

# EQUIPPED

FOR SMALL GROUP LEADERSHIP

# 2.0

student guide

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# Introduction to Equipped

## I. Theological Foundations for Small Group Ministry

### A. God: The Relational Nature of the Trinity

1. God has eternally enjoyed relationship within the Godhead as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.
2. Prior to the Fall, God made man to live in fellowship with him and to enjoy communication and relationship with God. Adam and Eve gladly depended on God for sustenance and direction in all their ways.

### B. Sin: The Effects of the Fall on Relationships

1. When Adam and Eve disobeyed God, the effects of the Fall were immediately felt in their relationship with their Creator. Rather than finding their refuge in God, they hid from him. Romans tells us that sin alienates us from God (Col 1:21). Therefore, through Adam all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God (Rom 3:23). In Paul's letter to the Ephesians we learn that apart from Christ everyone is spiritually dead and an enemy of God.
2. When sin entered the world, it had devastating effects upon human relationships. Adam and Eve, instead of humbly acknowledging their need for grace and forgiveness, quarreled with each other. Their son, Cain, murdered his brother Abel. Not only has sin brought conflict, but with it has come God's judgment of death. Now between birth and death, suffering and sin impact every life.

### **C. Savior: The Redemptive Work of Christ**

1. Because of our fallen condition and alienation from God, all of humanity stands in desperate need of redemption.
2. The amazing news of the gospel is all about Jesus. The Son of God took on flesh and entered the world to redeem the lost. Christ perfectly obeyed all of God's commands and died a substitutionary death on our behalf. In Christ's resurrection, God showed him to be victorious over sin and death. In his ascension, Christ reigns at his Father's right hand and makes ongoing intercession for his people.
3. This good news is the sinner's only hope for redemption. Through repentance from sin and faith in Christ's substitutionary death, sinners experience conversion, receive forgiveness of sins, are declared righteous, and become children of God.
4. When Christ became man through the Incarnation, he displayed perfect fellowship with the Father and delighted to do his will. This relationship is now our model for our fellowship with one another.

### **D. Church: Instruments in the Redeemer's Hand**

1. As sinners saved by grace, we are brought together in the local church to proclaim Christ's redemptive work to a world that desperately needs salvation.
2. We extend Christ's redemptive work as we care for those in the church. By demonstrating compassion to the sufferer, encouragement to the faint-hearted, and restoration to those ensnared in their sin (Gal. 6:1), we obey God's word and incarnate the love of Christ.
3. As God's chosen people (1 Pet 2:9-12) we are also called to encourage one another in our mission to make God known to the nations. As small group members we encourage and help one another to declare the gospel's message of salvation in our families, neighborhoods, workplaces, and schools.

4. God's relational nature, sin's effects, Christ's redemption, and the Church's mission all undergird small group ministry. As we gather in small groups we can, to use the words of Paul Tripp, live as "instruments in the Redeemer's hands."

## **II. Overview of Equipped**

### **A. What is Equipped?**

1. This course grew out of the small group ministry of Covenant Life Church. Josh Harris has stated that Covenant Life Church exists to make disciples who will love God, love the church, and love the world. A primary way we are seeking to fulfill this mission is through small groups. They provide a context for relationships, spiritual growth, and mission. By definition every member of Covenant Life is also a member of a small group.
2. *Equipped* is an eight-session program that trains men and women to lead small groups.
3. As pastors, we want to fulfill our mandate expressed in Ephesians 4:11-16, "to equip the saints for the work of ministry"—in this case by preparing people for small group leadership.
4. A key role of the small group leader is to encourage members of their small group to become "partners," not merely observers in the mission.

### **B. Equipped sessions will include:**

1. Discussion of teaching covered in recordings, articles and book chapters studied prior to each session.
2. The practice of small group leadership skills. Group members will be trained to lead discussion.

3. Participants will also be trained in providing care and counseling with opportunity for evaluation.
4. Throughout our times together you will have the opportunity to ask questions and interact with your pastor.

### **C. What is expected of participants?**

1. Commitment to the group (attendance).
2. Willingness to be evaluated (in character and leadership skills).
3. Preparation for each session completing assignments.

## **III. The Three Goals of a Small Group**

### **A. Spiritual Life**

The small group should be a place of spiritual activity. Our meetings should allow for time to cultivate an awareness of the Holy Spirit's presence and activity and deepen our love for the Word of God. Small groups pray together, sing together, and study God's Word together.

### **B. Relationships**

The Christian life is not solitary. God calls us to live out our lives with him in the context of relationships—especially those with members of our local church. We are called to walk out our relationship with Jesus linked arm in arm with our brothers and sisters. One of the primary purposes of the small group structure is to provide a context where we can establish real and lasting relationships. The small group provides a context for:

1. Developing friendships.
2. Caring for one another as we walk through trials.
3. Celebrating joyful occasions and having fun together.

4. Serving side by side in our local church.
5. Encouraging outreach into our communities with the light of the gospel.

### **C. Fellowship**

Gospel-centered believers grow as they walk out their Christian lives with one another. The small group setting is a place where men and women can:

1. Celebrate God's work of grace in each other's lives.
2. Share their lives with each other in order to become more like Jesus Christ.
3. Share truths from God's Word with one another, especially the truth of the gospel.
4. Invite others to correct our thinking by instructing us from the Scriptures.
5. Confess our sins to each other and pursue repentance in order to become more like Christ.

## **IV. Role of a Small Group Leader**

### **A. Promoting spiritual life**

1. Your role is to make sure that each meeting includes spiritual activities that depend upon the Holy Spirit and the Word of God.
2. As a small group leader you should:
  - a. Lead the group in prayer for individual needs.
  - b. Facilitate expressions of praise and thanksgiving to God which can (but do not have to) include singing together.

- c. Encourage the ministry of the Spirit between group members through words of prophecy and encouragement.
- d. Promote the private practice of the spiritual disciplines.
- e. Inform members of prayer needs that arise outside of meetings.

## **B. Cultivating relationships by building community**

- 2. A small group provides many wonderful opportunities for men and women to grow in friendship.
- 3. Your job is to encourage and foster relationships through your influence as a leader.
- 4. So you lead in...
  - a. Facilitating personal interaction in meeting contexts
  - b. Organizing care in crisis
  - c. Promoting fun activities
  - d. Celebrating milestones in the lives of members.
  - e. Organizing service projects for members of the group, within the church, and beyond.
  - f. Encouraging each member's participation in evangelism.

## **C. Guiding discussions that lead to care and fellowship**

- 1. You will guide discussion (or delegate this responsibility) for each meeting.



2. Your role is to keep the discussion grace-motivated and anchored in Scripture. Your goal is to lead men and women toward hope in the character and promises of God as they apply his Word to their lives.
3. We will train you to lead two basic types of discussions:
  - a. Discussion of materials the group has read or listened to in advance: Scriptures, commentaries, books, articles, tapes, and sermons.
  - b. Discussion focused on caring for members facing trials or dealing with sin.
4. Accomplishing this goal usually requires advance preparation.
  - a. Developing questions or choosing questions from a prepared list.
  - b. Preparing questions that invite group members to share the work of God in their lives and their struggle with a trial or sin.
5. Arranging to follow up with a group member who has shared in a previous meeting or shared with you apart from the meeting.

## **V. Our commitment to you:**

- A. Your pastor's commitment to you is to give you the necessary tools for being an effective leader. He will provide direction for curriculum while being responsive to your recommendations.
- B. Your pastor will partner with you in caring for those in your group. He will be accessible, approachable and available whenever needs arise. He is ultimately responsible before God for the spiritual care of the members of your group.

## Assignment for next session

- ❑ Read the outline in Session 2, “Biblical Leadership in a Small Group” and be prepared to discuss it.
- ❑ Listen to the audio recording of CJ Mahaney’s message, “Grace and the Adventure of Leadership.” Take notes, write down questions, and come prepared to discuss what you learned.

# Biblical Leadership in a Small Group

## I. Introduction

Building a small group into a community of gospel-centered people requires effective leadership. As pastors, we are so grateful for your willingness to serve as a care group leader. No matter how you assess your own abilities, we want to help you lead effectively, and we want to remind you of God's empowering grace. He promises to strengthen you for service! (1 Pet 4:11)

Christian leadership is characterized by three biblical values. We desire our small group leaders to lead with the gospel, lead with the Word and the Spirit, and lead with humility. Each one of these will be discussed at some length in this session.

## II. Leading with the Gospel

- A. Gospel-centered leadership must point the group toward the cross of Christ in prayer, praise, thanksgiving, and discussion (1 Cor 2:2)
- B. Gospel-centered leadership understands that the person and work of Christ are the focus of Scripture (Luke 24:27).
- C. A Gospel-centered leader is keenly sobered that he has been entrusted with the Gospel (2 Tim 1:14). He sees all his service for the purpose of making the gospel more powerful and precious for those he is called to lead.
- D. A gospel-centered leader fights against the temptation to seek man's approval, seeking to be content in the approval God has earned for him in Christ (Gal 1:10).

- E. A Gospel-centered leader will always draw his group's attention to the gospel's power and current work in his group. He makes it a practice to encourage his group to identify and give thanks to God for evidences of His grace at work in their lives.
- F. Gospel-centered leadership incarnates the love of Christ and reminds people who they are in Christ (2 Cor 5:17).
- G. Some questions a leader can ask that promote an awareness of the gospel and its effects:
  - 1. How does the gospel help you cultivate a conviction of sin?
  - 2. How does an awareness of the gospel help you to maintain hope in this trial?
  - 3. How does the gospel provide grace and motivation to forgive others who have sinned against you, so that you don't become angry or bitter?
  - 4. What recent area of character growth have you seen in the life of (your spouse, child, fellow believer, etc.)?

### **III. Leading by the Word and the Spirit**

#### **A. Leading by the Word**

- 1. Faithfully leading by the Word starts with your personal and consistent study of God's Word (Ps 119:97).
- 2. An effective leader delights in the Word of God (Jer 15:16) and hides it in his heart (Ps 119:11).
- 3. Knowledge of the Word will vary, but every leader should be increasing in his knowledge of the Word over time.
- 4. Leading by the Word points people to Scripture- not the leader and his opinions -as their ultimate authority.
- 5. During times of fellowship and ministry, the leader will ensure that all counsel aligns with the Word of God.

Whenever counsel conflicts with Scripture, he will graciously redirect counsel.

## **B. Leading by the Spirit**

1. A Spirit-led leader believes deeply that he is entirely dependent upon the Spirit for all that he does and that he continually needs the ongoing empowerment of the Spirit to live the Christian life.
2. He himself models an earnest expectancy and pursuit of the Spirit (1 Cor 14:1).
3. He leads others to experience the ministry of the Holy Spirit and encourages others to desire an awareness of the Spirit's presence and power.
  - a. "But earnestly desire the higher gifts" (1 Cor 12:31).

## **IV. Leading with Humility**

- A. Humility stems from an awareness of one's sinfulness and God's awesomeness. It is a posture of a heart that truly understands who he or she is - a sinner saved by the grace of a holy God.
- B. The biblical qualifications of any leader begin with character (1 Tim 3:2-7), and the most fundamental character trait necessary in a godly leader is humility.
- C. Scripture includes many examples of humble leaders:
  1. Moses, one of the greatest leaders of all time, is described as "more humble than anyone else on the face of the earth" (Num 12:3, NIV).
  2. John the Baptist, in response to the growing popularity of Jesus, humbly said, "He must increase, but I must decrease" (Jn 3:30).
  3. Jesus called his disciples to display "true greatness" by humbly serving others (Matt 20:25-28).

4. Jesus is the model of true humility as he “humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross” (Phil 2:8).
- D. God honors (Is 66:2) and exalts (Jas 4:10) the humble, but pride is an abomination (Prov 6:16-17) which God opposes (Jas 4:6).
- E. Some practical ways to lead a small group with humility:
  1. Be the first to serve when an opportunity presents itself.
  2. Lead by example, especially with confession of sin.
  3. Stay focused on others. Study others and follow-up consistently. Keeping your eyes off yourself and on others will deepen your humility.
    - a. Seek input from your group and your pastor.
  4. As mentioned above, a humble leader will love the Word, rely on the Spirit, and cherish the Gospel.

## **Assignment for next session**

- ❑ Read the outline in Session 3, “Building a Spiritual Community” and prepare to discuss it.
- ❑ Listen to Aron Osborne’s message “Making Room for the Holy Spirit”
- ❑ During each of Sessions 3-7, we will seek to care for one individual or married couple as they bring a life challenge to the group. We will decide who should be the focus of our care at the beginning of the meeting. You can prepare by thinking through the following categories so that if called upon you will have given sufficient thought to reporting the challenge that you face so that we can give meaningful care.
  - Here are some ideas to help you decide what to bring:
    - A source of regular anxiety
    - A sin that you have not had success overcoming
    - A relational challenge (if you choose this, please make sure that in your reporting, you do not practice gossip)

- If you are married, a recent conflict or disagreement and how you sought to resolve it
- If you are a parent, a challenge you face with a child or with your children that persists without change
- A question regarding the wisdom of a decision, activity, or friendship

## Building a Spiritual Community

### I. Small Groups: a Context for the Spirit's Ministry through the Word

- A. Small groups are more than social gatherings or discussion groups. They are contexts in which men and women who have been made alive by God in Christ may experience the ministry of the Holy Spirit and the Word of God together.
- B. Our meetings become contexts to counsel and care with the Word of God and edify one another. When we gather, we should bring our Bibles and anticipate the active ministry of the Holy Spirit as we serve one another to the glory of God.
- C. Faith-filled, biblically-informed leadership is a significant factor in a small group's experience of the Holy Spirit's ministry. A leader can hinder the work of the Spirit, or he can make room for His work in such a way that people experience profound care and give glory to God.
- D. Leadership by the Word is essential for helping people encounter the Spirit's ministry.
- E. Four ways in which we participate in the Spirit's ministry are through sharing Scripture, praying, singing, and serving one another with spiritual gifts.

### II. Share Scripture Together

- A. The Word of God is the authority over our lives (Jn 17:17; Prov 30:5; Matt 24:35) and is necessary for spiritual growth and life (Matt 4:4). Therefore, the leader should model and promote a high esteem for Scripture.



- B. Because the Word of God is sufficient in all situations, group members should share Scripture as they counsel and care for one another (2 Tim 3:14-17).
  - 1. Share Scripture to equip (2 Tim 3:17)
  - 2. Share Scripture to encourage the soul (Ps 19:7; Eph 4:29)
  - 3. Share Scripture to provide wisdom (Ps 19:8)
  - 4. Share Scripture to warn (Ps 19:11)
  - 5. Share Scripture to discourage sin (Ps 119:11)
- C. Without the ministry of the Word, growth in Christ-likeness will not occur. It is the Word of God that is living and active (Heb 4:12) and able to transform a man's heart and desires, making him prosper (Ps 1:3).
- D. Each leader will provide ample opportunity for small group members to share from the Word of God, whether that is during prayer, worship, or during a time of discussion or care.
- E. The more group members are studying the Scriptures outside of the small group context, the more Scripture will be shared within the small group. Consistent encouragement of the spiritual disciplines privately is imperative for the sharing of Scriptures publicly.

### **III. Pray Together**

- A. From its inception, the church has gathered to pray (Acts 2:42).
- B. When our prayers are grounded in the gospel, we remind one another of the access we have to God, which should only inspire great requests (Rom 8:32).
- C. When we pray, we help our group express gratefulness to God for his work in our lives. By recounting his grace with gratitude to him, we encourage our own souls.
- D. When we pray as a group for individual needs, we express care for one another.

- E. When we pray, we teach others to petition God with specific, biblically-informed requests.
- F. Here are some suggestions for how you can lead in prayer:
  - 1. Invite the group to state what they are asking of God.
  - 2. Solicit specific requests from the group.
    - a. Encourage the group to form requests around God's promises stated in the Bible (See Heb 6:12-15; 2 Cor 1:20-22).
    - b. Many times our requests become opportunities for us to understand our circumstances and our response to them better.
    - c. You may have to encourage or redirect requests if they indicate ungodly or unbiblical desires, reminding the group that God desires us to pray according to his will (1 Jn 5:14-15).
    - d. At times you may want to restrict your prayer to giving thanks for specific help or to praising God for his character and his deeds. It can help to begin a time like this by looking at a particular passage of Scripture. Some examples:
      - The extent of his love (Jn 3:16)
      - His remedy of our desperate need (Rom 5:6; Eph 2:1-3)
      - His complete provision for our salvation (Rom 3:21-26)
      - The blessings associated with salvation (Rom 8:32; Gal 3:14; 4:6; 5:22)
      - Our access to his throne of grace (Heb 4:14-16; Eph 3:11-12)

3. Encourage your group to participate actively by giving vocal agreement when others are praying. Praying together is not one person praying and others simply listening; rather, it is a group of people joining together in one another's prayers. Encourage your group in the ministry of the "amen" (literally, "may it be so") as others pray.
4. Set aside time in your meetings to pray and ask the Spirit to stir up spiritual gifts and boldness for evangelism.
  - a. Praying together as a group is an ideal setting to encourage the practice and employment of spiritual gifts.
  - b. Lead in prayer by inviting the Spirit to make his presence known and to use the group to minister to one another and "build one another up" (1 Th 5:11).

## IV. Sing Together

- A. Singing is one of the means God has provided to give him glory as we meet together (Col 3:16).
- B. Singing together can accomplish a number of purposes, including praising God, praying, confessing our need for God, and encouraging one another.
- C. Primary purposes in Scripture for singing include proclaiming God's character, recalling his Word and delighting in his promises. This is why we sometimes refer to singing together as "worship" (literally, declaring God's worth or value). Although all of life should be an act of worship to God through Jesus Christ, God delights in the praise of his gathered people.
- D. Due to a lack of musicians or musical ability, it is not our expectation or requirement that every small group will worship God together in song.
- E. If you don't sing together, take time to give thanks to God for what he has done, declare aspects of God's greatness, and confess confidence in his promises. Reading Scripture aloud can be very helpful in these times.
- F. If you do decide to worship God in song:

1. Make sure that the songs you use are easy to sing in a small group.
  2. Make sure the songs are God-centered with accurate theological content. Your pastor or the church's music director can help you with this.
  3. If you are led by a musician, make sure he or she has the necessary skills to allow the music to enhance singing.
- G. To obtain further training for a musician to lead singing in your group, ask your pastor for a copy of Bob Kauflin's message and outline "Worshiping God in a Small Group," available through Sovereign Grace Ministries.

## **V. Serve One Another Through the Exercise of Spiritual Gifts**

- A. "...the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good..." (1 Cor 12:7) refers to each of us being used by the Spirit to advance his work in people. First Corinthians 14:1 calls these various manifestations "spiritual gifts."
1. The list of gifts in 1 Corinthians 12 is not meant to be comprehensive, and there are other listings of gifts in the New Testament (cf. Romans 12).
  2. The point is that the Spirit works in a great variety of ways and each of us should expect him to use us for "the common good."
- B. Some of the gifts are spectacular in nature (e.g. the working of miracles), some unspectacular (e.g. administration). Yet all require the personal activity of the Spirit in order to be useful. We should, as individuals and as a gathered group, ask and expect the Spirit to work among us.
- C. Two ways the Spirit ministers through us include prophecy and ministry to the suffering.
1. Prophecy:

- a. Wayne Grudem helpfully defines prophecy as, "...telling something what God has spontaneously brought to mind."
  - b. This gift is not to be equated with that of the prophets in the Old Testament. It is not speaking infallible words from God or telling the future.
  - c. The person with the gift of prophecy, as described in 1 Corinthians 14:3, "...speaks to people for their upbuilding, encouragement, and consolation."
  - d. How does this operate in a small group? As you wait on the Spirit in your meeting—sometimes when praying for an individual, sometimes not—a person will get a thought, spontaneously brought to mind, that may edify a particular person or the whole group.
  - e. Two cautions you need to be aware of as a leader:
    - These words do not have the authority of Scripture. The person receiving a prophetic word is responsible to test what he hears to see if it truly applies to him.
    - Any word of prophecy must be consistent with the clear teaching of Scripture.
2. Ministry to those who are suffering
- a. The Lord often uses the body of Christ to comfort and care for one another out of our own trials and sufferings. "Blessed be the God and Father and Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our afflictions, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God" (2 Cor 1:3-5).
  - b. One of the greatest gifts we can offer to those who need comfort is to pray for them. "Is anyone suffering? Let him pray"(Jas 5:13).
  - c. When someone is experiencing illness, we should pray for their physical healing. Healing is a gift of the Spirit

through which God causes a person to recover from an illness or injury through the prayer of one or more people.

- d. This is not inconsistent with seeking medical care. Any healing by any means is a merciful gift from God.
- e. At times, this gift operates in a miraculous way—i.e. the person recovers in a way that cannot be explained by the body's normal restorative processes or by medical intervention. At other times, it simply results in recovery but not a spectacular recovery.
- f. Two cautions you need to be aware of as a leader:
  - When we ask God to give a gift of healing, we should encourage the sick to put their trust in God and his power. However, a lack of healing is not necessarily an indication of a lack of faith. Those who suggest otherwise misrepresent God in Scripture and can actually compound the suffering of a sick person.
  - If we lay our hands on someone, it is not necessary to touch the sick or injured body part for this gift to operate. Typically, it is best to lay hands on a person's shoulder, to hold his or her hand, and not to cross any boundaries of modesty or to do so in such a way that makes the person more aware of our touch than our prayers and God's presence.

D. Leading your group to expect the Spirit's work and to act on his promptings.

- 1. Lead your group to pray to experience the ministry of the Holy Spirit.
  - a. "If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!" (Lk 11:9-13).
- 2. Encourage your group to desire an awareness of the Spirit's presence and to anticipate his work.

- a. "But earnestly desire higher gifts..." (1 Cor 12:31).
  - b. It is important that we believe God wants to bless us through the ministry of his Holy Spirit. It is biblical to desire his active presence, so that we may experience his love and know the Savior better.
  - c. We have found that spiritual hunger and desire for the Holy Spirit's ministry is an important element in a group's experience. Where there is no desire, no expectation, and no room for the Spirit to work, rarely are spiritual gifts experienced. Bible scholar Gordon Fee puts it this way:
    - "...After all, 'seek earnestly after the better gifts' for the edification of the body is an imperative, not polite invitation."
    - "At the individual level, my stock answer is admittedly not always helpful: hunger and thirst with openness. For some this puts too much emphasis on the human rather than with the divine side; and I too fear that. But my own experience in the church is that there is a clear correlation between our hunger after God, on the one hand, and our experience of God, on the other. This does not remove the experience of the Spirit of God from God's own sovereignty, nor does it imply that the one hungering and thirsting does not already have the Spirit in full measure. I simply know no other practical solution."<sup>1</sup>
3. Set aside time in your meetings for the group to wait for the Spirit to lead them to exercise their gifts.
    - a. Praying together as a group is an ideal setting to encourage the practice and employment of spiritual gifts.

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Gordon D., *Paul, the Spirit, & the People of God*. (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1996). Pp. 190-191.

- b. Lead in prayer by inviting the Spirit to make his presence known and to use the group to bless and minister to one another for the purpose of “building one another up.”
- c. Target your ministry to individuals:
  - Someone facing a challenge to his faith
  - Someone enduring a trial
  - Someone considering a ministry opportunity
  - Someone facing a major life decision
  - Someone celebrating a significant milestone

## VI. Conclusion

Active, watchful, and directive leadership is critical to the fruitfulness of any care group or care group meeting. This is especially so if we want to maximize participation and specific application of truth in the lives of our group members. We can grow in leading meetings that expect and experience the Spirit’s empowering presence. This requires that we actively seek to discern his direction as we pray—both before and during the meeting. We must be intentional in our planning, preparation, and leadership, always watchful for potential opportunities to bring the group and individuals into fresh encounters with the living God.

## Assignment for next session

- ❑ Read the outline in Session 4, “Building a Relational Community” and prepare to discuss it.
- ❑ Read chapter 3, “Do We Really Need Each Other” in Paul Tripp’s *Instruments in the Redeemer’s Hands* and prepare to discuss it.
- ❑ Come prepared to share with the group some area of need in your life as described in the assignment at the end of Session 2.



## Building a Relational Community

### I. Introduction

As we saw in Session 1, we have three goals for our small groups: developing relationships, cultivating of fellowship, and practicing spiritual life together. In this session we are going to look at the value of leading our groups to become a community of friends.

#### A. Relationship is key to all we are trying to accomplish in our groups

1. In the small group context, men and women transformed by the gospel can form relationships characterized by trust and integrity, allowing them to be known and experience care.
2. Relationships are not the inevitable result of meeting together. The most successful small groups value relationships, live out their lives together, and see their small group as more than a meeting.
3. Genuine relationships require effort, and leaders play an important part in helping a group cultivate and develop friendships by leading and motivating their people in this direction.

#### B. The gospel makes true relationship possible

1. Our common understanding and experience of the gospel should define our relationships with other believers (1 Jn 1:3).

2. Because of the gospel, we are able to experience genuine friendships where we can let others know us as we truly are and as we pursue spiritual growth together.
3. The gospel frees us from having to impress others and models the sacrificial love that we are to show to one another (Gal. 1:10; Jn 15:12-13).

### **C. Relationship builds the trust necessary for fellowship**

1. When people know and experience our practical care and interest in their lives, they are likely to trust us when we are urging them to make progress in the war against sin (which we'll cover in sessions 5-7).
2. Building genuine friendships establishes a foundation that allows us to challenge each other to pursue spiritual growth (Eph 4:16).

### **D. Not simply a means to an end: relationships are a gift from God**

1. Although one aim of biblical care is to encourage one another to make progress in living the Christian life, it would be an error to think that building relationships is only a means to that end. Relationships are a gift from God to be enjoyed and treasured (1 Thess 2:8).
2. This gift becomes another means to experience God's unfathomable love and grace towards us.
3. As you seek to lead your group toward relationships, think of the following three contexts (which form sections II-IV of this outline:
  - Meetings and activities
  - Serving together
  - Evangelism

## **II. Building Relationships Through Meetings and Activities**

### **A. As the leader of your group, seek to provide a model for others to imitate.**

1. While you cannot be the source of every relationship in the group, you can set an example by the way you pursue others.
2. Let people know that you do not see serving them as a “ministry opportunity.” Make it clear that you consider it a joy to know them and to build friendships with them.

### **B. Take a genuine interest in people**

1. Draw people out by asking questions about their work, family, health, etc.
2. Opportunities abound expressing interest in others! Before and after a care group meeting, at Sunday meetings, or in other contexts where you happen to meet a member of your care group, you have opportunities to demonstrate you really care about them.

### **C. New group, new relationships**

1. New people coming into small groups often do not know one another.
2. Wise leaders will seek to help the group to get to know one another before jumping into the deeper waters of fellowship.

### **D. Make meetings relational**

1. Try to provide some relational element in each meeting. This means planning for it.

2. For example, sharing a meal together will not necessarily build the group together. If it's needed, lead in seating arrangements or provide everyone with a question that allows each person to relate a story from his life.
3. You can use almost any activity to create opportunities for people to get to know each other better. An addendum of possible activities is provided with this outline.

### **E. Ideas for cultivating relationships**

1. Encourage and model the practice of hospitality (Rom 12:10-13; Heb 13:2).
2. Build relational events into the regular schedule of your meetings.
3. Appoint someone in your group to be your “fun” director. Give them direction and arrange for the group to have time together to enjoy the gift of laughter by doing special things together on an occasional basis.
4. See Addendum

### **F. Be aware of the issues that pertain to season of life**

1. Please keep in mind the realities of each unique season of life and seek to lead in ways that reflect care for your group members. A group comprised of people who do not have children at home typically has more available time and the flexibility to spend time together. A group comprised of parents of young children has less flexibility, and a group with parents of teens has even less time.
2. Understanding the needs of your group will help you to set realistic goals for relating to one another. Consult with your pastor and experienced small group leaders to sharpen your ideas and set realistic goals.

### III. Building Relationships Through Serving

- A. We all need help with the basic tasks of life, and sometimes our need is big: at the birth of a baby, a tragic accident and hospitalization, the death of a family member or friend. Your group provides basic “on the ground” support for needs such as these as they arise in the church. Typically, your group is relationally closest to the need. As a leader, you lead in coordinating care and in so doing you help foster deeper relationships.
- B. You may first want to talk with the person in need to determine whether you should mobilize the group or simply ask another individual to help in the situation.
- C. In a crisis, the leader is responsible to insure that care is being provided. This does not mean that the leader is the primary one providing the care or even organizing the care. In fact, if you provide all of the organization and care, you deprive the group of practical ways to help them build relationships.
- D. Some examples of practical service:
  - 1. Provide family meals following the birth of a child
  - 2. Help a member move
  - 3. Care for the sick or injured with meals, cleaning, errands, child care, or simply a visit
  - 4. Supply money in a time of genuine need
  - 5. Provide meals and support for a family during a time of grief
  - 6. Provide childcare to a parent who cannot afford it or has no one to help
  - 7. Help an elderly member or single mom with basic chores
  - 8. Lead your group into church serving projects together

- E. NOTE: With many of these needs it is important that you inform your pastor of the need and how your group plans to serve. He may want to be involved in caring for the person in need and he may have guidance for you and the group.

## **IV. Building Relationships Through Evangelism**

- A. Christians are ambassadors for Christ, and one of the great privileges of the Christian life is sharing the gospel (2 Cor 5:17-21). Yet our relationships with unbelievers are often neglected. By bringing our care group into knowing about, and if practical, meeting our unbelieving friends, co-workers and neighbors, we can advance the gospel.
- B. Investing in relationships with unbelievers is part of being a witness to the gospel. It is in and through these relational investments that we often have the opportunity to share the gospel or invite someone to a care group or church activity.
- C. Leaders should strive to set an example for their group by cultivating love for and relationships with unbelievers.
- D. Leaders who are seeking to build gospel-centered small groups will keep this evangelistic mandate as a non-negotiable element of the group's relational life together.
- E. Groups grow closer as they seek to demonstrate and proclaim the gospel in the world together.
  - 1. Find ways in which your group can support the outreach efforts of the church
  - 2. Pray for the unbelievers with whom you are developing relationship with a goal of sharing the gospel and inviting them to an appropriate church event
  - 3. Encourage one another with updates of any evangelistic opportunities they have had
- F. Your small group can also sponsor its own outreach activities.

1. For example:
    - a. Host a barbecue for neighbors
    - b. Create a project to serve an elderly or needy neighbor
  2. Aim for activities that spark group excitement and maximum participation.
  3. One easy way to build group excitement is to ask for their ideas for outreach and build enthusiasm for the strategies they propose.
- G. Take an evangelism training course together as a group and review the material when you meet.

## **Assignment for next session**

- ❑ Read the outline in Session 5, “Fellowship, Part 1: Gospel- Centered Fellowship” and prepare to discuss it.
- ❑ Read chapter 4, “The Heart is the Target” in Paul Tripp’s *Instruments in the Redeemer’s Hands* and prepare to discuss it.

# Evaluating Personal Care

Name of Leader \_\_\_\_\_

Note both what the leader did well and how he could improve.

**Centrality of the Gospel:** Did the leader frame the discussion in the context of God’s grace and the Gospel?

**Fruit of the Spirit:** Was the leader patient, humble and gracious in pursuing sufficient details?

**Targeting the Heart:** Did he ask good questions and seek to understand motive? Did Scripture inform the problem and solution?

**Leading to Growth:** How well did the leader involve the group? Did he help target specific steps that lead to growth?

↓ Other Questions or Observations? ↓



## Fellowship, Part 1: Gospel-Centered Fellowship

### I. Biblical Foundations for Gospel-Centered Fellowship

- A. In fellowship, we may become aware of how God wants to work in the lives of our brothers and sisters. We desire to help them grow. But before attempting to do so, we must be sure to
  - 1. Examine our own hearts first (Matt 7:1-5).
  - 2. Demonstrate the love of Christ for our friends (Col 3:12-17).
  - 3. Remind them of the Father's love (1 Jn 3:1).
- B. Fellowship is possible only because of the gospel. God wants us to grow in the context of a grace-filled community of brothers and sisters.
- C. Therefore, fellowship must be gospel-centered. As we seek to "grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" (2 Pet 3:18), we must always remember that the gospel is "of first importance" (1 Cor 15:1-5).
  - 1. The gospel makes us alive in Christ (Eph 2:5).
  - 2. The gospel enables us to cultivate relationships. Because we have fellowship with God as our Father through his Son Jesus, we have fellowship with one another (1 Jn 1:7).

3. The gospel makes it possible for us to humble ourselves and confess our sins to one another, because our sins have in fact been forgiven (Col 1:21-23).
4. The gospel enables us to forgive one another, even as we have been forgiven (Eph 4:32).
5. The gospel makes it possible for us to experience the power of the Holy Spirit and gives us hope that even as imperfect sinners, by the grace of God we can grow into the image of Jesus Christ together (Rom 8:28-29).
6. The gospel compels faith for change: “He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?” (Rom 8:32).

## **II. Realistic Expectations for Gospel-Centered Fellowship**

- A. Since God is involved in all of life, we come to know God and conform ourselves to his will and ways as we apply the Bible to all of our life circumstances. Because of the way God has made us, we need the help of other Christians to do this.
- B. The apostle John begins his first letter writing about fellowship with God.

“That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we looked upon and have touched with our hands, concerning the word of life—the life was made manifest, and we have seen it, and testify to it and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was made manifest to us—that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, *so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ.* And we are writing these things so that our joy may be complete” (1 Jn 1:1-4).

- C. John’s letter continues along this line, as he shows how fellowship with God is not just an individual pursuit, but something to be pursued in community.

*“[I]f we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin” (1 Jn 1:7).*

- D. John’s letter goes on to develop how our fellowship involves our moral life (our sins and righteousness), our thought life (our doctrine), and our relationships (love for one another).
1. This is the essence of our life together: Through his work on the cross, Jesus Christ enters into relationship with us in community and thus touches everything about us and the world in which we live.
  2. So our life together as a group must be spent exploring how God is working in us and through us in our work, our families, our money and possessions, our recreations—everything under his blessing and kingship!
  3. We can’t demand or require self-disclosure. As Christians become more convinced of the Father’s love, they see more clearly the need and benefit they experience from opening their lives.
- E. Biblical leadership models the principles of 1 John. As you share the details of your life and your need for care and wisdom, you demonstrate what fellowship looks like.
- F. As we discuss God’s work in the circumstances of group members:
1. First we want to make sure we get all the relevant facts of the situation. We don’t want to address circumstances that do not exist.
  2. Then we want to explore how a person thinks about those circumstances. Fear, anger, lust, envy all are the products of what we believe. What we believe motivates the response of our heart to our situation. So we must not only learn the external circumstances of a person’s life, but ask good questions that reveal their thoughts, desires, and motives in response to their situation.

## Assignment for next session

- ❑ Read the outline in Session 6, “Fellowship, Part 2: The Heart of Change,” and prepare to discuss it.
- ❑ Read Chapter 5 in *Instruments in the Redeemer’s Hands*, and “Understanding Your Heart Struggle,” and prepare to discuss it.

# Evaluating Personal Care

Name of Leader \_\_\_\_\_

Note both what the leader did well and how he could improve.

**Centrality of the Gospel:** Did the leader frame the discussion in the context of God’s grace and the Gospel?

**Fruit of the Spirit:** Was the leader patient, humble and gracious in pursuing sufficient details?

**Targeting the Heart:** Did he ask good questions and seek to understand motive? Did Scripture inform the problem and solution?

**Leading to Growth:** How well did the leader involve the group? Did he help target specific steps that lead to growth?

↓ Other Questions or Observations? ↓

# Evaluating Topical Discussion

Name of Leader \_\_\_\_\_

Note both what the leader did well and how he could improve.

Did the leader move the discussion from review to application?

Did the leader show enthusiasm for the material and interest in each participant's contribution?

Were the questions (both initial and follow up) crafted to engage the group and lead toward a goal?

Did the leader keep the discussion centered on God's Word and grounded in grace?

↓ Other Questions or Observations? ↓

## Fellowship, Part 2: The Heart of Change

### I. God Wants Our Hearts

- A. God's goal for us is not a superficial confession of sin or outward behavioral change. He wants to change us from the heart, which ultimately affects our words and actions. So your goal for the group is to help members understand their trials and sins in reference to the heart and the need to be transformed by the Word and the Spirit in their thinking and desires.
- B. The heart is the inner core of who we are; it is the place of our beliefs, values, feelings, and decisions (Lk 6:43-45).
- C. Only the living Word of God can "search and discern" the heart (Heb 4:12). True change in the heart is only possible through the application of the Word of God by the Spirit of God.
- D. It's common for group members to want to move toward practical help or superficial change without addressing the heart's response to circumstances. Example:
  - 1. Concern: "They've been making some big layoffs at work lately and I'm pretty sure my department is next. I find myself preoccupied with losing my job and wondering how I'm going to pay my mortgage."
  - 2. Superficial response #1: "My company has been hiring lately, and I think they'll have a need for people with your background." (This may be helpful at a later time, but it does not address the heart.)
  - 3. Superficial response #2: "Are you reading your Bible before you go to work in the morning? I read through the Bible

every year, and I find that making this my daily practice really helps me with the stress of the job.” (A wonderful practice, but it does not adequately apply the Word to this specific situation and the response of the heart to it.)

4. Superficial response #3: “The Bible says, ‘My God shall provide all your needs. You just have to trust him.’” (Again, true and good, but to find this trust, we have to dig deeper into who God is, how we fail to believe him, how we need to discard our false beliefs, and then lay hold of his marvelous promises.)
5. Getting to the heart: “What exactly do you fear? ... Who is the Lord in this situation? ... How does your fear reflect on on your functional belief about God?” (This is the best help a group can give. It gets to the heart, helps root out fear that may grow from pride and a denial of who God is, and cultivates faith in the character and promises of God.)

## **II. Biblical Correction in a Small Group**

- A. In light of being “new creations in Christ,” “ambassadors for the Lord,” and “His chosen people,” there is a call from God to live holy lives for His glory. This pursuit of holiness is a non-negotiable, and when we don’t obey God and mirror His Word, we need others to “speak the truth in love” (Eph 4:15-16), showing us how we can more fully imitate Christ.
- B. Thus, biblical correction is not meant to remind us of who we were before Christ, but of who we are now in Christ. It is not meant to undermine our identity in Christ, but to underscore it and encourage us to live it out.
- C. Prior to correction, consider the other ways Scripture provides to care for those in sin:
  1. Mercy – “Blessed are the merciful” (Matt 5:7). We should extend mercy when possible in light of the mercy we have been shown by God (Lk 6:36).
  2. Love – “Love covers a multitude of sins” (1 Pet 4:8). We are called to demonstrate the sin-covering love of Christ to the world around us.



3. Overlook – “It is his glory to overlook a offense” (Prov 19:11). There are times when God uses a heart that overlooks an offense to bring contrition to the offender.
  4. Forbear – “Or do you show contempt for the riches of his kindness, tolerance and patience, not realizing that God's kindness leads you toward repentance?” (Rom 2:4) Often being patient with an individual in their sin will bring the conviction necessary for change.
  5. Charitable judgments (Matt 7:1-5) – Assume the best of others unless proven otherwise.
- D. Seeing the sinful motives and thoughts of our hearts is not an easy task. It requires humility and hard work—what Richard Sibbes calls “taking the soul to task” (see Prov 4:23). Our pride makes us prone to self-deception, and so we deny or ignore Scripture’s clear teaching. This is why we need each other. Our group can be a significant channel of God’s grace and truth to each of us.
- E. The Bible affirms our ability to help each other identify sin and promote change.
1. “I myself am satisfied about you, my brothers, that you yourselves are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge and *able to instruct one another*” (Rom 15:14).<sup>1</sup>
    - a. Most people think of “instruction” as the dispensing of information with no expectation of change. This is not the biblical sense of the phrase “to instruct” found in Romans 15:14.
    - b. To instruct is to admonish, to warn, to seek to turn someone from wrong thinking to right thinking, resulting in a change from wrong behavior to right behavior.
  2. Since the Bible is our only standard of truth, when we refer to “biblical correction” we mean speaking to someone in a

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<sup>1</sup> Other verses that encourage receiving correction or instruction from others are Proverbs 13:18; 15:31-32.

way that encourages change according to the teaching of Scripture.

- “All Scripture is inspired by God and is profitable for teaching, for reproof, for *correction*, for training in righteousness” (2 Tim 3:16).

F. Love must motivate biblical correction.

1. “Better is open rebuke than hidden love. Faithful are the wounds of a friend; profuse are the kisses of an enemy” (Prov 27:5-6).
2. We bring correction to others because we love them and desire them to be free from sin’s deceitfulness. We want them to experience grace. We want to examine our hearts for love when we give correction, and we want to make sure people know that our correction is motivated by love.

G. Characteristics of biblical correction:

1. The content of our correction must be based on Scripture. Biblical language is essential in the diagnosis of the problem and points to the only true solution to any sin.
2. Before bringing correction, we must make sure a person is confident of his status as a forgiven sinner through Jesus’ death on his behalf.
  - “The only sin that can be mortified [i.e., put to death] is forgiven sin.” —John Piper
3. We should help people adjust the language they use to describe their problem. The human heart tends to avoid the seriousness of sin by using language that denies responsibility for sin or the seriousness of its offense.
  - Some examples of neutral euphemisms commonly used for sin are “I am ticked off,” “I’m struggling,” or “I’m stressed out.”
4. The person bringing correction must be gentle and gracious.

“And the Lord’s servant must not be quarrelsome but kind to everyone, able to teach, patiently enduring evil, correcting his opponents with gentleness. God may perhaps grant them repentance leading to a knowledge of the truth” (2 Tim 2:24-25).

- a. If you have a concern, ask for permission to speak to it, and couch your exploration of a person’s sin in respect and gentleness.
    - “May I share with you a concern I would have for you in this matter?”
    - “Would you be open to hearing from the group on this?”
    - “I have not come to a conclusion on this, but I have some concerns about what you have shared. Would you be open to hearing my perspective on this situation?”
    - “We would be very interested in hearing your thoughts in response to our concerns.”
  - b. Note: People are aware of our attitude toward them and often respond accordingly.
5. Look for patterns of behavior rather than focusing on one incident of what appears to be sin.
  6. When discussing the motives of the heart, raise questions and share concerns without drawing conclusions.
    - a. “I could be wrong here, but your voice seemed to become tense and grow louder when you said to your wife, ‘I don’t want you doing that.’ It sounded like you were angry. How would you evaluate your feelings toward her at that point?”
    - b. “What concerns me is that you don’t seem to be changing in this area, and that leads me to wonder: Are you concerned about the seriousness of this sin and its potential consequences in your life?”

- c. “I am not sure about this, but it doesn’t seem like you are hearing what I am saying. Can you summarize what you think I am saying?”
- 7. Allow the person to explain his words or actions in a way that is different from what you perceived.
- 8. Allow people time to consider the perspectives of others. Don’t expect immediate agreement.
  - a. Only the Holy Spirit can bring conviction of sin.
  - b. Don’t insist (even in your heart) that people respond completely, sufficiently or immediately to your input.
  - c. A patient trust in the Spirit’s transforming power to frees you to share observations faithfully and peacefully without feeling the pressure to make people respond as you bring correction.
  - d. The fact that a person even listens to our concerns is a sign of God’s grace at work.
- 9. Bring serious concerns to your pastor (preferably by inviting the one confessing to do this first).

### **III. Biblical Encouragement in a Small Group**

- A. Not only are we often unaware of our sinful inclinations, we are also often unaware of God’s transforming grace. God’s Word calls us to a type of fellowship marked by consistent encouragement of one another (Heb 10:23-25).
  - 1. “Common grace” the innumerable blessings (apart from salvation) freely given by God to all people. We can see common grace in every realm of life (physical, moral, intellectual, social, creative, etc.). Common grace is all around us in what we see, hear, eat, and touch. Almost everywhere we look, or in everything we do, we experience some degree of common grace.
  - 2. “Saving grace” is God’s gift of salvation that comes only through grace and faith in Christ alone. Just as we need

reminders of the common grace all around us, we also need to be reminded of the saving grace that has come to us through Jesus Christ (Jn 1:14,17; Titus 2:11)

## Biblical Encouragement

- B. Those who have been bought by the blood of Christ are “new creations in Christ; the old has passed away; behold, the new has come” (2 Cor. 5:17). However, because of our battle with the world, our flesh, and Satan, we often forget who we are in Christ.
- C. We need the help of others to remind us that our identity is found in Christ and he is at work in our lives.
  - 1. “Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear” (Eph 4:29).
  - 2. “I give thanks to my God always for you because of the grace of God that was given you in Christ Jesus” (1 Cor 1:4).
- D. Scripture calls us to encourage one another.
  - 1. “But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called Today, so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness.” (Heb 3:13).
  - 2. “Therefore encourage one another and build one another up” (1 Thes. 5:11).
- E. Sharing encouragement is an expression of humility.
  - 1. A self-righteous heart is preoccupied with the shortcomings of others and often fails to see God's grace.
  - 2. Conversely, a humble heart is aware of God's transforming work in other's lives.
- F. It takes intentional time to consider where God is at work in someone. Study, share, and celebrate the grace of God in each other's lives.
  - Ask yourself, “Where do you see the fruit of the Spirit at work the in lives of others?” (Gal 5:22-23)

- Ask yourself “Where do I see specific gifts of the Spirit in others?” (see Rom 12:6-8; 1 Cor 12:8-10 and 12:28; Eph 4:11; and 1 Pet 4:11).
- What specific evidences of God’s grace have you observed in your friends/roommates/children/spouse in the last week?

## **Assignment for next session**

- ❑ Read the outline in Session 7, “Fellowship, Part 3: Lead Toward Growth,” and prepare to discuss it.
- ❑ Read Chapter 6 in *Instruments in the Redeemer’s Hands*, “Following the Wonderful Counselor,” and prepare to discuss it.

# Evaluating Personal Care

Name of Leader \_\_\_\_\_

Note both what the leader did well and how he could improve.

**Centrality of the Gospel:** Did the leader frame the discussion in the context of God’s grace and the Gospel?

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↓ Other Questions or Observations? ↓

# Evaluating Topical Discussion

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Did the leader keep the discussion centered on God's Word and grounded in grace?

↓ Other Questions or Observations? ↓



## Fellowship, Part 3: Lead Toward Growth

### I. Confession → Repentance → Help in Community

- A. Our goal in any small group meeting is not to provide one or more group members with a thorough “counseling” experience, but rather help as many members as possible to grow in godliness. Therefore, our goal should not be to cover all the issues, nor should we think that we can tie up a person’s problems in a neat package. The goal is *progress* in sanctification.
- B. **Confession.** Seeing sin is not enough. We must take responsibility for it and see it as offensive—an act of rebellion toward God that is often offensive to those around us, as well.
  - 1. While all our sin has been covered by the death of Jesus on our behalf, the Lord still expects us to acknowledge our sins to him (1 Jn 1:7-9, Ps 32:5). This is part of our Father-child relationship with him.
  - 2. Scripture also obligates us to be reconciled to those we’ve sinned against, which would include confessing our sins to those people we’ve offended (Matt 5:23-25).
  - 3. Beyond this, God can use our small group to help us pursue Christ-likeness, allowing us to grow in our relationship with him and with others through making humble, accurate confession.
- C. **Repentance.** Beyond confession, the pathway of growth involves taking steps to change. The Bible calls this change “repentance.”

- D. **Help In Community.** Repentance takes place over time and with the help of others (Gal 6:1). As a group we can help one another pursue growth as we encourage faithful obedience to God in specific areas.

## II. Confessing Sins in Our Small Group

- A. Many of our sins cannot be known without our confessing them to others. If we are going to pursue godliness with others, we must make sure they know what is really going on in our souls.
- B. The Bible supports the wisdom of this:
1. “Therefore, confess your sins to one other, and pray for one other so that you may be healed” (Jas 5:16).
  2. “Whoever conceals his transgressions will not prosper, but he who confesses and forsakes them will obtain mercy” (Prov. 28:13).
- C. Confession humbles us and humility brings grace (Jas 4:6).
1. We confess because we need others to help us to see ourselves clearly. How many times has a sin that you have helped someone else overcome ensnared you? This is a clear illustration of the deceitfulness of sin. (Heb 3:13)
  2. This principle of needing one another is fundamental to the humble and grace-filled practice of fellowship.
- D. A wise leader will take time to discuss the confession of sin with his group to make sure that everyone understands and sees the value of this practice. One good resource for helping us overcome sin from the inside out is Chris Lundgaard’s book *The Enemy Within*.
- E. A wise leader asks if everyone is open to input and correction before encouraging confession in his group. You must make sure that a member sees the benefit of this practice and participates willingly, otherwise he may feel coerced into a practice for which he lacks faith.

- F. Deferring discussion: Good discussion can lead to confession that, because of limited time or the nature of what the participant shares, should not be discussed in the group.
  - 1. Some issues are not appropriate for group discussion. If that is the case, thank the participant for sharing and ask if he or she could follow up in another more appropriate context.
  - 2. It may be appropriate to ask the person if they would like to discuss the issue privately with you or someone else in the group who is qualified to help him.
  - 3. If the implications of the confession are serious or especially difficult, encourage the group member to speak with a pastor.
  - 4. Be faithful to follow up as encouraged in #'s 1-3 above. Also it's important to follow up personally with members of your group when they bring up significant life issues that may discourage them or require significant change.

### **III. Repentance – Where the Change Happens**

- A. Once a Christian has sharpened his understanding of his sin through correction and confessed it appropriately, he is ready to begin walking a path of repentance.
- B. What is repentance?
  - 1. Repentance is both a gift and a command (Tim 2:25; Acts 17:30; 2).
  - 2. Repentance is a change of mind followed by a change of direction. It involves turning away from sin *because* you are turning to God.
  - 3. Repentance is always joined with faith. Repentance is not about self-help but about change that begins with a full confidence that all our sins are forgiven through Jesus' death on the cross.

4. The Spirit of God works through the Word of God to convict and produce godly sorrow, leading to repentance. (2 Cor 7:10)
5. Repentance requires a biblical view of sin as offensive to God. It is often misunderstood.
  - a. Confession involves identification – of specific sin.
  - b. Confession involves contrition – sorrow for sin.
  - c. Confession involves volition – a turning away from sin.
- C. Repentance must be particular. It must find expression in specific changes in the way we think and act. We can get at the particulars of repentance by asking the question, “What does repentance *look like*?”
  1. Putting to death particular thoughts and actions that open you to temptation and lead to sin.
  2. Bringing to life particular thoughts and actions that lead to righteous thoughts and behaviors that replace your sin.
  3. This pattern of putting to death and bringing to life is taught and illustrated in Colossians 3:4-17 (see especially verse 5: “Put to death...”; and verse 12: “Put on then...”) and in Ephesians 4:17-32 (see especially verse 22: “to put off your old self...”; and verse 24: “to put on the new self...”).
- F. How can a leader promote repentance through a small group discussion?
  1. Help the person define his sin biblically. Ask him: “How do you think the Bible defines your sin?” Invite the group to share their knowledge of Scripture on this point.
  2. Ask how the gospel speaks to his sin. Is he assured of God’s forgiveness through Jesus’ death? Does he have hope for change because of the resurrection? Invite the group to encourage him in this area from the Scriptures.
  3. Help him brainstorm (with the group’s help) about particular things he can do to avoid future temptation and sin. Make sure that Scripture, prayer, and fellowship are foundational to his plan.

4. Pray for him to experience deeper conviction, gospel hope, and power to change.

## IV. Help in Community

- A. Every human being is accountable to God.
  1. “So then each of us will give an account of himself to God” (Rom 14:12).
  2. “Nothing in all creation is hidden from God’s sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account” (Heb 4:13, NIV).
- B. Change is a Community Project.
  1. A primary means of the Spirit’s transforming power is fellowship with other believers (see 1 John 1:5-10).
  2. We can enlist the help of others by simply asking someone to inquire periodically about our progress.
  3. This kind of mutual care and accountability in community cannot be imposed; it must be desired and invited.
  4. Mutual care and accountability should always direct people to God. The goal is pleasing God, not impressing the group.
  6. Some other ways a small group leader can foster help:
    - a. Follow up on previous meetings and conversations in which a group member expressed a desire to repent.
    - b. Encourage the involvement of others between meetings (e.g. encourage the establishment of partners for follow-up, encouragement, and prayer).
  5. Always keep in mind: Accountability is not the goal; heart-felt repentance leading to joyful obedience is our aim. Repeatedly confessing the same patterns of sin without growth can be counter-productive and dull a person’s

conviction of sin. If this happens, we must help the person evaluate whether his repentance is sincere.

6. As with correction, confession, and repentance, accountability must always be practiced with the gospel in view.

## **V. Final Considerations: Confidentiality and Pastoral Involvement**

### **A. Confidentiality**

1. Each member of the group must be assured that what he shares with the group will not become the subject of gossip.
2. Confidentiality does not mean that we tell no one outside the group what we hear, but that we share only when we have a compelling and biblically supportable reason to speak to others.
  - a. Informing others outside the group must be in the best interest of the person who has shared a confidence, or it must be in the best interest of someone affected by another's sin. In most cases, this should be done after informing the group member that you are talking to someone else. If you are not sure how to handle a confidence that may need to be shared with others, discuss it with your pastor.
  - b. Married couples must use discretion: Marital unity means that we keep no secrets from one another. But this does not mean that we *must* share the details of another's sin with our spouse. There must be a compelling reason for giving your spouse such details (e.g. Your spouse may be helping the spouse of the one confessing sin). So you are not "keeping a secret" but acknowledging between each other that some things are not necessary for the other to know.

- c. We must be aware of the sinful tendency to desire information for selfish reasons and restrain ourselves out of a desire to please God and care for his people.

#### B. Pastoral Involvement

1. Small groups exist in the context of the local church and pastoral care.
2. The church is a place where God-given spiritual authority is exercised with the intention of protecting the church from theological error and moral compromise.
3. Small group leaders are extensions of pastoral care. They represent, and are appointed by, the pastors to care for others who desire to grow.
4. Pastors and confidentiality
  - a. Because pastors are accountable to God for the care and oversight of the members of your group, the leader should share anything that he believes will help the pastor achieve this or that helps him provide wiser leadership for his group. The group should be aware that the leader has these conversations with his pastor.
  - b. A small group leader may invite a person to take issues directly to a pastor before the leader speaks to the pastor, but the leader should also be free to discuss anything that comes to him in his role as a small group leader in God's church.

### Assignment for Session 8

- ❑ Read the outline in Session 8, "Leading a Men's and Ladies' Meeting" and be prepared to discuss it.
- ❑ Read the book *What's the Difference?* By John Piper and prepare to discuss it.

# Evaluating Topical Discussion

Name of Leader \_\_\_\_\_

Note both what the leader did well and how he could improve.

Did the leader move the discussion from review to application?

Did the leader show enthusiasm for the material and interest in each participant's contribution?

Were the questions (both initial and follow up) crafted to engage the group and lead toward a goal?

Did the leader keep the discussion centered on God's Word and grounded in grace?

↓ Other Questions or Observations? ↓



## Leading a Men's and Ladies' Meeting

While the biblical goals of building a community around relationships, fellowship, and spiritual life apply equally to men and women, unique opportunities exist in men's or ladies' meetings. Such context allow for gender-focused care and discipleship.

This final session is designed to equip the leader theologically and practically for opportunities to apply the Gospel and to transfer the values of biblical manhood and womanhood in men's or ladies' meetings.

### I. Making A Case for Men's and Ladies' Meetings

#### A. Biblical Manhood and Womanhood: God's Good Design

1. In the Garden, God created both men and women as his image bearers, and in doing so established their equality in personhood, worth and dignity.

“So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.” (Gen 1:27)

2. God assigned both men and women a dominion mandate to exercise a benevolent rule over the earth.

“And God said to them, ‘Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it and have dominion...’” (Gen 1:28).

3. While sharing this mandate, God clearly made men and women equal, yet different. God has assigned distinct and complementary roles to men and women (Gen 2:15-23).

4. God's curse for sin didn't introduce a distinction in roles. Sin brought a distortion of God-ordained roles and hardship in fulfilling them. (Gen 3:16-18)

#### B. Sound Doctrine on Display

1. Numerous scriptures echo the pattern for gender roles established in Genesis 1-3. (e.g Prov 31, Eph 5:22-33, Col 3:18-21, and 1 Pet 3:1-7).
2. Faithfulness to this pattern adorns the Gospel for a watching world. This gospel-witness explains why Paul placed such an emphasis on men and women understanding their roles.
  - After calling Titus to establish pastoral leadership in the area churches, Paul commanded that Titus teach "what accords with sound doctrine." (Titus 2:1) Specifically, Titus was to train:
    - "Older men" (Titus 2:2)
    - "Older women" (Titus 2:3)
    - "Young women" (Titus 2:4)
    - "Younger men" (Titus 2:6)
3. Without the foundations and distinctions laid out in God's Word, cultural influence increases and its confusion creeps into the church. The effects are seen when:
  - Marriages fail to portray Christ and the church.
  - Parents do not train their boys to be masculine or girls to be feminine.
  - Homosexuality increases and attempts to justify homosexual alliances emerge.
  - Patterns of unbiblical female leadership in the church reflect and promote confusion over the true meaning of manhood and womanhood.
4. John Piper provides a helpful definition of biblical masculinity:

“At the heart of mature masculinity is a sense of benevolent responsibility to lead, provide for and protect women in ways appropriate to a man’s differing relationships.”<sup>1</sup>

5. The clear teaching of Scripture calls men to “image God” through the pursuit of servant leadership. The flawless example of this can be found in the person of Christ. On the basis of his example, God calls men to lead. And application can be made in every area of life:

- a. As husbands (Eph 5:25)
- b. As fathers (Eph 6:4)
- c. In the workplace and community (Gen 2:15)

6. Piper also provides a helpful definition of biblical femininity:

“At the heart of mature femininity is a freeing disposition to affirm, receive and nurture strength and leadership from worthy men in ways appropriate to a woman’s differing relationships.”<sup>2</sup>

7. In ways unique to women, Scripture’s call is to “image God” through the pursuit of submission and servanthood. Christ modeled these characteristics before the Father, and such qualities define the church’s orientation to her Savior. Application for a woman can be made in every area of life:

- a. As wives (Eph 5:25)
- b. As mothers (Prov 6:20)
- c. In the home and community (Prov 31)

### C. Pursuing Fellowship as Men and Women

1. In “Equipped,” we have established the Gospel as the biblical basis for all fellowship between Christians and that which transcends the distinctions of culture, age, and sex. Therefore, fellowship is a rich gift that can be enjoyed between any two Christians (Gal 3:28).

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<sup>1</sup> (Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood, John Piper, Crossway, pg 35)

<sup>2</sup> (ibid, John Piper, Crossway, pg 36)

2. While the Gospel transcends distinctions, it does not minimize God's created design of mankind as male and female. Simply stated, but profoundly significant, every believer is a Christian *man* or Christian *woman*.
3. This difference in design shapes and focuses the application of our fellowship.
  - a. Fellowship shared by Christian men is a unique gift from God that cultivates male friendship, accountability, and encouragement toward biblical masculinity.

“Be watchful, stand firm in the faith, act like men, be strong. Let all that you do be done in love.” (1 Cor 16:13-14)
  - b. In the same way, fellowship shared by Christian women is a unique gift from God that cultivates female friendship, accountability, and encouragement toward biblical femininity.

## **II. Making the Most of a Men's or Ladies' Meeting**

### **A. Getting Practical**

1. In small group contexts, fellowship should point believers to the grace and power of the gospel as motivation for holiness. A single-sex context promotes freedom to appropriately discuss sensitive topics, allowance for more specific confession of sin, and unique opportunities for men to deepen relationships with other men and women to do the same with other women. And men's and ladies' meetings provide a context to transfer the profound values of biblical manhood and womanhood.
2. Transferring Biblical Manhood:
  - a. In a men's meeting opportunities exist for men to grow in their biblical understanding and conviction to lead, protect, provide and serve in the context of home, workplace and community.

- b. With each men's meeting, the leader should remind the men in some way of their God-given call and privilege to grow in biblical masculinity.

3. Transferring Biblical Womanhood:

- a. The leader's wife or assistant serves the ladies in her group by transferring the values of biblical womanhood through her example and their discussion. In doing this, the ladies may increasingly orient themselves as Christian women to their God-given faith (Titus 2:6).
- b. Recognize that while *practices* may differ among the ladies in your group biblical *principles* of femininity will remain the same.

B. Even More Practical:

1. Before the meeting: Assign the reading/listening of material that serves to transfer the value of biblical manhood/ womanhood. If there are application questions, e-mail one or more questions about the material to stir their thinking before you meet. (See your pastors for suggested assignments/questions.)
2. How long should the meeting go? Typically there are less time restraints on this meeting because for married couples the spouse is home with the kids. Our recommended time frame is approximately 2 hours.
3. What questions should we ask the men? Here are some questions you can rotate through in your efforts to care for the men of your care group:
  - a. Spiritual life: How is your pursuit of communion with God in your daily devotions? Where would you most like to grow?
  - b. Lust: In what ways have you found yourself tempted toward lust or sinning in lust? What steps have you taken to fight your temptation?
  - c. Romance: What have you been doing to serve and romance your wife since we last met? Where do you need to grow?

- d. Evangelism: What individual or individuals have you been praying for and reaching out to? What steps have you taken? What next step do you believe the Lord is calling you to take?
  - e. Leadership: Where do you believe you need to grow in leadership? In the home or workplace? In the pursuit of fellowship?
4. What questions should we ask the women?
- a. Spiritual life: How is your pursuit of communion with God in your daily devotions? Where would you most like to grow?
  - b. Temptation: In what ways have you found yourself tempted or sinning in a particular way? What steps have you taken to fight your temptation?
  - c. Romance: What have you been doing to serve and romance your husband since we last met? Where do you need to grow?
  - d. Evangelism: What individual or individuals have you been praying for and reaching out to? What steps have you taken? What next step do you believe the Lord is calling you to take?
  - e. Following my husband: Where do you need to grow in submission? In bringing him helpful counsel? In encouraging him?
  - f. Motherhood: How is your soul – encouraged or burdened? Is there any way we can practically serve you? How are your conversations going with \_\_\_\_? How have you been training \_\_\_\_? How is the adjustment going with the new baby?

## **Relationship Building Ideas for Your Group**

### **Getting to Know You Questions**

#### **PERSONAL**

- What day of your life would you most like to re-live and why?
- In what area of your life would you like greater peace and why?
- What have you been praying about recently?
- What is your most important decision in the near future?

#### **PARENTS AND SIBLINGS**

- Where were you born?
- Where were you raised?
- How many brothers and sisters do you have?
- Tell a story from your childhood or adolescence that gives insight into your family.

#### **SPOUSE AND CHILDREN**

- How did you meet your spouse?
- How does your spouse “complete” you?
- How many children, if any, do you have and what are their names and ages?
- When your children are grown, what would make you think you were successful in raising them?
- If your spouse and children could write your epitaph, what would you want it to say?
- What creative things have you done to cultivate romance in your marriage?
- What creative ways have you made memories with your children?

- What dreams do you have for your future marriage and your family?

## VOCATION AND EDUCATION

- Where did you go to school?
- What did you study or what do you wish you had studied?
- Where do you work, and what do you do?
- If you could do anything but what you do now, what would it be?

## HOBBIES AND INTERESTS

- What do you enjoy doing with your spare time?
- If a rich relative died and left you \$50,000 that you had to spend in a month, what would you do?
- What have you never done that you wish you could do?

## GOD AND CHURCH

- What church, if any, were you raised in?
- What were you taught about God as a child?
- What has been your most significant encounter with God?
- Describe the state of your current relationship with God.
- Tell us how you experienced conversion?
- What has helped you grow in your walk with God?
- Who has been the most significant influence in your relationship with God and why?
- What would you like your relationship with God to be five years from now?
- When you die and stand before God, what would you like him to say to you?
- How are you serving in the church? Is there another ministry you would like to get involved in?
- What has God been teaching you? What are you reading?

## EVIDENCES OF GRACE QUESTIONS

- What area of growth in your (or your spouse's) character are you most encouraged about in the last 3-6 months?
- What specific evidences of God's grace have you observed in your -children, small group, friends, spouse, roommates- in the last week?
- What are you be most encouraged about in your walk with God?



- What has been the most life- giving conviction you have experienced in the last month?
- How have you seen the Lord at work through you or your -friends, spouse- in ways that are not explainable by human effort, in the past several weeks?
- What things are you most thankful for in your -church, spouse, friends, workplace, and family?
- What have you been giving thanks to God for this week?

## Getting to Know You—Group Ideas

- Start the meeting with an icebreaker activity. Having dinner together is always an easy way to start. Begin by telling your stories. You don't have to get to everyone the first week. You may want to ask two or three people to share about their lives. As the leader, you can set the tone and an example by sharing first.
- Have group members bring a few photos from their childhood and introduce their family members.
- Sit together at church meetings.
- Ride together to special church events like conferences or retreats.
- Room together at events involving hotel stays. Arrange for the group to eat meals together at these events.
- Establish ways the group can be together outside of a meeting, like a “supper (or dessert) club.”
- Couples: Have group members bring photos of their wedding and share about their courtship and engagement.
- Thanksgiving dinner: Share a Thanksgiving dinner together and then play a game after dinner.
- Nerd Night: The ladies prepare a nerd setting and everyone comes dressed in their best nerd attire. The men are given “nerd names” as they sign in. Play some games. Then serve lunch box dinners and a table full of appetizers. After honoring the men individually, the ladies do a skit imitating their version of men's meetings.

- Semi-formal dinner: The guys make an elegant dinner for the ladies. Then they honor each woman individually with each receiving flowers.
- Watch major sporting events together. Assign a responsible person to monitor the advertising and to switch channels when needed.
- Take a retreat together (or just as men or women) to seek God together.
- Spend an evening playing board games together.
- Take a one-day fun retreat to a park. Spend the day there. Swim, boat, and play games. Have a cookout and fellowship together around a fire.
- Video scavenger hunt: Come up with a list of things that each team has to find, do, act out or interview. Everything has to be videotaped. The best size for each team is 4-5 people so that everyone can fit in one car. Allow at least an hour for the teams to hunt. After the hunt, go to someone's home and watch the videos.
- Small group cookouts: Have cookouts at different homes or parks. Play group games or just hang out and fellowship.
- Christmas party: Exchange "white elephant" (i.e. silly or old) gifts, play games, sing carols and worship.
- Go camping together.
- Go hiking together followed by gathering at someone's home or a restaurant near the trail afterwards.
- Take a trip to local tourist destinations.
- Go out for breakfast as a group, or as men or women.
- Spontaneously invite people to go on a picnic with you or to come over for coffee after the Sunday meeting.
- Have a ladies' tea party.

- Play miniature golf together.
- Discuss topics that will get people laughing together, such as “tell us your worst vacation”, or “the dumbest thing you have ever done.”
- Plan times to have the group together when their children are able to participate in the activities.
- Scale the climbing wall at a sporting goods store.
- Rotate responsibility for a monthly hospitality night among your members. Be sure to release anyone who is not in a place to extend hospitality.
- Take a group photo and make sure everyone has a copy for their refrigerator.

## **Find Ways to Celebrate Growth, Transitions and Milestones**

- Point out the people who are taking steps of relational growth and tell them how encouraging this is to the group.
- Ask people to share in the group context how they are benefiting from growing relationships. Allow them to share their stories of what’s happening and how they are getting to know people better.
- Identify sanctification. Honor people who are growing by sharing specifics of their growth with the group.
- Celebrate conversions of a group member friend.
- Recognize significant achievement of life goals and life transitions: promotions, graduations, new job, etc..
- Celebrate family joys: engagements, weddings, births, a child’s graduation, baptisms, salvation and birthdays.
- Celebrate with prayer and thanksgiving when someone’s loved one comes to Christ.

## **Care Group Leader Job Description**

### **A. Cultivating relationships through building community**

1. Your role is to help group members grow in their relationships—both within the confines of the meeting and daily life.
2. Your job is not to provide the same level of relationship to each group member, but to encourage and foster relationships through your leadership.
3. You lead in:
  - a. Encouraging personal interaction in meeting contexts.
  - b. Organizing care in crisis.
  - c. Promoting fun activities.
  - d. Celebrating milestones in members' lives.
  - e. Organizing service projects for group members within the church and beyond.
  - f. Encouraging each member's participation in our commission to evangelize.

## **B. Promoting spiritual life**

1. Your role is to make sure that each meeting includes spiritual activities that express our dependence on the Holy Spirit and encourage the ministry of the Spirit among the group members and a demonstration of the sufficiency of the Word.
2. You should also:
  - a. Lead the group to pray for individuals in the group and for others known to group members.
  - b. Encourage the ministry of the Word between group members.
  - c. Encourage praise and thanksgiving to God, which can (but does not have to) include singing together.
  - d. Encourage the ministry of the Spirit between group members through words of prophecy and encouragement.
  - e. Promote the private practice of the spiritual disciplines.
  - f. Inform the group of needs that require prayer whenever necessary.

## **C. Guiding discussions that lead to care and fellowship**

1. You will guide discussions (or delegate this responsibility) for each meeting.
2. Your role is to keep the discussion cross-centered, grace-motivated, and within the bounds of biblical wisdom. Members should always Scripture. Your goal is to lead men and women toward hope in the character and promises of the living God as they pursue gospel-motivated, faith-fueled growth.

3. There are three basic discussion models you should follow:
  - a. Discussion of Scripture that pastors have initiated.
  - b. Discussion of materials the group has read or listened to in advance: (Scripture, commentaries, books, articles, tapes and sermons).
  - c. Discussion focused on caring for members as they face trials or seek to overcome sin and walk in righteousness.
4. Accomplishing this goal usually requires advance preparation:
  - a. Developing or choosing questions from a prepared list. All discussions on specific Scripture will include questions prepared by the pastor.
  - b. Preparing questions that invite group members to share the work of God in their lives and their struggle with a trial or sin.
  - c. Following up with a group member on what he/she shared in a previous meeting or with you apart from the meeting.