

## Leadership Guide for

### 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”

- Please read this verse out loud at each meeting during this cycle, and then ask students to memorize it over the next week.

#### **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?

God warned them not to eat from the tree because he loved them and wanted to protect them from themselves. The tree was a test of their faithfulness and obedience to their Creator. The “death” Adam and Eve faced was a spiritual death. This act caused them to be separated from God. They also experienced physical death for their disobedient act. Though it was not immediate, it still was a result from their disobedience of God. The Lord promised: In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread till you return to the ground, for out of dust you were taken; for dust you are, and to dust you shall return (Genesis 3:19). The physical death was postponed due to God's grace but the spiritual death was immediate.

- B) Why did they eat the fruit anyway?

They were susceptible to the lies that Satan uses to separate us from God, just like we are still today.

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

Give examples of lies that you have believed or what causes you to stray from His word or causes you to doubt his goodness.

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”?

They felt the full weight of the shame, guilt and worry over the sin they had committed.

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

They felt exposed and unsafe. They wanted to protect themselves from God being upset with them. They only knew they were naked because of sin entering the world.

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

Give examples of ways that you hide from your sin or experience shame.

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?

We are trying to dodge responsibility of owning our sin.

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

All three of these things are what we are trying to avoid when we use others as an escape route. We are trying to find a way to not take ownership over our own decision-making capabilities. We have free will to make our own decisions.

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

It means we are not repenting our sins. We are casting the blame onto others. We are called to pick up our crosses and to ask for forgiveness from our Father. If we don't ask for him to cleanse us of our past mistakes/wrongdoings then we can't be forgiven.

When is a time you were unaware/in denial of a sin that you had committed?

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? Adam and Eve's decision was made in direct disobedience of their Creator. Their faithfulness was tested and they failed. In the same way, our faithfulness is tested and our flesh fails still today. The world was created perfect and invited sin in. We feel the consequences of their actions today as their descendants.

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?

In order to reconnect with God we have to believe in Him fully. We have specific instructions to wholeheartedly agree that God lovingly sent his only Son down to walk on Earth with us to show us the way to heaven and die for our sins.

**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

**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”

- Please read this verse out loud at each meeting during this cycle, and then ask students to memorize it over the next week.

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?

It showed God that we are unfaithful and are prone to disobedience. (Reference week above)

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?

There is constantly a battle going on within our minds. Because of the fall, we are prone to Satan entering in and feeding us lies about who we are. We are sinful by nature due to the fall. Earth is a battlefield for Satan and God. They both desire our souls.

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?

Salvation comes faith and Jesus alone. We can’t earn it, we don’t deserve it and it’s a free gift for us to choose to accept or reject.

B) Then how are we saved and what are we saved from?

God sent his son Jesus to Earth to be hung, on the cross, to pay for our sins. We are saved from eternal separation.

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?

Not all have to feel the same while reading this verse. Encourage others to share how it truly makes them feel and WHY!

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

**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”

- Please read this verse out loud at each meeting during this cycle, and then ask students to memorize it over the next week.

**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.

**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”

- Please read this verse out loud at each meeting during this cycle, and then ask students to memorize it over the next week.

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?  
The world was pure and sinless before the fall. Our minds and hearts are wicked and prone to being evil.
- B) How does jealousy and pride begin in the mind?  
They are lies that manifest in us because of sin.
- C) How does having a relationship with Jesus help us with these evil things?  
We can call on Him to make our hearts and minds pure. When we invite him in, he washes us clean.

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?

Yes, if you don't repent of them. Even if you do repent, He can choose to teach us lessons from our wrong doings. He loves justly and mercifully.

C) Why doesn't God erase [remove] these too?

He chooses some consequences to teach us lessons because He loves us and wants what is best for us.

C) How can memorizing this verse help you when you are struggling with sin?

It makes you keep your sinful nature in mind. It could serve as a constant reminder that we need Him to wash us clean daily. He teaches us because He loves us.

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?

It is our nature. It's a constant battle between what our flesh desires and what we know God desires for us. We are tempted by evil.

B) Are you currently moving towards God or away? If away, please explain why.

Give examples of how we move towards or away from God and what causes your movement in either direction.

C) How can we be connected to God if we are not currently?

If you accept Him into your heart and choose to accept Him as your Lord and Savior then he is always dwelling within you. Even though you may not feel connected physically, you are always connected spiritually.

If someone is a non-believer, God is currently pursuing them and wanting to be in a relationship with them so they can live in freedom.