

Main Passage: Hebrews 12:12-17

Supporting Passage: Ephesians 4:20-24

Purpose: To understand the importance of repentance in establishing and living a Gospel-centered life.

Session Snapshot: To live in a manner worthy of the Gospel, we must first deal with the habits of sin in our lives. Biblical repentance is more than just being ashamed of our sin; it involves a true heart change toward God.

GETTING STARTED

Kick off your time together by checking in and/or reviewing what you did in the last session.

FIRST, remind your group that this is week two of their video series about how disciples must live a Gospel-centered life. Of course, this study is part of a larger Bible study curriculum, *Be Disciples*, that helps men define exactly what it means to be a disciple of Christ.

THEN, if you want to start with asking men for prayer requests, checking in on how their weeks have gone, or any other housekeeping tasks, do so. If you have men present in this session who were not in your first session, consider re-introducing yourself and, if necessary, having the men in your group do the same.

FINALLY, if there are no questions or other input, transition into the *Digging In* section of your leader's guide.

DIGGING IN

Jump into the session by watching this week's video.

FIRST, if your group has been through these studies before, you can skip the setup here and jump right into the video. If you have less experience with the curriculum, consider reminding the group that you will watch a video that will be about 15 minutes long, followed by a short discussion of the video. Then, you'll spend a few minutes in Bible study, followed by a closing activity. Consider encouraging men to take notes as they watch the video.

THEN, play the video. You can access the video by logging into your Iron Hill Press account.

When the video is over, lead men in a short discussion based on what Rick covered. Feel free to come up with your own questions, or consider asking some similar to those below:

- **Rick speaks of an experience when he saw men groaning over their sin in an attitude of repentance. Have you ever witnessed or experienced intense remorse and regret that led to physical anguish? How did you respond? Why do we not have that physical and visceral response to all the sinful habits in our lives?**
- **In the video, we see how Esau was worldly and pursued a favorable status in his family and community instead of pursuing God. How are we like Esau and pursue worldly accomplishments**

instead of Godly ones? How can we be excellent in our life's work but still glorify God and not make that work our main pursuit as Esau did?

- In Scripture, we also see how Esau satisfied his desires instead of looking to fulfilling the desires of God. What are areas in our lives where we satisfy ourselves instead of satisfying God? How can we honestly identify those areas in order to deal with them directly?
- What does it mean to be truly repentant? How can we know that we aren't just ashamed of our sin but truly are repentant of sin?
- When dealing with habitual sin in our lives, what are the characteristics of a life surrendered to God instead of surrendered to the world?

FINALLY, transition into the *Opening the Word* portion of your time together by saying something like the following:

- **Living a Gospel-centered life is not an easy feat. It involves battling the world as well as battling our flesh. Repentance is an important piece of that battle. Let's look closer at this aspect of our battle as depicted in the book of Hebrews.**

OPENING THE WORD

Spend time going deeper into a specific concept Rick introduced in the video.

FIRST, explain that you're going to take a more in-depth look at Hebrews 12:12-17. As Rick stated in the video, living a Gospel-centered life involves rightly dealing with our sinful tendencies and repenting from our sin.

We must make sure your people have a good understanding of the context of the passage you'll be studying. Provide the context for the passage using the following bullet points:

- **Author:** Originally, this letter to the Hebrews was entitled "The Epistle of Paul to the Hebrews." However, since the Reformation, it's been widely recognized that Paul was probably not the writer. There's not enough textual or historical evidence to prove his authorship. Early historians suggested the author is perhaps Barnabas or Apollos, though there is no way to know for sure.
- **Time frame:** Hebrews was almost certainly written before the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple in 70 AD. The author does not mention or give any hint to this catastrophic happening.
- **Purpose:** Hebrews was written to address Jewish converts to Christianity and challenge them to hold fast to their newfound faith. Many of them were resorting back to old traditions, and some were even considering merging with certain Jewish sects. Because of the increased persecution of Jewish converts to Christianity, many were tempted to resort back to old rites and rituals purely to avoid the pain. The challenge from this Hebrew Christian writer to Hebrew converts was to hold fast to their Christian faith and not to slip back to their Hebrew roots.

THEN, read or have a volunteer read Hebrews 12:12-17. Lead the group in a brief discussion. Consider starting out saying something like:

- **The first word in this passage is the word "therefore." That means that what the writer is about to say refers to something he just wrote. Let's look at the prior verse before we get to the main passage.** Read Hebrews 12:11 out loud to the group, then ask: **How does discipline seem painful?**
 - Answers will vary but allow the group to think of ways that following God may seem inconvenient and countercultural.
- **Verse 11 speaks of "peaceful fruits" to those who follow a disciplined life. What are the good fruits of a disciplined life that follows God?**

- Again, answers will vary, but the discussion should be directed at the benefits of living a surrendered life to Christ. These are innumerable and include the fruit of the Spirit from Galatians 5: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Also, the gift of salvation and being rescued from the penalty and power of sin. Group members may also describe having a community of other followers as a benefit, as is having a personal relationship with God.
- **So, because of these innumerable fruits of living a disciplined life, the writer then encourages us to be strong and make straight paths for our feet in verses 12 and 13. Why did the writer need to provide this robust sense of encouragement to those trying to live a disciplined life?**
 - *Answer:* The Apostle Paul describes the Christian life as a spiritual battle, and Jesus describes it as taking up a personal cross. This is not an easy path to choose. The writer is encouraging all those who follow Christ to be strong and encouraged because he knows that we will need this encouragement to be successful.
- **What two characteristics does the writer encourage us to pursue in verse 14?**
 - *Answer:* Peace and holiness
- **How are we to pursue peace in our lives?**
 - *Answer:* Peace is not the absence of a storm but the absence of a stormy or wayward heart amid all circumstances. To have peace does not mean that there are no hardships in life, but it means that these hardships do not overtake us. We have peace because we trust in the Sovereign will of God. Striving for peace is also seen in our relationships with others. The writer is not suggesting that a follower of Christ will get along with every person perfectly, but to pursue peace means the follower of Christ is kind and gentle and does not stir up dissension.
- **What does it mean for us to pursue holiness?**
 - *Answer:* Holiness is being set apart by God for His purpose and glory. The follower of Christ who is set apart from the world while also not succumbing to the desires of his flesh is pursuing holiness. In practical terms, holiness is living a life that habitually pursues God and avoids sin.
- **How does living a life of peace and holiness allow others to see God, as stated in verse 14?**
 - *Answer:* The disciple who reflects God's peace and God's holiness in his family, work, and community will reflect God to those as well. Unbelievers should see a distinct difference in this disciple's attitudes, actions, and motives. A life with these qualities will encourage other followers to continue pursuing God first and foremost and will actively point unbelievers to God.

NEXT, explain that the writer of Hebrews uses Esau as an example of an unrepentant heart. Some of your men may need a refresher on who Esau was. Ask the group to share what they remember about Esau's story. If you need help, refer to some of the bullet points below:

- **Esau was the son of Isaac and Rebekah. He was the older twin brother of Jacob.**
- **He was an accomplished hunter and outdoorsman and his father's favorite son.**
- **He went against God and his father's wishes and married two Hittite women.**
- **He carelessly sold his birthright to his younger brother Jacob for a bowl of stew.**
- **Jacob would later trick his father Isaac into giving him the blessing intended for his Esau.**
- **Esau would pledge to kill Jacob, though years later, they would reconcile.**
- **Esau became the father of the nation of Edom, which would become an enemy to Israel.**

When you have reminded your group of who Esau was, ask:

- **What the author of Hebrews is saying here is that Esau is an example of someone with an unrepentant heart. He regretted a decision but did not make a heart change or change his actions. What does true repentance look like?**
 - *Answer:* True repentance involves seeing sin with the same disdain God sees it and then making a life change away from sin. It means identifying sin in our lives through the revelation of Scripture and the Holy Spirit and then turning away from that sin.
- **What are the elements of repentance?**
 - *Answer:* Repentance involves confessing sin to God, but also, Scripture encourages us to confess our sin to others as well. Not only does this show agreement in the seriousness of sin with the eyes of God, but this act of confession also opens a door of personal accountability to other believers. True repentance then is also making a turn in attitude and behavior away from sin. This repentant turning involves prayerfully spending time in Scripture and being equipped and ready for the temptations of the world, of demonic forces, and the flesh.

FINALLY, inform your group that you want to briefly look at one more Bible passage that deals with repentance. Ask the group to turn to Ephesians 4:20-24 and read or ask a volunteer to read this passage. (If you have done the 5-week study on transformation, this passage will be familiar.) Then, ask:

- **What similarities do you see in these two passages of Scripture?**
 - *Answer:* Both passages involve avoiding one manner of life and pursuing another lifestyle instead. At the heart of both of these passages, the writers are challenging followers of Christ to turn away and strip off those parts of our life that resemble our life before Christ in order to pursue righteousness and holiness in Christ.
- **What are daily habits that cause us to pursue a life of “new man” repentance?**
 - *Answer:* As we saw in Hebrews 12:11, disciplines of godliness may seem painful at the time but yield the fruit of righteousness. Regular times of prayer and Scripture studying lead to desiring God and being appalled by sin in our lives. Confession and accountability keep sin from secretly invading our lives. Living a life of peace and holiness instead of bitterness and immorality causes us to reflect the grace and glory of God to others around us. Regularly meeting with other believers in community reinforces these teachings and encourages us to be strong and diligent in our pursuit of Christ.

Ask if there are any questions and if there are none, transition into *Accepting the Challenge*.

ACCEPTING THE CHALLENGE

Focus your group’s attention on the takeaways from your time together.

FIRST, explain that you want to challenge the group to focus on takeaways from this session. Ask the group for what they think are the main application points from this lesson and allow discussion around those suggestions.

THEN, if necessary, use these application points. Say something like:

- **The first main application point is that our lives as followers of Christ should be marked with peace and holiness. When others think of you, do these two characteristics come to their minds?**
 - What are areas in your life where you do not display peace and grace?
 - Are you living a Holy life? If not, then what steps can you take to turn away from your current lifestyle to pursue a life of peace and holiness?

- **Secondly, every follower of Christ should pursue a repentant life.**
 - What are the habitual sins in your life that you need to repent and turn away from?
 - What are the steps you intend to make before our next group meeting to repent of those sins? (As the group leader, you should remind the group of the importance of secrecy and confidentiality in these matters of accountability. If members cannot trust the other participants in the group with confidence of confidentiality, then transparent accountability will not be achieved.)
- **Lastly, which man of the Ephesians 4 passage do you reflect: the old man or the new man? If others do not see a difference in your life before Christ compared to your life after Christ, then you have not put off the old man.**
 - What aspects of your current life do you need to shed?
 - What aspects of holiness and righteousness in the new man do you need to put on?
 - Are you appalled with your sin, or do you justify and tolerate sin? The follower of Christ must see sin with the same disdain that Jesus does; what do you need to repent of in your life and, instead of tolerating that sin, be appalled by it?

Allow the group to consider the weightiness and importance of repentance. Allow participants to either ask questions based on their reflections or share areas that need repentance in a spirit of accountability.

FINALLY, encourage men to process these questions in the week to come. Challenge them to listen to what God is trying to tell them and respond accordingly. If there are no more questions or input, close your time together in prayer, being sure to ask the Holy Spirit to convict all group members of areas in each member's life that need repentance.