

2026-08-09 Small Group Guide

Small Group Guide

Based on the Sermon: "Tug of War"

From the Book of Mark

Overview

This sermon explores the tension between surrendering to God's will and clinging to our own. Using passages from Mark 3 and 4, the message challenges us to examine what we are holding back from God, why we resist what He calls us to do, and what it truly means to live with faith, peace, and joy.

Key Takeaways

Obedience requires action. The man with the shriveled hand was healed in the act of stretching it out, not before. God often meets us in the moment of our surrender, not while we are still deliberating.

Division leads to collapse. A kingdom, a house, or a soul divided against itself cannot stand. The tug of war between God's will and our own will eventually tear us apart if we refuse to choose a side.

Being swept clean is not enough. An empty life, even a tidy one, is vulnerable. Being saved without being filled and transformed leaves room for old patterns and destructive forces to return.

Jesus offers peace in the storm. His rest in the stern of the boat was not indifference. It was a picture of the peace that comes from complete trust in the Father. That same peace is available to us.

Joy is evidence of peace, and peace is evidence of faith. When faith is genuine and surrender is real, peace and joy follow. Their absence is worth examining honestly.

Discussion Questions

Opening Question

Think of a time when you knew what you were supposed to do but hesitated or refused. What was holding you back? How did it turn out?

Section 1: The Shriveled Hand (Mark 3:1-6)

The man with the shriveled hand had likely spent years hiding and compensating for his condition. Are there areas of your life, wounds, failures, habits, or fears, that you have been hiding rather than bringing before God? What makes it hard to stretch those out in front of others?

The religious leaders were watching Jesus closely, looking for a reason to accuse Him rather than a reason to believe. In what ways do we sometimes approach God or Scripture with a critical or defensive posture rather than an open one?

The sermon points out that the man obeyed even though it was embarrassing and exposed him. What does it cost you personally to be obedient to what God is asking of you right now?

Section 2: A House Divided (Mark 3:20-27)

Jesus says in Mark 3 that a house divided against itself cannot stand. Where do you see division in your own spiritual life, places where you are trying to serve two masters or hold on to two conflicting things at once?

The sermon raises the reality of spiritual opposition and demonic forces. Whether or not this is a topic you are comfortable with, what do you believe about the reality of spiritual warfare in everyday life? How does your answer affect the way you live?

The passage in Matthew 12 describes a person who has been cleaned out but left empty, making them more vulnerable than before. What does it look like practically to be filled rather than just emptied? What fills you spiritually?

Section 3: Peace in the Storm (Mark 4:35-41)

Jesus was asleep in the stern during a violent storm. The disciples woke Him and asked, "Don't you care if we drown?" Have you ever felt like God was asleep during one of your storms? How did you respond?

The sermon describes the habit of giving something to God in prayer and then taking it back, like pulling something out of the trash. What is one burden or fear you have been repeatedly picking back up after giving it to God? What would it look like to leave it with Him this time?

The pastor says, "If you don't have joy, you probably don't have peace. If you don't have peace, your faith is shaky." Do you agree with that connection? How would you honestly assess your own level of peace and joy right now?

Deeper Reflection Question

The sermon asks: Is Jesus truly the anchor of your soul, or are you still trying to figure Him out on your own terms? What is one area where you need to stop deliberating and simply obey?

Practical Applications

This week, choose one of the following to put into practice:

Identify your shriveled hand. Write down one thing you have been hiding, protecting, or refusing to let God touch. Pray specifically over it and ask God what He is calling you to do with it.

Practice releasing in prayer. When you bring a concern to God in prayer, intentionally close with a statement of release. Say it out loud if it helps. When you find yourself picking it back up, simply pray again and release it again without guilt.

Examine what is filling you. Take an honest inventory of what occupies your

mind, your time, and your energy. Ask whether those things are drawing you closer to God or leaving you empty and vulnerable. Make one deliberate change.

Pursue peace as a discipline. When anxiety or fear rises this week, pause before reacting. Pray, release, and ask God for the peace that passes understanding as described in Philippians 4:6-7. Journal what happens.

Look for joy as a measuring stick. At the end of each day this week, ask yourself: Did I live today with joy? If not, trace it back. Where did peace break down, and where did faith waver? Bring that specific thing to God.

Closing Prayer Focus

Close your group time by praying together over these three things:

Surrender -- That each person would identify and release what they have been holding back from God.

Filling -- That the Holy Spirit would fill every empty and swept-clean place in your lives.

Peace and Joy -- That your group would be known not by its struggles alone, but by the genuine peace and joy that comes from trusting Christ as the anchor of your souls.

"That day when evening came, he said to his disciples, 'Let us go over to the other side.'" -- Mark 4:35

He is not asking you to figure out the other side. He is asking you to go with Him.