

EPIC Cycle 3 – Leader’s Guide for Is God’s Word Reliable?

How to have a student-led club:

- Open and close the meeting in prayer
- Explain what First Priority is [First Priority is a Christian group, but you do not have to be a Christian to attend]
- Ask everyone to download the First Priority of Tampa Bay phone app
- Assign someone to report weekly attendance via the phone app
- Assign someone to send weekly meeting reminders

This month’s topic: The Bible is a collection of books and broken into two parts- the Old and the New Testament. The Old Testament encompasses the time period before Jesus walked the earth and the New Testament details his birth, teachings, death, and resurrection. Not only is the Bible an historic document, but it is also the basis of the Christian faith. In this cycle, we will talk about why it’s important to read and trust the Bible.

MEMORY VERSE: “All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful to teach us what is true and to make us realize what is wrong in our lives. It corrects us when we are wrong and teaches us to do what is right.” **2 Timothy 3:16**

WEEK 1: EQUIP

The Bible is often referred to as God’s Word or the Holy scriptures, and we read it to know and understand God’s promises and plans. It also teaches us that God is good, just, and trustworthy. This week, we will talk about the Bible and why we should trust what it says.

1. In **2 Timothy 3:16** we read: “All Scripture [what is written in the Bible] is inspired by God and is useful to teach us what is true and to make us realize what is wrong in our lives. It corrects us when we are wrong and teaches us to do what is right. And, **2 Peter 1:20** reads: “knowing this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone’s own interpretation”.

QUESTIONS:

A. How is the Bible inspired by God and why does this matter?

God divinely influenced the human authors of the Bible so that what they wrote were the words of God. In the context of the Bible, the word “inspiration” means “God-breathed.”

B. What does “prophecy of scripture” mean?

Prophecy of scripture refers to verses in the Old Testament that predict [among other things] the coming of Jesus and what he would accomplish. By referencing these, Peter is reminding us that these predictions were given directly from God.

C. Do you believe that the Bible is still relevant today, why or why not?

Discuss your honest opinions and thoughts with your peers. Allow others to voice their opinions and encourage everyone to answer.

2. In **2 Samuel 22:31** it reads: "As for God, his way is perfect: The LORD's word is flawless; he shields all who take refuge in him." And, in **Psalms 34: 8** it reads: "Give the LORD a chance to show you how good HE is. Great blessings belong to those who depend on him!"

QUESTIONS:

A. What do you think it means to "take refuge in God"?

Taking refuge in the God means to find safety and security in Him when life circumstances aren't good. Practically, this means going to God in prayer during a hard circumstance and trusting that he is watching over you (mentally, physically & spiritually). Nothing happens to us without God knowing about it and working it together for our good.

B. Why is it difficult to trust that God is always good?

It's hard to trust that God is good when we live in a world that is so bad (death and dying is all around us). What we often see are the circumstances of a sinful world and people, and we lose sight of God's goodness, faithfulness, holiness, and willingness to work all things together for the good of those who believe in Him.

3. In **Psalms 33:4** it reads: "For the word of the LORD holds true, and we can trust everything he does."

QUESTIONS:

A. What are the implications(suggestions) of God's word holding true?

Holding true means that nothing can prevent it from being so. No matter what happens in our lives or in this world, We can trust that God's promises- found in the Bible- will always hold firm.

B. Have you questioned God's goodness or had trouble trusting Him? Please explain the circumstances.

Use this opportunity to be genuine, real, transparent, and authentic with real life examples.

C. If someone here is struggling to trust God, what would you say to them?

Encourage multiple people to answer.

CHALLENGE: This week pray for a friend who needs to know that God is good.

WEEK 2: PREPARE

Last week, we talked about how the Bible is God's Word and we read it to know and understand God's promises and plans. It also teaches us that God is good and trustworthy. One of the reasons that we can trust the Bible is because of the prophecies foretold and fulfilled. In fact, there are over 250 prophecies of Jesus that are fulfilled in the New Testament. This week, we will read a few of these verses.

1. In the following verses, the Prophet Isaiah predicts that Jesus will be born of a virgin and approximately 700 years later this is fulfilled!

"Therefore, the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son and will call him Immanuel!" **Isaiah 7:14**. "This is how the birth of Jesus the Messiah came about: His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be pregnant through the Holy Spirit." **Matthew 1:18**

QUESTIONS:

A. How significant is it that approximately 700 years had passed between Isaiah's prophecy and Jesus' birth?

It proves that the prophecy was true and trustworthy. There were roughly 7 generations between the prophecy and Jesus' birth- making it impossible for it to be anything less.

B. Why was it important for Mary to know that she would conceive a baby as a virgin?

Because she would not have understood what was happening to her. It makes her pregnancy and the birth of Jesus a miracle that only God would be able to do, and it confirms the prophecy about the Messiah being born of a virgin so Mary would know that her baby is the Son of God.

2. In the Old Testament, we read this prophecy about Jesus: "My people, hear my teaching; listen to the words of my mouth. I will open my mouth with a parable; I will utter hidden things, things from of old" **Psalm 78:1-2** and in **Matthew 13:13**, Jesus himself says this: "This is why I speak to them in parables "Though seeing, they do not see; though hearing, they do not hear or understand".

QUESTIONS:

A. Why is it important for Jesus to share "hidden things, things from old"?

It confirmed that he was with God and was God when the world and everything in it was formed.

B. What is the significance of Jesus using parables to speak to his people?

It fulfilled the prophecy that the Messiah (Son of God) would speak in parables.

C. Do you think that what Jesus said over 2,000 years ago still apply to us today? Why or why not.

Answer honestly and allow all people in the group to voice their thoughts and opinions. Take time to have a discussion here.

3. The Prophet Micah predicts that the Messiah will come from Bethlehem and approximately 700 years later, Jesus was born in Bethlehem. In **Micah 5:2** we read: "But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from old, from ancient times." And then in **Matthew 2:1-2** we read: "After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem ² and asked, "Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him."

QUESTIONS:

A. Besides the Messiah coming from Bethlehem, what other similarities do you see in these verses?

Jesus was from the clans of Judah, as was King David, and he was with God during the creation of the world [ancient times].

B. What have you learned this week and has this helped you to trust God's Word?

Talk with your group about the different prophecies that came true and how Jesus fulfilled them.

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

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

CHALLENGE: At the end of the meeting, pray for the student who has volunteered to share their faith story next week.

WEEK 3: INVITE

This week, one student shares a faith story and another does 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 (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 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 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 EQUIP 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: Invite two friends to your youth group or church this week.

WEEK 4: CONNECT

We have been talking about how the Bible helps us to know God and to trust Him. This week, we will talk about how the Bible helps us to know God's plan for our lives.

1. In **Psalm 119:105** it reads: "Your word [the Bible] is like a lamp that guides my steps, a light that shows the path I should take." And **Romans 15:4** reads: "Such things were written in the Scriptures [Bible] long ago to teach us. And the Scriptures give us hope and encouragement as we wait patiently for God's promises to be fulfilled."

QUESTIONS:

A. In the first verse, why is the Bible compared to a lamp and why does this matter?

A lamp is a source of light for seeing in the darkness- without stumbling or getting hurt. This is a metaphor for our lives. God's word [the Bible] directs and guides us through this dark world. It is a source of light in our lives.

B. How does the Bible show us the path that we should take?

The Bible is filled with everything we need to know about God and how and why to follow Him [Jesus]. It tells us how to love God and others; to repent when we sin against God; and to remain faithful and obedient to God in a broken world.

C. How does the Bible give us "hope and encouragement" as we wait for God to fulfill His promises?

The Bible is filled with God's promises for those who love and follow Him. We can trust that He will never leave us or forsake us; He is working all things together for our good; He is completely in control; and all evil and sin will be done away in His perfect timing. This gives us peace during difficult times and hope that we will spend eternity with Him.

2. In **Jeremiah 29:11** it reads: "For I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future."

QUESTIONS:

A. What does it mean that God wants to give us hope and a future?

God desires a relationship with us and to give us peace in all circumstances. Just like the previous verse, we can trust that He is the author of our salvation and our future is with him for eternity.

B. How can we find and know God's plan for our lives?

Through His word (reading the Bible), prayer, and having a Christian community. God's plan is for all of us to know Him and to tell others about Him. We also each have a specific calling and plan from God that is unique to you.

C. Can God's plan for us change?

This is a tricky question. Even though God never changes, His plans for us can change. The Bible says that His thoughts are not our thoughts, and His ways are not our ways. We can trust Him, though, to make His plan clear to us, even when it changes, if we faithfully follow/seek Him.

3. Psalm 32:8 reads: "The Lord says, "I will teach you and guide you in the way you should live. I will watch over you and be your guide. And **Deuteronomy 31:8** reads: "The LORD will lead you. He himself is with you. He will not fail you or leave you. Don't worry. Don't be afraid!"

QUESTIONS:

A. How do these verses encourage you?

God promises to always be with us, no matter what. And He has the power and ability to lead us on a path to Him. The Bible says that there will be pain and suffering in our lives but He is with us, comforting and providing for us during it all.

B. Do you read the Bible regularly? Why or why not?

Talk about this honestly with your group.

C. What benefits come from reading the Bible?

Knowing God's plan for you, understanding who God is, guidance and instruction on life, hope and encouragement, finding identity, boldness and courage, having peace and joy, gaining wisdom and maturity beyond your years, strength when going through hard times, blessing and promises from God, and so much more!

4. Use the remainder of today's meeting to **CONNECT** with and encourage each other.

CHALLENGE: Before you go to bed each night, spend time reading the Bible- starting with the book of John or Matthew.

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