



**STRUGGLES - TEACHING SERIES
LESSON 4**

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Lesson 4: The Potter and the Clay

Bible: James 1:2-4; Philippians 1:6; Romans 12: 1-2

Bottom Line: If we are willing, struggles can shape and mold us to become more like Christ.

Opening Game: Play-Doh Pictionary

In-person Game (supplies and prep):

- Make a list of words that you want your youth to mold into clay during the game. Words should be simple and not too hard to mold.
- Example List
 - Hot Dog
 - Cat
 - Basketball
 - Video Game Controller
 - Taco
 - Cross
- Cut the list up into pieces and put them in a cup or a hat.
- Split up your group into teams depending on the size of your group.
- A small group of 20 could have two to three teams.
- Have the teams sit in their groups facing the front of the room.

In-person Game (how to play):

- Each team will have one player to start the game.
- Give that person a container of Play-doh and show them the word they have to mold.
- Without talking or making any gestures, they are to mold their word into clay and their team members are to call out what they think it is.
- The team who guesses first gets a point.
- Then the team chooses another player to go up and mold the word.
- You can play as many rounds as you have time for.
- The team with the most points at the end of the game wins.

Opening Game: Playdough Pictionary

Online Game (supplies and prep):

- Play-Doh (or recipe for salt dough)

- Let students and parents know in advance that they are going to be using Play-Doh.
- If you can, mail them the Play-Doh or have parents pick it up.
- You could also send home a recipe to make homemade Play-Doh called “salt dough.”
- The recipe for this can be found online and most people already have the ingredients for it in their own home.
- You will also need to be able to send students their secret words privately via text.
- Be sure you have parent or guardian permission to text or message them.
- (If both things are not possible look for the Game Twist)

Online Game (how to play):

- Text one student in the group the secret word
- Have that student use their dough to mold the secret word on the camera.
- Students can guess what it is via the chat on whatever program or app you are meeting on.
- The first one to guess right gets a point.
- You can play as many rounds as possible that you have time for.
- The person with the most points wins.

Online Game (a twist on the game):

- If you are not able to get Play-Doh for everyone, you can be the sole person who models words with clay on camera and allows everyone else to guess what you are molding.

TEACH

Doesn't playing with Play-Doh bring back memories of elementary school?

Hopefully, all our playdough was soft and malleable.

Can you imagine what it would be like if we were trying to mold with dried-out Play-Doh?

It most likely wouldn't be moldable or would just crumble.

Did you know that God was an artist?

Not only did he create the heavens and the earth, but He also created everything in it.

He created us and knit us together in our mother's womb.

But just being born doesn't mean God is done creating us.

We are one of God's amazing masterpieces and He still has a lot of work to do to make us more and more like the person we are called to be.

James 1: 2-4:

Dear brothers and sisters, when troubles of any kind come your way, consider it an opportunity for great joy. For you know that when your faith is tested, your endurance has a chance to grow. So, let it grow, for when your endurance is fully developed, you will be perfect and complete, needing nothing.

Many do not have joy in times of trouble, but we must remember joy and happiness are not the same things.

You can be joyful that your troubles are growing your faith, but you don't have to be happy about it.

Happiness is fleeting, while joy is lasting and comes from the Lord.

The keyword in **James 1:4** is *endurance*.

Endurance is the ability to keep up in a race without getting tired.

When a runner first begins running, he doesn't have much endurance.

The more he runs, the stronger he becomes and the more endurance he has.

As young believers, we do not always have the endurance to get through trials and troubles without getting weary.

God allows these trials to help build our endurance.

Do you know how a potter makes a vase?

The first thing he does is cut a piece of clay from a bigger chunk of clay.

He will knead the clay to make it more pliable.

Then he will throw the clay onto a potter's wheel.

If he doesn't knead the clay, it won't be able to move on the wheel, and it will be stiff.

When we get into times of trouble, we often are like that stiff clay.

We don't want to move.

We are stuck in fear and worry.

But God has different plans.

He wants to use this time of trouble to knead us and make us moldable.

Philippians 1:6:

And I am certain that God, who began the good work within you, will continue his work until it is finally finished on the day when Christ Jesus returns.

When we accept Jesus into our lives, that is just the beginning of our journey as believers.

Before we even accepted Jesus, God was already at work in our lives. Even after we accept Jesus, God doesn't stop working.

As believers, we partner with God and He continues to work in our lives so we can grow and become stronger in our faith and endurance.

When we are born, we often are very moldable.

As we get older, often life makes us stiff and hard.

We are not able to be molded as we once were.

Many things in our lives cause this.

Just a few examples include our parents' divorce, struggles in school, peer pressure, low self-esteem, and so much more.

After the potter throws the clay on the wheel, he uses water to help shape the clay.

At the same time, he uses his foot to push a pedal that makes the wheel spin.

The water helps keep the clay from drying out and getting too hard to mold.

Jesus is like that water in our lives.

He helps us have softened hearts that are clean and ready to be molded by God.

Romans 12: 1-2 talks about our bodies being living and holy sacrifices.

We should not be transformed by this world, but let God transform us.

God wants us to allow Him to mold us and transform us to be more like Jesus.

But we have a choice, and we need to open our hearts and allow Him to do the work.

If we allow our hearts to be hardened by this world, we will not be able to be moldable.

It can be scary to give over yourself for the Lord and allow Him to mold you and make you more like Christ.

But when we imagine how much more amazing it is to be pleasing to God and work for His kingdom, it isn't as scary as it once was.

Not only does God want to mold us and shape us to be like Christ, but He also wants us to partner with Him.

God never promises that the life of a believer will be easy, but He does promise to work things out for our Good.

In times of trouble and struggle, we need to look to God for answers and allow these times to shape us.

If a time of struggle feels like too much for you to handle, remember that God can carry you through it.

Once the potter is finished molding his vase, he puts it into an oven to harden.

But he isn't done quite yet.

Once the vase is out of the oven, he paints in it.

Then he puts his mark on the vase so that everyone will know who the artist is.

When we accept Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior, we are giving God permission to work in our lives.

The way the artist puts his mark on the bottom of the vase is the same way that we are marked by God as belonging to him as adopted sons and daughters.

This mark we carry means that we belong to the Creator and that makes us the most precious and amazing creations in this universe.

Isaiah 64:8:

But now, O Lord, you are our Father; we are the clay, and you our Potter; and we all are the work of your hand.

This verse clearly explains how God is the Potter, and we are the clay.

In times of trouble, we need to remember that struggles are opportunities for God to mold us and make us more like Jesus.

We also need to remember that it's okay for us to take time to be molded.

Everyone in life will have a different journey and different obstacles to struggle with.

Do not compare yourself to others, but embrace your own path.

Remember that God made you unique and completely different from anyone else.

Even a potter uses different methods and amounts of time to make each vase unique and special.

When you struggle, pray for a soft moldable heart and allow yourself grace to make mistakes.

At the same time, learn from those mistakes.

And when trouble comes, view it as an opportunity to be molded.

Don't let yourself be hardened by the struggles.

Even believers who have been molded can have times of struggle that lead to the opportunity for change.

Our whole life is an opportunity to change and become more Christ-like.

In Japan, when a piece of pottery breaks, they don't throw it away.

Instead, they repair it with gold or silver in a process called *kintsukuroi*. (Share a photo of an example of *kintsukuroi*).

When we are broken due to struggles, we need to also allow God to repair the broken pieces.

God is so gracious that He will repair us to be better than we were when we got broken.

During small group discussion, we are going to dive a little deeper into what it looks like to have a hard heart and a soft heart.

We also will look at our personal experiences and give ourselves some time to reflect and share what we have learned about our struggles.

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What is something unique about yourself that you love? Examples: skills, freckles, abilities
2. Why does God make each of us unique, but at the same time wants us to look like Jesus? Example response: Looking and being are two different things. We are to have the same heart as Jesus but be our unique self.
3. How do struggles allow God opportunities to mold us?
4. What are some struggles we are seeing in our church today?
5. What are some struggles we are seeing in our personal lives?
6. What does a hardened heart look like that isn't moldable?
7. What does a soft heart look like that is moldable?
8. Have you ever heard the saying that an artist never truly finishes his artwork? How does that apply to us and how we are God's masterpieces?
9. Is there a time in your life that you went through a struggle that has made you stronger today? (Leaders have an example to share)
10. Is there a struggle in your life that has caused you to harden up? If so, can we pray for you about it?