

Beginning of Meeting:

- Welcome 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 everyone to download the First Priority of Tampa Bay phone app (scan QR code)
- Assign someone to report weekly attendance on app
- Assign someone to send meeting reminders to the group
- Close in prayer

Topic: The purpose of this cycle is to understand that we were created to be in a relationship with God, but sin (selfish desires) has separated us from Him. The only way that our relationship with God can be restored is by placing our faith in His son, Jesus. When we trust in Jesus as our Savior, our relationship with God is restored and we are "saved" from eternal separation from Him.

Memory Verse: "Therefore, since we have been made right in God's sight by faith, we have peace with God because of what Jesus Christ our Lord has done for us." **Romans 5:1**

EQUIP- WEEK 1

Before starting this week's lesson, read the topic explanation above.

1. It is important for us to know that we are restored to God through faith, not by anything that we can do or be. In **Ephesians 2:8-9** we read: "God saved you through faith as an act of kindness. You had nothing to do with it. Being saved is a gift from God. **9** It's not the result of anything you've done, so no one can brag about it."

Questions:

A. What are we saved from when we place our faith in Jesus?

[We are saved from eternal separation from God and eternal suffering.]

B. Why is faith the key to salvation?

[Because you must have faith in order to believe that Jesus is Lord and that he died and resurrected for our sins. Our salvation comes from believing in Him, not believing in ourselves or anyone else.]

C. Why isn't salvation based on you being a "good person"?

[If salvation was based on being a good person, no human could ever be saved, because we are born into sin and cannot live a perfect sinless life because of it.]

2. In **Acts 2:21** we read: "But everyone who calls on the name of the LORD will be saved." And **Titus 2:11-12** reads: "That is the way we should live, because God's grace has come. That grace can save everyone. **12** It teaches us not to live against God and not to do the bad things the world wants to do. It teaches us to live on earth now in a wise and right way—a way that shows true devotion to God."

Questions:

A. According to these verses, who is able to call on God for salvation?

[Anyone! This verse was especially important because in the past, talk of salvation was primarily focused on the Jews, as God's chosen people. However, with the coming of Jesus, the message of salvation was spreading to everyone and was for all people!]

B. What does it mean to live *against* God in verse 12?

[It means to not pursue a Godly way of living, or anything which contradicts God's will or His nature. This could be to live selfishly for yourself, turn away from God, be disobedient, sin purposefully, behave wrongly, do evil or many other things.]

C. What is the "world" in verse 12 and how does this affect our behavior?

[The world is referring to worldly passions/lusts or the ungodly, sinful ways of the world. You may often notice that pop culture, popular trends, or things celebrated/encouraged by our society go against God's word. When we become too influenced by the world, rather than God, our thoughts, motivations, desires, actions, and behaviors start to model the world in a negative way.]

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

PREPARE- WEEK 2

Last week, we talked about how we were created to be in a relationship with God, but sin (selfish desires) has separated us from Him. The only way that our relationship with God can be restored is by placing our faith in His son, Jesus. When we trust in Jesus as our Savior, our relationship with God is restored and we are "saved" from eternal separation from Him. This week, we will talk about having peace with God and why this is important.

1. In **Romans 5:10** we read: "And since, when we were his enemies, we were brought back to God by the death of his Son, what blessings he must have for us now that we are his friends, and he is living within us!"

Questions:

A. Why is it so terrible to be eternally separated from God?

[God is perfect and holy, and all good things come from Him. He is the only source of love and perfection, and part of the best plan He has for us is to live eternally with Him in Heaven- where there is no pain, suffering, or evil. We were created to be with God so being eternally separated from Him means eternal pain and suffering. There is no goodness, love or kindness where there is no God.]

B. How does this verse describe us before we are restored to God through faith in Jesus?

[We are God's enemies before we put our faith in Jesus. Yikes!]

C. Have you heard this before? If no, how does this make you feel?

[Discuss why you are an enemy of God before you put your faith in him. Also, think and talk about how while you are an enemy of God, God still loves you and desires a relationship with you. Do you desire a relationship with people that are against you? Do you love people that are against you?]

2. **Psalm 29:11** says: "The LORD gives his people strength. The LORD blesses them with peace."

Questions:

A. What is the definition of peace and what is the opposite of peace?

Peace according to google is "freedom from disturbance or tranquility." The biblical definition of peace is different than the world's definition though. Shalom (the Hebrew word for peace) is more than just simply peace; it is a complete peace. It is a feeling of contentment, completeness,

wholeness, well-being, and harmony. God's peace is present despite chaotic life circumstances that happen. The opposite of peace could be war, conflict, chaos, irritation, or anxiety.

B. Why would we want peace with God?

Because peace with God can exist at all times regardless of how we feel, or the bad life circumstances we face. Whereas worldly peace *only* exists when things are going good, or negativity is absent.

C. How does having peace with God **PREPARE** us to stand against the inevitable struggles in life? When we have peace with God and struggles in life come, we do not have to be anxious or worried like others do because we can put our hope and trust in God. He will either help us through it, teach us from it, or we can look to better days in Heaven with Him.

3. 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):

- Share his or her faith story [how Jesus has affected their life]
- Be greeters at the door
- Report attendance and decisions
- Read the salvation prayer and invitation (see below)
- Hand out the Response Cards [found on the FP website under the "Student" tab]
- Be on the follow-up team (see below)

- Open and close the meeting in prayer

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

INVITE- WEEK 3

This is the week when a student shares a faith story and another reads the invitation and prayer. 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)
- A student shares their faith story
- A student reads the gospel and invitation
- Hand out and collect the Student Response Cards (found on the FP website)
- Report attendance & decisions on the 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 good news that Jesus died on the cross as payment for 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 faith in Jesus, I can be forgiven and reconnected to God. So 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.

When contacting these students, student leaders will want to:

- Answer any questions
- Offer to pray for them
- Invite them to next week's CONNECT Week meeting
- Invite them to your church

2. 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

In this cycle, we have talked about how we were created to be in a relationship with God, but sin (selfish desires) has separated us from Him. When we trust in Jesus as our Savior, our relationship with God is restored and we have peace with God. This week, we will talk about why it is important to CONNECT with a local church to help us grow in our faith and find support during difficult times.

1. The Bible often describes the church as a "body." In **1 Corinthians 12:25-27**, we read: God did this so that our body would not be divided. God wanted the different parts to care the same for each other. **26** If one part of the body suffers, then all the other parts suffer with it. Or if one part is honored, then all the other parts share its honor.**27** All of you together are the body of Christ. Each one of you is a part of that body."

Questions:

A. How does a human body work together and how is this the same with the church?

Each part of the body is unique and serves its own purpose. However, while different, all parts of the body work together to function as a whole. The Church is the same because it's made up of different parts that all serve a purpose in helping the Church function and reach the lost.

B. How is each believer (Christian) a part of the body?

Christians are what make up the Church, not a building. Every person is unique and has a special gift of their own, designed for a purpose. However, every person and their gift are necessary and important for spreading God's love on earth.

2. The New Testament of the Bible often refers to believers meeting together for support and encouragement. **James 5:16** reads: "Admit your faults to one another and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The earnest prayer of a righteous man has great power and wonderful results." **Philippians 2:15-16** reads: "so that you may become blameless and pure, "children of God without fault in a warped and crooked generation." Then you will shine among them like stars in the sky **16** as you hold firmly to the word of life. And then I will be able to boast on the day of Christ that I did not run or labor in vain."

Questions:

A. How does telling a trusted person your faults heal you?

With confession and repentance comes forgiveness. Admitting our faults to someone safe brings us out of solitude or hiding and into community where we can be supported. When we are willing to talk about our faults, God is able to shed his light on our situations, heal our wounds (guilt, shame, anger, rejection, etc.) and offer us grace and forgiveness.

B. Why are church gatherings important for encouraging and supporting each other?

They are a safe place where you aren't judged for your mistakes because everyone recognizes their need for a savior (Jesus). They are also filled with people that can offer Godly support and encouragement that is life-giving.

C. If we are all in a "warped and crooked generation" why does shining among others "like stars in the sky" matter?

Because our purpose as Christians is to share God's love and what he has done for us (or in us) to others. Our friends and family that don't know Jesus, live in the dark because they don't have hope for a better future or peace with God. The only way they will come to know the good news of Jesus and his love and hope for heaven is if we tell them.

3. Spend the last few minutes sharing about your youth groups/churches and invite your friends who are not connected to one.

Challenge: Invite a friend to next week's EQUIP meeting.