

Fostering Love and Resilience: How a Ugandan Street Boy Found Fulfillment as a US Foster Dad

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...

- be inspired to pursue their dreams, even in the face of obstacles, and be willing to explore non-traditional approaches in striving towards goals.
- recognize that caring for others has the potential to bridge divides of race, background, culture, and stereotypes.
- understand that when someone does something "bad," it might be a sign that they need help.
- value the impact of helping others and building connections not only as "the right thing to do," but as integral parts of recovering from their own hardships and in some cases trauma.
- identify individuals in their own lives who dedicate themselves selflessly to the well-being of others.

Highlighted Virtues and Character Traits

Resilience: the ability to recover from, or adjust to change and difficulties; choosing to use setbacks as an opportunity to learn and grow

Determination: firmness of purpose; complete commitment to achieving a goal

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

Caring: helping others; a caring person lives with empathy in trying to understand another person's situation, compassion in desiring to help others, and then with generosity in acting to help

Empathy: trying to understand another person's situation, entering into the feeling or spirit of others and imagining yourself in another person's situation

Compassion: feeling of sympathy for the distress of others with the desire to help

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

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

Leader Introduction:

In today's lesson, we'll meet a true hero who shows us the meaning of caring for others and being resilient. Born in Uganda, Peter Mutabazi's early life was marked by adversity, leading him to flee from his abusive father at only 10 years old. The hardships that he faced as a child laid the foundation for his profound life dream: to become a loving father to his own children. After moving to the United States, Mutabazi realized that the traditional path to fatherhood was likely out of reach. Instead of giving up, he made the courageous choice to become a single foster father to not just one, but four children, so that he could provide them with the love and consistency he lacked as a child. Let's watch Mutabazi's inspiring story.

Lesson Videos:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kjxeWgtN71o>

Leader Summary:

Peter Mutabazi's journey, from being a street kid in Uganda to becoming a foster dad in the United States, serves as a powerful reminder that determination, care/support *from* others, and importantly caring *for* others can help us overcome adversity, be resilient and move forward towards our dreams. Mutabazi's story also shows us how caring for others builds solidarity and enables us to transcend barriers of race, class, and life circumstances. Let's dive into Mutabazi's story and talk about how it relates to our lives.

Discussion Question Options: *(discussion prompts / answers are in parentheses)*

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

1. How was Mutabazi's path to becoming a dad an untraditional one?
(After years of longing for a wife and family, he embraced single fatherhood through fostering, offering a home for children with life challenges similar to his own)

Mutabazi did not let traditional expectations deter him from his dream to be a father, he adapted and adjusted his path, but still met his goals. What virtues does this reflect?
(**determination**, he was committed to becoming a good father, regardless of being a single, immigrant man; **resilience** in adjusting to the reality of not being married)

Let's share some stories of when we faced unexpected difficulties in working towards a goal, and like Mutabazi, adapted our approach and still achieved our goal. These stories can be within our family life, sports or school.

2. Mutabazi was shocked when his first foster child, Anthony, who he later went on to adopt, was white. He said, "Little did I know that when it comes to abuse and neglect, kids are affected the same way (regardless of their race). . . They don't look like me, but they are my family." In this quote, he suggests that being "family" is more about loving and caring for each other than about blood relations, and that his family can accept anyone in need, not just children of the same race or culture. What virtues does this reflect and why?
(**solidarity** in the unity that comes from a shared purpose of caring for each other and loving each other; **family dedication/support**)

How can Mutabazi's example of accepting children from different racial and cultural backgrounds be applied to our own schools and communities? What actions can we take to help and even love others, even if they are different from us?

3. Mutabazi said that when he fled his own family and arrived in Kampala, he felt helpless, unwanted, and uncertain of his future, and today he imagines that's how his foster children feel when they arrive. Do you think that Mutabazi's experiences as a child help him connect better with children in the foster care system?
4. How does Mutabazi live out **solidarity** and **caring** with the foster children he welcomes into his home?
(**solidarity** in relating to, supporting and coming into union with others who have experienced similar childhood hardships; **caring** in living with **empathy** in understanding the adversity and challenges his foster children have experienced, **compassion** in desiring to help them and **generosity** in freely giving of his love, time, home and other resources)

How does Mutabazi's sharing of his own story help him to create deeper connections with his children?

(They feel understood and less alone, he creates a sense of belonging and acceptance, which contributes to their emotional healing and growth)

Let's share some stories of times when we experienced a deeper connection with someone because of a shared experience, and especially when the other person is very different from you.

5. Mutabazi said, "People say (the children) are lucky, but I am the lucky one to have them. As much as I am helping them, they are helping me through (my own trauma.) That's a joy, (I am) always. . .giving, but also benefiting." Why do you think he finds joy and healing in giving to his children?

Do you think that supporting and caring for others can lead to healing and happiness for both the giver and recipient? Why or not?

6. Mutabazi initially tried to steal food from his foster father in Uganda because he was a street kid trying to survive. Do you think his actions at that time made him a bad person? Why or why not?

How did Mutabazi's foster father respond when he realized Mutabazi wanted to steal from him?

(He asked Mutabazi for his name, and no one had ever before asked him for his name. He gave him food and decided he wanted to care for Mutabazi and become his foster father.)

Mutabazi's foster father treated him with **compassion, cared** for him, and recognized his potential, even though he felt "less than human" himself. How did just one person recognizing Mutabazi's potential and showing belief in him affect his self-esteem and future choices?

(Mutabazi said that no one had ever believed in him or saw the good in him and he said it changed his life forever, in both thinking better of himself and wanting to help others.)

7. What might have happened for the rest of Mutabazi's life if his foster father in Uganda had assumed he was a bad kid, and how would that one decision have likely impacted the lives of others in America?

What does Mutabazi's story teach us about making assumptions or judging others without understanding their circumstances?

8. Ken Maxwell, the executive director for the organization through which Mutabazi has fostered and adopted his children, describes Mutabazi as "loving, kind, and genuine." He said that Mutabazi has a heart for less privileged children from hard places and makes a difference in the lives of others. Let's share some stories of people in our lives and community who make a difference in the lives of others by being loving, kind and generous.
9. Maxwell also said, "(Mutabazi)'s story is remarkable, from where he came from to the fact that he stepped out and said, 'I'm going to change this life' and now he's going on to change another and another. What's really going to be remarkable is all those kids that he's touched, they're going to go out and change other people's lives. And so the impact of one is going to be spread out over the years. It's going to be amazing."

Have you ever heard of the term “the butterfly effect?” It suggests that small actions can result in bigger changes later on. How do you think Mutabazi’s decision to help foster children demonstrates the butterfly effect?

(He was a foster child, who went on to foster many more children. His children may also go on to foster or **care** about people deeply too, he will inspire others to foster by his example.)

Journal Writing Options

- Reflect on how Mutabazi demonstrates family dedication and support. What does it mean to be dedicated to your family, and how can you specifically support and affirm the other members of your family?
- Think about the people who support you in your life, just like Mutabazi’s foster father supported him, and how Mutabazi has gone on to support his own children. Write about how your support system has made a difference in your life and character.

Extended Activity:

- Organize students into groups of 3-4 and have them reflect on “the butterfly effect” and Mutabazi’s willingness to care for others extending to more than just the people he is helping directly. Have students create and perform a short skit demonstrating how one small act of kindness can have a big impact on others. Encourage students to consider all the different communities this can happen within – family, school, sports teams, clubs and their larger communities.
- Organize students into groups of 3-4 and have them create a character profile by drawing a picture of Mutabazi, detailing the virtues that he shows around the drawing. Encourage them to add to the character profile further with quotes and direct examples from the story that show how he lives out each of the virtues.

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