LifeGroup Leader Discussion Guide

Crashing Sukkot – Stones and Dust

KEY SCRIPTURE:

“Then neither do I condemn you,” Jesus declared. “Go now and leave your life of sin.” — John 8:11

Big Idea

Jesus doesn't stand at a distance from our mess. He gets down in the dust with us. In a moment when religious leaders are eager to condemn, Jesus exposes their hypocrisy, extends mercy to a guilty woman, and calls her into a new way of living.

The story reminds us that the grace of Jesus is neither condemnation nor permission to keep living in sin. He offers us both forgiveness and transformation. Those who have received his mercy are invited to extend that same mercy to others.

LifeGroup Goal: Help people recognize the stones they may be holding, experience the grace of Jesus in their own brokenness, and learn to extend mercy while still taking seriously Jesus' call to transformation.

Opening Prayer

Heavenly Father, thank You that You are a God who doesn't stand far away from us when life gets messy. Thank You for Jesus, who came to live among us, who sees us in our brokenness, and who offers us grace instead of condemnation.

As we open your Word and talk together tonight, help us to be honest about our own lives. Show us where we may be holding stones against others, where we need to receive your forgiveness, and where You are calling us to change.

Give us humble hearts, open minds, and a willingness to extend to others the same grace You have shown us. May we become people who follow Jesus, love God, and love people well.

In Jesus' name, Amen.

Discussion Questions & Leader Insights

1. What was memorable or interesting from the sermon?

Leader Insights:

This is an opportunity to get everyone talking and reconnect with the main ideas from the teaching. There are several memorable elements worth revisiting:

- The religious leaders brought a woman to Jesus, intending to put Him on trial, but Jesus turned the spotlight back on them.
- Jesus stooped down and wrote in the dust rather than immediately responding to their accusations.
- One by one, the accusers walked away, until only Jesus and the woman remained.
- Jesus offered her both freedom from condemnation and a call to leave her old life behind.
- The picture of God getting down into the dust with the accused is a powerful expression of the incarnation—God coming near to us in Jesus.

Follow-up thought: Sometimes the most powerful part of this story isn't what Jesus says to the crowd, but what He says to the woman when everyone else has left.

Encourage people to share what stood out personally, rather than trying to get everyone to remember the same sermon points.

2. Read John 8:1–11. The story of the woman caught in adultery is missing from the earliest manuscripts of John. How do you feel about naming that footnote honestly in church, and does it shake your trust in the story?

Leader Insights:

This is a great opportunity to talk about biblical reliability and how we approach difficult questions about Scripture.

- The story is absent from several of the earliest and most important Greek manuscripts of John's Gospel. Some later manuscripts include it in different locations.
- Most Bible translations acknowledge this with a footnote rather than hiding the textual question.
- There is no reason to pretend that every question about the transmission of Scripture has an easy answer.
- The story's teaching is consistent with the character of Jesus and themes found throughout the New Testament.

It is important to distinguish between questions about how a passage was transmitted and questions about whether its message reflects the heart and teaching of Jesus.

A helpful perspective: Being honest about what we don't know doesn't have to weaken our faith. It can strengthen our confidence that Christianity doesn't require us to avoid difficult questions.

Also, the earliest manuscripts are not necessarily evidence that the story is fabricated. The passage has a long history in the church, and many Christians have found its message deeply consistent with Jesus' ministry.

Leader takeaway: We don't need to be afraid of honest questions. A healthy faith is not one that has all the answers, but one that is willing to seek truth.

3. The teachers of the law drag the woman before Jesus. But the law required both the man and the woman to be brought forward (Leviticus 20:10; Deuteronomy 22:22). Why does the missing man matter, and what does it tell us about how the law was being used?

Leader Insights:

The absence of the man is significant. If the woman was genuinely caught in adultery, where was the man? The law clearly addressed the responsibility of both parties.

This raises several important observations:

- Selective justice: The religious leaders were not interested in faithfully applying God's law. They were selectively using it to accuse a woman.
- A lack of compassion: The woman had become a tool in their attempt to trap Jesus. They weren't concerned about her dignity, her circumstances, or her restoration.
- Religious hypocrisy: They were quick to identify someone else's sin while apparently overlooking their own motives and failures.
- The misuse of Scripture: God's law was intended to reveal His holiness and guide His people, not become a weapon for self-righteousness.

Their actions expose a dangerous tendency: we can use God's standards to elevate ourselves while putting others down.

Something to emphasize: The problem wasn't that God's law took sin seriously. The problem was that these religious leaders were using the law without justice, humility, or love.

Follow-up thought: How can we sometimes use truth, biblical principles, or even our concern for holiness as a way to criticize others rather than help restore them?

4. What does it mean to follow a God who does not stay above our mess but gets down in it? Where in your life do you most need him to meet you in the dirt?

Leader Insights:

This question gets to the heart of the gospel.

The Christian faith teaches that God didn't remain distant from humanity's brokenness. In Jesus, He entered into our world, experienced human suffering, and came alongside people who were hurting, rejected, ashamed, and broken.

Consider these examples:

- Jesus touched people who were considered unclean.
- Jesus ate with tax collectors and sinners.
- Jesus welcomed people who were rejected by religious society.
- Jesus wept with those who were grieving.
- Jesus ultimately went to the cross to deal with our sin.

The image of Jesus stooping down into the dust is especially meaningful. The woman was standing in a place of shame, surrounded by people ready to condemn her. Jesus came down to where she was.

Leader takeaway: Jesus doesn't wait for us to clean ourselves up before He comes near. He meets us in our brokenness and invites us into something better.

Encourage people to consider where they need Jesus right now:

- A relationship that is broken.
- A habit or struggle they are ashamed of.
- A season of grief, disappointment, or failure.
- A decision they regret.
- A situation where they feel judged or misunderstood.

Allow people the freedom to share at whatever level they are comfortable. This is an opportunity to create a safe environment, not pressure anyone into revealing something deeply personal.

5. Read Jeremiah 17:13. This is one of the strongest arguments for what Jesus writes in the dirt. How do you handle the parts of the Bible we simply cannot know for sure?

Leader Insights:

Jeremiah 17:13 says:

"Those who turn away from you will be written in the dust because they have forsaken the LORD, the spring of living water."

This is an interesting connection to Jesus writing in the dust.

The passage describes those who turn away from God as being written in the dust. Some biblical scholars have suggested that Jesus may have been intentionally alluding to this passage as He stooped to write on the ground.

If that connection is intentional, Jesus may have been communicating something powerful to the religious leaders: those who were so eager to judge this woman were themselves in danger of judgment because they had turned away from God.

However, we need to be careful. John doesn't tell us what Jesus actually wrote. We cannot know with certainty whether He was quoting Jeremiah, writing out the sins of the accusers, or doing something else entirely.

Important teaching points:

- Scripture sometimes leaves details unexplained.
- We can distinguish between what the Bible clearly says and what we believe may be implied.
- We should be comfortable saying, "We don't know," rather than presenting speculation as biblical fact.
- Not knowing every detail doesn't prevent us from understanding the central message of the passage.

Leader takeaway: Our faith doesn't depend on knowing exactly what Jesus wrote in the dust. We know what He said to the woman, and that is enough to reveal His heart.

6. What stone are you holding right now (person or thing you like to condemn), and what would it take for you to set it down before you throw it?

Leader Insights:

This question invites personal reflection and can be one of the most challenging discussions of the evening.

The religious leaders came carrying stones, but Jesus challenged them to examine their own hearts before judging someone else.

We all have stones we can be tempted to throw:

- Resentment toward someone who has hurt us.
- Frustration with someone whose choices we disagree with.
- Judgment toward people who have different values or lifestyles.
- Bitterness toward someone who has failed us.
- Condemnation toward someone who repeatedly makes the same mistakes.

There is an important distinction between recognizing that something is wrong and positioning ourselves as someone's judge.

Jesus isn't saying that sin doesn't matter or that we should ignore wrongdoing. He is challenging the pride and hypocrisy that allow us to condemn others while overlooking our own need for grace.

A helpful reminder: Before we pick up a stone, we need to remember how much grace we ourselves have received.

You might encourage the group to consider:

- What makes it difficult for me to put this stone down?
- Am I holding someone to a standard that I struggle to meet myself?
- What would it look like to replace condemnation with prayer, compassion, or forgiveness?

Leader takeaway: Putting down a stone doesn't necessarily mean approving someone's behaviour or removing appropriate boundaries. It means giving up our desire to condemn and choosing a response shaped by humility and grace.

7. Jesus gives the woman both grace without condemnation, and a call to leave her old life. Cheap grace drops the second half, and moralism drops the first. Jesus keeps both. Which half do you tend to drop, the mercy or the call to change? What does it look like in your life to hold both?

Leader Insights:

This is one of the most important theological ideas in the passage.

Jesus says two things to the woman:

1. "Then neither do I condemn you."
2. "Go now and leave your life of sin."

Both statements matter. Jesus neither ignores her sin nor defines her by it.

There are two common ways we can get this wrong:

Cheap grace – mercy without transformation

- We emphasize God's forgiveness but don't take sin seriously.
- We want Jesus to accept us but don't necessarily want Him to change us.
- We treat grace as permission to continue living however we want.

Moralism – transformation without mercy

- We emphasize obedience, behaviour, and religious performance.
- We believe God's acceptance depends on how well we behave.
- We become more focused on pointing out sin than offering grace.

Jesus offers something better:

His grace welcomes us as we are, but it doesn't leave us as we are.

We don't pursue holiness to earn His love. We pursue holiness because we have received His love.

Questions to help the discussion:

- Do you tend to be harder on yourself or harder on others?
- Is it easier for you to accept God's forgiveness or to make the changes He is asking of you?
- How does knowing you are loved by God make it possible to face your sin honestly?

Leader takeaway: Grace and truth are not competing values. In Jesus, they belong together. The same grace that forgives us also gives us the freedom and power to change.

8. Jesus does not just let the woman off the hook; ultimately, he takes her place. What does it mean for your own discipleship that Jesus carried what you deserved, and how does that change the way you respond when someone else deserves judgment?

Leader Insights:

This question moves the conversation from the woman's story to the heart of the gospel.

Although Jesus doesn't condemn the woman, the larger biblical story reminds us that He ultimately went to the cross to bear the judgment our sin deserves.

Romans 8:1 declares:

"Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus."

Jesus didn't simply tell us that our sin doesn't matter. He dealt with it through His death and resurrection.

Consider what this means for our discipleship:

- Humility: We have no reason to look down on others. We are recipients of grace, not people who have earned God's favour.
- Gratitude: We can live with joy and freedom because Jesus has carried our sin.
- Forgiveness: We become more willing to extend mercy because we recognize how much mercy we have received.
- Transformation: We want to live differently, not to earn forgiveness, but because Jesus has given us a new life.

A helpful illustration: Imagine standing before God with a list of all the reasons you deserve judgment. Jesus steps forward and says, "I'll take that." That's the heart of the cross.

Leader takeaway: The gospel changes how we see both ourselves and others. We no longer need to position ourselves above people who have failed. We can stand alongside them as people who desperately need the same grace.

9. Read Matthew 5:45. Think of rain as mercy. How does that picture of indiscriminate mercy challenge the way you decide who deserves grace and who does not?

Leader Insights:

Jesus says that God causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. (see Matthew 5:45)

In the context of the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus is teaching His followers to love their enemies and pray for those who persecute them.

Rain was especially meaningful during Sukkot, a celebration that remembered God's provision and included prayers for rain for the coming agricultural season.

The picture of rain as mercy reminds us that God's goodness is not limited to people who have earned it.

Consider these observations:

- God gives good gifts to people who don't acknowledge Him.
- God's kindness is not reserved for those who behave well.
- We cannot make ourselves the gatekeepers of who deserves compassion.
- Followers of Jesus are called to reflect the generosity of their heavenly Father.

This doesn't mean that every behaviour should be approved or that justice doesn't matter. It means that mercy should not be restricted to people we like, agree with, or believe have earned it.

Questions to explore:

- Who do you find it hardest to show grace toward?
- Do you sometimes want God to be merciful to you but more judgmental toward someone else?
- What would it look like to let God's generosity shape your response to a difficult person?

Leader takeaway: Rain doesn't check the character of the ground before falling. In the same way, God's mercy challenges us to extend kindness beyond the boundaries of our preferences and comfort.

Closing Reflection: Putting Down the Stones

As you wrap up the discussion, bring everyone back to the central image of the story.

The religious leaders arrived carrying stones, ready to condemn. Jesus stooped down into the dust, met the woman in her shame, and offered her something she could never earn: grace.

But He also invited her to walk away from the life that had brought her there.

The same invitation is extended to us.

- Receive His mercy: There is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. (Romans 8:1)
- Respond to His invitation: Don't settle for staying where you are. Allow His grace to transform your life.
- Extend His mercy: Put down the stones you are holding against others. Remember how much grace you have received.

Final question for the group:

What is one thing you want to take away from tonight's discussion and put into practice this week?

- This LifeGroup Leader discussion guide has been generated by ChatGPT AI and edited by Jeff Austen.