

How to Love a Troll

By RLD Editorial Team

for use as
STEP 1

**Lesson 4****Focus:**

Always respond
in love.

Lesson 4**Bible Basis:**

Luke 9:51-56;
Matthew 5:38-48

Lesson 4**Memory Verse:**

“But I tell you, love your enemies
and pray for those who persecute
you.” —Matthew 5:44

Students will discuss ways to respond to something hurtful as they consider Jesus’ teaching on always responding in love.

Materials:

- None

NOTE: This lesson covers how to respond to someone who is being mean to you. If, after working through the lesson with your students, you discern that any of them are in a situation that involves cyberbullying rather than just the occasional mean comment, explore the resources available at <https://www.stopbullying.gov/cyberbullying/what-is-it/> if you aren’t sure how to handle it.

In the last couple years, most of us have been more connected to technology, social media, and the internet than ever before. While there are benefits to being connected, such as staying updated with our friends and family, there are also downsides. Not everyone on the internet or social media is kind.

- **What’s a troll?** (We’re looking for the definition of an *Internet* troll. As your students may already know, a troll is “a person who starts quarrels or upsets people on the Internet . . . by posting inflammatory . . . messages in an online community” [Wikipedia].)
- **Have you ever run into a troll who said mean things about you online?** (Sadly, many Internet users have had this experience. Let your students share briefly about their encounters with trolls.)
- **How did you respond to the troll?** (Encourage students to answer honestly, whether their responses were commendable or not.)

Mean comments are a fact of Internet life. One study from Pew Research Center found that “Nearly half of U.S. teens have been bullied or harassed online, with physical appearance being seen as a relatively common reason why...”

“While bullying existed long before the internet, the rise of smartphones and social

media has brought a new and more public arena into play for this aggressive behavior... The most commonly reported behavior in this survey is name-calling, with 32% of teens saying they have been called an offensive name online or on their cellphone. Smaller shares say they have had false rumors spread about them online (22%).”

We can't stop others from being mean, but there are ways to handle it wisely.

➤ **How do you think students should handle online trolls or bullies?** (Students may have heard the advice “Don't feed the trolls”—in other words, ignore nasty comments instead of responding to them. It's also wise to block a troll from posting on your social media account, and to report the person to the website where the troll is spreading nastiness. If a student has an ongoing problem with the same person or group of people, it has probably evolved into bullying and is time to get an adult involved.)

When someone is mean to us, our first response is often to say something mean right back. In other words, we want to fight trolling with trolling! But you already know that isn't the Christian response.

➤ **If the Internet had existed at the time of Jesus, how do you think He would have responded to trolls?** (While Jesus didn't have a smartphone, He endured plenty of “offline trolling.” He could even tell what people were *thinking* about Him! He always demonstrated love for His critics, even when they said or thought hateful or untrue things about Him.)

It's not easy to respond to mean people with love, whether they're trolling online or in real life. But Jesus taught us how. Let's learn more about how to love a troll.

Sources:

Pew Research Center

<https://www.pewresearch.org/internet/2022/12/15/teens-and-cyberbullying-2022/>

Internet troll

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Internet_troll

Anyone Can Become a Troll: Causes of Trolling Behavior in Online Discussions

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5791909/>

(Continue on to Steps 2 and 3 in your teacher's guide; your Step 4 appears below.)

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Materials:

- Paper
- Pens/pencils
- Optional: Whiteboard and marker (or screenshared document)

Responding in love when people say or do mean things is hard. In fact, “love your enemies” may be the hardest command Jesus ever gave.

Living in the Internet age only makes it harder. When you’re the victim of an online troll or bully, it’s really tough not to troll them back. However, it’s possible to show love to anyone. . . even a troll.

Distribute supplies (or invite teens to have them ready at home). Even if you’ve been treated badly online, you can decide not to return evil for evil.

On your paper, write down as many strategies as you can think of for responding to trolls online and loving your enemies. If students need ideas, suggest some of the following ideas to get them started: ignoring the mean behavior, trying to empathize with why that person might be hurting others, praying for that person that God might heal their hurts and help to change their heart, thinking before reacting, not believing mean things about yourself, and praying that God will give you peace and understanding.

Give students a few minutes to write, allowing them to discuss and collaborate with the students around them. Then, invite students to share their ideas with the whole class. You can keep a list on the whiteboard or screenshared document as students share. Encourage students to write down their classmates’ ideas on their papers as well.

Sadly, there’s a good chance every one of us will run into a troll this week—whether online or in real life. That’s why I hope you’ll take home your paper where you wrote down advice for handling this type of mean behavior. Encourage your students to read through each point this week to familiarize themselves with the strategy in case a troll crosses their path. They might also want to discuss the points with a parent to get their feedback.

Don't fall into the temptation of trolling the troll. Instead, respond in love! Jesus' advice for dealing with haters can help you do that: "Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you." Let's all work to do that in the week ahead and beyond.

Close in prayer.

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