

SESSION GUIDE FOR THE LEADER

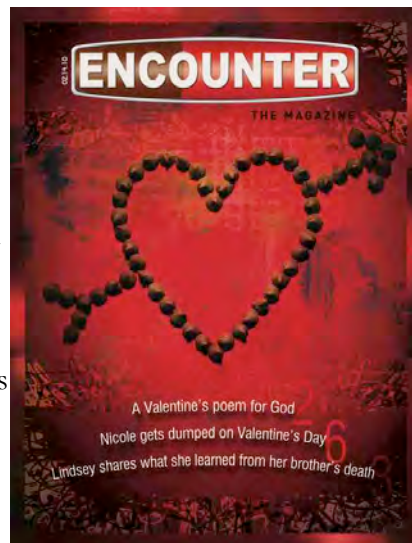
Study Title: He Shared Human Hardship

Bible Text: John 11:32-36; Hebrews 2:10; 4:14-16

To Begin

Begin the session by playing, “Can You Top This?” Start out with a simple complaint (ex. “I’m having a horrible day. I got up and discovered we were out of corn flakes!”). Someone else might answer, “That’s not a problem. I not only didn’t have cereal, I also didn’t have milk or clean dishes.” Continue, allowing the complaints to elevate and get totally ridiculous. As time and interest allows, let others start new rounds with other complaints.

Lead into Bible study by talking about real difficulties members have faced. How do we survive the tough times?



Bible Principles (Use the Scripture Commentary to help you lead discussion.)

- Help your class recall the favorite childhood story *Pinocchio*. What was Pinocchio’s greatest wish? (To be a real, live boy!) Talk about what it takes to be a “real human being.” Read Hebrews 2:10 to see how God chose to make Jesus completely (perfectly) human. Why does it make sense that no one is completely human unless he or she faces hard times?
- Quickly review last week’s Scripture text—the raising of Lazarus. Note how Jesus shared the emotional experience of losing Lazarus with an emotional Mary (John 11:32-36). How does Christ’s suffering “flow over into our lives”? See 2 Corinthians 1:3-5.
- Sometimes a person who has never faced difficulty looks down on those who do. Help your group think of examples of that. (For example, an adult who has never had small children may be impatient with someone with a crying child, or someone who is healthy may resent someone who is handicapped getting a special parking space!) Compare Hebrews 4:14-16 with 1 John 4:10, 16-18 with your group. How does knowing that Jesus suffered give us confidence that God still loves us, even when we suffer?

Open the Magazine

Give each member a copy of *The Magazine* and a copy of the Group Member Guide. Work as a group or in pairs to perform the activities and discuss the questions found on the worksheet.

As time and closeness of the group permits, end the session asking group members to share personal trials they face. Pray for one another, encouraging one another to remember the example of our suffering servant Savior.



SCRIPTURE COMMENTARY

Completion Hebrews 2:10

Jesus fully experienced hardship, like any other human being.

Can a rich politician really understand the effects of poverty? Can a parent who went to a safe, suburban school really understand what his or her child is going through in a violent, urban school? Can a celibate priest really counsel a married couple with problems? While those questions have not been definitively answered, a similar one has. “Can the Christ save human beings without having tasted their suffering?”

In Hebrews 2:10, the writer indicated that Jesus was made “perfect through suffering.” The word *perfect* used here does not refer to removing moral imperfection, since Jesus had none. It means to “complete” or “finish.” (Note how the same word is translated in John 19:30.) Jesus was not able to complete His task to save us without suffering like us. Jesus is described in verse 10 as “the author of [our] salvation.” The word for “author” may also be translated: “leader, captain, guide, or trailblazer.” This term shows that the reference to Jesus’ suffering is not limited to general pain but extends beyond that to the suffering of death. Jesus not only experienced general hurts before we did, He also led the charge into the jaws of death so that we may safely pass through them as well.

Centuries before Christ, the prophet Isaiah revealed that God’s Messiah would not be a judge on a pedestal looking down on human suffering. He would be “a man of sorrows,” one who would experience the full extent of our hurts firsthand (Isaiah 53:3). For that reason, followers of Jesus in the New Testament did not shrink from suffering but counted it as an honor to experience willingly what Jesus also experienced (Acts 5:41; Philippians 3:10; 1 Peter 4:1).

Consolation John 11:32-36

Jesus can provide comfort to others who hurt because He understands hardship.

Near the end of Jesus’ ministry, his dear friend Lazarus died (John 11:14). Jesus traveled to the tomb of Lazarus and was greeted by Lazarus’s mourning sisters, Martha and Mary. Jesus mourned with Martha as she more philosophically dealt with why the man she knew was the Messiah would not prevent a friend’s death (John 11:21-27). Jesus then mourned with the more emotional Mary by simply having a good cry with her (vv. 32-35). Seeing the pain of a man who was weeping at the loss of a good friend, onlookers remarked about Jesus’ love for Lazarus (v. 36).

Some have speculated that Jesus’ tears were not for the death of his friend, since He knew that He would raise that friend back to life. But we who are convinced that we will see a departed loved one soon still sorrow at his or her passing. There is no reason not to believe that Jesus did not experience that same sorrow. In fact, by experiencing that sorrow, He was able to comfort Lazarus’s sisters more fully.

This model of sharing sorrow in order to comfort continues in the body of Christ, His church. Paul told the church at Corinth that God comforts us during times of pain or loss so that we can be equipped to be a credible and effective comforter to someone facing the same trials (2 Corinthians 1:3, 4). He argued that Christ suffered so that His sufferings would “flow over into our lives,” giving us authentic consolation (v. 5).

Confidence Hebrews 4:14-16

We can be sure that a Savior who understands us will be merciful.

It is human nature to look at suffering people with disdain, reasoning that they got what they deserved. If we have not experienced a certain trial, we may be tempted to feel superiority and treat the sufferer with contempt. In fact, the common teaching of the Jews in Jesus’ day was that even those born with a disability deserved it, either because of a sin committed in the womb or a sin committed by one’s parents (John 9:2, 34). We can be brutal to those whose trials we do not understand.

But the sufferings of Jesus keep this from happening. Jesus sympathizes with our weakness since He endured the same trials and temptations that we face (Hebrews 4:14, 15). The result is that we can be confident when facing judgment, expecting mercy and grace rather than superiority and condemnation (v. 16).

Perfect love (“completed” or “finished,” as discussed above) is shown by the sacrifice of Christ (1 John 4:10). This kind of love can be relied upon, driving out fear of judgment (1 John 4:16-18). The suffering of Jesus teaches us that He understands our pain and will grant mercy to those who belong to Him.

Even on the worst days of our lives, we have reason for hope. Our suffering Savior was shown to be qualified by suffering. He can comfort us because He too has suffered. And finally, we can know He will be merciful because He has endured the trials and temptations of this world.



CREATIVE OPTIONS

Introduction

Try this simple object lesson to start the session. Take two identical soup cans. Leave one full, but empty the second and clean it out before the session.

To start the session, have group members try to crush the full can, using only their hands. Of course, that will be very difficult to do! Then reveal the empty can and ask them to perform the same task. The results are obvious.

Lead into Bible study by talking about times when members felt that life was crushing them. How does this object lesson give us a hint as to how to minimize the impact of those crushing times?

MAGAZINE STUDY

Instead of using the Group Member Guide, read the article as a group. Help members summarize how Nicole learned to deal with a tragedy that she thought she could not overcome.

Now look at the three “fifth grade tragedies” mentioned in the article: Denise’s gymnastics disappointment, Nicole’s new teacher tragedy, and Nicole’s new bike debacle. Ask for volunteers to imagine that Jesus appeared in person during one of those difficult moments. Have them act out the conversation that might have occurred between Him and the sister who was suffering.

MEDIA OPTIONS

Music

Open this session by playing House of Heroes cover of “Ob-La-Di, Ob-La-Da” from their *Meets the Beatles* EP. Look at the lyrics of this optimistic, rosy song. How has the group’s personal experiences shown that this is view of life is unrealistic?

Movie clip

Show this clip from *Baul Blart: Mall Cop* (2009). (The clip may be downloaded at no charge with a free membership to Wing Clips. Always screen clips to make sure they are appropriate for your group.) Blart has anything but a good start to his day as ironic theme music plays in the background in this clip:

http://www.wingclips.com/cart.php?target=product&product_id=16949&category_id=661

Free Download

Download The Scene, an activity designed to open this session using a current news story here:

<http://www.encounterface2face.com/scene.asp>

GROUP MEMBER GUIDE

Turn to the article “The Worst Day of My Life” on page 6 of the February 14, 2010, issue of ENCOUNTER—*The Magazine*. Read about Nicole’s pain after a breakup.

Before reading the article, try to get an overview of what it might say by reading the pull-quote on the top of page 6 and the three questions used as subheads on page 7.

Now read the entire article. Discuss the following questions about each of the three big questions asked in this story:

Question one—Is That All?

- How would you describe this approach to dealing with someone who is suffering?
- List some results of using that approach in the story.
- Tell about a time when you asked this question to someone suffering or someone asked you the question when you were suffering. Do you think Jesus would use this approach? Why or why not?

Question two—Have You Prayed About It?

- How would you describe this approach to dealing with someone who is suffering?
- List some results of using that approach in the story.
- This sounds like a very spiritual question. But is it what it seems? Explain. Do you think Jesus would use this approach? Why or why not?

Question three—When Did It Stop Hurting?

- To whom is this question being asked? How does that make this approach different than the other two?
- How could we adapt this approach to helping others?

