

E.P.I.C. Cycle 1: The Problem with Separation and Finding the Solution

Beginning of Meeting:

For your first meeting, please follow this checklist:

- ___ Welcome everyone and open in prayer
- ___ Explain what First Priority is (a Christian group, but you do not have to be a Christian to attend)
- ___ Start with a quick icebreaker (idea: ask everyone to say their favorite movie/television)
- ___ Ask everyone to download the First Priority of Tampa Bay phone app
- ___ Assign someone to report weekly attendance & someone to send meeting reminders to the group
- ___ Close in prayer

Topic: Sin and Separation

The purpose of this cycle is to help us understand that sin separates us from God. Sin is not as much about our behavior (bad choices) as it is about our hearts (seeking God and wanting to follow His will). But, by putting our faith in Jesus, our sins are forgiven, and we are reconnected to God.

Memory Verse: Psalm 51:1: “God, be merciful to me because of your faithful love. Because of your great compassion, erase all the wrongs I have done”

Week One- EQUIP:

In the beginning, God created Adam and Eve and they lived in the Garden of Eden, where they oversaw the land and animals. When God created Adam and Eve, they did not know or think about evil.

1. Read the following verses in **Genesis 3** to learn about the “fall of man”: “Now the serpent was more crafty than any of the wild animals the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, “Did God really say, ‘You must not eat from any tree in the garden’? The woman said to the serpent, “We may eat fruit from the trees in the garden, but God did say, ‘You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden, and you must not touch it, or you will die.’” When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it.

Questions:

A) Why did God warn them not to eat from the tree and why would they die if they did?

B) Why did they eat the fruit anyway?

C) How is this related to why we struggle with sin [in other words, how is this story relevant to us now]?

2. In **Genesis 3:7-10** says: “Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves. Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the LORD God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the LORD God among the trees of the garden. But the LORD God called to the man, “Where are you?” He answered, “I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid.”

Questions:

A) What does it mean in verse 7 that “the eyes of both of them were opened”?

B) Why did they then cover themselves with leaves and hide from God?

C) In what ways is their response similar to how we respond when we sin (give examples)?

3. In **Genesis 3:11-13** says: “And he said, “Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree that I commanded you not to eat from? The man said, “The woman you put here with me—she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate it.” Then the LORD God said to the woman, “What is this you have done?” The woman said, “The serpent deceived me, and I ate.” When God asked why they had eaten from the forbidden tree, both Adam and Eve deflected by blaming someone else [Adam blames Eve and Eve blames the serpent].

Questions:

A) Why do we often blame others when we sin?

B) How do shame, pride, and fear impact why we blame others?

C) How can this be dangerous or unhealthy (give examples, if possible)?

4. In these verses, we see how Adam and Eve’s decision to eat the forbidden food was a sin against God and it changed their lives forever.

Question:

How does their decision separate them from God and why did this affect all people?

5. **Read John 3:16-17:** “For God loved the world so much that he gave his only Son [Jesus], so that everyone who believes in him may not die but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to be its judge, but to be its savior.”

Question:

How does this verse **EQUIP** us to know how to reconnect to God?

Read the Challenge to the group: Over the next week, pray for two friends who do not know Jesus as their Lord and Savior.

Week Two – PREPARE:

Please follow this checklist for the meeting:

- ___ Welcome everyone and open in prayer
- ___ Explain what First Priority is (a Christian group, but you do not have to be a Christian to attend)
- ___ Start with a quick icebreaker
- ___ Ask a student to share their faith story next week
- ___ Report attendance & send meeting reminders to the group
- ___ Close in prayer

In week one, we talked about how we are separated from God because he is holy [one perfect in goodness and righteousness] and we are not. We also talked about how God provided a way back to Him if we put our faith in Jesus.

1. **Romans 5:12** says: “Sin came into the world because of what one man did [Adam]. And with sin came death. So this is why all people must die—because all people have sinned.”

Question: Will someone please *briefly* explain how Adam and Eve’s decision to eat the forbidden fruit caused all people to be separated from God?

2. **Colossians 1:21-22** says: “At one time you were separated from God. You were his enemies in your minds, because the evil you did was against him. But now he has made you his friends again. He did this by the death Christ suffered while he was in his body. He did it so that he could present you to himself as people who are holy, blameless, and without anything that would make you guilty before him.

Question:

How are we God’s enemies “in our minds”? How would you explain this concept to someone who had never heard this?

3. **Ephesians 2:8-9** says: “For it is by God’s grace that you have been saved. You receive it through faith. It was not *our plan* or our effort. It is God’s gift, *pure and simple*. You didn’t earn it, *not one of us did*, so don’t go around bragging *that you must have done something amazing*.”

Questions:

- A) What does it mean that we cannot earn salvation?
- B) Then how are we saved and what are we saved from?

4. **Hebrews 7:25** says: “Christ can save those who come to God through him. Christ can do this forever, because he always lives and is ready to help people when they come before God.”

Question: How does this verse make you feel (thankful, relieved, confused, etc.) and how does it help you to OVERCOME any disbelief you may have?

5. Spend the remainder of the meeting preparing for next week’s meeting. This includes asking students to volunteer for the following responsibilities (be sure to get students’ contact info so you can prepare and remind them):

___ A student or two to share his or her faith story (how God has impacted their life in some way)

___ A student to read the invitation and prayer (see under INVITE Week)

___ Two students to be on the follow-up team (see below)

___ A student to end the meeting in prayer

Read the Challenge to the group: We will spend the next few minutes praying for each other (popcorn prayer, if time allows, or take prayer requests).

Week Three – INVITE:

This is the week when a student will share a faith story and another will share the gospel and invitation. Please follow the following steps at the beginning of the meeting:

___ Welcome everyone and open in prayer

___ Explain what First Priority is (a Christian group, but you do not have to be a Christian to attend)

___ Start with a quick icebreaker

___ The student shares their faith story

___ The student reads the gospel and invitation

___ Hand out and then collect the Student Response Cards (found on the FP website)

___ Report attendance & decisions, send meeting reminders to the group

___ Close in prayer

Invitation/Prayer (ask students to close their eyes and bow their heads):

And now we will pray. This is not a magical prayer. It is simply an opportunity to respond to the gospel message, which is the good news of Jesus who died on the cross as payment of our sins and three days later rose from the dead, proving that God accepted Jesus’ death as payment.

(Please ask students to bow their heads and close their eyes)

If this message is speaking to you today, and you want to trust in Jesus as your savior then pray this simple prayer to yourself: Dear Lord, I admit that I have been sinful, which means that I seek my own selfish desires and this has separated me from you. But I believe that through Jesus, I can be forgiven. Today, I pray that you will come into my life and help me to trust in you. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.

Follow-up Plan:

Once you have shared the gospel and invitation, collect the Student Response Cards (can be downloaded from the First Priority website) and then follow these steps:

1. Student leaders commit to praying for and contacting any student who has decided to follow Christ and/or has questions.
2. When contacting these students, student leaders will want to:
 - Answer any questions
 - Offer to pray for them
 - Invite them to the next week's CONNECT Week meeting
 - Invite them to your church
3. Return all Student Response cards to a student leader or teacher sponsor (Response cards or information on the cards must never be given to an outside adult or organization/ church)

Week Four – CONNECT:

For the last few weeks, we have talked about how sin [our selfish desires and behaviors] separate us from God and often causes us to blame others and/or to feel shame. This never-ending cycle of shame and deflection is the human condition- especially if we have not placed our faith and trust in Jesus. This week, we will finish up our discussion and then talk about ways to CONNECT with God.

1) **Mark 7:20-23** reads: And Jesus said, "The things that make people wrong [sinful] are the things that come from the inside. All these bad things begin inside a person, in the mind: bad thoughts, sexual sins, stealing, murder, adultery, greed, doing bad things to people, lying, doing things that are morally wrong, jealousy, insulting people, proud talking, and foolish living. These evil things come from inside a person. And these are the things that make people unacceptable to God."

Questions:

A) What does it mean that these evil things come from inside a person?

- B) How does jealousy and pride begin in the mind?
- C) How does having a relationship with Jesus help us with these evil things?

2) **Psalm 51:1** reads: God, be merciful to me because of your faithful love. Because of your great compassion, erase all the wrongs I have done.

Questions:

- A) If God can erase your wrong doings, can there still be consequences from your wrong actions? B) Why doesn't God erase [remove] these too?
- C) How can memorizing this verse help you when you are struggling with sin?

3) **Read Acts 3:19:** "Now repent of your sins and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped away." The idea of repentance means to turn back or towards to God [to follow Him and not your own selfish desires] AND to feel sorry for your rebellion against God [remorse].

Questions:

- A) Why is it so hard to follow Jesus rather than on our own selfish desires?
- B) Are you currently moving towards God or away? If away, please explain why.
- C) How can we be connected to God if we are not currently?

Read the Challenge to the group: Invite a friend to your church or youth group this week.