



How to Keep the Faith

Small Group Study Guide

OPENING PRAYER & KEY TAKEAWAYS

How to Keep the Faith

Open your time together in prayer, inviting God into your conversation. Encourage group members to be honest and vulnerable, reminding one another that this is a safe space to share.

- 1 Bitterness is the greatest danger of pain, not the pain itself.** Pain is unavoidable, but bitterness is a choice. When left unchecked, bitterness does not just affect the individual -- it spreads and can defile an entire community. Like roots growing underground, bitterness can cause unseen damage to the foundation of our lives and relationships before we even realize it.
- 2 Acknowledge the pain -- do not bury it.** Healing does not begin when we pretend we were never hurt. It begins when we are honest about where it hurts. God does not ask us to sweep pain under the rug. He invites us to bring it into His presence. You cannot heal from something you refuse to acknowledge.
- 3 The failure of people in the church is not the failure of Jesus.** Hurt often happens horizontally -- between people -- but the enemy wants the damage to become vertical, driving a wedge between us and God. People are imperfect and will fall short. Jesus remains faithful regardless of the failures of those who represent Him.
- 4 Do not let pain isolate you.** We were never created to walk through pain alone. Isolation makes us easy targets for discouragement, depression, and bitterness. The body of Christ is designed to bear one another's burdens, weep with those who weep, and walk with one another through difficult seasons.
- 5 Pain is not the end of the story.** Friday looked like defeat, but Sunday was coming. Whatever painful season you are in right now, it is not the final chapter. Our hope is not merely that life will get easier -- our hope is in Christ, in resurrection, and in eternal life.

GROUP DISCUSSION / SECTION 1

Don't Let Pain Make You Bitter

Opening Question (Warm-Up)

When you hear the phrase "Pain in the Process," what is the first thing that comes to mind from your own life experience?

01 The sermon described bitterness as a hidden disease, like roots growing underground toward a foundation. Have you ever seen bitterness take root in someone's life -- or your own -- in a way that was not immediately obvious? What did that look like over time?

02 Joseph chose not to let his brothers' sin become his bitterness. He said what they meant for evil, God meant for good. What do you think made it possible for Joseph to hold that perspective? What makes that kind of perspective difficult for us?

03 The sermon pointed out that just as Joseph's earthly father wrote him a letter asking him to forgive his brothers, our Heavenly Father has done the same through Scripture. How does the reality that God has forgiven us shape the way we approach forgiving others?

GROUP DISCUSSION / SECTION 2

Acknowledge the Pain -- Bring It to God

04 The sermon challenged the idea of simply telling someone to "just forgive and move on" without addressing the actual pain. Have you ever had your pain minimized or rushed past? How did that affect you?

05 David poured out his honest pain to God in the Psalms, even saying things like "How long, Lord, will you forget me?" (Psalm 13:1). How comfortable are you with being that raw and honest with God? What holds you back, if anything?

06 The sermon made the distinction that "biblical faith sounds more like, God, everything is not fine, but I am going to talk to you about it." How does that reframe what faith looks like during painful seasons?

07 Paul asked God three times to remove his thorn in the flesh, and God said no -- but He also said His grace was sufficient. Have you ever experienced a situation where God did not remove the pain but carried you through it instead? What did that teach you about His grace?

GROUP DISCUSSION / SECTION 3

Don't Let Pain Isolate You

08 The sermon said that isolation makes us easy targets for the enemy. Why do you think pain so naturally pulls us toward isolation rather than community?

09 Romans 12 calls us to rejoice with those who rejoice and weep with those who weep. Which of those two is harder for you personally, and why?

10 The sermon described someone who came to the pastor's office not looking for answers, but simply needing prayer and connection. Is there someone in your life right now who might need that kind of presence from you? Is there a way this group can step into that role for one another?

GROUP DISCUSSION / SECTION 4

Pain Is Not the End of the Story

- 11** The sermon used the imagery of Friday, Saturday, and Sunday in relation to the crucifixion and resurrection. Where do you feel like you are right now -- in a Friday, a Saturday, or a Sunday season? What does it mean to you that Sunday is coming?

- 12** The sermon shared the story of a woman named Madonna who, when diagnosed with cancer, asked not for prayers for healing but for prayers to be a light to those around her. What does that kind of faith look like in practice? What would need to be true about your relationship with God to respond to pain that way?

THIS WEEK

Put it into practice

Choose one or more of the following to put into practice this week:

- 1 Take an honest inventory.** Set aside time this week to sit quietly before God and ask yourself: Is there any bitterness in my heart toward a person or toward God? If so, bring it honestly to Him rather than burying it. You may want to write it out in a journal as a way of pouring it out before Him.
- 2 Stop picking the scab.** Identify one painful situation or offense that you have been replaying in your mind. Each time that thought returns this week, practice consciously releasing it to God rather than rehearsing it. If it comes back, release it again. Keep doing this until it becomes a habit.
- 3 Reach out to someone who is isolated.** Think of someone in your church community or circle of relationships who has been pulling away. Send them a message, make a phone call, or stop by. You do not need to have answers. Just let them know they are not forgotten and that they are not alone.
- 4 Ask God to change you, not just the situation.** In your prayer time this week, intentionally shift your ask from "God, change this situation" to "God, what do you want to change in me through this?" Write down what He brings to mind.
- 5 Share your pain with a trusted person.** If you are carrying pain alone right now, identify one person in this group or in your life you trust, and share what you are going through with them. Allow them to pray with you and walk alongside you.

CLOSING PRAYER

Pray together

Close your time together by giving group members an opportunity to share one thing they are carrying right now -- a pain, a burden, or a struggle. Pray over each person by name, asking God to meet them in their specific pain, to guard them against bitterness, and to remind them that Sunday is coming.

PRAYER REQUESTS

ANCHOR SCRIPTURE

Psalm 62:8 -- A reminder that God is our refuge and that we are called to pour out our hearts to Him at all times.