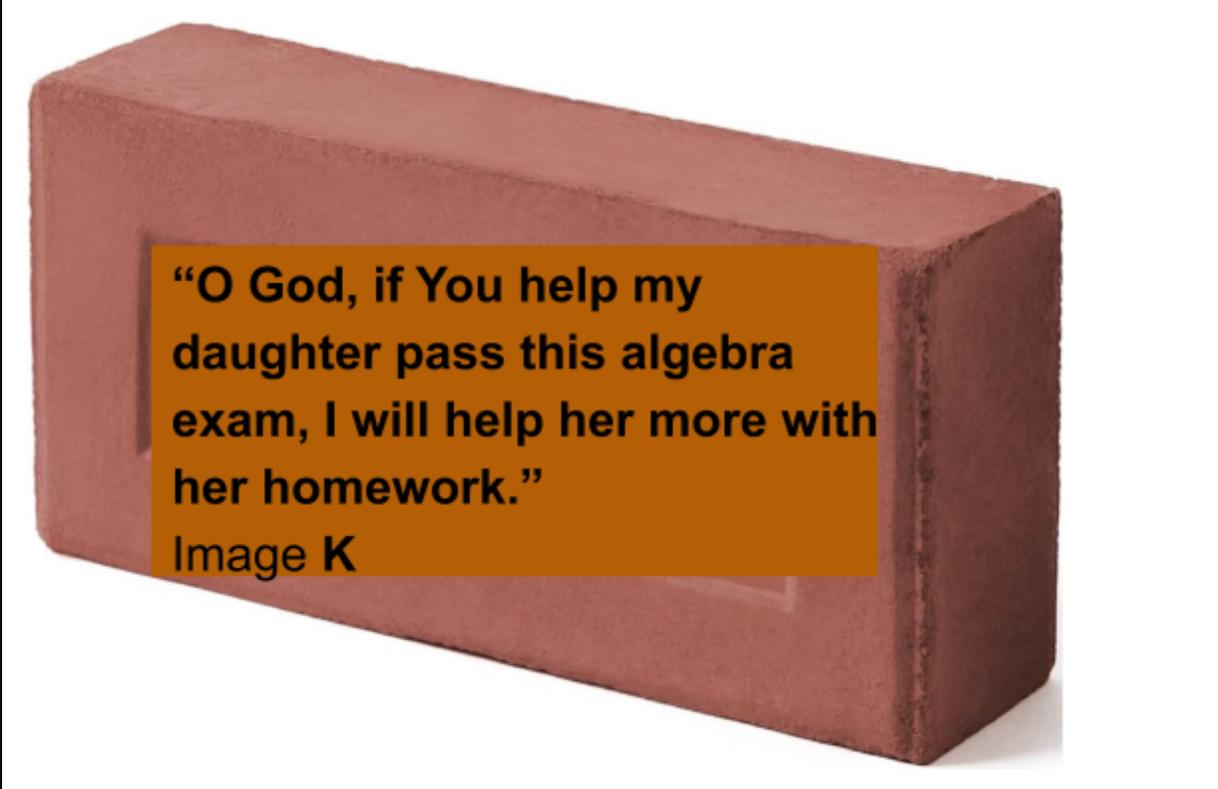
Image B









A single red brick is shown at an angle, casting a soft shadow on the surface below it. The brick is a deep red color with a slightly textured surface. An orange rectangular box is superimposed on the front face of the brick, containing text.

“O God, if You help my daughter pass this algebra exam, I will help her more with her homework.”

Image K



Image L

Text strips for Adult Grudges:

Severity Level #1 Adult Grudge #1

- “You said you were going to clean the dishes,
but the house now smells like fish!”**

Severity Level #1 Adult Grudge #2

- “I came home early from work so we could go out
for dinner. But you forgot and already ate!”**

Severity Level #1 Adult Grudge #3

- “You were supposed to pick me up after class
at 4:00 but you didn’t get there until 6:00.”**

Severity Level #2 Adult Grudge #4

- “You forgot our wedding anniversary!”**

Severity Level #2 Adult Grudge #5

- “You spend more time with your friends than
with me!”**

Severity Level #2 Adult Grudge #6



“You got the promotion in our company that I thought I should get!”

Severity Level #3 Adult Grudge #7



“You never told me that you had been married before!”

Severity Level #3 Adult Grudge #8



“You quit your job to write your memoirs!”

Severity Level #3 Adult Grudge #9



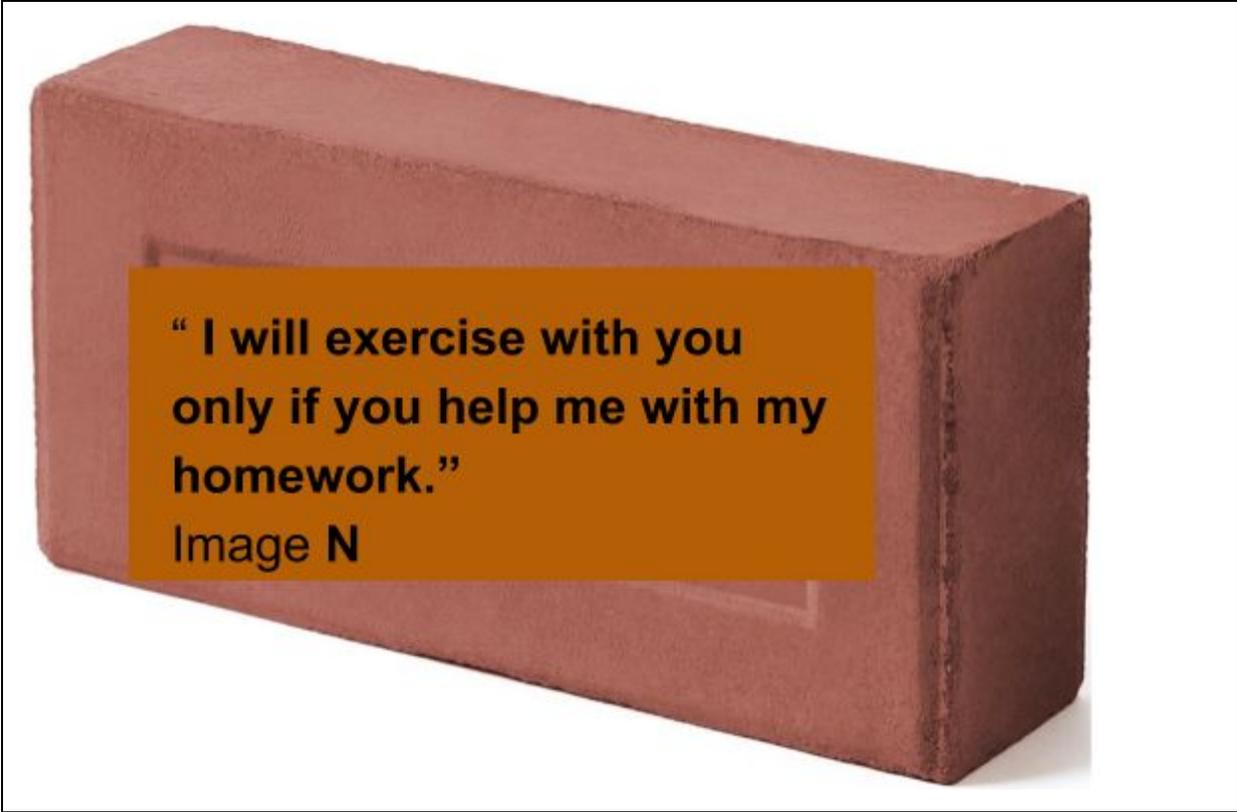
“You bought a new sports car without telling me!”

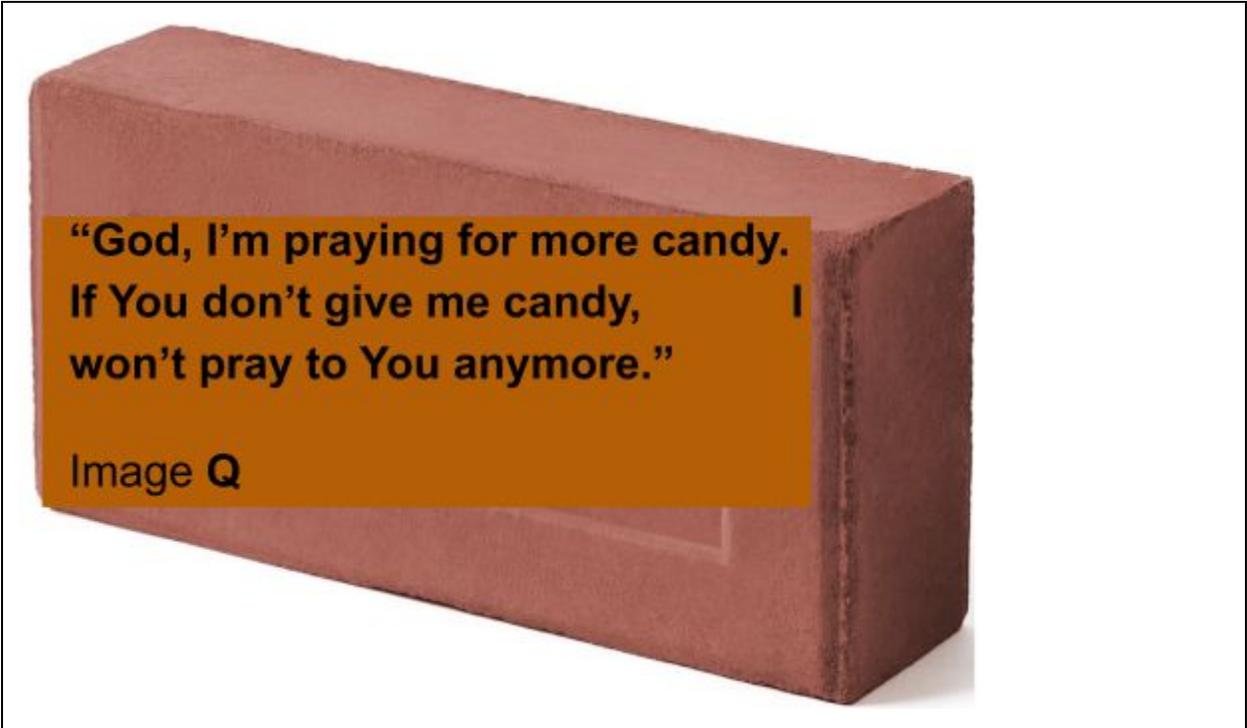
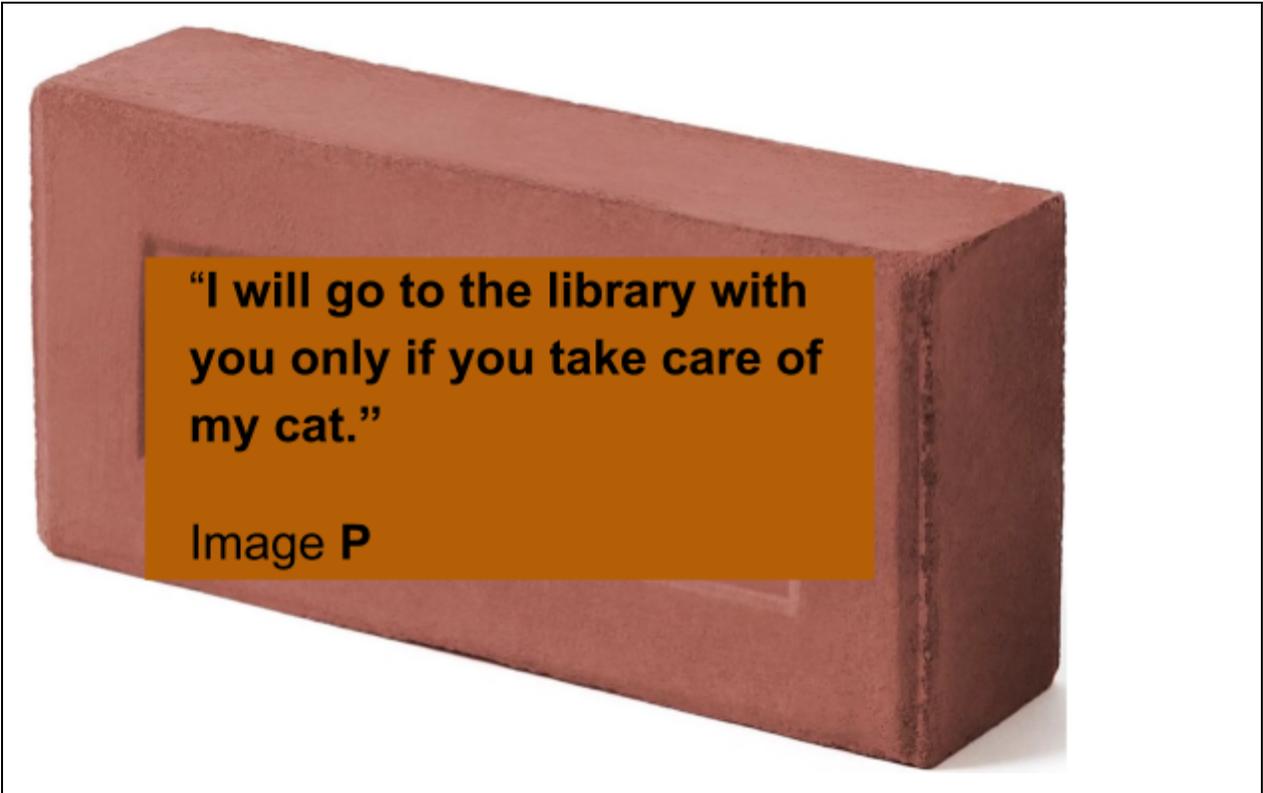
Blank Grudge strip template



Bricks for Children's Activity:



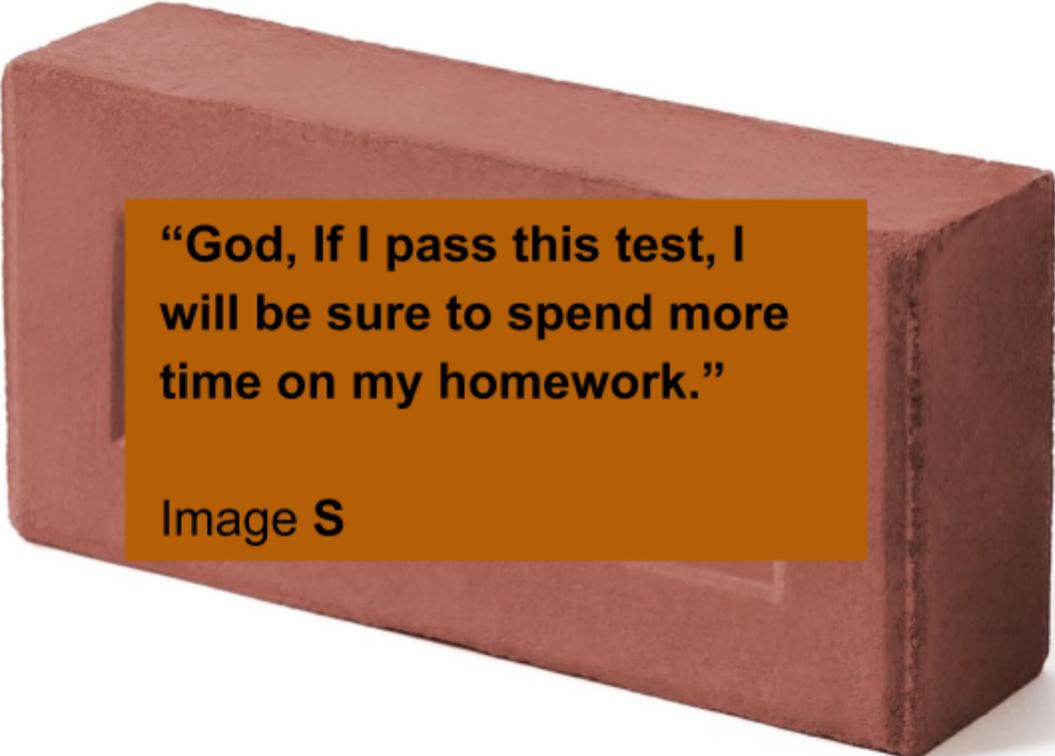




A single red brick is shown at an angle, with a semi-transparent orange rectangular box overlaid on its front face. The brick has a slightly textured surface and a visible mortar joint on its right side.

**“ I’ll love You so much,
God, if You will only give
me a baby sister.”**

Image R

A single red brick is shown at an angle, similar to the one above, with a semi-transparent orange rectangular box overlaid on its front face.

**“God, If I pass this test, I
will be sure to spend more
time on my homework.”**

Image S

A single red brick is shown at an angle, with a semi-transparent orange rectangular box overlaid on its front face. The text inside the box is in a bold, black, sans-serif font.

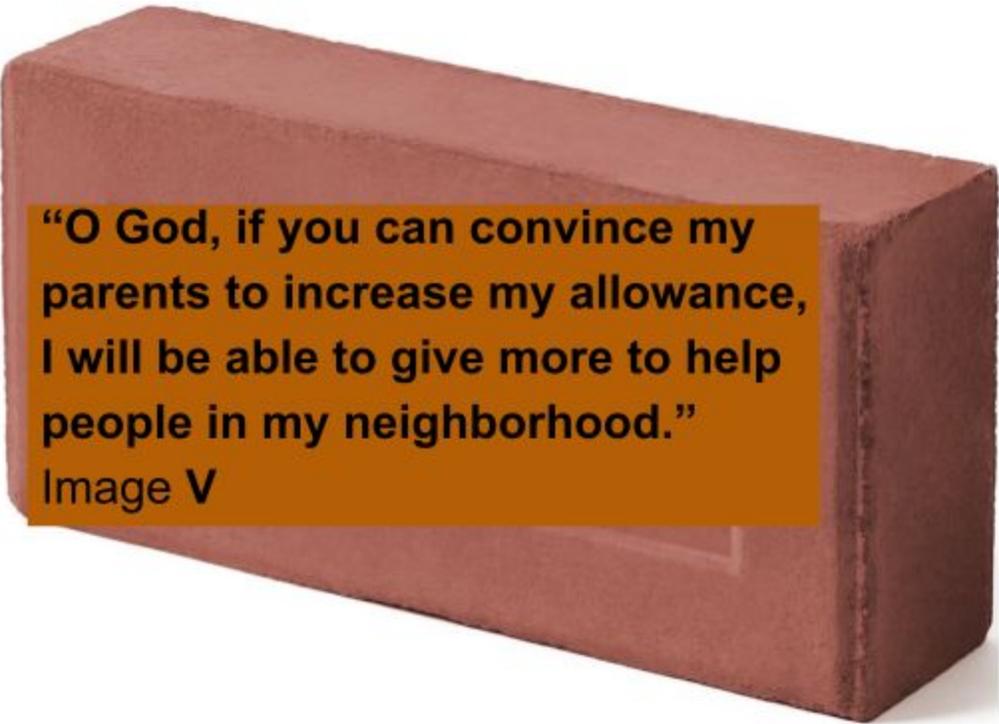
“Please God, I won’t ask anything else from You ever, if You just help me do a good job in my class play.”

Image T

A single red brick is shown at an angle, with a semi-transparent orange rectangular box overlaid on its front face. The text inside the box is in a bold, black, sans-serif font.

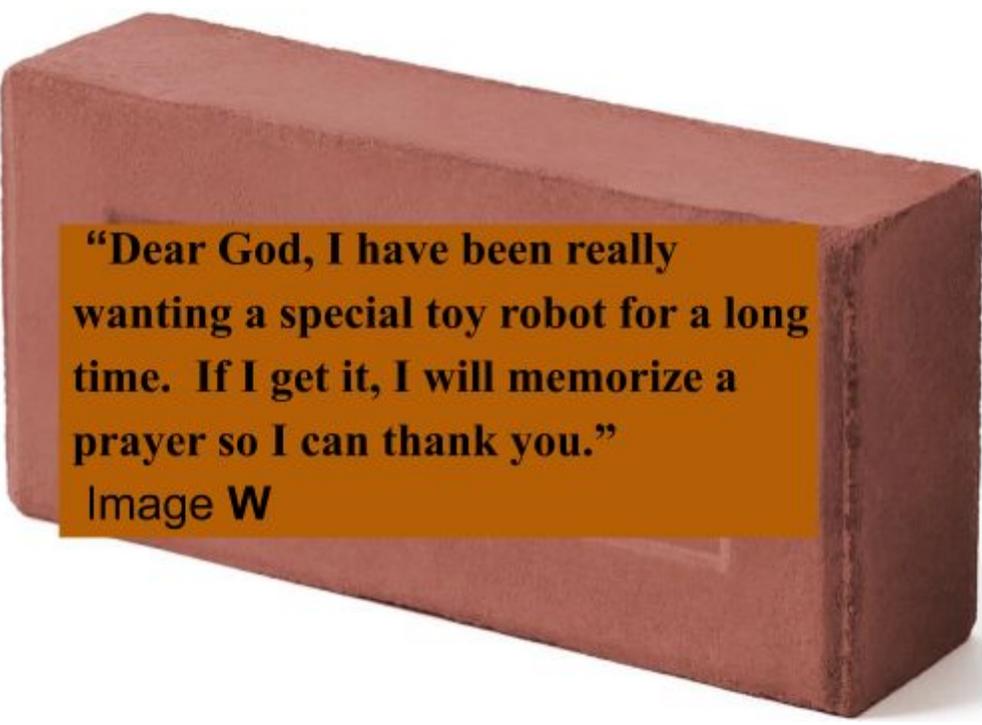
“God if you make the rainstorm end so we can go to the party I will help my mom clean the house later.”

Image U

A single red brick is shown at an angle, with a semi-transparent orange rectangular box overlaid on its top surface. The box contains text in a bold, black, sans-serif font.

“O God, if you can convince my parents to increase my allowance, I will be able to give more to help people in my neighborhood.”

Image V

A single red brick is shown at an angle, with a semi-transparent orange rectangular box overlaid on its top surface. The box contains text in a bold, black, sans-serif font.

“Dear God, I have been really wanting a special toy robot for a long time. If I get it, I will memorize a prayer so I can thank you.”

Image W

Text for Children/Youth Grudge strips

Children/Youth Grudge #1

- “My sister played with my favorite game and broke it! I will never play with her again!”**

Children/Youth Grudge #2

- “You ripped a page in my favorite book. I am so mad!”**

Children/Youth Grudge #3

- “You borrowed my white shorts and spilled grape juice on them. I will be mad at you forever! ”**

Children/Youth Grudge #4

- “You threw my ball over the fence and I can’t find it! I will never play ball with you again. ”**

Children/Youth Grudge #5

- “You got a turn to ride the bike. I didn’t get a turn.”**

Children/Youth Grudge #6



“You have nicer clothes than I do. Your family has more money. I am so jealous!”

Children/Youth Grudge #7



“You always know all the answers in class!”

Children/Youth Grudge #8



“You can run faster than I can. I want to be the fastest runner!”

Children/Youth Grudge #9



“It takes me longer to memorize a prayer than my sisters. I am mad at them!”

Blank Grudge strip template

