

THE STRUGLE

Week 5 - Messy

THE MAIN POINT

In order to handle conflict well, we have to be able to acknowledge our own mess. Everyone has sin, and many conflicts come from a sinful heart. It's extremely rare to experience conflict that is 100% the fault of one party over another. This meeting will teach students to own their piece, acknowledge their mess, and attempt to understand others in a conflict.

MATERIALS NEEDED

- Blindfolds
- Items for Activity (see below)
- Foil pans or plates
- Paper towels

GETTING STARTED

Welcome everyone. Ask them how their week is going. Thank them for joining the group. Go over the rules before jumping in to the discussion.

RULES FOR SMALL GROUP:

Commitment - Commit to being at every group meeting (make it a priority!)

Confidentiality - What is shared here stays here.

Be honest or be silent - don't make up an answer just to have one. Sometimes the most honest answer is no answer, so if you need to, just say pass.

Respect - for one another, their thoughts/ideas/opinions (no put downs).

ACTIVITY

Are You Smelling What I'm Stepping In? (Small groups edition)

Have your group split up into teams of 2. Sit them in a circle in chairs with blindfolds on when it's their team's turn. One partner will be designated the "smeller" and the other partner will be designated the stepper. The stepper will need to take off one of their shoes and socks. The smeller will smell the item on the plate and the stepper will feel the item on the plate with their bare foot. They will discuss what they think the item is, and as a team guess. If they get it correct, they get a point. Do as many rounds as you need to in order to get a winner or until everyone has gone.

(Example items: tuna, mandarin oranges, chocolate pudding, pumpkin pie, spaghetti sauce, dirt, grated parmesan cheese, and more. Get creative!)

Well that was kind of gross, and some of you are way better at that than I thought. That is a skill that will get you far in life.

-What was difficult about that game?

-Did you ever struggle to agree on a guess? How did you handle it?

GOING DEEPER

That game was kind of fun, but it can be hard when you have to work as a group in real life. What if that person lets you down?

- Have you ever done a group project at school and someone didn't do their share? How did you feel? What did you do?

Getting let down is really tough and it leads to a lot of conflict. Over the last few weeks we've talked a lot about good and bad ways to handle conflict. It's easy to *talk* about what a good way to handle conflict looks like, but when something happens in real life it's much harder to live it out--especially when we've been let down or hurt.

- What are some other ways you've been let down or hurt by others? How do you tend to respond when it happens?

Conflict is messy. There's just no way around it. The reality is as much as we want to point the finger at how others have hurt us or let us down, we shoulder a lot of blame too.

Read Matthew 7:1-5

- What do you think Jesus is saying here?
- This passage seems to be about judging others, what does that have to do with our conversation?
- In Jesus' metaphor, why does he say that the person we are judging has a speck in their eye, while you have a log in yours? What does that mean?

We all like to think of ourselves as being non-judgmental. Yet when conflict arises, that is often when we are the most judgmental. Conflict exposes the side of us that says "you are terrible and I am good. I am in the right. You are in the wrong." The reality is much different. Jesus reminds us of that in this passage by his humorous mental picture of a log in your eye. What Jesus is saying is we have no right to condemn someone else over a slight speck, when we are guilty of a lot ourselves.

Read or recite Romans 3:23

- Sin is kind of a church word. What does it mean? Do you agree that ALL have sinned?
- If we know that everyone has messed up, how should that change how we view others who hurt us or let us down?

Sin is ugly. You have experienced the hurt that comes when other people sin. You've also probably understood how your own sin hurts others. Not all conflict is the result of sin, but a lot of it is. When our desires and actions fall out of line with the good that God wants for us, we are bound to bump into someone and start a conflict. Even when a conflict isn't caused by sin, we often take sinful actions that look more like a sledgehammer than a scalpel or a thermometer over a thermostat.

- Think of the worst conflict you've ever been in. How did sin play a part in that conflict?

Sin doesn't just stir up conflict between us and others. Sin also causes conflict between us and God. God gives us guidelines not because He's mean or wants us to be bored to death. The guidelines come from a loving desire for us to live a life filled with goodness, freedom, joy, trust in Him, and harmony in the world. When we sin, it's a rejection of His loving desire for our lives and a violation of what is good. This causes a conflict and a break in our relationship. Sin has a cost.

- In what ways have you seen sin ruin the world? This could be current events or things that have happened in your life.
- How does knowing God's attitude about sin make you feel? What do you think?

When Jesus challenges us not to judge others, it means we need to first look at ourselves and see that we need work too. We are a mess. In conflict, this means we have to see what others have done to us and remember that we're guilty too.

Empathy is a word that basically means attempting to see things from another person's point of view. Understanding our own guilt makes it much easier to have empathy with a person who wrongs us. Why should we do that? Because God did it for us. More on that next week.

It is extremely rare to have a conflict with someone where 100% of the blame lies with one person and 0% to the other. Jesus is challenging us to own our part of the conflict before laying blame on someone else.

- How does empathy help us handle conflicts well?
- Do you find it difficult to admit your own fault in a conflict? Why?

TAKE AWAY

Our challenge for you this week is to be more willing to see the other side of the story in conflicts. When we can be less judgmental and have more empathy, it's much easier to handle things the right way. We are all messy people who have all sinned.

This week, take some time to think about how you've lacked empathy or behaved judgmentally in the past. Maybe it'd be appropriate to go and apologize to those people.