

I'M MY BROTHER'S KEEPER

Study Guide
For
Group Discussion

Session 1

Reflective Time Outline:

Darren talks a lot about listening and leaning into his brother to develop a greater sense of compassion for him. Though they grew up together and did everything together, Shannon had an angst in his heart that Darren couldn't initially understand. As a result, Darren distanced himself from his brother because of how uncomfortable their differences made him. This brought an even greater angst and pain to Shannon's heart. Once a bridge of relational equity was built, they both determined to live by the motif *"I can still love you and not live like you."* In this session we will engage in discussion around the area of compassion and why compassion is such a vital component to loving those that might be difficult to love or understand. You see, compassion moves us beyond just having empathy for someone. Compassion moves us from empathy into action. Compassion calls us to enter into someone's world.

- Job 2:13 gives us an example of simply being present without expressing our opinion on a matter.
 - Discuss why simply being "present" without taking a "position" is so important to building relational equity (a strong, consistent, & reliable relationship) with someone.
- Jesus public ministry as revealed in the Gospels highlights several instances where Jesus built relational bridges with people even if being present with those people wasn't popular (see John 4, Matthew 9, Luke 19)
 - Share a time when you may have felt socially isolated or uninvited into a social group.
- Jesus always had compassion for people even if it wasn't convenient in the moment.
 - Discuss moments when you went out of your way to show concern for someone. What was the outcome?

Deeper Discussion:

1. Do you struggle in the area of having compassion for people? If yes, Why? If not, how have you been able to develop compassion for people?
2. Is it difficult for you to love someone that may have a different worldview than you? If yes, explain why. If no, explain why you don't find it difficult.
3. Why is it so easy to allow our differences (politics, race, church denomination etc etc) to divide us?
4. Have you ever felt uncomfortable around a loved one because their personality is the polar opposite of yours? Yes or no?
5. Why do you think we tend to gravitate toward people that are more like us? Do you typically gravitate to people that are more like you?

Opportunity for Action:

Find someone in your community, work place, family, etc that you don't typically gravitate towards and take them to lunch. Don't make it weird. Just be honest with them and let them know you are trying to grow in the area of compassion and understanding. Let them know you are genuinely interested in hearing their story. This is not the time for you to dominate the conversation. This is the time for you to listen and simply be present. If the lunch conversation goes well, take them to lunch a second time. This time tell them you'd like for them to hear your story. You never know, you both just build a bridge into each other's lives.

Session 2

Reflective Time Outline:

Darren mentions that while he was able to demonstrate compassion for his brother he did not cave in on his personal convictions. In other words, while Darren and Shannon did not agree on everything, they did not cancel each other out. We happened to live in a “cancel culture.” That simply means that the cultural norm is to block someone from your social media account if they happen to disagree with you on a subject. Initially that’s exactly what happened with Darren and Shannon. Darren shares how Shannon blocked him on facebook out of frustration and pain due to Darrens’ lack of compassion. The two brothers kept a distance from each other until Darren moved from trying to correct Shannon to being charitable toward Shannon. In other words, when we have charitable conversations we leave behind our desire to be right and replace it with a desire to understand.

- In John Chapter 4, Jesus demonstrates what it means to have a charitable conversation with the Samaritan woman at the well. At no point during the dialogue did Jesus cave in on his convictions. Yet, he was able to navigate what initially started out as an awkward discussion, and turn it into a charitable display of sharing truth in love.
 - Discuss a time when you may have won an argument but lost a friend.
- In the book Darren and Shannon debate the topic of gender transition and accepting the new pronouns of a gender transitioned child. Darren did not want to cave in on his biblical conviction and affirm Shannons world view regarding this transitioned child. Darren also wanted to be charitable in his approach so he was willing to refer to the gender transitioned individual as “the child” hoping to meet his brother halfway in the debate.
 - Do you think Darren copped out? Why or why not? Discuss a time when you found yourself scrambling to be biblically correct but lovingly inoffensive.

Deeper Discussion:

1. How does pride factor into our desire to “be right” or “win” debates?
2. Was there ever a time when you sacrificed a great relationship for the sake of being “right.”
3. Is there a way one could be biblically correct and politically correct?
4. What do you think it means when you hear this phrase: “you can be right the wrong way”
5. Why is it so important not to cave in on your biblical convictions?
6. Why is it so important to have relational equity (an established strong relationship) with someone before you try to correct that person’s perspective

Opportunity for Action:

Check out this youtube video by typing the following into the youtube search box:

“Should I Call Someone by Their Preferred Pronouns? | Sam Allberry [#TrendingQuestions](#)”

After you watch the 6 minute video be ready to discuss it at the opening of session 3

In addition, perhaps, if possible, a reconciliation with someone that was “canceled” -- whether it be in person, or via a letter (even if the letter never gets mailed/given to the person - if safety is a question or if the person is unreachable)

Session 3

Reflective Time Outline:

Darren shares how he initially declined invitations to Shannon's house parties and other opportunities to hang out due to fear of not fitting in for feeling uncomfortable. After Darren and Shannon had some very long and honest conversations, Darren changed his approach. Instead of Darren ducking the invitations, Darren started accepting Shannon's invitations, all of them! Darren mentioned how he went to one of Shannon's house party's and made himself part of the welcoming committee. He literally greeted and hugged everyone as they walked in and took their coats. The result of this was Shannon getting a text from his party guests expressing how loved they felt by his brother "the preacher" and that they'd never experienced that type of warmth and kindness from a "preacher." The bridge was now built! Shannon felt like Darren was now a safe place again. The two brothers would freely engage in each other's worlds without fear and without shame.

- In many places throughout scripture we see Jesus partying or having dinner or simply engaging in conversations with "sinners." As a result, the Pharisees tried to indict Jesus. Yet, Jesus continued to pursue those who were considered "socially unacceptable"
 - Discuss a time when you felt uncomfortable to enter into a certain environment that "others" may have considered "unacceptable" for a Christian (ie a loved ones party at a trending bar, a house party thrown by a non Christian loved one, etc etc)
 - **Note:** keep in mind Romans 14 & 1 Corinthians 8 cautions us not to allow our Christian freedom to cause another to stumble. Galatians 6 cautions us to be careful that we don't indeed stumble trying to care for a sinner. That said, we are in no way suggesting you put yourself in a precarious situation by trying to "build a bridge." Exercise wisdom and discretion when making decisions of the conscious.
- Darren mentions how he had to decline the invitation to walk in Shannon's wedding because of his biblical convictions. This was a very difficult moment in the relationship of these two brothers. Though Darren worked hard to build a bridge, he also had to draw the line. Darren did however agree to attend the wedding out of love for his brother and Jon (Shannon's fiance).
 - Discuss a time when you had to simply draw the line for the sake of not compromising a conviction. Do you think Darren was compromising/sinning by his willingness to attend the wedding? Does the bible clearly tell us not to attend an event that does not align with our conviction?

Deeper Discussion:

1. What does it mean to be relatable? Does being relatable mean you have to be sinful?
2. Does it mean you are out of touch if you decide not to attend “secular” events?
3. Can you attend a secular event and not be sinful? Is there a line a Christian should draw when it comes to certain secular events?
4. If Christ tells us to “go and make disciples of all nations” (Matt 28:18-19) and he “sends his disciples into the world” (John 17:18) should a Christian only hang out with other Christians?
5. If a Christian does indeed have a non Christian friend, or a friend that simply sees life differently, how can that friendship work or last?

Opportunity for Action:

- Read 1 Corinthians 9:19-23
- Find a person on your job that doesn't consider himself/herself to be a Christian and invite them over to your home for a BBQ. If you are single, have some friends over for a game night and be sure to invite the non Christian coworker. If that non Christian decides to reciprocate by inviting you into their world i.e. home, game night etc etc... accept the invite! Unless the invitation is bringing you somewhere that may cause you to sin, go enjoy your new non Christian friend! Be ready to share / write about how the interchange went after both occurrences -- when did they feel most comfortable / uncomfortable... How did the non-Christian friend feel (at both events)

Session 4

Reflective Time Outline:

A great portion of this book is Darren's vulnerability on display. In Chapter 5, Darren invites us into a very painful and personal conversation he has with God. This conversation is centered around some very deep and theological questions. These questions show us that even as a pastor Darren does not have all the answers. As a matter of fact, Darren's pain and questions draw us into the reality that we won't always understand God. Yet, did Darren take it too far? Are we allowed to question God? Of course we can. The chapter closes out with Darren placing his full and total trust in God.

- In Matthew 26 Jesus agonizes with God in the garden of gethsemane. Not only does Jesus agonize but he too raises a question to God. "Can this cup pass from me?" In other words, God can I avoid the excruciating suffering I'm about to endure right now. Jesus would resolve that God's will be done. Jesus would acquiesce to that will and suffer a brutal death on the cross. This death would serve as an atonement for our sins. That's right, you and I are so sinful that we need our sins atoned for. Christ would not only atone for our sins on the cross but he would resurrect himself out of the grave after 3 days. Christ would then take it a step further by showing himself to 500 people before he would ascend back to heaven with the promise of a triumphant return!
 - This is the Gospel! When Christ returns he promises to wipe every tear from our eyes. No more pain, no more sorrow! Darren knows this. That is how Darren and his family are able to receive consolation amidst such tragedy. The question is, do you know this? Are you willing to receive that same comfort? Perhaps you may have stayed away from your relationship with Christ. Your group leader is ready and willing to pray with you right now. Will you commit your life to Christ and receive the free gift of everlasting life? Will you recommit your life to Christ and break free from the chains of sin?

Deeper Discussion:

1. Have you ever gone through a crisis or hardship and ran to a family member or loved one for consolation before you sought comfort from God?
2. Have you ever been angry at God? Why?
3. When going through a crisis, why is it at times easier to find comfort in material things as opposed to finding true comfort in God?
4. Are you able to trust God with the eternal destination of a loved one that may have been “on the fence” about their faith?
5. What does it actually take to make it into heaven?

Opportunity for Action:

Read the entire book of Habakkuk...(its only 3 chapters) You'll Notice that Habakkuk struggles with God. Habakkuk asks God difficult questions. Habakkuk gets a difficult response from God. Habakkuk then gets some comforting news from God. The book closes out with Habakkuk worshipping God. If you're going through a personal trial right now, or perhaps you've been through a trial and you're holding a longstanding grudge against God, I would challenge you to follow the pattern of Habakkuk . Ask God hard questions. Trust God's response, and worship God.