

# Summer Devotional & Vocabulary Study for Incoming 9th Grade ELA

## Preparing the Heart and Mind for *To Kill a Mockingbird*

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### How to Use This Packet

***IMPORTANT: You will need a 3-ring binder to hold your packet and work pages. Bring your summer devotional binder to school with you the first week so that you may submit it for credit.***

1. **Pace Yourself**
  - Complete **one devotional every 3–4 days**. This allows time for reflection and prayer.
2. **Use Highlighters and Notes**
  - Highlight new vocabulary words and make notes in the margins of your packet.
  - Consider printing your scripture passages if possible, and highlighting or making notes on those, as well.
  - Think of this as both a devotional journal and a learning tool.
3. **Scripture First, Reflection Next**
  - Read the verses carefully. Take time to consider what God is teaching through them.
4. **Answer Questions Thoughtfully**
  - Don't rush. Write complete sentences on additional paper and add it to your binder. Be thorough and sincere. If you really take this seriously, you may truly grow academically and spiritually. Use examples from your life if possible.
5. **Prayer Section**
  - Pray honestly and personally. You may write short or long prayers. God wants your heart more than perfect words.
6. **Living It Out Challenges**
  - Try the suggested action in real life. These practical applications make the devotionals come alive.

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# DEVOTIONAL 1

## What Does It Really Mean to Love Your Neighbor?

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### Vocabulary Study

**Word:** Love

**Greek:** ἀγάπη (agapē)

**Pronunciation:** ah-GAH-pay

### What it means:

In Scripture, *agapē* is not just a warm feeling or affection. It is a kind of love that **chooses the good of another person**, even when it is difficult, inconvenient, or costly.

### Simple student definition:

**Biblical love is choosing to seek someone else's good, not just feeling kindly toward them.**

### Why this matters:

Many people think love means being nice to the people they already like. But the Bible teaches something deeper. Loving your neighbor may require patience, sacrifice, courage, and even defending someone others overlook or mistreat.

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## Scripture Reading

- Mark 12:30–31
  - Luke 10:25–37 (The Good Samaritan)
  - Philippians 2:3–4
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## Devotional Reflection

When Jesus was asked about the greatest commandment, He gave two answers that can never be separated: love God, and love your neighbor. That sounds simple—until we realize that “neighbor” does not only mean the people we naturally understand, enjoy, or agree with.

In the parable of the Good Samaritan, the hero is not the person others would expect. The Samaritan crossed a social boundary to care for someone in need. He gave time, money, attention, and effort. He did not simply *feel* compassion; he acted on it.

Biblical love is more than politeness. It is more than avoiding cruelty. It is more than being “nice.” Real love sees another person’s humanity and responds with mercy, even when it would be easier to walk away.

As you prepare for high school literature, one of the most important questions you can ask is this: **Do I only love the people who are easy to love, or am I willing to treat every person as someone made in the image of God?**

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## Response Questions

1. What is the difference between *liking* someone and *loving* them biblically?
  2. Why do you think Jesus used a Samaritan as the hero of the parable?
  3. What made the Samaritan’s love costly or inconvenient?
  4. Why is it often easier to ignore people than to truly love them?
  5. How can loving your neighbor require courage, not just kindness?
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## Personal Reflection

Write 4–6 sentences responding to this question:

**Who is hardest for people to treat as a “neighbor” in today’s world, and why do you think that is?**

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 **My Prayer**

Write a short, honest prayer asking God to help you grow in biblical love.

**Prayer:**

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**Living It Out**

This week, intentionally show kindness, patience, or attention to someone you might normally overlook.

**After you do it, write one sentence below about what you noticed:**

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# DEVOTIONAL 2

## Hypocrisy and the Masks We Wear

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### Vocabulary Study

**Word:** Hypocrisy

**Greek:** ὑπόκρισις (hypokrisis)

**Pronunciation:** hi-POK-rih-sis

**What it originally meant:**

This word developed from the world of **theater and performance**. It referred to **acting a part**—playing a role, sometimes behind a mask.

**What it means in Scripture:**

In the New Testament, hypocrisy means **pretending to be righteous while your heart and actions tell a different story**.

**Simple student definition:**

**Hypocrisy is acting like a good person instead of actually becoming one.**

**Why this matters:**

A hypocrite is not just someone who struggles or fails. We all fail. Hypocrisy happens when someone is more committed to **looking good** than to **being truthful, humble, and sincere**.

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## Scripture Reading

- **Matthew 23:27–28**
  - **Luke 12:1**
  - **James 1:22–25**
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## Devotional Reflection

Jesus spoke strongly against hypocrisy because it is a sin of performance. It is the difference between appearance and reality—between public image and private truth.

A person can say all the right things, attend the right places, use moral language, and still be deeply dishonest inside. Jesus described some religious leaders as “whitewashed tombs”: clean and impressive on the outside, but spiritually dead within. That image is startling because it reminds us that outward respectability is not the same as inward righteousness.

Hypocrisy is dangerous because it can fool other people—and eventually, it can fool us. When we care more about reputation than truth, we stop asking, “Am I right before God?” and start asking, “How do I look to others?”

As you grow in wisdom, you will need to learn the difference between **imperfection** and **pretense**. A sincere person may fail and repent. A hypocrite hides behind a mask.

The goal of the Christian life is not flawless performance. The goal is **truthful transformation**.

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## Response Questions

1. What is the difference between hypocrisy and simply making mistakes?
2. Why do people sometimes care more about image than truth?
3. Why do you think Jesus spoke so strongly against hypocrisy?
4. What “masks” do people sometimes wear in social, academic, or religious settings?
5. How can a person become more sincere instead of more performative?

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## Personal Reflection

Write 4–6 sentences responding to this question:

**In what area of life are people most tempted to “look right” instead of actually being right? Why?**

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## My Prayer

Write a prayer asking God to help you value sincerity over performance.

**Prayer:**

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## Living It Out

Choose one small area this week where you can practice sincerity.

Examples: admit when you are wrong, tell the truth instead of protecting your image, or quietly do the right thing without seeking praise.

**What did you choose?**

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## DEVOTIONAL 3

### What Is Truth?

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#### Vocabulary Study

**Word:** Truth

**Greek:** ἀλήθεια (alētheia)

**Pronunciation:** ah-LAY-thee-ah

**What it means:**

In Scripture, *alētheia* means **truth, reality, what is genuine, what is not false.**

**Simple student definition:**

**Truth is what is real and right—not merely what is popular, repeated, or preferred.**

**Why this matters:**

People often confuse truth with opinion, emotion, or the loudest voice in the room. But Scripture teaches that truth is grounded in the character of God and fully revealed in Christ.

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## Scripture Reading

- John 14:6
  - John 8:31–32
  - Philippians 4:8
  - Proverbs 12:22
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## Devotional Reflection

Our culture often treats truth as something flexible: “your truth,” “my truth,” “what feels true,” or “what most people believe.” But Scripture gives us a firmer foundation. Jesus does not merely *speak* truth—He says, “I am the truth.”

That changes everything.

If truth is rooted in God, then truth is not created by feelings, trends, rumors, or majority opinion. It does not become false because it is unpopular, and it does not become true because it is repeated often enough.

This matters because human beings are easily influenced by what they hear. Rumors spread quickly. Assumptions become accepted. Reputations form before facts are known. And once people decide what they want to believe, truth can feel inconvenient.

But God calls His people to be different. Christians are meant to love what is true, speak what is true, and seek what is true—even when it is uncomfortable.

As you prepare to read literature that deals with misunderstanding, judgment, and social pressure, remember this: **truth is not determined by the crowd. Truth is determined by what is real before God.**

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## Response Questions

1. How does the world often define truth differently than Scripture does?
2. Why is it dangerous to treat rumors or repeated stories as if they are facts?
3. What does it mean that Jesus said, “I am the truth”?
4. Why can truth sometimes feel costly or uncomfortable?
5. How can a person learn to value truth even when it challenges what they want to believe?

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## Personal Reflection

Write 4–6 sentences responding to this question:

**Why do people sometimes prefer a simple story or rumor over the harder work of discovering the truth?**

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## My Prayer

Write a prayer asking God to help you love truth, seek truth, and speak truth.

**Prayer:**

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## Living It Out

Before reacting to something you hear this week, pause and ask yourself:

- Is it true?
- Is it fair?
- Is it loving?

**Write one sentence about why this habit matters:**

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## DEVOTIONAL 4

# Personal Ethics: Doing Right When It Costs You

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### Vocabulary Study

**Word:** Conscience

**Greek:** συνείδησις (*syneidēsis*)

**Pronunciation:** soon-I-day-sis

**What it means:**

In Scripture, *syneidēsis* refers to **conscience**—the inward awareness that bears witness about right and wrong.

**Simple student definition:**

Conscience is your inner awareness that tells you something is right or wrong.

**Important note:**

A conscience is important, but it is not enough by itself. A conscience must be **formed by truth**. If our hearts are shaped by pride, fear, or culture instead of God's Word, our conscience can become weak, confused, or misled.

**Related idea:** Integrity

While “integrity” is not the same word, it connects closely here. Integrity means **being whole, honest, and consistent**—doing what is right even when it costs you.

### **Why this matters:**

A strong conscience and real integrity help you stand firm when doing right becomes unpopular, uncomfortable, or costly.

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## **Scripture Reading**

- **Daniel 1:8**
  - **Acts 24:16**
  - **Galatians 1:10**
  - **James 4:17**
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## **Devotional Reflection**

There is a big difference between reputation and integrity.

Reputation is what other people think about you.

Integrity is who you are when doing right becomes difficult.

In Daniel 1, Daniel “resolved” not to defile himself. That word matters. Before the pressure came, Daniel had already decided what would guide him. He did not wait until the moment of testing to suddenly invent convictions. His conscience had already been shaped by loyalty to God.

That is how personal ethics work.

Many people assume they will do the right thing when the moment comes. But if you have never thought deeply about truth, courage, justice, or obedience, you may discover that social pressure is stronger than you expected.

A conscience without truth can become unstable. A conscience shaped by Scripture becomes steadier. That does not mean you will never feel afraid. It means fear will not get the final word.

As you enter high school, you will face moments—big and small—when it is easier to go along, stay silent, protect yourself, or please the crowd. Personal ethics means you ask a better question:

**“What is right before God?”**

That question may cost you comfort. It may cost you popularity. But it builds character.

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## Response Questions

1. What is the difference between reputation and integrity?
  2. Why is it important that Daniel had already “resolved” before he was tested?
  3. Why is conscience helpful, but not enough by itself?
  4. What kinds of pressure can make it difficult to do what is right?
  5. Why do you think doing the right thing often requires courage?
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## Personal Reflection

Write 4–6 sentences responding to this question:

**Why is it easier to know what is right than to actually do what is right?**

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## My Prayer

Write a prayer asking God to strengthen your conscience, deepen your integrity, and help you do what is right even when it costs you.

**Prayer:**

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## **Living It Out**

Think of one situation you might realistically face in high school where you may feel pressure to ignore your convictions.

**Complete this sentence honestly:**

**If I know something is right, I want to remember to \_\_\_\_\_**

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# DEVOTIONAL 5

## Justice, Mercy, and Human Dignity

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### Vocabulary Study

**Word: Justice**

**Hebrew: מִשְׁפָּט (mishpat)**

**Pronunciation: mish-PAHT**

**What it means:**

In the Old Testament, *mishpat* refers to **justice, right judgment, fairness, and what is due according to what is right.**

**Word: Mercy**

**Hebrew: חֶסֶד (chesed)**

**Pronunciation: HESS-ed**

**What it means:**

*Chesed* is one of the richest words in Scripture. It means **steadfast love, covenant kindness, mercy, loyal compassion**.

### **Simple student definition:**

- **Justice** = giving what is right and fair
- **Mercy** = showing compassionate kindness, even when someone is weak or undeserving

### **Why this matters:**

God is not only just; He is also merciful. Human beings often separate those two ideas. We may want fairness without compassion—or compassion without truth. Scripture teaches us that true righteousness includes both.

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## **Scripture Reading**

- **Micah 6:8**
  - **Psalm 82:3–4**
  - **Zechariah 7:9–10**
  - **Luke 6:36**
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## **Devotional Reflection**

The Bible teaches that every person is made in the image of God. That means human dignity is not earned by intelligence, popularity, wealth, race, social class, or reputation. It is given by God Himself.

Because of that, justice matters.

Justice is not merely a legal idea. It is a moral one. Justice asks whether people are being treated rightly, fairly, and truthfully. It asks whether the weak are protected or ignored. It asks whether truth is honored or distorted. It asks whether power is being used to serve or to harm.

But Scripture also teaches mercy. Mercy does not cancel justice. Mercy reminds us that truth should not make us cruel. God's people are called to care deeply about what is right **and** deeply about the people involved.

This is difficult because people often prefer one or the other. Some want justice without compassion. Others want compassion without moral clarity. But biblical wisdom asks us to hold both together.

As you prepare for high school literature, you will encounter stories where systems fail, people are treated unfairly, and truth is not always enough to guarantee fairness. When that happens, remember this: **God cares about justice because He cares about people.**

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## Response Questions

1. What is the difference between justice and revenge?
  2. Why is mercy not the same thing as excusing wrongdoing?
  3. Why does human dignity matter in conversations about justice?
  4. Why do you think people sometimes want justice for themselves but not always for others?
  5. How can justice and mercy work together instead of against each other?
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## Personal Reflection

Write 4–6 sentences responding to this question:

**Why is it important to remember that every person has dignity, even when others do not treat them that way?**

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## My Prayer

Write a prayer asking God to help you care about what is right while also showing compassion.

**Prayer:**

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## Living It Out

Notice one moment this week when someone is ignored, dismissed, or treated unfairly.  
Ask yourself: *How could I respond with both truth and compassion?*

**Write one sentence below:**

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# DEVOTIONAL 6

## Judging Others, Assumptions, and Partiality

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### Vocabulary Study

**Word: Partiality**

**Greek: προσωποληψία (prosōpolēmpsia)**

**Pronunciation:** pro-so-po-LAME-psee-ah

**What it means:**

This word refers to **showing favoritism based on outward appearance, status, or surface-level impressions.**

**Simple student definition:**

**Partiality means judging people unfairly based on what you see, assume, or prefer.**

**Related idea: Prejudice**

While “prejudice” is a more modern English word, it connects closely here. It means **forming a judgment before truly knowing the facts or the person.**

### **Why this matters:**

Scripture repeatedly warns against shallow judgment. People often judge by appearance, reputation, class, race, social category, or rumor. God calls His people to see more truthfully and more humbly.

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## **Scripture Reading**

- **James 2:1–4, 8–9**
  - **1 Samuel 16:7**
  - **John 7:24**
  - **Proverbs 18:13**
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## **Devotional Reflection**

Human beings are quick to judge.

We notice appearance. We absorb rumors. We assume motives. We sort people into categories before we truly know them. We decide who seems trustworthy, respectable, strange, intelligent, weak, or “other” long before we have enough truth to make a fair judgment.

The Bible warns us against this because shallow judgment is both foolish and sinful.

In 1 Samuel 16:7, God reminds Samuel that people look at outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart. That does not mean appearances never matter. It means appearances are not enough. Human beings are often very confident in judgments that are actually incomplete.

James goes further and warns against favoritism. If we treat people differently because of status, presentation, or social advantage, we are not seeing them the way God sees them.

This matters deeply in life and in literature. Many conflicts begin not with facts, but with assumptions. A person becomes a rumor. A group becomes a stereotype. A name becomes a label. And once people are labeled, it becomes easier to ignore their humanity.

God calls His people to resist this. We are to listen carefully, judge rightly, and remain humble enough to admit that first impressions can be wrong.

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## Response Questions

1. What is the difference between discernment and unfair judgment?
  2. Why do people so easily make assumptions about others?
  3. How can favoritism or partiality distort the truth?
  4. Why is it dangerous to form an opinion before hearing the full story?
  5. How can humility help a person become a better judge of character?
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## Personal Reflection

Write 4–6 sentences responding to this question:

**Why do you think people often trust first impressions more than deeper understanding?**

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## My Prayer

Write a prayer asking God to help you see others more truthfully and more humbly.

**Prayer:**

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# DEVOTIONAL 7

## Courage, Conscience, and Standing Alone

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### Vocabulary Study

**Word:** Courage

**Greek:** θαρσέω / θαρρέω (tharseō / tharreō)

**Pronunciation:** thar-SEH-oh / thar-REH-oh

**What it means:**

These Greek words carry the idea of **being confident, taking heart, or being brave in the face of fear.**

**Simple student definition:**

**Courage is not the absence of fear. Courage is choosing what is right even when fear is present.**

### **Related idea: Boldness**

The New Testament often uses the idea of **boldness** to describe speaking or acting with confident trust in God rather than in human approval.

### **Why this matters:**

Many people think courage is dramatic or heroic. Often, real courage is quieter. It may look like speaking honestly, refusing to join cruelty, defending someone else, or staying faithful when you are misunderstood.

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## **Scripture Reading**

- **Joshua 1:9**
  - **Daniel 3:16–18**
  - **Acts 4:13**
  - **Galatians 1:10**
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## **Devotional Reflection**

Most people like the idea of courage. Fewer people like the cost of it.

Courage becomes real when it asks something from you. It may ask you to stand apart from the crowd. It may ask you to speak when silence feels safer. It may ask you to remain steady when others mock, misunderstand, or reject you.

In Daniel 3, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego stood before enormous pressure. Their courage was not rooted in confidence that everything would turn out comfortably. It was rooted in loyalty to God. They believed God was able to save them—but even if He did not, they would still obey.

That is a powerful kind of courage.

Biblical courage is not based on guaranteed success. It is based on conviction. It says, **“I will do what is right because it is right before God.”**

As you grow older, you will discover that courage is often connected to conscience. If your convictions are weak, your courage will often be weak. But if your mind and heart are shaped by truth, you become steadier when pressure comes.

Sometimes standing alone is not a sign that you are wrong. Sometimes it is evidence that you are refusing to bend.

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## Response Questions

1. Why is courage not the same thing as feeling fearless?
  2. What made the courage of Daniel's friends especially strong?
  3. Why is conviction important for real courage?
  4. What are some ordinary situations in school life that may require courage?
  5. Why can standing alone sometimes be necessary?
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## Personal Reflection

Write 4–6 sentences responding to this question:

**Why do you think it is so hard to stand alone, even when we know something is right?**

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## My Prayer

Write a prayer asking God to strengthen your courage and help you remain faithful when doing right is uncomfortable.

**Prayer:**



## **DEVOTIONAL 8**

### **Wisdom, Compassion, and Growing Up**

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#### **Vocabulary Study**

**Word:** Wisdom

**Greek:** σοφία (sophia)

**Pronunciation:** so-FEE-ah

**What it means:**

In Scripture, *sophia* means more than intelligence or knowledge. It refers to **wisdom, insight, sound judgment, and the ability to live rightly according to truth.**

**Simple student definition:**

**Wisdom is knowing what is true and learning how to live by it.**

**Related idea: Discernment**

Discernment means **seeing clearly, judging carefully, and understanding what matters most.**

**Why this matters:**

Growing up is not just about getting older. It is about learning to see people, situations, and yourself more truthfully—and then responding with humility, compassion, and maturity.

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## **Scripture Reading**

- **James 1:5**
- **James 3:13, 17**
- **Proverbs 4:5–7**
- **Colossians 1:9–10**

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## **Devotional Reflection**

One of the most important parts of growing up is realizing that life is more complicated than it first appears.

Children often see the world in simple categories: good people and bad people, right and wrong, obvious fairness and obvious unfairness. Some things really are that clear. But as we mature, we begin to see that human beings are more complex. People can be wrong and wounded. They can be blind and sincere. They can be kind in one moment and cowardly in another.

This is where wisdom becomes essential.

Wisdom is not cynicism. It is not assuming the worst about everyone. And it is not simply becoming “street smart.” Biblical wisdom means learning to see clearly while still remaining humble, truthful, and compassionate.

James says wisdom from above is pure, peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy, and sincere. That is a beautiful picture of maturity. True wisdom does not make a person proud or harsh. It makes them steadier, more thoughtful, and more compassionate.

As you prepare for high school, ask God not only to make you knowledgeable, but wise. Knowledge helps you understand a text. Wisdom helps you understand life.

And often, one of the clearest signs of wisdom is this: **you begin to see people more honestly without loving them less.**

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## Response Questions

1. What is the difference between knowledge and wisdom?
  2. Why does maturity require more than simply getting older?
  3. How can wisdom help a person respond to complicated situations?
  4. Why is compassion an important part of biblical wisdom?
  5. What does James 3 suggest about the character of a truly wise person?
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## Personal Reflection

Write 4–6 sentences responding to this question:

**What do you think it means to “grow up” in character, not just in age?**

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## Final Reflection:

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After completing all 8 devotionals, take time to answer the following questions completely on separate paper. Include these answers with your binder. This will help you synthesize the themes before reading the novel.

### Reflection Questions:

1. Which devotional challenged you the most? Why?
2. How do the themes of love, justice, and mercy connect with your understanding of human behavior?
3. What does it mean to see people truthfully, without partiality or prejudice?
4. How can courage and personal ethics influence the way you interact with others?
5. Reflect on a time when you faced pressure to do the easy or popular thing. How would wisdom and integrity guide you differently now?
6. How does Scripture define truth differently than the world often does?
7. How can you apply the lessons about conscience, sincerity, and standing alone to your daily life?

8. Choose one vocabulary word from a devotional that impacted your thinking. Write a 3–4 sentence reflection on why this word matters in your life.
9. How can your understanding of God’s justice and mercy prepare you to better understand the story of Maycomb, Atticus, Scout, and others in *To Kill a Mockingbird*?
10. Write a short prayer summarizing what you hope God will teach you this school year about character, integrity, and seeing others rightly.