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THEME: "FIRE OF SORROWS"

There is so much brokenness in our world, so much loneliness, need, hurt, struggle, injustice, abuse, suffering, worry, illness and grief. Each one of us is especially sensitive to certain types of suffering due to our own personal history, and values and constitution. God speaks to us through these certain areas of suffering and sensitivity, and calls us to some kind of redemption action in those areas.

OPENING SCRIPTURE, PRAYER, AND INTRODUCTION	(5 MINUTES)
BIBLE STUDY - Moses' Call	(20 MINUTES)
NAMING HELLS	(10 MINUTES)
ALTAR BUILDING	(30 MINUTES)
STRETCH BREAK	(5 MINUTES)
SHARING PARTNERS	(20 MINUTES)
DISCUSS ARTICLE - No Preparation Needed for God's Call	(20 MINUTES)
ANNOUNCEMENTS	(2 MINUTES)
CLOSING PRAYER	(8 MINUTES)

PREPARATIONS:

Advanced Planning:

1. Arrange **Homework Partner List**. Participants are asked to do their homework sheets with an assigned homework partner (they also will meet with homework partners after the sixth session). The leadership team should in advance figure out how to pair up the homework partners, taking geographic distance and common experience into consideration. Be sensitive and prayerful as to who would enjoy whom as homework partners. Pre-select partners before this third session putting phone numbers after names. Post several copies of the list in your meeting room, or make individual copies for everyone to pick up.
2. **Multiple Small Altar-Building Groups:** In this third session, you will for a time divide your group into multiple small altar-building groups of no larger than 6 people (see p. under the heading, 7:35 P.M. ALTAR BUILDING ON SORROW). After you determine how many separate small altar-building groups you will need, do the following...

- ❖ You must recruit enough leaders to facilitate each altar-building group. If the number altar-building groups of 6 people exceeds the number of leaders you have on your leadership team, then you must identify and ask people from the large group with natural leadership abilities to lead an altar-building group. Photocopy for them the pages of this leader's manual that pertain specifically to facilitating this altar-building group (pp.). Talk them through what they will need to do (it's not that difficult).
 - ❖ You must gather enough altar building materials (altar tables, altar clothes, pillar candles) for the number of small altar-building groups that you will have. You will need to set up these altars in separate rooms around the church – each altar will be circled with 6 chairs. This set up may take some time in larger groups!
3. **Refreshments:** Gather together whatever you need or want for refreshments. You might wish to ask a few participants to take charge of refreshments for the remaining sessions of the course.
 4. **Two Small Flowering Plants:** Arrange to have two small flowering plants near your chair that you will place on the main altar for the closing worship time. (See "8:52 P.M. CLOSING WORSHIP: PLANTING THE GARDEN" on p. .) You can ask someone in the group who has a green thumb and a house full of flowering plants to bring two small potted flowering plants. Or you can take care of this detail yourself by purchasing them inexpensively from a large grocery store. After this group session, you might use the same flowering plants on the main church altar for your next Sunday morning worship service to add some beauty.

Materials:

Bibles, flipchart on flipchart stand, markers, name tags, tape deck/CD player, tapes/CD's, refreshments for break. Materials enough for multiple altar tables (altar clothes, pillar candles, matches), 2 small flowering plants (you can get them from a large grocery store, or from one of your homes).

Set-up:

1. Set up large group with altar table and circle of chairs. Place a Bible on each chair (if you have Bibles).
2. Set up your small group spaces for your altar-building groups of 6-7 people (see above – Advanced Planning).
3. Set up refreshment table. Cue up music. Put on background music.
4. Set up the flipchart stand as follows:
 - 3 On the opening FLIPCHART SHEET #1, write the opening meditation question,

“God, how are you asking me to open my heart to the world around me?”

When people come in, encourage them to put on their name tags and meditate on the question up on the flipchart.

NOTE TO LEADERS: Make sure you have done the homework assignment yourselves and bring your own completed homework to the session.

After you have set up everything for Session 3, take each other's hands and have a moment of silence and prayer. Ask God to be your guide and to bless all your efforts and the efforts of the participants to grow as disciples.

6:45 P.M. GATHERING AND SOCIALIZING

6:55 P.M. (exactly!) GATHER IN SILENCE

Background Music: Put on at this time any soft, relaxing, meditative-sounding music. Invite people to meditate on the question on the flipchart. **READ THE QUESTION ALOUD.**

“God, how are you asking me to open my heart to the world around me?”

As new arrivals come in, draw their attention to the question written on the flipchart, again by reading it aloud.

7:00 P.M. OPENING SCRIPTURE, PRAYER, AND INTRODUCTION (5 MINUTES)

Invite people into prayer. Begin by reading Psalm 40:1-3, WITHOUT referring to chapter and verse. Then, finish with your prayer.

Ideas for Prayer: *“Gracious and tender God, there is so much brokenness in our world, so much loneliness, so much need and hurt and struggle, so much injustice and abuse and suffering, so much worry and illness and grief. Our hearts hurt for humanity.*

“Today we give you thanks for the ways you lift us up out of the pit and put a new song in our hearts. We thank you also for giving us the strength and ability to help others out of the pit. You have made each one of us sensitive to certain types of suffering that go on around us and within us.

“God, we know you speak to us through the feelings of our hearts. We know that you call us to minister to certain kinds of human suffering in the world that especially weigh on our hearts. Show us tonight, God, how you can take our wounds and our sensitivity to sorrow, and empower us through these experiences to be comforting instruments of your grace. Amen.”

Welcome: *“Welcome! The theme for tonight’s session is hearing God’s call through the sorrows of the world that we are sensitive to. Please turn to p. (p. in Leader’s Manual) which is the “Sorrows” section of your Spiritual Passion Profile.*

“Tonight we will be hunting for God’s voice, feeling God’s activating fire, as we tune into the real sorrow or moral pain we feel for certain situations in our corner of the world. God’s fire within us, symbolized by the flaming hands in the center of the logo, rises up and pushes us to make some changes in the world around us – it makes us feel passionate about helping others, making a contribution, creating a better world.”

“Just as Moses heard God’s call in a burning bush, so we hear God’s call to specific action in the fire of our sorrows about the world.”

7:05 P.M. BIBLE STUDY: MOSES CALL - EXODUS 3:1-13; 4:10-13 (20 MINUTES)



LEADER’S NOTE: Be careful not to let this Bible study go over the time limit – you have only 20 minutes! Then, move the developing discussion right into the next exercise that this Bible study sets the stage for - “Naming Hells on Earth that People Inhabit.”

(Purpose: Through the story of Moses’ call, we begin to explore how God opens our hearts, communicates to us through those things in our world that cause us sorrow, or moral pain.)

Read Scripture: *“Let’s take a look at God’s call to Moses before the burning bush, and explore how God opened Moses’ heart and sensitized him to a problem that God was calling him to attend to. Open your Bibles to **Exodus 3:1-13; 4:10-13.**”*

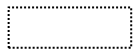
Have a volunteer read this passage LOUDLY! Then, ask the following questions:

- ❖ What sorrows about the Hebrew situation in Egypt does God reveal to Moses in Exodus 3:7-8?
- ❖ *Remember that Moses was born in Egypt as a Hebrew slave some eighty years before. His mother, trying to save her infant son Moses from Pharaoh's decree to kill off Hebrew male infants, set him floating down the Nile river in a little basket, hoping some compassionate Egyptian would see him and adopt him.*

The baby Moses was found in the bull rushes by the Pharaoh's daughter who adopted him and raised him in the royal court. Moses always knew he was a Hebrew raised as an Egyptian of privilege. When he was a young adult and saw an Egyptian foreman beating a Hebrew slave without justification, Moses jumped from his chariot in anger and killed the Egyptian. Then, to save his own skin, he fled from Egypt, never to return.

- ┆ What memories and feelings about the Hebrews back in Egypt is God reactivating in Moses in order to re-sensitize and open Moses' heart?
 - ┆ How has God used a former sorrow of yours to open your heart to others?
 - ┆ Why is an open and sensitive heart that feels the suffering of others essential in "hearing God's call"?
- ❖ Look at Exodus 4:10-13.
 - ┆ What was paralyzing Moses, making him afraid to do what God asked him to do?
 - ┆ How does God empower Moses?
- ❖ What in Moses' story do YOU especially relate to? What ELSE?

7:25 P.M. NAMING HELLS ON EARTH THAT PEOPLE INHABIT (10 MINUTES)



LEADER'S NOTE: Make this exercise quick and zippy – only 10 minutes!

a. Newsprint Exercise (5 minutes):

Write at the top of a blank sheet on the flipchart: *"Hells that People Inhabit."*

"God helped open and re-sensitive Moses' heart to the suffering of the Hebrew people, his own kin – that was something that Moses had long forgotten about. Each one of us, like Moses, has felt the suffering of others. Each one of us has seen or even personally experienced the many different kinds of hells that people live in or endure in this life."

“Think for a moment about all the different kinds of hells that people inhabit. Think also of the different kinds of hells YOU personally have endured. Let’s see how many we can think of, and I will write them up on the board.

People name hells (e.g. poverty, depression, racism, rejection, loneliness). Quickly record on the flipchart what the group members name.

b. Theological Reflection on God's Relation to Hell (5 minutes):

- ❖ When you take a minute to think about these human hells we’ve listed on the flipchart, how does that effect you?
- ❖ Turn to Worksheet 3-A. This is the Apostle’s Creed, one of the oldest creeds of the Christian church written in the early 100’s, that tries to articulate the essential meaning and ministry of Christ. Let’s read that aloud in unison right now....

APOSTLE’S CREED

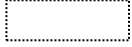
“I believe in God the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, and in Jesus Christ his only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead and buried. He descended into hell; the third day he rose again from the dead; he ascended into heaven, and sits on the right hand of God the Father Almighty; from thence he shall come to judge the living and the dead. I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and life everlasting. Amen.”

- ❖ Notice the line, *“He...suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead and buried. He descended into hell; the third day he rose again...”* What do you think Jesus was doing in hell after he rose from the dead? What do you imagine he was doing among all the suffering inhabitants of hell? (probably the same thing he did on earth – comfort and heal the suffering!)
- ❖ What would you say does God hunger to do with all our human hells?

Leader’s Concluding Remarks: *“God redeems, saves, and comforts! Jesus’ name literally means “to save.” This is Jesus’s ministry - redeeming, relieving, removing the hells we see around us!*

“So, when we are a disciples of Jesus, we are called to this same ministry. We are each called to enter some of these hells we have mentioned on the board and bring comfort, or healing, or help! Think about which of these hells God is calling you to enter and minister to.”

7:35 P.M. ALTAR BUILDING ON SORROW (30 MINUTES):



LEADER'S NOTE: It is important for this sensitive altar-building on sorrow to divide into small groups of 6 people. Set up little altars about your building in classrooms, offices, the sanctuary, etc. where the separate groups cannot hear or see each other. Each meeting space should have a small, low-lying altar table, with altar cloth and burning candle, and a small circle of chairs or cushions around it. One of your small groups can meet in your main meeting room, drawing the chairs closer together.

Each small group should have its own facilitator. Divide up leaders in leadership team so that each leader is facilitating one of the altar-building groups. If you expect to have more altar-building groups than are members of your leadership team, then ask someone in the larger group who has natural leadership ability to facilitate a small group. Call them in advance, if possible, explaining to them how to facilitate an altar-building group.

a. Introduction of Altar Building: *"It was hard for Moses to listen to God's sorrows at the burning bush. These are things we don't want to hear either. This is territory, along with Moses, that we would rather not enter.*

"In a similar vein, we read in the scriptures that when Jesus looked out over Jerusalem before he entered the city during Passover, he wept for his people for being so lost. His heart was opened as Moses' heart was opened, and he felt deep sorrow and love for the people of Jerusalem. When we allow ourselves to have a sensitive and 'listening heart' like Jesus and like Moses, we too become sensitive to the sorrows and needs of our world, our workplace, church, and community.

"We were each asked to bring an object that represents some need or situation we see in our workplace, church, or community that especially grieves us or causes us sorrow – a situation we'd love to change if we could. We each will be sharing a particular sorrow we carry about our world or community in small groups of 6 people.

"Though these are feelings that we don't always like to share, this is often an important first step in letting God tug us into ministries that we really care about. If you have forgotten to bring an object, please share anyway without an object about something that you see in the world around you that especially makes you feel sorrow.

"As each person in the circle shares, let us try to listen deeply and lovingly to him or her. During the silent pauses after each person shares and places his or her object on the altar, let us meditate on how God is trying to speak to us through that individual's sharing.

"When your small group sharing is over at 8:10 p.m., you will have a 5 minute break. When you return to the large group, bring your altar object and place it on the main altar."

b. Divide Into Small Groups of Six People: Cluster people into their small groups of 6 either by counting off, or by grouping people who are near each other. Then assign a leader to each group, and assign each group to small group space.

Ask them to go to them in silence, and tell them they have 25 minutes to share their objects and the sorrows they represent. Tell them to finish up by 8:05 P.M. and then take a 5 minute stretch break before the large group reassembles.

(to be continued ...)