

Epic Cycle 9 Leaders' Guide What it Means to Stand in the Gap

How to have a student-led club:

- Open and close meetings in prayer
- Explain First Priority [First Priority is a Christian group, but you do not have to be a Christian to attend]
- Download the First Priority of Tampa Bay phone app

- Report weekly attendance via the phone app
- Send weekly meeting reminders

Memory Verse: “He [God] wants all people to be saved from the punishment of sin. He wants them to come to know the truth. ⁵There is one God. There is one Man standing between God and men [people]. That Man is Christ Jesus. ⁶He gave His life for all men so they could go free and not be held by the power of sin. God made this known to the world at the right time.” **1 Timothy 2:4-6**

Topic: When we think of a gap, we usually think of a space between two things- for example, the gap between a sidewalk and grass. The problem with a gap is that if there isn't something bridging the space, things fall through and are lost. In the same way, there is space between people and God because He is holy and we are not. This is why Jesus is the bridge between God and us so that we are not separated from Him forever. In this cycle, we will talk about what it means to stand in the gap and why it matters.

Week 1: EQUIP

When Adam and Eve made the choice to sin against God and disobey Him, sin entered the world and affected all humans- separating all people from God. In Genesis, we read God's plan for providing a way back to Him through His son, Jesus.

1. In **1 Timothy 2:4-6**, we read “He [God] wants all people to be saved from the punishment of sin. He wants them to come to know the truth. ⁵There is one God. There is one Man standing between God and men [people]. That Man is Christ Jesus. ⁶He gave His life for all men so they could go free and not be held by the power of sin. God made this known to the world at the right time.”

These verses give us an understanding of how Jesus “stands in the gap” between God and people, explaining why placing our faith and trust in Jesus is the only way back to God.

Questions:

A. Why do we need to be reconnected to God and what happens if we are not?

Adam and Eve sinned against God in the Garden of Eden. When this sin entered the world, it separated us from God. If we are not reconnected with God, through Jesus, we will live eternally separated from Him.

B. How is Jesus qualified to stand in the gap for us and why isn't anyone else qualified? God sent His Son to intercede on our behalf. He was sinless and died on the cross to save us from our own sin. This created a pathway to Heaven, through Him.

2. In **Hebrews 7:25**, we read: "Therefore He [Jesus] is able also to save forever (completely, perfectly, for eternity) those who come to God through Him, since He always lives to intercede and intervene on their behalf [with God]." And **Isaiah 53:12** reads: "I [God] will do this because he [Jesus] gave his life for the people. He was considered a criminal, but the truth is, he carried away the sins of many. Now [Jesus] will stand before me [God] and speak for those who have sinned [all people]."

Questions:

A. What does intercede or intercession mean and what is an example of this in modern times? The word intercede means to go between or act on someone's behalf. A modern example is a defense attorney who pleads the case of someone charged with a crime.

B. Why does Jesus "speak for those who have sinned" and why is this important for us to know and understand? Because Jesus took our place on the cross and God accepted this as full payment for our sins, Jesus is blameless before God and has the authority to speak on our behalf.

3. Romans 8:26 reads: "Also, the [Holy] Spirit helps us. We are very weak, but the [Holy] Spirit helps us with our weakness. We don't know how to pray as we should, but the Spirit himself speaks to God for us. He begs God for us, speaking to him with feelings too deep for words."

Questions:

A. Why does this verse describe people as weak and how does this affect our relationship with God? All people are struggle with sin (selfish desires) and this makes us weak against the struggles of the flesh. But, by dwelling in our spirit, the Holy Spirit teaches, comforts, protects, leads, and corrects us. The power of God lives in us, giving us the strength we need to follow and obey Him.

B. How does this week's lesson **EQUIP** you to trust that Jesus intercedes to God on your behalf?

Please read this prayer out loud to the group:

Dear Lord, please forgive me for sinning against you and wanting to seek after my own selfish desires. In my weakness, I know that I need you and I am trusting in Jesus to help me to follow and trust you. Please give me a desire to know you and tell others about you. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.

Week 2: PREPARE

Last week, we talked about how Jesus stands in the gap between God and us as our savior and intercessor- speaking to God on our behalf. This week, we will talk about prayer, and how and why we are able to intercede on behalf of others.

1. **Colossians 1:9b** reads: “We have not stopped praying for you, asking [specifically] that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom [with insight into His purposes], and in understanding [of spiritual things]...”

Questions:

- A. How does this verse describe prayer to God? It shows us that we should pray regularly, specifically, and with purpose because God desires to fill us with spiritual wisdom and insight.
- B. Why would we desire for others to have “insight into God's purposes”? So that they too can know and feel close to God, and His plan for their lives.
- C. What, specifically, do you want others to pray on your behalf?

2. **James 5:16** reads: “So always tell each other the wrong things you have done. Then pray for each other. Do this so that God can heal you. Anyone who lives the way God wants can pray, and great things will happen.”

Questions:

- A. How does confessing our selfish desires to others before we pray help us (and others)? When we tell a trusted friend our sin and how we are struggling, it humbles us, brings our sin out of shame and into the light, brings us closer to others, and provides accountability.
- B. Why does prayer [for ourselves and others] act as a catalyst to God's healing? When we pray to God [talk to Him] it aligns our minds, hearts, and desires to His, which brings peace [with God]. It also softens our hearts for others, and helps us to have empathy and connection with them- all of which brings healing.

3. **Matthew 5:44** reads: “But I tell you, love your enemies. Pray for those who treat you badly” and **Luke 6:28** reads: “bless those who curse you, and pray for those who mistreat you.”

Questions:

- A. Why does God want us to pray for those who treat us badly? Praying to God [talking to Him] softens our hearts, and helps us to see our own faults and to have compassion for others. It also helps us to forgive others and not develop bitterness and rage.
- B. How is it possible to have love for those who mistrust us? As we pray to God for others and those-not-so-nice to us, He works in our hearts to have forgiveness. Only God can help us to have right hearts and minds that are able to forgive and love those who mistreat us- it cannot come from us alone.

C. Are you struggling to forgive someone who has hurt you (you do not need to share names or details, if your answer is yes, ask your group to pray for you)?

For the remainder of today's meeting, PREPARE for next week's **INVITE** meeting by:

- Asking a student to prepare a faith story (how Jesus has affected their life) for next week.
- Asking a student to prepare to share the gospel and/or invitation next week.

Challenge: Invite at least two friends to next week's meeting.

Week 3: INVITE

This week, a student shares a faith story and another the gospel and/or invitation. After the invitation, the Response Cards are passed out and collected, and then the leaders use the Follow Up Plan below.

Please follow these steps:

1. Welcome everyone and open in prayer
2. Explain First Priority and the purpose of today's meeting
3. Introduce the student sharing his/her faith story
4. After the faith story, a student reads the gospel and/or invitation
5. Response cards are passed out to all students and then collected at the end of the meeting
6. A leader invites all guests to next week's First Priority meeting
7. A leader reports today's attendance and decision for Christ's on the First Priority phone app
8. A student closes in prayer

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

- Admit that you are a sinner. To "sin" means to make a bad choice out of selfish desires, and sin separates us from God because we are pursuing our own path aside from what God's perfect plan for us.
- Believe in Jesus and put your trust in Him. Christ's death on a cross was an act of selfless love. He took on the whole sins of humanity, making it possible for all people to be reunited with God.
- Confess Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior. This means acknowledging that you want Him in your life. Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." This means that we cannot be saved by being "good enough", but only through accepting Jesus as our Savior.

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, your Word 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, helping 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:
 - 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: Pray for those who may a decision to follow Jesus today.

Week 4: CONNECT

Last week, we talked about standing in the gap for others by praying to God about and for them. This week, we will talk about how and why we should stand in the gap between two extremes. Here are two examples of extremes: God's holiness and our sinful nature; the perfection of Heaven and this fallen world.

1. Exodus 13:3a,11 reads: Moses said to the [Israelites] people, "Remember this day. You were slaves in Egypt, but on this day the Lord used his great power and made you free. "The Lord will lead you into the land he promised to give you."

These verses are not only about God freeing the Israelites from slavery under the Egyptians and eventually guiding them to promised land, it's also a picture of spiritual slavery: we are slaves to our selfish desires[sin], but Jesus died on the cross to set us free [to our sinful, selfish nature].

Questions:

A. In these verses, how is Moses acting as an intercessory for the Israelites? **Moses was God's human representative who was the go-between for God's people, both spiritually and physically. In essence, Moses was acting on God's behalf.**

B. How would you explain the two extremes of being a slave to our sinful desires and being free in Christ? **Before we accept Jesus Christ as our Savior, we are controlled by our selfish**

desires, but once we are saved, we are made new in Christ's image [and this is how God sees us] and no longer trapped in our selfish desires. We will still struggle daily with selfishness, but Holy Spirit that lives in us will give us the strength and desire to follow and trust God.

2. Joshua 3: 14,15,16a,17 reads: "So when the people broke camp to cross the Jordan, the priests carrying the ark of the covenant went ahead of them.¹⁵ Now the Jordan is at flood stage all during harvest. Yet as soon as the priests who carried the ark reached the Jordan and their feet touched the water's edge,¹⁶ the water from upstream stopped flowing. The priests who carried the ark of the covenant of the Lord stopped in the middle of the Jordan and stood on dry ground, while all Israel passed by until the whole nation had completed the crossing on dry ground.

Question:

A. How do these verses symbolize God's plan for redeeming believers to Him [hint: think of God being with them, and Jesus saving them from eternal separation from God]? The Ark of the Covenant was God going with them where ever they went; the priests going ahead of the people, stopping in the middle of the river, represents Jesus' as standing in the gap for God's people through his death on the cross and his intercession in heaven now; and the whole nation going across represents all who are saved by faith in Jesus [from the beginning of time]. In essence, it's God's plan for how believers cross into eternity.

3. For the remainder of the meeting, please share information about your church's youth group meetings, and any upcoming activities or events.