

Who Are You Looking For?

South Jersey Small Group Guide

Big Idea: Pain we address leads to life. Pain we delay leads to loss. Pain we avoid leads to death. Jesus meets us in the very place we're convinced he won't, and when we run, he sends people.

Ice Breaker Question: When something hurts physically, are you the type to get it checked right away or wait until it's bad? Why?

Recap

Michelle opened with three patients. One dealt with chest pain immediately and fully recovered. One ignored foot pain for three months and lost a leg. One ignored small symptoms for 34 years and died. Then she asked: if that's true for the body, what are we doing with the pain in our hearts, minds, and souls? From there she walked through Judas, whose expectations of Jesus collided with reality, and shared her own story of disappointment with God, a suicide attempt in 2022, and the friend whose love met her there.

Discuss Questions

Read John 18:1-9

1. Michelle described pain that's addressed, delayed, and avoided. Which one looks most like how you handle emotional or spiritual pain? What does "delay" look like in your life?
2. Why do you think we avoid pain instead of dealing with it?

Read Matthew 27:3-4

3. Judas expected a warrior Messiah, and every peaceful thing Jesus did disappointed him. What did you expect from God when you first started following Jesus? Which expectations have held up, and which have been challenged?
4. Judas felt remorse but brought his shame to people who couldn't carry it. Where do you tend to take your shame instead of to Jesus?
5. When God didn't fit his formula, Judas took matters into his own hands. Where are you tempted to do the same right now?

Read Matthew 26:36-39

6. Michelle named a few mismatches: wanting instant provision but getting wisdom and relationships, wanting instant freedom but getting a process of self-control. Which one hits closest to home? What might God be offering you instead of what you asked for?
7. Jesus asked for the cup to pass, and heaven was silent. How does that change the way you see your own unanswered prayers?
8. "There is no resurrection without death." What might you be keeping on life support that needs to die?
9. Michelle heard God ask, "Why do you want to experience me but not be transformed by me?" What stirs in you when you hear that question?

Practice: Confession and Repentance

Michelle said vague requests get vague answers. Give everyone a few quiet minutes to write honestly to God:

- This is how I see my situation.
- This is what I wanted.
- This is why I'm disappointed or angry.
- Here is the specific thing I need from you to follow you in a new direction.

Then break into pairs or threes (same gender) and share whatever feels right. Nobody has to read their whole page.

"When you run from God, God sends people." Who has God sent to you? Is there someone God might be sending you to right now? Pray for one another, and be specific.

Leader Notes

This message touches heavy things, including Michelle's suicide attempt and Judas's death. Don't press anyone to share, and keep an eye on the people who go quiet. If someone opens up about thoughts of suicide or self-harm, don't let the moment pass: respond the way Michelle's friend did ("Thank you for telling me. It's an honor to hold this."), stay with them, and loop in a pastor that week. If anyone is in immediate danger, call or text 988 or call 911. Also, steer away from debates about Judas's eternal fate. That's not the point of the night.