

E.P.I.C. Cycle 1 Leader's Guide: The Separation

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: Separation from God

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: "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." **John 3:16-17** [please read the verse and ask the group to memorize it]

EQUIP- Week 1

In the first book of the Bible called Genesis, we read about God how created Adam and Eve and they lived in the Garden of Eden. When God created Adam and Eve, they did not know or think about evil- but then they were tempted and made the decision to defy God's clear instructions (and warning), which resulted in the "fall of man".

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 set boundaries for their protection, because he knew the consequences that would follow. They would first die spiritually, experiencing immediate separation from God. Secondly, being out of eternal relationship with God in Eden, their bodies would physically die.]

B) Why did they eat the fruit anyway?

[The fruit looked delicious to eat and Eve desired to gain wisdom. They made a decision based on their flesh (feelings), rather than what God had said. Hunger and the desire for wisdom are not bad, but Adam and Eve tried satisfying those desires in the wrong way that was disobedient to God.]

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

[We have the same natural desire as Adam and Eve to gravitate towards sin and away from God, even though God's ways are best. We are also tempted by Satan to disobey God, just like they were. We also have a daily struggle with sin of making decisions that honor and obey God, despite our feelings and trusting that He knows best, not us.]

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 as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from God among the trees of the garden. But 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) Why did they suddenly realize that they were naked and how did they respond?

[They realized they were naked because they ate the fruit and they gained the knowledge of good and evil, which gave them shame for being naked. Prior to this they never saw being naked as a bad thing, but with sin comes shame.]

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

[When shame follows sin, because we are aware we did something wrong, our human instinct is to hide or cover up (sometimes because we don't want to get in trouble or face the consequences of our actions). Discuss personal examples of a time you've tried to hide something you did (maybe from parents or teachers).]

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 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) How do Adam and Eve respond to God's questions?

[They immediately make excuses and blame someone else for what they did.]

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

[**Shame** makes us feel guilty for what we did and feel worse about ourselves, so we might blame others to make ourselves feel less guilty. **Pride** makes us want to keep a high esteem and perfect image of ourselves, so we will blame others to make them look bad and ultimately make ourselves look better. **Fear** keeps us from wanting to admit our wrongs so we don't have to face any consequences, so we might blame others to avoid getting in trouble.]

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

[Blaming others can involve lying which is unhealthy and ultimately a sin. Blaming others also gives in to and feeds unhealthy qualities such as pride, shame, and fear, when we should be desiring healthy qualities such as humility, growth, honesty and peace.]

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?

[Their decision was disobedient to God's command and therefore was a sin. Since God is perfect and holy, sin cannot be present or exist where God is, so Adam and Eve had to be separated from God because of their sin. This affected all of mankind because sin and evil entered the world and now we all face the reality and consequences of our decisions (whether they are good or bad).]

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 be reconnected to God?

[This verse teaches us that there is hope and a way to have eternal life and relationship with God once again. That way is through Jesus Christ. It also teaches us that God did not (and does not) desire for us to suffer, die, or be separated from Him. Rather, He loves us and desires for us to have a relationship with him and to be in eternity with him.]

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

PREPARE- Week 2

Please follow these steps 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 on the First Priority of Tampa Bay phone app
- 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?

[Adam and Eve's decision was an act of disobedience which brought sin into the world and the consequences fell on all of humanity to come.]

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 and how would you explain this concept to someone who had never heard this?

[We are enemies of God because our sin separates us from him. Some sin is against other people (like lying, murder, revenge etc.) but all sin is against God. That is why we need Jesus to connect us back to God.]

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 is not earned through works, it is a free gift from God through what Jesus did. That is because nothing we do or try to do measures up to God's goodness.]

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

[We are saved by grace through faith. Meaning Jesus dying on our behalf is the grace of God and it is through believing in Jesus and declaring him Lord (faith) that we are saved. We are saved from eternal separation from God (hell).]

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?

[Provide your own personal, honest and authentic answers here.]

5. Spend the remainder of the meeting preparing for next week's INVITE 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 (try to ask for prayer requests before you begin).

INVITE- Week 3

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)
- The student shares their faith story
- The student reads the gospel and invitation
- Hand out the Student Response Cards (found on the FP website)
- Report attendance & decisions on FPTB phone app
- 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)

CONNECT- Week 4

For the last few weeks, we have talked about how sin [our selfish desires and behaviors] separate us from God and we often blame others when we are caught. This 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?

[Because of the fall (what Adam and Eve did), humans are prone to sin and evil. Our hearts and our thoughts are not pure and lead us astray.]

B) How do jealousy and pride begin in the mind?

[They come first as thoughts in our minds. "I wish I had what they have." or "I deserve that, not them." or "I'm too good to be here." are some examples. Then if we let the thoughts continue and repeat over time, they become heart issues.]

C) How does the Holy Spirit help us to purify our minds?

[The Holy Spirit helps us to renew our minds, which means to think differently and more righteously. The Spirit will also convict us of thoughts that aren't good or Christ-like.]

2) **Psalms 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. God erases our wrong doings by not holding what we've done against us. He still loves us the same and wants the best for us. However, our consequences will still exist.]

B.) How is mercy an extension of God's faithful love and compassion?

[Not only does God still love us and want the best for us when we do wrong, but He offers us forgiveness when we repent. That is mercy.]

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]. The concept of repentance is turning away from following your own selfish desires and turning to following God's plan for you.

Questions:

A) Why is it so hard to follow God's plan rather than on our own selfish desires?

[Because we think we know better than God at times or don't trust that God's plan is better. It can also be hard, because our desires sometimes are gratifying to the flesh or sound good.]

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

[Have an honest and open discussion with your group.]

C.) How can we turn to God if we haven't already or have moved away from Him?

[Go to God in prayer, admitting the wrong ways you have been thinking or living, asking for forgiveness and deciding to put him at the forefront of your life.]

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

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