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***WEEK 3
LESSON GUIDE***

BIG IDEA

When it’s not easy to do what’s right, it’s still worth it.

BIBLE

Mark 6:17–29; 1 Peter 3:14–18; Hebrews 13:18

WHAT? What are we talking about today?

ACTIVITY **| Riddle Me This**

* Welcome back to another week of *Not Okay*, where we continue to figure out the puzzle of how we can engage with God even when things in our life feel full of stress and anxiety.
* The strange thing about stress is that not all stress is totally bad. Sometimes, we introduce light stress into our lives to create fun. Like when we are on a road trip, and we are so bored that someone asks us a riddle. The thing about riddles is they require deep and clear thinking. So, to get us ready to start figuring out who we are, we're going to play a game and test your riddle capabilities.
* **INSTRUCTIONS:** *For this game, you'll need a series of riddles and a buzzer or bell. Before your program, choose a few riddles you think would work for your group. To play, split the entire room into two teams, and have one volunteer from each team come to the front Tell the teams they can help their team by saying the answer, but they could also help the other team. Read the riddle aloud, and the first player to hit the buzzer gets to answer. If they are correct, their team gets one point. Otherwise, the opposing team gets to steal. Have new students cycle up to represent their team each round. Here are a few riddles to get you started:*
	+ **What has four wings but cannot fly?** *A fan.*
	+ **What can fill a room but doesn't take up space?** *Light.*
	+ **I have cities but no houses, forests but no trees, and rivers without water. What am I?** *A map.*
	+ **A man calls his dog, who immediately crosses the river without getting wet, crossing a bridge, or using a boat. How did the dog do it?**
	*The river is frozen.*
* Some of those riddles are tricky. And there's added pressure for being in front of your peers. You want to get it right. You want to do well for your team.
* There's an internal desire to avoid doing something wrong. When we look at some of these riddles, we *know* there's only one correct path toward the answer, but it's hard to see what it is sometimes. So, we might end up guessing and getting it wrong. There's a lot of stress in the space between being asked the question and the need to answer.

VIDEO **| The Marshmallow Test**

* There's this famous test in psychology called The Marshmallow Test that tests children on if they can delay their gratification. Kids are given a marshmallow and told to eat it or wait for a bit and get two marshmallows. Here's what happened when one church tried this out.
* **INSTRUCTIONS:** *As a teaching tool, play a short clip from a video* [*like this one*](http://sycu.org/NotOk_Marshmallow) *(2:00*–*3:13) of The Marshmallow Test. For more information on how to legally use copyrighted material for educational purposes,* [*read this*](http://stuffyoucanuse.org/copyright)*!*
* When you watch those kids, you can practically feel the stress they're experiencing. They so badly want to give in, but they know they can get that second marshmallow if they can wait.

QUESTION **| "What motivates you?"**

* These kids had so many internal motivations going on you could see it on their faces. Our motivations have huge impacts on our decisions. We could all benefit from looking at why we act and think in specific ways.
* **Think about what you spent the most time on this week. What motivated you to spend time there?**
* **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Ask the question above and give a few students a chance to respond.*
* Many things can motivate us to act and live the way we do. We might be motivated by the opinions of others — the way our families and friends think of us. We might be motivated by the internal desire to be good people. However, here is a reality— many of us are inspired by integrity.
* Integrity is an attribute we build up over time. It means being the same type of person in every situation. Integrity means that whether someone is looking or not, if you are by yourself or with others, you are the person you say you are.
* Whether the decision is easy or difficult, a person with integrity would make sound decisions in most scenarios, but this can create tension. What if the thing you are doing you know is right, but the people around you are saying it is wrong? This can generate a tremendous amount of stress.
* If we want to be people who say they want to live in the counter-cultural way of Jesus, its going to be really important for us to learn how to process this version of stress.

DISCUSSION

* **INSTRUCTIONS:** *If you have more than 15 students, skip this discussion time and save it for small groups! If you have fewer than 15 students, the starred questions are designed for high schoolers, so you may want to skip them for middle schoolers.*
	+ **Would you rather never be able to lie or know when everyone else is lying and have to confront them about it?**
	+ **How would you describe integrity to someone else?**
	+ **\*On a scale of one to five (five being most important), how important is it to be someone who lives with integrity?**

SO WHAT? Why does it matter to God and to us?

SCRIPTURE **| Mark 6:17–20**

* There is a story in the book of Mark about Jesus' cousin John the Baptist, which helps us see what it looks like to begin to work through some of that stress. For those of you who are not sure who he is, John the Baptist is the cousin of Jesus, who baptized Jesus in the Jordan river at the start of Jesus' ministry.
* At this time, John's message was predominately telling people to prepare for the coming of God's savior. They needed to get their lives in order, follow God's way and leave behind anything that got in the way of God's best for them. This way, when the savior came, people's lives wouldn't get in the way of joining in now what God was doing. Unfortunately, this meant he upset some people in power, and they had him arrested.
* **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Read Mark 6:17–20.*
* Herod was a political leader at the time and appointed the Roman government to oversee the Jewish people and the lands they had once ruled over. He was born into a family that was supposed to follow God's ways, but he had wandered far from what God hoped for him. John the Baptist knew what was right, called him out for it, and Herod had him arrested. Herod still liked hearing from him. He knew he was moral and kind, and honest. Herod knew John was a person of integrity.

SCRIPTURE **| Mark 6:21–29**

* Unfortunately, not everyone around Herod felt the same way.
* **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Read Mark 6:21–29.*
* Herod's niece, acting on behalf of her mother, used the favor she had won from Herod to make a morbid, terrible request. She wanted John to be killed because of what he was speaking of and how, though truthful, it had upset her.
	+ This is a challenging consequence for us to wrap our minds around. John was doing what he knew was right — proclaiming a message God had given him — but he was about to lose his life for carrying through. Sometimes, when we do what's right, there's a difficult consequence.
	+ It's easy to fear the consequences of standing up for what's right, because, often they can be costly.
* Maybe you thought the Bible was a story with lots of "happily ever afters." Perhaps you've heard people say, "If you follow God, everything will work out." By now, though, you've probably been able to figure out this isn't always true. Yet, that doesn't mean it's not worth doing the right thing.
* If we're not careful, we might look at what happened to John and think, "Well, great, if that's happening to *him,* what will happen to *me*?" Or we might decide that the most crucial part of the story is both Herod and John had a reasonable argument. Why couldn't they talk it out? These questions miss the details behind the scenes.
	+ John's ministry and willingness to maintain a lifestyle of integrity greatly impacted the people around him.
	+ He's the cousin of Jesus, who *baptized* Jesus, and was given a chance to pave the way for the savior. His words earned him an audience with some incredibly powerful people, even if they're challenging and difficult for folks to hear.
* His life was a model to the early church, providing the energy they needed to continue moving God's good news forward by focusing on Jesus' life and ministry. From John, we see that doing what is right is worth it, even if it is not always easy.

DISCUSSION

* **INSTRUCTIONS:** *If you have more than 15 students, skip this discussion time and save it for small groups! If you have fewer than 15 students, the starred questions are designed for high schoolers, so you may want to skip them for middle schoolers.*
	+ **What is something in the story of John the Baptist that surprised you?**
	+ **\*Why might God choose to allow John to go through what he did?**

SCRIPTURE **| 1 Peter 3:14–18**

* One of Jesus' closest friends, Peter, wrote a letter to a church that was regularly mocked and isolated because of its beliefs. They had chosen to follow God's ways, which meant they were saying "no" to Caesar's standards.
* These Christians often found themselves left out of events, attacked, taken to court, and more. So, Peter writes this letter to encourage them as they continue to do what is right.
* **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Read 1 Peter 3:14–18.*
* Peter's words reinforce the faith of this community of people following Jesus. Despite the difficulties they were experiencing, Peter wanted them to know God was with them.
* He reminds them about their desire to keep doing what is good, even when difficult. Their decision is similar to how Jesus chose to go to the cross for all humanity. In their suffering, they are experiencing something to what Jesus experienced when he chose to reunite all people with God through his sacrifice on the cross.
* He's reminding them that their stress levels and integrity will be worth it. And even **when it's not easy to do what's right, it's still worth it.**

NOW WHAT? What does God want us to do about it?

STORY **| Share Your Thoughts**

* God has provided us with some truly incredible people, and we get to discuss things with them. Through them, we are reminded of the importance of community and support as we live a life of integrity and make the right choices.
* **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Share a story about when you went to a trusted friend or mentor for guidance, affirmation, or simply expressing a decision you were struggling with. How did you feel before the conversation? How did you feel after? What advice did they give you that you couldn't have figured out on your own? You could also invite a volunteer or student to share.*
* Doing what is right can be tricky. So, it might take some practice for us to get there. Here are three habits you can start today that can help you choose to do what is right even when it isn't easy.
	+ **TALK ACROSS:** One of the ways we practice being people of integrity is by learning to talk to our friends about what we're experiencing. To do that, we'll need to know how to be honest about what we are wrestling with and how we struggle to make decisions. Talk to some friends this week about the hard decisions you are facing regarding living with integrity.
	+ **ASK FORWARD:** If we want to pursue wisdom and growth, we must be honest about what we know and, let's face it, what we don't know. When we lack understanding, having older trusted people give us wisdom or advice can be a helpful tool. People farther down the road have different life experiences than we do, and that can help us figure out how to live with integrity.
	+ **MODEL BACKWARD:** Often, the final step of learning is teaching. If you want to learn how to live with integrity, you may consider volunteering in places where there are people younger than you. Maybe it is in the kid's ministry at church or at your local elementary school. Showing others who are a little younger than us what it looks like to live with integrity is a great way to help solidify the ways we want to live our lives.

DISCUSSION

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	+ **\*What is something you noticed in Peter's letter that you could start doing in your life?**
	+ **Who is someone that encourages you to share what you are experiencing honestly? How can you do that for others?**
	+ **\*If you were asked to help teach someone younger than you how to live with integrity, what would be one thing you would say?**

REFLECTION **| "I" Statements**

* We have access to resources and people who can help us choose to do what's right, even when it's complicated. However, we have to learn how to talk about those things. One practical way to share our feelings is by using "I" statements. These are simple ways to talk about what's happening in our heads and hearts, giving us clear templates to formulate a way forward.
* **INSTRUCTIONS** *For this reflection, you will need to print out the* [*handout included*](http://sycu.org/NotOk_3) *in week three of this series materials and something to write with. These sheets contain prompts for students to express what they feel, what they need, and how someone else can help them. Give the students a few moments to think through a stressful conversation or decision in their life. Ask them to think about what they feel, what they need, and what they might need to request from someone else to navigate this conversation and do the right thing successfully. Have them fill out their "I" statement card as a template for how to start a conversation toward resolution.*
* When we feel an increase in stress, we often forget how to communicate well. Remember to use "I" statements. Building our conversations around tools like this can help us navigate these conversations and share what we're feeling, and choose what is right.
* Jesus wants you to be heard and provides the resources to help you. You can express needs and use your voice to connect and communicate with others. This can help us get the advice we need or be firm and assertive in deciding to do the right thing in difficult circumstances.

DISCUSSION

* **INSTRUCTIONS:** *If you have more than 15 students, skip this discussion time and save it for small groups!*
	+ **Read Hebrews 13:18. Where is the one place in your life where we can pray for you to do what is right even if it is not easy?**
	+ **What keeps you from living with integrity? What is one way you want to address that this week? How can we support you?**

PRAYER **| Picturing God**

* Even though we can use "I" statements to communicate our feelings and needs, we might still feel stressed or anxious. We might still struggle to feel like God is with us as we do difficult things or make the right decisions.
* Neuroscience tells us that our brains and bodies don't know the difference between what we are imagining and what we are "genuinely" experiencing. It's all the same.
* This means when you need a reminder that Jesus is with you, you can imagine Jesus' loving presence and visualize a picture of the reality you know is true but are having a hard time believing at that moment.
* **INSTRUCTIONS:** *For this prayer practice, lead the students through a few moments of reflection with prompting questions. Consider playing some contemplative music as you guide students through this experience.*
	+ *Where is Jesus in this room with you? Is Jesus sitting or standing?*
	+ *How does Jesus' presence make you feel?*
	+ *What is Jesus wearing?*
	+ *Ask Jesus about a hard decision you are facing in your life.*
	+ *What is Jesus saying back to you?*
* Knowing Jesus is with us when we are wrestling with difficult decisions can give us the strength to press on toward being people of integrity. We can understand God is with us, calling us to do what is right. And just like John showed us, sometimes following Jesus means that **when it's not easy to do what's right, it's still worth it.**