

Messy & Abundant

2023-05-21

Leader Notes

OVERVIEW: Welcome to our study, Messy and Abundant! Proverbs 14:4 says, “Without oxen a stable stays clean, but you need a strong ox for a large harvest.” Life is messy and complex, and it can be challenging to stay committed and persevere through difficult times. Proverbs 14:4 teaches us that embracing the messiness of life and dealing with the challenges that come with it can lead to growth, progress, and success. Today’s study can encourage us to stay committed to goals and relationships, even when things get tough. Rather than run away, staying committed helps us embrace the learning opportunities that come from difficult situations and enjoy the harvest that comes when we persevere.

ICEBREAKER: That Was a Mess!

The apartment we had in graduate school left a little to be desired. One of the challenges that we had was a tiny kitchen. To make the most of a crammed situation, our landlord gave us shelving for the pantry. One day I pressed down on the lid of the pickle jar on the top shelf, only to have the shelving collapse, creating a gooey mixture of pickle juice, baking supplies and cereal on the floor. That was a mess! What mess have you made or experienced? What did you learn from the mess? Share your story with the group!

STUDY:

Life is messy. There are no two ways about it. Whether it's the dirt and chaos of everyday living, the struggles we face in our relationships, or the challenges we encounter in our spiritual lives, messiness is an inescapable part of the human experience. But as Christians, we are called to find God in the midst of this messiness, to trust that He is at work even when things seem chaotic or uncertain. In this study, we'll explore the theme of messiness and abundance in Scripture and consider what it means to trust God even when things are messy.

1. The Blessing and Challenge of Abundance

READ: Proverbs 14:14

“Without oxen a stable stays clean, but you need a strong ox for a large harvest.” NIV

- Abundance, whether it be relationships, business opportunities or material wealth, can bring both blessings and challenges. How does this verse speak to that challenge?

LEADER NOTE: Our passage from Proverbs 14:4 reminds us that abundance comes with its own set of challenges. The more we have, the more we need to manage, and the messier things can become. The example of a clean stable without oxen is tempting, but it comes at the cost of a large harvest. Similarly, our lives may be cleaner and more organized without the abundance of blessings, but we would miss out on the joy and richness that comes with abundance.

READ: John 10:10

“The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.” NIV

- What does it mean to have a full (abundant) life?

LEADER NOTE: This word “abundant” (full) in the Greek is *perisson*, meaning “exceedingly, very highly, beyond measure, more, superfluous, a quantity so abundant as to be considerably more than what one would expect or anticipate.” The full life Jesus promises comes from our growing, forever relationship with Him. Knowing and walking with our Creator fills our life with purpose, meaning, joy and hope. These are the keys to experiencing a full, abundant life.

- What are some examples of abundance in your life that you are grateful for, even though they come with challenges?

LEADER NOTE: Examples of abundance may be friendships, family, skills and abilities or material wealth. Although material and relational abundance are not necessary for us to experience full life Jesus promises us, we should be grateful for these things and give thanks to God when we experience them.

2. The Messiness of Life

Life is unpredictable, and things don't always go according to plan. Our best efforts to keep things clean and tidy can often fall short. But the messiness of life can also be an opportunity for growth and transformation. When we lean into the mess and trust God to guide us, we can learn valuable lessons and grow in our faith.

READ: Matthew 6:25-34 - Jesus' teaching on worry and trust in God's provision.

- What are some of the worries or anxieties that can come with the messiness of life?

LEADER NOTE: The messiness of life can cause us to worry and be anxious. Like Jesus says in these verses, we may worry about where our next meal is coming from, or, if we have material wealth, we may worry about losing it or worry about how to manage it.

- What does Jesus' teaching tell us about how to approach these worries?

LEADER NOTE: Jesus teaching tells us to approach these worries by looking around and seeing how God cares for and looks after His creation. Even the simplest things in nature provide us with powerful life lessons about God's love and control in our lives. Jesus' teaching reminds us to focus on his kingdom. As we make following Jesus the central goal and focus of our life, these other areas we tend to worry about fall into place.

3. The Messiness of Relationships

Friendship expert, Jennie Allen, says, "Outside of Jesus, relationships are the greatest gifts we have on earth and simultaneously the most difficult part of being alive." Relationships are one of the messiest parts of life. We are imperfect people, and we often hurt and disappoint one another. But as Christians, we are called to pursue peace and reconciliation even when it's difficult. When we choose to work through the messiness of relationships, we can experience the deep joy and connection that comes with true community.

READ: Matthew 5:23-24 - Jesus' teaching on reconciliation.

23 "Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother or sister has something against you, 24 leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to them; then come and offer your gift." NIV

- What are some of the challenges that come with pursuing peace and reconciliation in relationships?

LEADER NOTE: Relationships are great, but they can bring lots of challenges as well. The challenges that come with pursuing peace can include our fear of the pain that can come from conflict, our lack of healthy communication (speaking and listening well) and our lack of willingness to extend grace and forgiveness.

- Why is it important to work through these challenges and seek reconciliation?

LEADER NOTE: The reason conflict resolution is so difficult is that we're hesitant to place ourselves in uncomfortable situations. We're also frequently unwilling to humble ourselves enough to admit that we might be wrong or to do what it might take to make amends if we are wrong. Those who do conflict resolution best are often those who would prefer not to confront others about their sin, but still do so out of obedience to God. If the matter is relatively minor, it may be that the best thing to do is to practice forbearance and overlook the offense (Proverbs 19:11). If it cannot be overlooked, one must pursue reconciliation. This is such an important issue to God that peace with Him and peace with others are inextricably entwined (Matthew 5:23-24). Got Questions

- How can we rely on God's grace and strength to navigate the messiness of relationships?

LEADER NOTE: God's grace teaches us to love and forgive others just as he has loved and forgiven us. (see Ephesians 4:32). As we put on the nature of Jesus, God will give us the strength to navigate our relationships well (see Colossians 3:12-14).

4. Finding God in the Mess

At the end of the day, our goal as Christians is not to avoid the messiness of life, but to find God in the midst of it. When we trust in His goodness and sovereignty, we can rest in the knowledge that He is at work even when things seem chaotic or uncertain.

READ: Psalm 46:1-3

“God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, though the earth give way and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea, though its waters roar and foam and the mountains quake with their surging.” (NIV)

READ: Isaiah 43:2

“When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned; the flames will not set you ablaze.” (NIV)

- What do these passages tell us about God’s presence in the midst of difficult circumstances?

LEADER NOTE: In the midst of difficult circumstances we can rest in the truth that God is with us, comforting us and seeing us through.

- How can we trust in God’s promises when life feels messy and uncertain?

LEADER NOTE: Trusting in God’s promises happens as we read and think about his promises to us in the Bible. In the midst of messiness and uncertainty, we need daily reminders of who God is and what he has promised us.

5. Embracing Messiness as Part of Our Spiritual Journey

The messiness of life can be especially challenging when it comes to our spiritual journey. We may feel like we’re not making progress, or like we’re failing in our efforts to grow closer to God. But the truth is that spiritual growth is messy and nonlinear, and we often learn the most when things feel the messiest.

READ: Proverbs 3:5-6

5 Trust in the LORD with all your heart
and lean not on your own understanding;
6 in all your ways submit to him,
and he will make your paths straight.[a]

- How can we trust that God is working for our good even when things feel messy and uncertain?

LEADER NOTE: Instead of focusing on our circumstances, God encourages us to focus on him. Like Peter walking on the water, we grow our trust as we take our eyes off of the waves and focus on Jesus. (see Matthew 14:22-31)

READ: Hebrews 10:36-37

36 You need to persevere so that when you have done the will of God, you will receive what he has promised. 37 For, “In just a little while, he who is coming will come and will not delay.” NIV

- God can use the messiness of life to teach us important spiritual habits that can bring a harvest in our lives. How does learning perseverance do this for us?

LEADER NOTE: Perseverance is a key way God grows our faith. As we learn to persevere through tough circumstances and difficult relationships, God will reward us with a rich relationship with him. (also see James 1:2-4)

THE BIG SERVE TheBigServe.ca Check out details about how your LifeGroup can be involved!

PRAY:

God, thank you for the reminder from today's study that life comes with messes and abundance! Thank you for the abundance you've blessed me with in my relationships and in meeting my daily needs. Even though the messiness of life isn't fun in the moment, I know that you have a plan. Thank you for showing me that you want to grow me in the mess. Please help me, in the messiness I'm facing today, to trust in you. Rather than focusing on the mess, help me to focus on you. Rather than being anxious, help me to be at peace. God, please help me to persevere so that I can experience the harvest of knowing you more. Thank you for loving me. I pray these things in the Name of your Son, Jesus. AMEN.