



PROBLEM

2

CHAPTER SUMMARY

WEEKLY WIN

Participants realize they are more than “mistakers.” They are “sinners,” and that sin is the “problem” that must be resolved if we are to have a relationship with God.

BOTTOM LINES

- Jesus raised the behavioral standard so high that no one could make a passing grade.
- God is on an endless pursuit to restore his relationship with sinners.
- Jesus never minimized the seriousness of sin, but he did not condemn sinners.

BEFORE THE MEETING

PRAY

Pray specifically for each person. Pray that there will be connection and authenticity during your group meeting.

LEADER DEBRIEF

Address the following:

- Evaluate the first meeting with your co-leaders. Talk about what went well and what needs to be adjusted for the next meeting.
- Decide who will facilitate each part of the discussion for the upcoming week.
- Decide on the logistics for the social gathering outside the group meetings. The majority of the group will share their stories during the gathering, so the sooner you can schedule it the better. Be ready with several options.

CONTACT GROUP MEMBERS

Contact your group members individually by email. Thank them for their participation and the specific insights they brought to the group. By sending individual emails, the participants recognize that you were listening and that their voices matter.

You can use the email template provided for Week Two at startingpoint.com/leaders.

DISCUSS SECTION ONE: IT'S A MISTAKE

SECTION WIN

Participants begin to see how calling their bad behaviors “mistakes” is inadequate.

SECTION SUMMARY

The word “sin” and the label “sinner” are uncomfortable. It’s easier to admit we make mistakes. However, we do things that the word “mistake” doesn’t adequately describe.

LEADING THE DISCUSSION

Question 1: Page 10 says, “There is a problem with using the term mistake to describe all our less-than-perfect decisions and behaviors. The problem is that label doesn’t adequately describe everything we call a mistake.” What do you think about this statement?

This question allows the participants to engage without revealing anything personal.

Question 2: What comes to mind when you hear the word “sin”?

This question may give you insight into the religious framework your participants grew up with. Pay attention to answers that reveal a legalistic upbringing.

Question 3: How do you feel and what do you do when you know you did something wrong?

This question takes the discussion to a more personal level. Lead by modeling authenticity and transparency. When you go first, it gives the rest of the group permission to follow.

POTENTIAL FOLLOW-UP QUESTION

- Is using the word “sin” uncomfortable for you? Why or why not?

DISCUSS SECTION TWO: REPEAT OFFENDERS

SECTION WIN

Group members see that embracing their status as “sinners” is a necessary step to connecting with God.

LEADING THE DISCUSSION

Question 1: Do you resist the idea of being called a sinner? Why or why not?

Embracing our status as sinners will wound our pride. If you have a story about how your personal pride was a barrier to your relationship with God, this is a good place to share it.

Question 2: Page 12 says: “When you read the Gospels, you can’t help noticing that Jesus was attracted to sinners. Never once do we find him threatening them with hell. In fact, just the opposite is true. Jesus’s response to sinners was an offer of restoration. As a result, people who were nothing like Jesus liked Jesus.” How does this match the version of Jesus you’ve heard about?

Many participants wonder if God can really like them, much less *love* them. They often don’t know much about the biblical accounts of Jesus’s life. The reality that Jesus was both *liked by* and *attracted to* those that society considered the worst sinners may be encouraging.

DISCUSS SECTION THREE: ONLY ONE PERSON

SECTION WIN

Participants become aware of Jesus's treatment of sinners.

LEADING THE DISCUSSION

Question 1: What does Jesus's response to the criminal say about the forgiveness God offers us?

This question highlights a strange story that goes against the way we think we establish a relationship with God. The criminal did nothing to earn a relationship with God and he had no opportunity to change the way he lived his life. Yet Jesus said, "Today you'll be with me in paradise."

Question 2: What, if anything, stands out to you about Jesus's interactions with the woman?

This question highlights the contrast between the words Jesus taught in the Sermon on the Mount and his behavior toward actual sinners. Highlight this tension to help create a foundation for the discussion. The story also contrasts the response of Jesus with the judgment of the religious leaders. This may bring up past experiences, especially if people felt shamed by religious people in the past. Be sensitive to the emotions that may arise.

POTENTIAL FOLLOW-UP QUESTIONS

- How does Jesus' behavior in these two accounts contrast with your experience?
- How does Jesus' behavior in these two accounts contrast with his own words in the Sermon on the Mount?
- What if the criminal on the cross next to Jesus had murdered your loved one? How would that impact your view of fairness?
- Have you ever wondered if you are somehow beyond God's ability to forgive? How do Jesus' actions toward the criminal affect that view?

WRAP-UP

REVIEW THE BOTTOM LINES

- Jesus raised the behavioral standard so high that no one could make a passing grade.
- God is on an endless pursuit to restore his relationship with sinners.
- Jesus never minimized the seriousness of sin, but he did not condemn sinners.

PREP FOR NEXT WEEK

- Read Chapter Three in the Conversation Guide and complete the questions.
- Listen to Episode Three of the Starting Point podcast which can be found on Apple Podcasts, Spotify, or startingpoint.com/podcast.

STORIES

If your group members will share their stories at the social gathering, encourage them to begin preparing. If you are going to share stories in your group time each week, make sure one or two people will be ready to share next week.

Encourage group members to use the *Appendix: What's Your Story?* section at the end of the Guide to help organize their thoughts.

SOCIAL PLANNING

Confirm the details of your social gathering: date, time, location, food, and who will share their stories. Telling stories at the social helps to free up group time for discussion.

PRAYER

Every time you pray in the group, you model the nature of prayer and your relationship with God. Keep it short and simple. Avoid using “churchy” language. Be authentic. And hold off on taking prayer requests in the group setting until you sense that people are comfortable sharing personal matters.