

EPIC Cycle 5: Leader's Guide Being Willing and Steadfast in Faith

How to have a student-led club:

- 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 athlete/sport)
- Ask everyone to download the First Priority of Tampa Bay phone app
- Assign someone to report weekly attendance on the phone app
- Assign someone to send meeting reminders to the group
- Close in prayer

Topic: In this cycle, we will talk about why it's important to remain willing and steadfast in following the Lord- no matter the circumstances.

Memory Verse: "Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer." **Romans 12:2**

EQUIP- WEEK 1:

The Bible tells us to be ready for temptation and in **Matthew 26:41** we read: "Keep actively watching and praying that you may not come into temptation; the spirit is willing, but the body is weak."

Questions:

A. How would you explain that "the spirit is willing, but the body is weak" to a new or non-Christian?

If you are a believer in Jesus Christ then you have the Holy Spirit in you. The Holy Spirit helps you to trust and obey God. However, believers still have human weakness and selfish desires that pull us away from God (often referred to as the flesh).

B. What is the role of the holy spirit when it comes to withstanding temptation?

The Holy Spirit gives believers the power and desire to turn away from temptation.

C. Why is it so easy to give in to temptation and what happens when we do? Because we are all born sinful, it is human desire to only seek pleasure and fulfill our own selfish needs. When we do this, though, we separate ourselves from God (because HE is holy), and this results in misery, pain, loneliness, and emptiness.

2. Psalm 51:12 reads: "Restore to me again the joy of your salvation and make me willing to obey you." And **2 Thessalonians 3:5** reads: "May the Lord direct your hearts into the love of God and into the steadfastness and patience of Christ." These verses point to the fact that the Lord gives us the ability to remain willing and steadfast. It does not come from ourselves.

Questions:

A. Why is David asking God to make him willing to obey? Why can't David do this on his own?

Because our human nature is to rebel against and disobey God, and we need God to help us faithfully follow God through the power of the Holy Spirit.

B. How does God “direct our hearts” and why is this important?

When we turn to and trust God, He places His purposes and desires in our hearts, and because He is good and loving, we are able to find peace and joy in the process.

3. Psalm 16:8 reads: “I have set the Lord continually before me; Because He is at my right hand, I will not be shaken.”

Questions:

A. What does it mean to be shaken (give examples)?

Give an example of when you struggled to trust God and His goodness.

B. How can we “set the Lord continually before” us- especially during difficult times?

We can pray to Him and remind ourselves of His goodness and promises- even when we don't feel like it. We can memorize Bible verses and recall them when we are struggling or need to redirect our minds. And, we can invest in healthy relationships with others who want God's best for us and will encourage us to follow Him.

4. The story of Job (pronounced Joe-bah) is found in the Old Testament and is about how Job was steadfast in his faith even though he suffered tremendous loss and pain. In **Job 2:3** we read: “Then the Lord said to Satan, “Have you noticed my servant Job? There is no one on earth like him. He is a good, faithful man. He respects God and refuses to do evil. He is still faithful, even though you asked me to let you destroy, without reason, everything he has.”

Questions:

A. Why should we remain steadfast in our faith even if we experience tremendous suffering?

Everyone will experience pain and suffering in their lives, this is guaranteed. Knowing that it is part of the human experience and trusting that God is with us, working all things together for our good and according to His plan, helps us to remain hopeful in His plan and provision (steadfast).

B. What are some qualities of God's character for us to remember and how will this EQUIP us to be steadfast when we are going through difficult times?

God is loving, generous, patient, forgiving, faithful, perfect, consistent, just, powerful and trustworthy. He is in full control of the world, even if it feels out of control. He wants to be a part of a relationship with us and is willing to forgive and love those who turn to Him in repentance and faith.

Challenge: Write the names of a friend who may be going through a difficult time on a sticky note and place somewhere that you will see it and remember to pray for them (bathroom mirror, bedroom door, etc.).

PREPARE- WEEK 2:

Being prideful means that we have an exaggerated sense of self and a subtle side of pride is self-pity, which is often expressed in victimhood. It is the idea that we deserve better. This week, we will talk about pride and self-pity, which are rooted in sin and make it difficult for us to experience fellowship with God and others.

1. In **Proverbs 11:2** we read: "Proud and boastful people will be shamed, but wisdom stays with those who are modest and humble." And **Proverbs 22:4** reads: "The reward of humility [that is, having a realistic view of one's importance] and the [reverent, worshipful] fear of the Lord is riches, honor, and life."

Questions:

A. How is wisdom connected to humility?

People who are prideful have trouble seeing themselves as they really are- sinful and selfish. When we truly understand God's goodness and holiness, we are able to have a realistic view of ourselves. We are then able to love, honor, and obey God, and He, in turn, blesses us with wisdom.

B. Do you know someone who is prideful and arrogant? If yes, describe their attitude and how it affects others (without using names). Ask students to answer using real life examples, without stating someone's name.

C. Why does knowing who God is help us to have a realistic view of ourselves? If we are able to grasp God's power, perfection, and all-knowing abilities, then we will have a realistic view of ourselves.

2. **Proverbs 12:15** reads: The way of the [arrogant] fool [who rejects God's wisdom] is right in his own eyes, but a wise and prudent [careful] man is he who listens to counsel."

Questions:

A. How is asking for and listening to others' counsel an act of humility?

By asking others for advice and help, we recognize that we are not perfect, and need others to provide perspective and wisdom (especially in circumstances where we are lacking in these areas). Pride is thinking you don't need help or advice from others.

B. How are you wise if you are asking others for their opinion/advice?

We know from scripture that a wise person will listen to counsel. This is wise because others may have more experience than you or a difference perspective.

3. In **1Kings 19:3-4** in the Old Testament we read about Elijah, a prophet of God: "And Elijah was afraid and arose and ran for his life, and he came to Beersheba which belongs to Judah, and he left his servant there. But he himself traveled a day's journey into the wilderness, and he came and sat down under a juniper tree and asked [God] that he might die." In these verses, Elijah's fear leads him to feeling overwhelmed and sorry for himself.

Questions:

A. How is Eljah's self-pity (feeling sorry for himself) related to a lack of faith?

Elijah was overwhelmed because he was afraid for his life. He felt sorry for himself because he wasn't trusting God's goodness and plan.

B. How does self-pity often become bitterness?

Self-pity is another form of pride- we think we DESERVE something better. This is faulty thinking because God is in control and whatever He has allowed in our lives has a purpose. If we don't deal with the self-pity then it will develop into jealous and/or resentment, which are the roots and bitterness.

C. How do we know if we are feeling sorry for ourselves and what can we do about it?

Some signs you are feeling sorry for yourself are comparing yourself/your life to others, craving attention or sympathy from others, and thinking everything bad always happens to you. If you find yourself here, it is important to bring your thoughts/feelings to God in prayer, talk to a trusted friend or youth leader/pastor about it, and remind yourself of who God is and the plans/purposes He has for you.

4. 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 if we are not?

This means to seek a consistent relationship with God through prayer and reading your Bible. God will give you the power of the Holy Spirit to withstand the attacks of the devil in your life. The Bible says that God has NOT given you a spirit of fear but one of power and a sound mind.

B. How do these verses PREPARE you to stand against temptation, self-pity, and doubt?

These verses teach us to be humble; to ask for advice from those who are trustworthy; and to be aware and turn away from self-pity; and to trust the Holy Spirit to help us when we doubt God’s goodness and plans.

5. Spend the rest of the meeting preparing for next week’s meeting. Please make sure a student is prepared to share a testimony, the gospel and invitation, and students hand out the Response Cards (found on the First Priority website).

Challenge: Invite two new friends to next week’s Invite meeting.

INVITE- WEEK 3:

One student should share his/her faith story and another student share the invitation [see below]. Please use the Student Response cards, which can be downloaded from the First Priority website. [www.firstprioritytampa.org]

Invitation/Prayer (*ask students to close their eyes and bow their heads*):

If God is stirring your heart today to trust in Jesus as your Savior, then pray this simple prayer to yourself: Dear Lord, I admit that I am selfish and this separates me from you because you are holy. I believe that Jesus died on the cross and was raised from the dead 3 days later. This proved that you accepted his death as payment for my sin. Please come into my life and help me to trust in you. In Jesus’ name I pray. Amen.

[Pass out Student Response Cards here]

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 group president or teachers 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 to be willing and steadfast in the Lord, even when times are tough or we are full of fear.

1. In **Nehemiah 11:2** we read: "Now the leaders of the people lived in Jerusalem; but the rest of the people cast lots to bring one [person] out of ten to live in Jerusalem, the holy city, while nine-tenths remained in the *other* cities. And the people blessed all the men who volunteered to live in Jerusalem."

This is an Old Testament verse in the time of Nehemiah when the wall was rebuilt around Jerusalem (for protection). Those who volunteered to move back to Jerusalem were uprooting their lives and families. This was not an easy task and showed their willingness to follow God, no matter the circumstances.

Questions:

A. Why is willingness such an important aspect of faith?

Willingness to trust God is an act of giving God your yes (or being obedient) to a situation, regardless of the outcome. It opens our hearts and minds to God.

B. How can we willingly follow God's plan even if it may include suffering or difficult circumstances?

First, we must accept that suffering is a part of life for everyone and that we all experience difficult circumstances. Then, if we trust that God is good, Holy, and in control of all circumstances then we can willingly submit to His plan for us because we know that He is working in all of our circumstances for our good.

C. How do we know that God is good even when we are suffering and/or experiencing difficult circumstances?

God did not INTEND for there to be suffering, which is a consequence of sin. The Bible says that God is good and loving, and we can also see this in creation. and that we can be restored to Him by placing our faith in his son, Jesus. Then, when we die, we will be in heaven where there is NO suffering or pain.

2. 2. In **James 1:2-4** we read: “Dear brothers and sisters, is your life full of difficulties and temptations? Then be happy [joy-filled], ³ for when the way is rough, your patience has a chance to grow. ⁴ So let it grow, and don’t try to squirm out of your problems. For when your patience is finally in full bloom, then you will be ready for anything, strong in character, full and complete. And **Romans 12:2** reads: Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer.

Questions:

A. How does patience grow during difficult times and make us “ready for anything”?

Patience grows because hard times bring out our true colors and reveal how we respond to situations whether good or bad. When we experience any form of hardship it forces us to be patient and wait for better days. It also makes us more resilient (strong, adaptable) to get through other hard times that happen in life.

B. How do we have a joy-filled mindset during tough times and suffering?

By trusting in and relying on God’s goodness, mercy, and provision, we have hope that He’s working in our circumstances. This hope produces peace and joy in us.

C. How does prayer help us to be patient in difficult times?

Prayer helps us to release the stress and pain we feel by communicating and giving it to God. Prayer also changes our perspective and helps us to build endurance and patience.

3. Spend the remainder of the meeting praying for each other and any difficult circumstances, trials, or temptations that you may be going through, and help students to **CONNECT** to a local church (if they are not already).

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

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