

2026-10-04 Small Group Guide

Small Group Guide

"Tug of War: Emotions, Compassion, and Trusting God"

Before You Begin

Open your time together in prayer, asking God to help your group move beyond surface-level conversation into honest, meaningful reflection. Remind everyone that what is shared in the group stays in the group.

Key Takeaways From the Sermon

1. **Jesus Was Fully Human, Including Emotionally** Jesus did not simply perform a mission like a robot. He grieved, he wept, he needed to pray, and he felt the weight of loss. Hebrews 5:7 describes him offering prayers with loud cries and tears. His humanity was intentional so that he could genuinely relate to our experience.
2. **Emotions Are Real, But They Should Not Drive Us** The sermon identified two unhealthy extremes: burying emotions entirely and being completely driven by them. Neither is healthy. The goal is to become more spiritually grounded while still allowing emotions to help us connect with and care for others.
3. **Compassion Is Often a Choice, Not Just a Feeling** When Jesus landed and saw the crowd after grieving John the Baptist and seeking rest, he chose compassion. He healed the sick and fed thousands. Compassion sometimes flows naturally, but often it is something we must work toward, especially when we are emotionally depleted.
4. **Serving Others Is One of the Most Powerful Antidotes to Emotional Turmoil** The sermon made the point that when we shift our attention from our own pain and frustration toward serving others, something remarkable happens. Peace follows obedience. The disciples feeding 5,000 people from nearly nothing was not just a miracle for the crowd. It was a transforming moment for those doing the serving.

5. Surrender Leads to More Peace Than Control Praying "not my will, but yours be done" is not passive resignation. It is active trust. God sees the full picture. Our prayers matter and our emotions are welcome, but the goal is to land in a place of faith and submission.

Discussion Questions

Opening Question (to help the group warm up)

On a scale of one to ten, how emotionally charged has your week been? What was the biggest contributor to that?

Section 1: The Humanity of Jesus

The sermon emphasized that Jesus came not just to be our Savior but to genuinely relate to us as a human being. Does that change how you think about bringing your emotions to him in prayer? Why or why not?

Hebrews 5:7 tells us that Jesus prayed with loud cries and tears. Does it surprise you that Jesus needed to pray emotionally? What does that say about the role prayer is meant to play in our own emotional lives?

The pastor noted that Jesus likely faced temptation long before his baptism at age thirty. How does the idea of Jesus navigating a lifetime of human struggle, not just a single wilderness moment, affect how you see your own ongoing battles?

Section 2: The Tug of War Within Us

The sermon described two emotional extremes: people who bury everything and people who are driven by everything. Which end of that spectrum do you tend toward? How has that pattern affected your relationships or your walk with God?

The pastor said, "In your anger, do not sin," referencing the principle found

in Ephesians 4:26. What does it look like in practical terms to feel anger without letting it lead to sin? Can anyone share an example from their own life?

The story of John the Baptist's death was used to show that Jesus grieved real loss. He did not simply move on. Is there a loss in your own life, whether a person, a relationship, a season, or an opportunity, that you have not fully allowed yourself to grieve? How might bringing that grief honestly to God change things?

Section 3: Choosing Compassion

When Jesus saw the crowd after seeking rest and solitude, the text says he had compassion on them. The pastor pointed out that compassion can be an emotion, but it is often a decision. When is compassion hardest for you to choose? What makes it difficult?

The sermon referenced God's character as described throughout the Old Testament: gracious, compassionate, slow to anger, and abounding in love. If those are the pillars of who God is, what would it look like for those same qualities to become the pillars of who you are? Where is the biggest gap right now?

The pastor said that when people do not see grace, compassion, and love in Christians, they conclude that we are just churchgoers and not real followers of Christ. Have you ever been on either side of that observation, either making that judgment about someone else or sensing that someone was making it about you? What did you take away from that experience?

Section 4: Serving as a Path to Peace

The pastor made the claim that one of the most effective ways to overcome emotional turmoil is to serve someone else, especially in a way you would not naturally choose. Has that ever been true in your experience? What happened?

The little boy who offered his five loaves and two fish had no logical reason to believe it would be enough. Yet he gave what he had. Where in your life is God asking you to offer something that does not seem like enough? What is holding you back?

The sermon closed with the observation that every person in the room makes a decision, whether to do something or to do nothing. What decision do you sense God is calling you to make this week in response to what you heard?

Practical Applications

Choose one or more of the following to work on individually or as a group before your next meeting.

Practice Honest Prayer Set aside at least ten minutes this week to pray without filtering your emotions. Tell God exactly what you are feeling, including frustration, grief, confusion, or doubt. Then, before you close, try to end with a version of "not my will, but yours be done" and sit quietly for a moment afterward.

Identify Your Emotional Pattern Reflect honestly on whether you tend to bury your emotions or be driven by them. Write down one specific situation where that pattern has caused harm, either to yourself or to someone else. Bring it to God and ask him to begin reshaping how you respond.

Choose One Act of Compassion Identify one person in your life, or even a stranger, who needs something you could offer this week. It does not have to be large. It could be a conversation, a meal, a note, a practical need met quietly. Do it without announcing it and pay attention to how it affects your own emotional state afterward.

Study the Character of God Read through several passages in the Old Testament where God describes himself as gracious, compassionate, slow to anger, and abounding in love. Consider keeping a short journal this week noting moments when you see that character of God at work in your own circumstances.

Memorize One Verse Consider committing Hebrews 5:7 to memory this week as a reminder that Jesus understands emotional prayer from the inside out.

Closing Prayer Prompt

Close your group time by praying specifically for the emotional needs that surfaced during your discussion. You may want to pray in pairs or in a circle, with each person praying briefly for the person to their left. Ask God to replace anxiety with trust, isolation with community, and emotional exhaustion with the peace that comes from surrender and service.

This guide is based on a sermon in the Tug of War series, drawn from Mark 6, Matthew 14, Luke 9, 1 John 1, and Hebrews 5.