

Session

# 1 VICE VERSA



## From Selfish to Selfless

**Text:** NUMBERS 12:1-16

**The point:** Turn from ME and move toward WE

### ENTRY POINT

*The point where students connect to the Vice Versa lesson: from selfish to selfless*

*(Teacher's Note: Show the Vice Versa series video and then present the following illustration.)*

### Illustration: Happy Meals and supersized combos

*(Teacher's Note: Go to your local McDonald's and purchase one Happy Meal and one Big Mac supersized combo. Display the two meals on a table in front of your group and use them as props for the opening illustration.)*

Everybody loves McDonald's. Sure, the documentary *Super Size Me* made us feel a little guilty and maybe even a little worried about what McDonald's food might be doing to our bodies. But we still can't stay away. McDonald's is really a national icon. We have a national flag, a national bird, and a national anthem, and if we had a national fast-food restaurant it would have to be McDonald's.

Our love affair with this fast-food restaurant starts early in our lives. Most kids in the United States get excited when they hear the name McDonald's. The

mere mention of the word sends shivers down their spines. They love Ronald. They love the playground. And what they love most is a little thing known as the Happy Meal. This Happy Meal has everything a kid could need in it: a burger or nuggets, French fries, a drink, and most importantly a prize.

*(Teacher's Note: Point out the different items in a Happy Meal as you describe them.)*

As kids, we live on Happy Meals. We love the prizes – in fact, some of you even now still get the Happy Meal for the prize. (Of course, that brings up a whole different set of issues.) We love the little burger. We love the little bag of fries and the drink. It seems that all you could ever want fits inside this nice, neat, little box.

But eventually, something happens in our lives. Whether at age 6 or 8 or 17, we discover that McDonald's has more than Happy Meals on the menu. Things like the exciting Big Mac, the intriguing Filet-O-Fish, and the dangerous McRib begin to come across our path. Whole new realities enter our world. Before we know it, we leave the life of Happy Meals for the life of the supersized combo. After all, once you taste the Big Mac supersized combo, it's hard to go back to the boxed Happy Meal.



*(Teacher's Note: Point out the different items in a supersized combo as you describe them. Also, you will want to complement this illustration by telling a personal story of how you moved from ordering Happy Meals to ordering supersized combos.)*

**Connecting the illustration:** It's hard to imagine being satisfied with Happy Meals once you've tasted the Big Mac. But think about the way you made this transition in your life. (And if you haven't made the transition yet, we will have a counselor available for you after the session – ha, ha.) You didn't stop eating Happy Meals because someone told you that you couldn't eat Happy Meals anymore, did you? You didn't stop eating Happy Meals because someone told you not to even think about Happy Meals anymore, did you? You stopped eating Happy Meals because you found something better.

Today, we are starting a journey called Vice Versa. It's a look at some of the struggles and sin problems that Christians and non-Christians alike have had through the years. It's a look at some of the bondages and traps that many of us are tempted to fall into every day. But more importantly, it's a look at how to break free from those things. It's a look at how to become new. It's a look at how to live up to the kind of life that God is calling us to.

In this opening illustration, we discover the main idea behind this series. We don't defeat sin in our lives by trying not to sin. Instead, we overcome sin by learning to desire something better. When, through the grace of God, we cultivate virtues (the versa to our vices, so to speak – things like humility, grace, peace, etc.), we move away from sin. What we need most is not to stop sinning but to become free. And this pathway is not the pathway of quenching our desires; rather, it is the pathway of fulfilling those desires in the way they are supposed to be satisfied.

C.S. Lewis described the idea behind this series this way: "We are half-hearted creatures, fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making

mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea. We are far too easily pleased."

*(Citation: C.S. Lewis, The Weight of Glory (New York, HarperCollins, 2001) 26.)*

*(Teacher's Note: Now that you have introduced the series, transition into today's topic.)*

Today we want to begin our journey of traveling through our vices toward our versas by looking at the struggle of selfishness in our lives. This struggle manifests itself in the traps of pride and envy, and it often leads us to do things and say things that destroy us as well as others. As we try to prop ourselves up, we often actually tear down the things that are most important in our lives.

But the answer to selfishness is not simply choosing to stop thinking about ourselves. Instead, we must start thinking about others. By putting others before ourselves, we cultivate humility and selflessness in our own lives, and this allows us to be a blessing in the lives of others. And when we become a blessing to others, we slowly step out of the grip of selfishness. Today we want to think about this by exploring this idea: Turning from me first and move toward we first. Or to put it more simply, **turn from me and move toward we.**

As we take the first step of this journey today, let's take a look at a passage of Scripture in which we find a couple of people trapped in selfishness and then see how someone comes on the scene and shows them how to live the life of we.



## VANTAGE POINT

*The point where you examine Scripture and share your vantage points on it*

### Text: Numbers 12:1-16

#### Picture: Reality TV

Reality TV has taken over the world. But what is it about reality TV that keeps us interested? Part of it might be that we get to peek into a person's mind and motivation during their confessional time. Whether it's the confessional booth of *The Real World* or *Big Brother* or hearing Lauren narrate her own life story on *The Hills*, in these undercover and transparent moments we see some good but a lot of bad and ugly as well. While we may debate whether reality TV makes either good reality or good TV, this look below the surface often mirrors a picture of our own struggles and shortcomings. Interestingly, the Bible may have been the first to give us such a look at reality.

#### BACKGROUND

The Bible takes us into the lives of real people and shows us both their successes and their messes. Instead of hiding the failures of its primary characters, as most ancient histories did, the Bible takes us behind the curtain to see these characters' humanity along with God's grace. The Bible shows us God in the lives of real people and, in doing so, gives us hope for the messes we too often find ourselves in. This passage shows us a leadership mess that started with murmurings (often the first expressions of selfishness manifested through both pride and envy) and led to an all-out power struggle.

Times were changing in Israel. The family of Moses, Miriam, and Aaron had been the sole leaders of the people, but now 70 elders had been appointed to carry out the work of leadership as well. This new order was threatening to some of the old leaders, namely Miriam and Aaron. They didn't want to see their position and power threatened. They were so



caught up in their own concerns and perceived rights that they couldn't see the bigger picture. In the end, this struggle of selfishness almost destroyed them. This story shows us what God thinks of pride and envy, and it depicts the freedom of contentment and blessing He sets before us.

#### EXPLANATION

It's hard to play the role of the sidekick.

We all want to be the lead character.

We want the lead storyline in the drama.

We want to win, because second or third place really feels like last place.

We want to be in the power position.

We want to be recognized and admired.

But often, this desire for acceptance and recognition is short-circuited into a life of selfishness. By looking out for and protecting our own interests at the expense of others, we too often get caught in a king-of-the-hill battle in which our success depends on another's demise. Some of us fall into this trap directly, leaving a trail of carnage and hurt in our wake. Others of us fall into this trap more subtly, passively sabotaging others behind their backs. Either way, the damage we cause in the name of self-interest is heartbreaking. That is the struggle Miriam and Aaron found themselves in here. It's a struggle that almost destroys them literally.



*The pride and envy that Miriam and Aaron demonstrated in this passage robbed them of the freedom and great experiences that were lying ahead. And we can relate. At heart, all of us have a tendency to want to be God. But when we begin to think that life revolves around us, we begin to have unrealistic expectations that will not be met, because everyone else is acting the same way with the same expectations. These offshoots of pride can inevitably then lead to envy, which means wanting what we see others have.*

*And envy kills. It always does – maybe not physically, but emotionally and spiritually. It goes to any extreme, burning us up from the inside out until we get what we want (and think we deserve). It leaves others one step below us in our minds. But the irony associated with envy is the person it kills or destroys – instead of the person of whom we’re envious, envy strikes its deathblow toward us. We try to destroy others but find that envy destroys us instead.*

Aaron and Miriam were most likely insecure over leadership changes that had happened a chapter earlier. Since that change in leadership came from Moses, Aaron and Miriam were looking for any reason to discredit him. Conveniently for them, Moses had a Cushite wife. This was the opening Miriam and Aaron were waiting for, and they murmured against Moses. As we look deeper into this passage, we see that the nationality of Moses’ wife (right or wrong) was not what Miriam and Aaron were really upset about. That angle was only the cover story. Because Miriam and Aaron were insecure about their own jobs, and because they felt like they deserved to be running things, they wanted Moses’ job. You can see how the pride and envy had infiltrated their thinking. Again, in their minds, they thought they deserved it. They were prophets like Moses. And who did Moses think he was, exerting his authority in this way? So Aaron and Miriam tried to exert their own authority at Moses’ expense.



The text shows us that God didn’t take kindly to Aaron and Miriam’s murmuring. God called them to the principal’s office (so to speak) and questioned their intent. God knew that their murmuring stemmed not from trying to hold Moses accountable but from pride and envy rooted deep in their hearts. So God came to Moses’ defense, striking Miriam with leprosy and humbling Aaron. The white leprosy of envy that had festered on the inside became outwardly apparent, and the death toward which pride and envy lead was physically pictured on Miriam’s body.

Thankfully though, this struggle of selfishness is not where the story ends. Moses shows us a different way.

He shows us the way of selflessness.

He shows us the way of we.

Even though Moses could have stepped back and let Aaron and Miriam get what they deserved, he chose a different way. Even though they had threatened his power and position, Moses chose to intervene and intercede to God on their behalf. And because he did so, Moses saved his sister’s life and brought forgiveness to his brother. Where Moses could have hurt, he healed. In other words he turned from me and moved toward we. And in doing so, Moses demonstrated a better way to live. Let’s think about how we can make a similar move in our lives.

## MATCH POINT

*The point where students see today’s point and match it to what’s happening in their lives*

**Picture:** Oranges and bananas





Take a moment to challenge your group not to think about an orange. Most likely, once you tell them not to think about an orange, all they will be able to think about is an orange. Now tell them to think about a banana. When they think about a banana, most likely they will stop thinking about an orange.

**Connecting the picture:** Often, well-meaning people will tell us that the best way to stop being selfish is to not think about ourselves. The only problem is that ourselves keeps popping up in every scene of our lives. In fact, ourselves is the only character besides God that will appear in every scene of the story we write with our lives. So not thinking about ourselves will be challenging if not impossible, kind of like telling someone not to think about an orange. Maybe the better strategy for breaking the hold of selfishness is to start thinking about others. And as we think about others' interests first, we will also think about ourselves in a more healthy way.

### APPLICATION

Just as Aaron and Miriam did not have to give in to pride and envy, neither do we. We need not jump into life as a competition and try to squash everyone in our way. There is another way. Think about this truth today by demonstrating the difference between the way that pride and envy think and the way that contentment and blessing think:

Pride: I think you want what I **have**.

Envy: I want what you **have**.

Contentment: I'm OK with what I **have**, and I'm OK with you having what you **have**

Blessing: I want you to have what I **have**

The challenge for us today is to **turn from me and move toward we**. To embrace this, we must begin thinking through the lens of contentment and blessing. That means we must realize that as we make others

better, we too join in the benefits of others' successes. As we give, they may give in return, and before you know it everyone's life takes on a better trajectory. While this kind of shift will not be easy, it is the kind of thing that changes the world.

So instead of trying not to think about ourselves, it is better to think about what we have to offer to others. As we do this, we begin to maximize our own potential as individuals while serving the greater good of others. In other words, life for us moves from a Happy Meal approach in which we live for the prize to feasting on the supersized goodness of feeding others.

### LAUNCHING POINT

*The point where you inspire students and launch them into their small groups*

*(Teacher's Note: Refer again to your props from McDonald's as you inspire your students to think bigger with their lives.)*

So, will you choose to let go of the Happy Meal today and grab hold of the supersized life that God intends for you?

Will you kick pride and envy to the curb to make room for contentment and humility and blessing?

Will you decide to be OK with what you have or don't have and with whatever someone else has or doesn't have?

Let's join together now and refuse to let competition and frustration fueled by pride and envy ruin our lives. Let's learn to serve each other. Let's **turn from me and move toward we**. And as we do so, we might just find that hazard of selfishness will soon be in our rearview mirror.



Session

# 1 VICE VERSA



## From Selfish to Selfless

**Text:** NUMBERS 12:1-16

**The point:** *Turn from ME and move toward WE*

## Master Teacher Outline

### ENTRY POINT

Show the Vice Versa video

Do the Happy Meals and supersized combos illustration to introduce the idea that we need to move beyond looking at our vices so that we can embrace their versas

Transition into the lesson by talking about how we need to move beyond the vices of pride and envy

### VANTAGE POINT

Use the background and the Reality TV picture to describe the setting of the text

Read Numbers 12:1-16

Explain the text to show that Miriam and Aaron demonstrated the destructiveness of pride and envy while Moses showed the life of contentment and blessing

### MATCH POINT

Use the Oranges and bananas picture to show the importance of thinking of others instead of just trying not to think of ourselves

Use the application to bring out the point that we need to turn from me and move toward we

### LAUNCHING POINT

Inspire your students to turn from me and move toward we

Launch your students into their small groups to experience the Turning Point

## Small Group Turning Point

*The point where today's point changes our heart, head, and hands*

### INTRODUCTION QUESTIONS

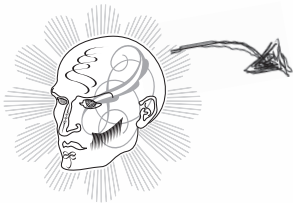
What inspired you about today's lesson? What disturbed you about today's lesson?

### RECAP

In today's lesson, we talked about moving from selfishness to selflessness. We began a journey designed to help us break free from pride and envy by committing to **turn from me and move toward we**.

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How should Miriam and Aaron have handled this situation?
2. Does Moses' reaction surprise you? Explain your answer.
3. How can you be an agent of humility and blessing instead of an agent of pride and envy?
4. How have you seen the destruction that pride and envy bring in your life?
5. In each of these situations, what did you learn about pride and envy?
6. What do you think God might have wanted you to do in each of these situations?



*Letting today's point change the way we think about God and ourselves*

The seven deadly sins on which this study is based are not found in the Bible on a specific list. Instead, Pope Gregory the Great compiled this list in the late sixth century. This list of vices, which has been passed down through the ages, identifies seven great struggles of humanity that still ring true today. As people thought about these sins, they tried to find ways to keep others away from them. One of the ways they did this was by imagining the punishment in hell for each of these sins. Here is one list of those sins and their punishments. Ask the students to complete the matching exercise below and explain why they matched certain punishments with certain sins.

#### **Sins**

1. Pride
2. Envy
3. Anger
4. Sloth
5. Greed
6. Gluttony
7. Lust

#### **Punishment**

- A. Placed in freezing water
- B. Smothered in fire and brimstone
- C. Forced to eat rats, toads, and snakes
- D. Placed in cauldrons of burning oil
- E. Thrown in snake pits
- F. Dismembered while still alive
- G. Broken on the wheel (touch your toes backward)

Answer Key:

- The punishment for pride was being broken on the wheel (basically being forced to bend over backward so that you can touch your toes). (G)
- The punishment for envy was being placed in freezing water. (A)
- The punishment for anger was being dismembered while still alive. (F)
- The punishment for sloth was being thrown in snake pits. (E)
- The punishment for greed was being placed in cauldrons of burning oil. (D)
- The punishment for gluttony was being forced to eat rats, toads, and snakes. (C)
- The punishment for lust was being smothered in fire and brimstone. (B)

These punishments were intended to fit the sins. For example, because pride needs to be broken, being broken on the wheel was thought to be an appropriate punishment in hell. While it's interesting to imagine these punishments in hell, the truth is that the painful realities these vices lead to in our earthly lives are far more threatening. Being perpetually broken on the wheel in hell would certainly be painful and as unpleasant as anything we could think of. But the way pride leads us to live our lives in the here and now can be just as hurtful, as we try to bend over backward to get what we think we deserve and have coming to us. This is the kind of life many of us choose every day. But we don't have to live this way. We can join others who have gone before us and forge a different kind of life, one marked by humility and blessing.

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. When is the last time that you were broken by pride?
2. When is the last time that you saw envy freeze a friendship?



*Letting today's point inspire and disturb us*

Bring in a one-foot section of rope. Ask two students to play a game of Tug-of-War using the one-foot rope. You win by pulling the other person to your side. If you are really adventurous, you may want to even set up a mini-tournament with your group. After the game is over, ask the individuals to drop the rope together.

The life of envy is like an endless game of the Tug-of-War. We pull as hard as we can to get what we feel we deserve. We want to gain one more inch for ourselves, and in so doing, take that inch away from the other side. On the other hand, contentment challenges us to drop the rope and to be OK with the amount of rope we have on our side and the amount of rope others have on their side.

Moses exemplifies the life of contentment, which we can also call the life of humility and blessing. Moses dropped the rope and stopped playing tug-of-war. He reacted to Miriam and Aaron's envy with a shocking display of grace. Instead of cheering for God's judgment on them

for their malicious actions, Moses pleaded for God to heal them. This is what humility and blessing are all about.

Spend a moment reviewing the statements that we talked about in large group. Read the statements and then talk about them using the discussion questions.

Pride: I think you want what I **have**.

Envy: I want what you **have**.

Contentment: I'm OK with what I **have**, and I'm OK with you having what you **have**

Blessing: I want you to have what I **have**

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Which statement best describes your life right now?
2. How could you move one step toward the freedom of blessing and commitment today?



*Letting today's point direct us toward a next step of loving others*

In 1994, Buffalo Bills star running back Thurman Thomas sat on the bench with his hands covering his face following his team's fourth consecutive Super Bowl loss. His three fumbles had helped seal the Bills' fate. Suddenly, standing before him was star Dallas Cowboys running back Emmitt Smith, who had just been named the Super Bowl's most valuable player. Smith was carrying his small goddaughter, and when he got to Thomas, he told her, "I want you to meet the greatest running back in the NFL, Mr. Thurman Thomas."

*(Citation: Allen Mann, Leadership, Vol. 15, No. 4)*

Living in humility allows us not only to see the value of ourselves as made in God's image but also allows us to value others. Philippians 2:3 says, "In humility consider others better than yourselves." As long as we are living with a me-first mentality, trying to be God and have others serve us, this kind of life is not possible. But when we are free in humility, understanding that our value comes not from our power or performance but from God, we in turn can pass that value to others and live a life of blessing.

Put this illustration into practice by pairing the students off and having them encourage each other. Have them serve each other in humility and blessing by saying what they love about or admire in each other. Help the students see how the value they often seek through pride comes better through humility. Gather the students back together and encourage them to continue the life of humility and blessing by finding someone to bless this week. They can do this in many ways: by giving something away, by encouraging someone who may be a rival of sorts, by helping someone over whom they might normally climb on their way to the top, etc.