

NFL Quarterback Russell Wilson Shows Us How to Live with Hope and Love for Others

This lesson can be presented over 1-2 sessions. Instructors should feel free to use whichever discussion questions and activities you think best for your class or group. We advise giving students the sheet with the definitions of the virtues before the discussion questions.

Lesson Goals

Help students:

- see a model of **love** that is the center of one's life and lived out through service to others
- see how important **hope** is in helping us to formulate a vision and strive for a better future
- recognize the importance of **family support** in helping each other achieve our goals
- practice **gratitude** in being thankful for all who have a positive influence on our lives
- focus on **solidarity** in realizing that we are stronger together and finding ways to come together through love and service to others, and especially during a time of disunity
- become more aware of issues of injustice and unequal opportunity and to consider how hope, love and solidarity can help us to effectively address these issues

Primary Virtues / Character Traits

Hope: confident expectation of achieving a goal or wish. Hopes are realized in building a strategy to achieve the goal and then implementing the strategy.

Love: to freely give of ourselves for the betterment of another person, without expecting anything in return

Family Dedication / Support: complete dedication for the well-being of other members of our family, physically, emotionally and spiritually, motivated by love

Gratitude: the quality of being thankful; readiness to show appreciation for kindness and to return kindness

Secondary Virtues / Character Traits

Solidarity: unity from a shared common purpose and / or interest; active loyalty within a group; mutual support within a group; being present with others

Generosity: giving freely of our own possessions, time and/or talent

Grit: living with passion and perseverance over the long term in pursuit of a goal

Leader Introduction:

Black History Month is an opportunity to look back at the past and to learn about historical injustices, to learn about individuals and institutions who made a difference in the endeavor to resist injustice and to strive for equal rights and opportunity.

Importantly, this month is also an opportunity to consider this history speaks to our life today and how as individuals and a community we are called to work for justice and to serve others. NFL legend Walter Payton was a person we can look to for inspiration as he strove for excellence, not only on the field, but also in service to others. As Payton was setting new NFL records as a running back for the Chicago Bears, he worked to address unequal opportunities by helping to launch a children's literacy program and establishing a foundation that gives money to provide opportunity for poor children and others. Each year, coming into the Super Bowl, the NFL names a Walter Payton Player of the Year who is living a life of excellence on and off the field by making a significant contribution to his community. This year's awardee is Russell Wilson, the Seattle Seahawks' star quarterback. Let's learn about Wilson's approach to life and service to others.

Video:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rxYmt1EeKAg>

Leader Summary:

Wilson and his wife Ciara give us an inspiring model of hope, love and service to others through their visits with sick children, providing meals for the hungry and the work of the Why Note You foundation. In addition to these projects, Wilson has announced that he and Ciara are supporting the creation of a new school, the Why Note You Academy that will empower poor children through education, community projects and mentoring.

Wilson challenges us to consider how we can live out a life of hope and love in service to others and in addressing injustice.

Discussion Question Options (*discussion prompts / answers are in parentheses or bullet points*)

Before beginning our discussion, let's read over the virtues and their definitions, which is found in the online lesson as a separate document.

1. In his acceptance speech Wilson spent a lot more time talking about who he is **grateful** for in his life, rather than his own accomplishments. Who did Wilson thank for helping him in his life? (dad, brother, mom, wife, coaches, others who inspire him through their service to others)

Now let's share some stories of who we are grateful for in our life and why? (encourage students to think about the people who are a part of their everyday lives and in some way make their life better. This is also a journal writing option below)

2. People comment that Wilson has an amazing smile. Do you think being so **grateful** is one of the reasons he is so happy? Do think that in general people who focus on what they are grateful for are happier, why or why not?

3. Wilson said he remembered his dad telling him, “son, **love** changes things” and going on in his speech to state, “Well, dad, you were right. I wish you were here to tell the world that in the toughest of times.” Let’s read over the definition of love. What do you think Wilson’s father meant by “**love** changes things?”

How do you think love changes things, and especially within difficult situations and the challenges of life?

4. Wilson was brought up by his dad to live with **hope** and **solidarity with others**, saying “I do believe in this one thing and it’s hope. If we come together and we love together we can make this world a better place. The fundamental question my dad always asked me was son why not you? Of all the millions of people in the world, why not you. It’s the ultimate belief that something great is going to happen.”

Hope is a sense of confidence that a goal or wish will be achieved. Do you agree with Wilson that if we come together in **solidarity** with one another that we can achieve goals such as ending racism and injustice wherever it exists, ending hunger and poverty?

(By conveying a sense of confidence that we will succeed, and focusing on bringing many different groups to a cause, we increase the probability of attracting more people to work with us in addressing difficult issues.)

5. How are Wilson and his wife Ciara living out his dad’s call of “why not you” in making a difference for others? (visiting sick children, providing millions of meals for the hungry, starting a school to provide opportunity to poor children, the billboard campaign for BLM with a focus on love).

Even with all of the good work Wilson and Ciara are doing, they may not end hunger, poverty or all racism where it exists, even just in their city of Seattle. Does that mean they shouldn’t try? Do you think their work will spark a movement of **solidarity** and inspire more people to work for positive change by working with others?

6. In his speech, Wilson quotes Walter Payton, the former football player that the NFL’s Man of the Year award is named after. Payton said, ‘We are stronger together than we are alone.’ What are some examples from our life where working with someone else or supporting someone else we were stronger together than alone? (encourage examples from family life, among friends, within our school, or sports teams).

7. In an interview, Wilson was asked about the most influential people in his life. He said, “When I reflect back to my youth I go to three people that I think really affected me. When I was young [it was] my dad and my brother. I distinctly remember my dad hitting me ground balls and me having to throw it back to him... just over and over and over... and me throwing deep post routes to my brother deep down from the right to the left on the goal post for touchdowns. Just repping and repping and repping. My dad used to wake us up at 5/5:30 in the morning and that was just the work ethic we had. So my dad and my brother were instrumental in my success and what they were able to teach me.” Wilson also thanked his mother in his speech for teaching him how to love.

What virtues does this part of Wilson’s life reflect? (**family support** and **grit**).

Do you think Russel would have achieved his success, and become the type of person he is today without the support of his family and grit?

8. The virtues of **love** and **family support** often work together. Explain how these virtues influence each other. (We are motivated by love to want the best for each member of our family and for them to become the best that they can be, and this desire is what motivates us to then support each other with time, effort, encouragement and resources)
9. Russell Wilson has chosen to support or build a number of endeavors to help others in need. If you had the type of wealth that a star NFL quarterback has, what charities would you support, or start, and why?

Few of us in life will ever have the wealth and fame of someone like Russell Wilson, but does that mean we aren’t called to help others in need? How does Wilson’s foundation speak to this question?

(Why Not You challenges each of us to step up and to help empower each other with hope, and by loving each other through service to others in whatever ways we can.)

10. Wilson said about love, “Love always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love changes things.” Wilson went on to say about the BLM billboards he and Ciara sponsored across America that “Love has to be at the core center of change, has to be at the core center of it all.” Do you agree with this, and why?
- (Love seeks and works toward the betterment of the other and trusts the other, so love helps to break down barriers among different peoples and groups and encourages us to find what unifies us, and to then work toward common goals. Even if the other side of an issue disagrees with us, if we engage the issue with love this will encourage them to view us with greater respect and become more open-minded.)

Journal Writing Options

1. Wilson's speech was written like a letter to his father expressing his **gratitude for his father**, and his **love for his father**. Write your own letter to someone that you are grateful for and be sure to give specific reasons and examples of how they have helped you and why you are grateful for them.
2. Russel's father, brother and mother were important to his success in life. Someday you may become a parent. Write about the kind of parent you hope to become, how specifically would you want to support your children?
3. Wilson mentioned in his speech what others have done to inspire him. Write about who inspires you to be the best that you can be and why? This person can be someone within your family, community, or someone you don't know personally but still inspire you to strive for excellence or to become a better person.

Extended Activities:

Organize students into small teams and ask each team to come up with one charity project that they think would include the key virtues that Wilson is living out:

- serving others in need and enabling us to love others, placing love at the center of our endeavor
- inspiring hope for a better future
- creating unity and solidarity with others

Each team should present its project to the larger group and outline how each of the above goals would be achieved through the project.

Character Action Media

Connecting Virtues to Our World

www.characteractionmedia.com

Parent Links in Education

Copyright 2016

