

2026-08-23 Small Group Guide

Small Group Guide: Tug of War -- Jesus in the Middle of It All

Based on Mark 5:21-43

Overview

This session explores one of Scripture's most layered narratives -- a story within a story -- in which Jesus is pressed on every side by desperate people, impossible circumstances, and the relentless pull of human emotion. Through the accounts of Jairus and the bleeding woman, we examine what it looks like to bring our need to Jesus with bold faith, and how to hold on to peace when life does not unfold the way we planned or hoped.

Key Takeaways

Faith is not a feeling or a wish -- it is a settled trust that God means what he says and will do what he has promised.

Jesus was fully human and fully God. He understands the weight of competing demands, emotional exhaustion, and the pressure of unmet expectations.

Satan's primary strategy in the tug of war is to pull us out of faith and into fear, resentment, or despair -- particularly in seasons of loss.

The bleeding woman's desperation teaches us that reaching for Jesus, even imperfectly and quietly, is never wasted.

Peace is not the absence of difficulty. It is the settled confidence that God is Lord of all -- including the things we cannot control.

Surrender is not defeat. Praying "not my will, but yours be done" is one of the most powerful declarations of faith a believer can make.

Warm-Up Question

Think about a recent moment when you felt pulled in multiple directions at once -- by responsibilities, emotions, or the needs of others. How did you handle it? What did that tension reveal about where you were placing your trust?

Discussion Questions

Section 1: The Weight of Competing Demands

The sermon opened with the image of Jesus returning from a draining ministry experience, only to be immediately surrounded by a pressing crowd and a desperate father.

Have you ever had a moment when someone needed something from you at the worst possible time -- when you had nothing left to give? How did you respond, and what did that response reveal about your heart?

The pastor pointed out that Jesus was "tempted in every way that we are, yet without sin," referencing Hebrews 4:15. What does it mean to you personally that Jesus understands emotional exhaustion and competing pressures from firsthand experience?

The sermon described how Jesus consistently withdrew to pray, even when surrounded by crowds and constant need. What rhythms of rest and prayer do you currently have in place, and are they actually protecting your spiritual health?

Section 2: The Bleeding Woman -- Desperate, Hidden Faith

The woman who had been bleeding for twelve years risked everything to touch the edge of Jesus' garment, believing that contact with him would be enough.

The pastor noted that the word translated "healed" in this passage can also be translated "saved." What does it mean to you that this woman was not just physically restored but fully made whole? How does that shape your understanding of what Jesus offers?

This woman was ceremonially unclean, financially ruined, and socially invisible. She did not announce herself or make a formal request -- she simply reached out in faith. Is there an area of your life where you have been hesitant to bring your need to Jesus because you felt disqualified, embarrassed, or unsure he would respond?

Jesus stopped everything -- including a journey to heal a dying child -- to acknowledge this woman publicly and restore her dignity. What does that tell you about how God sees the people the world tends to overlook, including you?

Section 3: Jairus -- Faith Under Delay

While Jesus stopped to address the bleeding woman, messengers arrived to tell Jairus that his daughter had already died.

Jesus responded to the news of the girl's death with the words, "Don't be afraid, just believe." That is easy to read and extraordinarily difficult to live. What makes it so hard to hold onto belief when circumstances seem to confirm our worst fears?

The pastor said, "Belief is not a wish. It is done. And every time anxiety tries to come in, it is still done. Jesus did not change his mind." Where in your life right now do you need to treat the promises of God as settled rather than as something you are still waiting to see if they are true?

The mourners at Jairus' house laughed at Jesus when he said the girl was only sleeping. Have you ever felt like your faith was being laughed at -- by others or even by your own doubts? How did you respond?

Section 4: Death, Loss, and the Sovereignty of God

The sermon addressed one of the most emotionally charged topics a group can discuss -- how we respond to death and loss in light of God's sovereignty.

The pastor referenced the idea found in Psalm 139:16, that all of our days were written before one of them came to be. How does that truth either comfort you or create tension for you, especially in the context of loss you have experienced?

The sermon challenged us to examine whether we are willing to call God

Lord of all only when life is going the way we want it to. In what area of your life is it hardest to genuinely pray, "Not my will, but yours be done"?

The pastor shared that his confidence in his father's salvation transformed his experience of grief. How does the hope of resurrection and eternal life actually change -- not just theoretically but practically -- the way you grieve or the way you walk alongside others who are grieving?

Section 5: The Tug of War in Daily Life

The sermon described the tug of war not only in dramatic moments of crisis but in ordinary daily life -- the interruptions, the unfinished tasks, the moments when someone else's need collides with our own agenda. Where do you feel that pull most consistently, and what would it look like to bring God into those moments rather than reacting from emotion?

The pastor made a distinction between believing in God and simply believing God -- taking him at his word. What is one specific promise from Scripture that you need to stop debating and start treating as settled truth this week?

Practical Applications

Choose one or more of the following to practice before your group meets again.

Reach and trust. Identify one area where you have been holding back from bringing a need to Jesus -- out of shame, doubt, or the sense that your situation is too complicated. This week, bring it to him directly in prayer, even if all you can manage is a single honest sentence.

Interrupt your reaction. When you feel the pull of fear, resentment, or anxiety this week, pause before you respond. Ask yourself: what has God already said about this? Then choose to act from that truth rather than from the emotion.

Show up in person. The sermon referenced the power of physical presence

in moments of grief or difficulty. Identify someone in your life who is walking through a hard season and make the effort to show up -- not with a text, but in person.

Pray the surrendered prayer. Once each day this week, intentionally pray, "Not my will, but yours be done," over something specific in your life that you have been trying to control or resolve on your own. Write down what happens in your heart as you do.

Sit with Psalm 139. Read Psalm 139 slowly this week, paying particular attention to the verses about God's knowledge of our days. Journal your honest response -- including any resistance or comfort you feel -- and bring those reflections to share with the group.

Closing Thought

The two people at the center of this passage -- a synagogue leader and an unnamed woman -- had almost nothing in common except one thing: they both believed that getting to Jesus was worth whatever it cost them. One fought through a crowd. The other fell to his knees in public. Both were met. Both were answered. The tug of war is real, and the enemy will use every tool available -- fear, grief, delay, distraction, and doubt -- to pull us away from that same conviction. But Jesus has not changed. He is still the one who stops, who turns around, who calls us daughter, who says do not be afraid, and who proves that death itself does not have the final word.

This guide was prepared based on a sermon from Mark 5:21-43.