

## Epic Cycle 7 Leaders' Guide

### How to Have a Student-Led Meeting:

- Welcome everyone and open in prayer
- Explain First Priority (a Christian group, but you don't have to be a Christian to attend)
- Read the memory verse, questions and challenges
- A student reports weekly attendance on FPTB phone app
- A student sends meeting reminders to the group
- Close in prayer

**Memory Verse:** "For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful- I know that full well". **Psalm 139:13-14** (NIV)

### Week 1-Equip

This week we will talk about the effects of loneliness and/or isolation. The purpose of this lesson is to recognize the symptoms of loneliness, and avoid isolation, if possible.

1. In the Bible, we read about David who suffered with loneliness and isolation. In **Psalm 25:16-17** David cries out to God: "I am hurt and lonely. Turn to me, and show me mercy. <sup>17</sup> Free me from my troubles. Help me solve my problems." And in **Psalm 42:5** he also says: "Why are you in despair, O my soul? And why have you become restless *and* disturbed within me? Hope in God *and* wait expectantly for Him, for I shall again praise Him for the help of His presence".

### Questions:

**A.** Why do loneliness and isolation create despair and/or restlessness?

Feeling lonely and isolated can have a wide range of physical and emotional effects on your body, which can lead to negative emotions, burnout and hopelessness.

**B.** What is David doing in **Psalm 42:5** and why is this important?

He is talking to himself and verbally processing his feelings. This is important because it helps us to be more self-aware and get to the root of what is happening emotionally.

**C.** Have you ever cried out to God? If yes, please explain the circumstances.

2. In **1 John 4:13** we read: "By this we know [with confident assurance] that we abide in Him [Christ] and He in us, because He has given to us His [Holy] Spirit" and in **John 16:32** Jesus tells his disciples the following: "Take careful notice: an hour is coming,

and has arrived, when you will all be scattered, each to his own *home*, leaving Me alone; and yet I am not alone, because the Father is with Me”.

**Questions:**

A. What does it mean to “abide” in Christ and why is this an important aspect of the Christian faith?

Abide means to accept or act in accordance with (a rule, decision, or recommendation). To abide in Him means to receive and trust all that God is for us in Christ. This is a continual dependance on the Lord. We are called to live in relationship with Him.

B. How does **John 16:32** encourage us when we feel alone?

Our God never leaves us. Even when we feel alone and no one is physically present, He is there.

C. How do you handle feeling alone or lonely (share the positive and negative)?

3. **Ecclesiastes 4:9-10** reads: “Two can accomplish more than twice as much as one, for the results can be much better. If one falls, the other pulls him up; but if a man falls when he is alone, he’s in trouble. And **Job 2:11** reads: “Now when Job’s three friends heard of all this adversity that had come upon him, each one came from his own place, Eliphaz the Temanite, Bildad the Shuhite, and Zophar the Naamathite; for they had made an appointment together to come to sympathize with him and to comfort him”.

**Questions:**

A. How do the verses in **Ecclesiastes 4:9-10** apply to loneliness and isolation?

We are encouraged to stay connected to others and to ask for help/support when needed. Having others to lean on and trust will help us to avoid “self-reliance” and bitterness. Having a connection to others will also provide a level of accountability and keep us from slipping into unhealthy patterns of behavior.

B. Why do we need friends who will sympathize and comfort us when we are struggling, and how does this EQUIP us to help others who are having a hard time?

When others comfort us, it helps us to feel like we aren’t alone in our suffering. This is one way that the Lord comforts us when we are in need. Friends are meant to ease your burden and suffering. It shows that they love you. When we feel this type of love, it reminds us to be that for someone else.

**Action:** Spend time with a friend this week talking about your faith; make an effort to talk to someone new or with someone you haven’t spoken to in a while.

**Challenge:** Pray for a friend who needs to know Jesus.

**Week 2-Prepare**

The Bible tells us that in this world we will have stress and hardships, which can often cause us to feel overwhelmed and anxious. This week, we will talk about how to manage these feelings.

1. In **Hebrews 13:5** we read: “Let your character [your moral essence, your inner nature] be free from the love of money [shun greed—be financially ethical], being content with what you have; for He has said, “I WILL NEVER [under any circumstances] DESERT YOU [nor give you up nor leave you without support, nor will I in any degree leave you helpless], NOR WILL I FORSAKE *OR* LET YOU DOWN *OR* RELAX MY HOLD ON YOU [assuredly not]!”

**Questions:**

A. Why does God care of and think about people?

He created us. He made us in His own image. God loves us and wants to be in relationship with us.

B. Why do we often focus on the “but”- as in “I am grateful for this...but” or “I should be at peace in this situation...but”?

In our human weakness, it is easy for us to feel sorry for ourselves and to think we deserve more than we have/God has given us. It is a state of being ungrateful.

C. How can we have the right perspective on God and His attributes, and why does this matter to us and to God?

By remembering that God is good and able to provide all that we NEED. He knows His plan for us and it is good. Remembering these truths will help us to be content and grateful for what HE has given us.

2. **Romans 5:3-5** reads: “And we are also happy with the troubles we have. Why are we happy with troubles? Because we know that these troubles make us more patient. And this patience is proof that we are strong. And this proof gives us hope. And this hope will never disappoint us. We know this because God has poured out his love to fill our hearts through the Holy Spirit he gave us”.

**Questions:**

A. Why does struggling make us more patient?

It makes us rely on God to help and guide us through our trials, which builds our trust in Him. We learn to wait on His timing and not our own.

B. How does the Holy Spirit help us during times of stress and why is this important?

The Holy Spirit lives within the hearts of those who have accepted Christ as their Savior. The Holy Spirit comforts us during our troubles with His peace, and when we feel alone we can call on Him through prayer.

3. **1 Peter 5:10** we read: “And the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast”.

**Questions:**

A. Can you give an example of a time when you were struggling [suffering] and you questioned if God cared or noticed?

B. What does the word “restore” mean and why does this matter to us?

The word restore means to return something to its original state. In this verse, it means that the Lord is responsible and able to return you to the complete state that He created you to be in.

C. How does knowing that God will make you strong, firm, and steadfast help you to have joy, no matter the circumstances?

I feel comforted that God will be there and help me survive anything that happens while I am alive. He won't give me something I can't handle as long as I invite Him into it.

**Action:** Spend time in prayer thanking God (list everything you can think of, even the difficulties) and then thank Him for His promises.

**Challenge:** Invite at least two new friends to attend next week's INVITE meeting.

### **Week 3-Invite**

This week, a student should share a faith story about how God is moving in their lives, and another student should share the gospel message and invitation (SEE BELOW). Please remember to use the Response Cards [found on the First Priority of Tampa Bay website under the Students tab], and report attendance and decisions for Christ on the First Priority of Tampa Bay phone app.

#### **Gospel Message (To be read out loud to the group):**

- Admit that you are a sinner. To "sin" means to make a bad choice, and sin separates us from God.
- Believe in Jesus and put your trust in Him. Christ's death on a cross two thousand years ago was an act of selfless love. He took on the whole sins of humanity, making it possible for all people to encounter God.
- Confess Christ Jesus as your Lord and Savior. This means acknowledging that you want Him in your life.

#### **Invitation/Prayer (ask students to bow their heads):**

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 have sinned and this has separated me from you because you are a Holy God. But, I your word in Ephesians says that Jesus died for me, and his grace is extended to me so that I can be forgiven. Today, I pray that you will come into my life and be my LORD and help me to trust in you and live in a way that is pleasing to you. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.

#### **Follow UP Plan:**

Once you've 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 made a decision for Christ and/or has questions.

2. When contacting these students, student leaders will want to:

- Answer any questions they may have
- Offer to pray for them
- Invite them to the next week's HELP Week meeting
- Invite them to your church, if they don't have one

3. Return all Student Response cards to the student leader or teacher (Response cards or information on the cards must never be given to an outside adult or organization/church)

**Challenge: Follow up with your friends who attended today's meeting and ask how you can pray for them.**

#### **WEEK 4-Connect**

This week we will talk about how to have resiliency, which is the process of recovering from or adapting well in the face of adversity, trauma, tragedy, threats, or significant sources of stress.

1. **1 Thessalonians 5:11** reads: "So encourage each other and help each other grow stronger in faith, just as you are already doing".

#### **Questions:**

A. How are we likely to respond to difficult circumstances if we are struggling with our faith, feeling overwhelmed, and/or hopeless?

**We are going to need encouragement from friends to turn to God during this time.**

B. Why do we need good friends to help us grow in our faith and can they encourage us when we are struggling?

**We need to be held accountable and grow together with people toward Christ instead of being guided down an "unhealthy path". Healthy friends will encourage us to deal with difficult times in healthy ways.**

2. **1 Peter 5:8-9** reads: "Be sober [well balanced and self-disciplined], be alert *and* cautious at all times. That enemy of yours, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion [fiercely hungry], seeking someone to devour. But resist him, be firm in *your* faith [against his attack—rooted, established, immovable], knowing that the same experiences of suffering are being experienced by your brothers and sisters throughout the world. [You do not suffer alone.]"

#### **Questions:**

A. What does it mean to be “rooted, established, immovable” against the devil’s attacks and what happens when we are not?

This means you are fully dependent on God for everything in your life. He is your first priority and you rely on Him solely.

B. How does it help it help you to know that you do not suffer alone?

It makes you feel understood and comforted. I am cared for and loved enough to not go through the painful, darkness of this world alone. Jesus lived on this Earth and experienced the same sin we do. He cannot just sympathize but he can empathize.

**3. Philippians 4: 4-7; 12-13** reads: “Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! <sup>5</sup> Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. <sup>6</sup> Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. <sup>7</sup> And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. <sup>12</sup> I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. <sup>13</sup> I can do all this through him who gives me strength.”

**Questions:**

A. How is it possible give thanks to God in every situation, even when we are suffering?

He will make all things good. He has walked before us and knows what we endure here on Earth. His timing is perfect, you just need to be patient in the waiting.

B. Why is it important for God to guard our hearts and minds, especially during stressful situations?

You can convince yourself that you are in control of the situation. God is in control and he is good. His timing is greater than ours and he holds us in His hands. Even when you don’t see Him, He is still working.

C. Are you currently in a stressful situation and find it hard to be thankful or content? Please share

4. Spend the remainder of the meeting discussing how to connect with your campus-contact a First Priority representative if you need suggestions.

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