

Icebreaker: Throwing Stones

by Tami Rudkin

Bring a rock to your group (about the size of your palm). Ask each member to hold the rock as they complete the statement: "I tend to be quick to judge people who _____ (drink, look poor, are overweight, etc.)."

This could be a tough barrier breaker but a valuable one if you are doing a lesson on judging others. The "rock" reminds us of the woman brought before Jesus who had been caught in adultery. Nicole Johnson tells us, "Rocks don't hit sin, they hit people."

Why Bother if Extra Grace is Required?

By Pat J. Sikora

When Jim signed up for our Bible study, I didn't know any better than to accept him. Jim was often shunned in our singles group. He was small and scrawny, but had a loud, self-conscious laugh. He was quite bright, but had few social skills. There was really nothing wrong with Jim; he was just "different."

In those days many of us who led groups knew nothing about EGR (extra grace required) people. And as beginners, we had few leadership skills. We just knew that we needed to love our group members, so we did. And as we modeled love, the others in the group imitated us. There was nothing deliberate about it, so we were amazed to see Jim blossom right before our eyes. His laugh toned down and his ability to interact with others increased. We found that he was a fascinating person with a variety of interests, a deep love for Jesus, and a firm grasp of Scripture. He even began using deodorant.

Then others in the larger singles group began to discover Jim. They listened and learned. They too loved him. Over the next few years, he became quite "normal" and respected. He married, got a promotion, and became a deacon in his church, all because a small group loved him to wholeness.

How did I know what to do? I knew because it had been done for me. When I became a Christian at the age of 28, I brought with me a truckload of emotional baggage. I needed a lot of healing. That same singles group had a group of women who invited me in as if I were OK. I joined their study where I learned from women who were mature in their faith. They encouraged me, offered friendship, disciplined me, and expressed confidence that I had potential. When it was my turn to take on the study's rotating leadership, they came alongside me and showed me how. I grew like Jack's beanstalk. I discovered my spiritual gifts. I learned to serve and to love others. These women modeled the love of Jesus for me and are the reason for the start I got in my faith and in leadership.

As leaders, we may want a small group of "people like me." That's normal, and from an ease-of-leadership point of view, it's not a bad idea. But as Christian leaders, we have a duty to incorporate the "people not like me" into our groups. Why? Because Jesus has commanded us to love one another, even the unlovely, so that the church (us) exhibits the manifold wisdom of God (Ephesians 3:10) and makes a difference in the world.

We live in a society of cliques. We only want to associate with those who can serve us in some way; those who make us feel good. And unfortunately, the church is not much different. We often avoid EGR people unless we have targeted them as a "project." Otherwise, leave me to my friends, thank you. The problem is that we are seeing more and more wounded people coming to the church, expecting to find hope and healing. If we are not willing to love these people to wholeness, who will?

I now minister to women who have been profoundly abused. They suffer from many problems, including addictions, eating disorders, dissociation, fear of abandonment, and many other issues. It has been estimated that it takes at least 10 people to minister to one profound abuse survivor. Unfortunately, I can't find two who are willing to commit to these women. So rather than being able to disciple leaders to serve this population, I end up doing much of the direct ministry myself and through groups that I lead. This means that rather than being exposed to six to eight healthy people as Jim and I were, these women are relegated to a group of people like themselves. Where are the models? Where are those they can imitate in order to learn?

Consider Ginny. She is admittedly a very difficult person to love. The victim of profound childhood abuse, she is loud, dissociative, and has ongoing problems with finances, children, spiritual oppression, depression, and addictions. But she has a heart for God and a tremendous desire to heal. She signed up in her church for a small group that was targeted for people with addictions. It was an open group and she was one of the first to register. But she got a call from the leader saying the group was full. I understand that she would be difficult to have in a group and that this leader felt inadequate. But the result for Ginny was to reinforce her woundedness. It triggered abandonment, which triggered depression, which led to a serious suicidal episode. Could that group have loved her to healing? Probably not alone, but they could have been a safe place for her.

Carl has done a lot of healing. Those who knew him years ago can see great changes. But he still needs a community in which to continue healing from his childhood abuse. He started attending a church that reached out to him in love, invited him to a small group, and began praying with him. But his needs required more grace and time than they were willing to offer and he found himself being ignored, shunned, and finally told that they couldn't help him after all. He now attends a church two hours from his home where a small group is surrounding him with love and prayer. His healing continues.

As leaders, we need to decide if there are indeed throw-away people in our churches and groups, or if we will, in the power of the Holy Spirit, provide the stable community of love that increasing numbers of men and women need in order to heal.