

EPIC Cycle 8 Leader's Guide: Loving Difficult People and Avoiding Unsafe People

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 how God helps us to love difficult people, and the importance of identifying and avoiding unhealthy/unsafe.

Memory Verse: "But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us." **Romans 5:8**

Equip Week 1:

This week, we will talk about loving difficult people. Maybe you have a family member, friend, or classmate who seems difficult to get along with. However, God wants us to have patience and kindness for everyone, even those who are being difficult.

Side note: This week, we are talking about difficult people, not unsafe people. We will cover that topic next week.

1. Romans 5:8 says: "But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us." And **Romans 5:10** reads: We were God's enemies, but he made us his friends through the death of his Son [Jesus Christ]. Now that we are God's friends, how much more will we be saved by Christ's life!

As believers in Christ, we know that before we were saved by faith we were referred to as enemies of God. It is important for us to remember this whenever we study scripture. It will help us to understand how much we needed God's forgiveness and how He loved us even when we were unlovable [in this sense, we are all considered difficult people].

Questions:

- A. Why did Christ die for us if we were unlovable [stuck in our sin] and how is this a demonstration of love? (John 3:15 says that God loved so much that he sent his son-Jesus- to die for our sins; since Jesus is God, we understand the implication)
- B. Why is it important to realize that we can all be difficult to love at times and why does this matter? (It helps us to have compassion and understanding for others who are having a hard time or being difficult)

2. Romans 12:18-19 reads: "Don't hit back; discover beauty in everyone. If you've got it in you, get along with everybody. Don't insist on getting even; that's not for you to do. "I'll do the judging," says God. "I'll take care of it." And **2 Timothy 2:24** reads: "The servant of the Lord must not participate in quarrels, but must be kind to everyone [even-tempered, preserving peace, and he must be], skilled in teaching, patient *and* tolerant when wronged."

Questions:

- A. Why does God instruct us to not "participate in quarrels"? (If we are participating, then we become trouble-makers and God wants us to be peace-makers)
- B. Why does God warn us to not "hit back" or "insist on getting even" (retaliate) and how can it be dangerous if we do? (When we chose to retaliate it makes the situation worse; it also causes us to feel bitter and self-focused)
- C. Have you ever felt like getting back at someone who hurt you? How did you respond? Please don't share names.

3. Ephesians 4:15a says: "No, we will speak the truth with love." And **Mathew 18:15** says: "If your brother or sister in God's family does something wrong, go and tell them what they did wrong. Do this when you are alone with them. If they listen to you, then you have helped them to be your brother or sister again."

Sometimes, it is necessary to confront others who are being difficult, but we must do it in love. If we are not able to do it in love then we need to pray for God to help us.

Questions:

- A. Why is it important to confront someone in truth and love (rather than with contempt and a need to retaliate)? (If our motive is rooted in love and we have a desire to help the person be more like Jesus, then we can trust that we are honoring God; if our motive is to hurt the person, then it is not from God)
- B. Can you provide an example of when you have had to speak truth in love to a person who did something wrong or hurt you?

4. In Galatians 5:14-15, we read: The whole law is made complete in this one command: "Love your neighbor the same as you love yourself." ¹⁵ If you continue hurting each other and tearing each other apart, be careful, or you will completely destroy each other. And **Mathew 5:9** reads: "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God."

Questions:

- A. How are we to love others like we love ourselves? (By putting them first & showing them love)
- B. What is an example of loving someone who is difficult (please do not say names)?
- C. What is a peacemaker and how does this week's lesson EQUIP us to love difficult people? (A peace-maker looks for ways to bring peace to situations and relationships, rather than destroying or hurting others; peace-makers do not participate in gossip, retaliation, or rejection of others)

Challenge: Pray for someone in your life who is difficult for you to be around. Pray for God to give you patience with this person.

Prepare Week 2:

Last week, we talked about having patience for difficult people. This week, we will talk about the behaviors of unsafe people and the fourth week, we will talk about why we should avoid people with these behaviors.

1. In **2 Timothy 3:2a, 3-4**, God gives us the characteristics of unsafe people: "Remember this: There are some terrible times coming in the last days. ²People will love only themselves and money. ³They will have no love for others and will refuse to forgive anyone. They will talk about others to hurt them and will have no self-control. They will be cruel and hate what is good. ⁴People will turn against their friends. They will do foolish things without thinking and will be so proud of themselves. Instead of loving God, they will love pleasure".

Questions:

- A. From these verses, what are a few characteristics of unsafe people? (Selfish, greedy, cruel, no self-control, hate what is good, don't love God)
- B. How is refusing to forgive others an unsafe characteristic? What about hating what is good?
- C. Can you give an example of what it means to love pleasure instead of God? (Being self-focused and not caring if your actions hurt others)

2. In **Proverbs 16:28**, we read: "Troublemakers are always causing problems. Their gossip breaks up the closest of friends". And **James 3:16** reads: "For wherever there is jealousy and selfish ambition, there you will find disorder and evil of every kind".

Questions:

- A. In additions to causing problems and gossiping, how would you describe a "trouble maker"? (Arguing and fighting with others, having a bad attitude, not respecting others' boundaries)
- B. Why is someone who is jealous and has selfish ambition unsafe? (Because they are self-focused and don't care how they hurt others)

3. In **Proverbs 18:24**, we read: "Some friends are fun to be with, but a true friend can be better than a brother". And **Psalms 1:1** reads: "Happy are those who reject the advice of evil people, who do not follow the example of sinners or join those who have no use for God".

Questions:

- A. Why is following the "example of sinners" dangerous? (It means you are making the same bad decisions that lead to dangerous and hurtful circumstances)
- B. How does this week's lesson PREPARE you to tell the difference between safe and unsafe people?

4. 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: Spend time in prayer, asking God to help you to be a safe friend to someone.

Action: Invite two friends to next week's INVITE meeting.

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 First Priority of Tampa Bay 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:

Student leaders commit to praying for and contacting any student who has decided to follow Christ and/or has questions.

1. 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

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)

Challenge: Invite two friends to church or youth group this week.

Connect Week 4:

Two weeks ago, we talked about the behaviors of unsafe people and this week, we will talk about why we should avoid people with these behaviors.

1. 2 Peter 3:17 says: "Dear friends, you already know about this. So be careful. Don't let these evil people lead you away by the wrong they do. Be careful that you do not fall from your strong faith." And **1 Corinthians 5:33** says: "Do not be misled: "Bad company corrupts good character."

It is important for us to distinguish between difficult people and unhealthy/unsafe people. Being a "good Christian" does not mean we need to be in an active relationship with unhealthy/unsafe people. If we try to stay in unhealthy/unsafe relationships, the other person's behavior will affect us in negative ways.

Questions:

- A. How can unsafe people cause us to fall away from our faith? (Read the verses above)
- B. What are the qualities of a SAFE friend? (Trustworthy, faithful, considerate, loving, thoughtful, reliable, others-focused)
- C. Do you consider yourself a safe friend?

2. In **Proverbs 22:24-25**, we read: "Do not have anything to do with a [person] given to anger, or go with someone who has a bad temper. Or you might learn [their] ways and get yourself into a trap".

Questions:

- A. Why is having a bad temper considered an unsafe behavior? (When we get really angry, we lose the ability to make good decisions/control ourselves)
- B. How can someone else's sin negatively impact you? (Read the verse above)

3. In **Proverbs 13:20**, we read: "Be friends with those who are wise, and you will become wise. Choose fools to be your friends, and you will have trouble". And in **Proverbs 19:20**, we read: "Listen to advice and accept discipline, and at the end you will be counted among the wise".

Questions:

- A. Why is being wise important? (We are able to make better decisions, avoid dangerous circumstances, and be self-controlled)
- B. Why should we listen to good advice and why would an unsafe person avoid it? (When we are prideful and think we know everything, we are not able to listen to others who are trying to help us avoid bad situations/outcomes)
- C. Do you have someone in your life who is safe, trustworthy, and supportive? If yes, who?

4. Your First Priority group should be a safe place to find friends and support. Spend the rest of the meeting connecting with each other (take prayer requests and pray for each other).