



# COMMUNICATOR GUIDE

Stuck / Week 3

PRELUDE

SOCIAL

WORSHIP

STORY

GROUPS

HOME

## BOTTOM LINE

Ask God to change your mind in the moment.

## GOAL OF SMALL GROUP

To help students understand that changing their mind is the best way to changing their behavior long-term.

## SCRIPTURE

*Throw off your old sinful nature and your former way of life, which is corrupted by lust and deception. Instead, let the Spirit renew your thoughts and attitudes (Ephesians 4:22-23 NLT).*

*For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind (2 Timothy 1:7 NKJV).*

### CONTEXT OF SCRIPTURE

Paul tells the church in Ephesus that to get rid of the sin inside of them—the sin that leads to poor behavior patterns—they need to address their thoughts and attitudes. Additionally, Paul reminds them that renewing their minds isn't something they have to try and do on our own; the Holy Spirit is available to help. The same principle is true for us today.

## TEACHING OUTLINE

### INTRODUCTION

Have you ever noticed how you can get stuck in a pattern of doing something?

Today, I want to talk about something that often gets us stuck: our actions.

### TENSION

The problem is, very rarely do we feel like we have habits or behaviors we're stuck in.

There are behavior patterns you have that are directly

impacting your life that you've never viewed as a habit.

So what's the solution? Well, most of us think it's to just change our behavior, right?

But that doesn't work. Trying to change our behavior on our own doesn't really change it for the long term.

And whether you're a Christian or not, we all do things we know we *shouldn't* do.



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## TEACHING OUTLINE

### TRUTH

Well, today we're going to look at a passage that talks about habits in a different way than you might expect.

Paul is addressing the patterns of those in the church—much of which included their behavior.

According to Paul, the way to change your behavior is to let the Spirit lead you.

But how does the Spirit of God help us “throw off” our old behaviors and actually change? By renewing our thoughts and attitudes.

Changing behavior doesn't start with hating yourself, motivating yourself, or making more commitments. It starts in your *mind*.

What would it look like to renew your thoughts and attitudes about something like cheating instead of shaming yourself, having good intentions, and waiting for consequences?

You can ask God to help you renew your thoughts and attitudes. You can invite Him into the process.

Ask God to change your mind in the moment.

Don't just ask Him to change your behavior in that moment, ask Him to change your thinking and attitude about the situation altogether and in the future!

### APPLICATION

Deleting old thoughts and attitudes doesn't necessarily get you unstuck or happen right away. There needs to be something new—something renewed—to fill that gap the old patterns took up.

Here are two ideas to get you started:

1. Bible verses
2. Conversations

### LANDING

God has not given us a spirit of default-fear. He's actually given us some power.

And most of all, He's given us access to Him!



# TEACHING SCRIPT

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## BOTTOM LINE

ASK GOD TO CHANGE YOUR MIND IN THE MOMENT.

## INTRODUCTION

1 MINUTE

Have you ever noticed how you can get stuck in a pattern of doing something?

For example, you find yourself saying the same things over and over in conversations. Stuff like, "You know what I mean?" or, "You know," or you say, "Umm," sixty times every time you're trying to tell someone a story.

Or maybe you've noticed it in class. Every time you go to your third period Chemistry class, you fall asleep. It's almost as if walking through the doors of that third period classroom signals your brain to shut down. Or maybe the tone of your Chemistry teacher's voice is basically your version of counting sheep. Sometimes you think you should record her lectures and play them on nights you can't sleep.

We all have behavioral habits and patterns. And chances are pretty good that we never think about them. It's just what we do.

In this series, *Stuck*, we've been talking about some things in life we feel like we're trapped in. We've talked about being stuck in a relationship that isn't good for us and feeling stuck in a bad mood. Those are typically pretty obvious to us. But today, I want to talk about something a little less obvious that can get us just as stuck:

Our actions.

## TENSION

4 MINUTES

The problem is, very rarely do we feel like we have habits or behaviors we're stuck in. Not many of us would be bold enough to admit, "You know what? I feel like I'm trapped in these behavior patterns, and I can't get out of them."

Instead, we justify. We make excuses. We blame our circumstances. We don't notice the pattern. Instead, we notice the circumstances that pushed us toward the behavior.

But think about it for a minute. **There are behavior patterns you have that are directly impacting your life that you've never viewed as a habit.** In fact, you've probably never thought about them at all.

Maybe it's . . .

- **Partying.** When the weekend hits, it's just what you do. You go out with your friends, drink a few beers, and hang out. You say to yourself, "We're just having fun. Nobody is getting hurt. It's not a big deal." But it's a behavioral pattern. You would never tell somebody, "I just want you to know that I'm a partier." But if they were to look at the pattern of your life, they would see partying is something you do with total consistency. Are you stuck in it? I don't know. Maybe you are, maybe you aren't. But it is a consistent pattern.
- **Lying.** Maybe you constantly twist the truth a little bit, leaving out some details, editing, and changing the story enough to keep yourself out of trouble. Or you do it to make your life seem more interesting. You play up certain stories and add details that didn't really happen so your story is better.
- **Porn.** Maybe you browse late at night or visit certain sites on a consistent basis. It's just what you do when you can't sleep and you're by yourself. You tell yourself it's not a big deal: "When I'm older and married, I'm not going to do this anymore. I can stop anytime I want." But it's a behavior you're stuck in and you don't even realize it.
- **Cheating.** You tell yourself you *have* to do it to keep up with the pressures of your school academics. Besides, other people are doing the same thing, so it's not like you're the only one. And you only do it occasionally, so you're not a "cheater." It's not that you don't feel bad about it—it's that you don't think about it at all.
- **Obsession.** Maybe you're obsessed with the idea of dating, or you're obsessed with a certain guy or girl you want to be dating. If you look back, you've been like that for a long time. You would never admit, "Yeah, I'm obsessed." But you don't feel right unless you have somebody that you think about constantly. It's a pattern of thinking you're stuck in.
- **Self-hate.** You constantly put yourself down. You don't feel normal unless you're thinking terrible thoughts about yourself, or saying terrible things to yourself. You don't even try to self-hate. It's just a pattern that's become a reflex.
- **Gossip.** Maybe you just love having the latest information on people. Or you're really good at talking negatively about people. It's the way you talk, and the way everybody around you talks.

This list could go on for a while, but let me summarize it this way . . .

1. We don't always recognize our behavior patterns.
2. When we do, we justify them with blaming or making excuses.
3. And over time, these behaviors become our default: They feel completely normal and we don't even see them anymore.

So what's the solution? Well, most of us think it's to just change our behavior, right? Just STOP doing bad things. Just do what you're supposed to and avoid what you're supposed to avoid. In other words, try harder.

But that doesn't work. Maybe it does for a day or a week, but it doesn't change our behavior long-term. And whether you're a Christian or not, we all do things we know we *shouldn't* do. We all have habits we wish we didn't. The question is: What do you do about them? Even if you don't care or don't want to change the habit now, what if you do in the future? How do you stop doing something you've been doing for a long time?

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## TRUTH

5 MINUTES

Well, today we're going to look at a passage that talks about habits in a different way than you might expect.

The passage is from the book of Ephesians, which was a letter the apostle Paul wrote to the church in Ephesus.

And this is important to remember: The people receiving this letter are actual HUMAN BEINGS IN A CHURCH. In other words, you can relate to the people hearing this because that's what you are: *a human being in a church!*

So, in this letter, Paul says this,

*Throw off your old sinful nature and your former way of life, which is corrupted by lust and deception (Ephesians 4:22 NLT).*

Paul is addressing the patterns of those in the church—much of which included their behavior. And because he was taking the time to write about it in his letter, we can assume that something needed to change.

And looking at the verse we just read, it does sound like what we might expect, right? Just "throw off" the sinful stuff. Get rid of it. Change. Be better. Do better. Only do good stuff, not bad stuff.

# TEACHING SCRIPT

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But in the next verse, Paul takes the conversation in a different direction. He says this:

*Instead, let the Spirit renew your thoughts and attitudes (Ephesians 4:23 NLT).*

According to Paul, the way to change your behavior is to let the Spirit lead you. He's referring to the Spirit of God who lives in us, and who is available to us at all times and in all places.

But how does the Spirit of God help us "throw off" our old behaviors and actually change? **By renewing our thoughts and attitudes.** By changing us on the inside, He changes what we do on the outside.

Changing behavior doesn't start with hating yourself, motivating yourself, or making more commitments. It starts in your *mind*.

Stick with me for a moment through this silly example . . .

What's your favorite type of music to listen to? Let's say you love hip-hop. You don't sit and think, *I really want to set a goal to listen to more hip-hop songs this year*. Because you don't need to motivate yourself to change when it comes to something you enjoy, like music. Your thoughts and attitudes do all the work for you.

Now let's move to a behavioral pattern, like cheating. Telling yourself the following doesn't work:

- *"I'm such a loser for cheating."* That's shaming yourself, and it's a terrible motivator to change.
- *"I should stop cheating at some point."* That's intention, and it never works long-term.
- *"I bet my mom, student pastor, Small Group Leader, and teachers would be mad at me if they found out I cheated."* Those are consequences, and they only work as motivation if you actually get caught cheating.

So what would it look like to renew your thoughts and attitudes about cheating instead of shaming yourself and waiting for consequences?

Well, a good start would be internal dialogue like this . . .

- *"With God's help, I can control and decide whether or not I cheat."* That's a change of thinking.
- *"I would love to be the type of person who doesn't cheat, who's cool with being honest about what I know and what I don't."* That's a change of attitude.
- *"When I choose not to cheat and get a bad grade, I'll live with the outcome. I believe that God is bigger than a bad grade on a test or an assignment."* That's a change of belief.

See the difference? Now imagine if you brought God into the equation . . .

- *"God, I feel this natural pull toward cheating. Show me that I have a choice in*



# TEACHING SCRIPT

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*this moment.”*

- *“God, help me love the fact that I’m going to approach this difficult test or assignment without doing something wrong.”*
- *“God, I trust You by not cheating on this test. And I trust You with whatever grade I get on it, good or bad.”*

**Now you have God involved in renewing your thoughts and attitudes.** You’ve invited Him into the process. That’s exactly what Paul was talking about.

Think of it this way . . .

**Ask God to change your mind in the moment.**

When you’re feeling tempted to lie about something, and you know that your natural tendency is to justify it, make excuses, and blame it on your circumstances, invite God into that very moment. Before you continue the pattern, pause and ask God to help you throw the pattern out of whack! Don’t just ask Him to change your behavior in that moment, ask Him to change your thinking and attitude about the situation altogether and in the future!

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## APPLICATION

2 MINUTES

Deleting old thoughts and attitudes doesn’t necessarily get you unstuck or happen right away. There needs to be something new—something renewed—to fill that gap the old patterns took up. And doing that takes time. Here are two ideas to get you started . . .

1. **Bible verses.** Did you know that you can Google search a list of verses on basically any behavior pattern you’re struggling with? Just type in something like, “Bible verses on cheating.” There are websites that can help like . . .
  - a. [OpenBible.com](http://OpenBible.com)
  - b. [BibleStudyTools.com](http://BibleStudyTools.com)
  - c. [BibleGateway.com](http://BibleGateway.com)

You can print out one of these lists that the websites give you. Or edit it down to three to five verses that really speak to you. You may be sitting there thinking, *Will printing out a list of Bible verses really help me?* YES! Just try it. Put these verses in a place you will see them regularly. You’ll be amazed at how having a list of what’s TRUE in front of you will begin to change your mindset and attitude toward the things you struggle with. Maybe even try memorizing a verse or two.

2. **Conversations.** Talk to someone you trust: a friend, your student pastor, a parent, or a Small Group Leader. Look for someone who truly cares about what’s best for you and your future—someone who will love you as you try to get unstuck.

# TEACHING SCRIPT

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Doing this is helpful in two ways. First of all, just getting it out in the open will help you feel better. Second of all, hearing the perspective of someone you trust will give you the advice, guidance, and wisdom you'll need to help shape your thinking, attitudes, and beliefs about that struggle.

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## LANDING

1 MINUTE

As we wrap up this series, I want to leave you with this verse . . .

*For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind (2 Timothy 1:7 NKJV).*

It's true. God did not create us to live in fear. That's not from Him. He's actually given us some power. Some control. Some people around us who can help. Some resources that will help us renew our minds and attitudes.

And most of all, He's given us access to Him! **Ask God to change your mind in the moment.** You may be surprised at how a change in your mind can get you unstuck from habits you wish you didn't have in the first place.



TRANSITION INTO SMALL GROUPS

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