

Your Walk with God Is a Community Project

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Discussion Guide to be used with the conference on DVD
(Ten 25 minute sessions on 3 DVDs)
for Church-wide Events, Classes,
Small Groups or Personal Study

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Introduction

The following pages provide practical discussion and application based on a biblical perspective of community and relationships. The guide has been designed for use within church wide events, classes and small groups or it can be used for personal study. Discussion with others can stimulate ideas and questions you may not have otherwise considered. You may find in your discussions and answers that your trials are not unusual, which gives encouragement and accountability. If you are not already part of a small group, consider inviting others to join you in going through this material. Nonetheless, this material can be beneficial as an independent study.

It is recommended that you write down your answers and thoughts. This is a useful exercise as writing deepens and clarifies your thinking and acts as a stronger form of commitment than just thinking about something.

There are a variety of personal application questions. Some work well as discussion questions to answer and consider together; others are best considered individually within one's own thoughts. A time of prayer after answering the application questions can be a good way to reinforce them and to make further application. Prayer can help you to make a commitment to God with what you want to apply and also to hear what He may be saying to you. At the end of each session are suggested Scripture passages that can deepen your study and understanding of each topic.

As you share your thoughts, feelings, struggles and accomplishments, speak humbly, honestly, and in love. We all have sin; we all have great value in God's sight; and we are all on a journey to grow and become more like Christ. May God bless you greatly!

Session 1

Opening Discussion

- A) What is the connection between everyday relationships and the work of God?
- B) What are the present benefits of the work of Christ in your everyday life?

Bible Reading

- 2 Peter 1:3-9

DVD

Key Points

- a) Christian lives will be ineffective and unfruitful when the benefits of Christ are not grasped for daily living.
- b) The wrong things rule our hearts when we forget that our identity is in Jesus Christ.

Discussion Questions

- 1) As Christians we can easily misunderstand or forget about the benefits of Christ's work in the here and now. How common is this experience and how does it hinder our ability to live as children of God in a fallen world?
- 2) All of us have times in our Christian lives when we are ineffective and unproductive. What might these moments look like and why do they happen?
- 3) When we forget that our identity is in Jesus Christ, wrong things will start to rule our hearts. In what ways might we start to shop horizontally (in the world) for wrong things and how dominating can they become?

Personal Application

A) Have there been any recent moments in your life where you have misunderstood or forgotten the present benefits of the work of Christ? How have these moments hindered your ability to live as a child of God in your daily experiences of life?

B) In what ways have you encountered moments of ineffective and unproductive Christian living? What has been the result of such moments and what have you learnt from them?

C) In your own life are there things other than Christ that could possibly be taking a greater functional ownership of your heart than you care to admit? What might these things be and how will you stop them from ruling your heart?

Further Bible Study

- Colossians 3:1-17

Session 2

Opening Discussion

- A) What do you see as your biggest problem in trying to live an effective and productive life?
- B) What is your understanding of having a dual identity i.e. living as a fallen human being and a child of grace?

Bible Reading

- Mark 6:45-52, 2 Peter 1:3-9

DVD

Key Points

- a) As Christians we can be very skilled at arguing for our righteousness and forget that we constantly need the forgiveness and grace of God each day.
- b) Our biggest problem is not outside of us but rather inside of us and therefore we need to attach ourselves constantly to Christ and His grace for daily fruitful living.

Discussion Questions

- 1) When we make mistakes we can fall into the trap of self-justification. Why as Christians do we continue to make mistakes and why do we struggle to confess our failures?
- 2) Our biggest problem is not outside of us but rather inside of us. Why do we often fail to identify this problem? When we admit that the problem of self is our biggest struggle, how does this help us to live lives that are more fruitful?
- 3) Christ has given us everything we need for life and godliness. Why do we often turn these grace gifts into a list of dos and don'ts and how can we avoid this trap?

Personal Application

A) Some of us are not able to confess our sins because we first need to confess our self-righteousness. In recent months, where have you made mistakes but failed to confess them because of self-justification?

B) Where in your own life are you encountering problems yet failing to see the struggle inside of you rather than outside of you? How might you respond differently to these problems by admitting your own heart struggle?

C) In what areas of your life (marriage, parenting, employment, neighbors) do you struggle to believe that you have been given everything you need? In these areas, what steps will you take in order to apply what Christ has already given you?

Further Bible Study

- Romans 3:9-20

Session 3

Opening Discussion

- A) How do people measure their potential to take on or complete a particular task?
- B) Do you believe that Christians should be able to face all the tasks that God puts before them?

Bible Reading

- Galatians 2:20, Hebrews 10:19-31

DVD

Key Points

- a) When we forget that our identity is in Christ we fail to see our potential in Christ and struggle with daily tasks.
- b) When we forget that our identity is in Christ we will look for hope and security in other things, especially when daily tasks seem overwhelming.

Discussion Questions

- 1) When faced with trials or tasks in daily life, how do we tend to view them? How does our identity in Christ enable us to overcome the responsibility of tasks that seem too challenging?
- 2) When a challenge in life appears overwhelming, rather than turning to Christ we often turn to other things for hope and security. Why do we tend to do this and what is the result when other things do not fulfill that role?
- 3) When Christians ignore or fail to engage in the daily tasks to which God calls them because the tasks seem too much, would you call this sin? How should a Christian respond to such moments?

Personal Application

A) In what areas of your life (marriage, parenting, employment, neighbors) do you see tasks that just seem impossible? How have you been viewing your potential to deal with these and how will your identity in Christ enable you to fulfill them?

B) In your own experience what things have you found yourself running to rather than taking on the tasks that God has put in front of you? What were you looking for in these other things and did they produce a positive result?

C) What daily tasks has God put in front of you yet you have avoided because they seemed overwhelming? Is God calling you to repent of your avoidance and to step out in faith?

Further Bible Study

- 1 Samuel 17

Session 4

Opening Discussion

- A) How might God use relationships in order to remind you of your identity in Christ?
- B) What do you view as the essential elements of a healthy community where you would grow in Christ?

Bible Reading

- Hebrews 10:19-31

DVD

Key Points

- a) God uses people and community to help us remember our identity and potential in Christ in order to ensure that we live out of this identity rather than out of our fallen identity.
- b) God has called us to intentionally intrusive, Christ-centered, grace-driven, redemptive relationships and community.

Discussion Questions

- 1) God uses people and community to help us grow in our faith. Discuss how this works in everyday life.
- 2) Hebrews 10:24-25 is often used to encourage Christians to attend church on a Sunday. While church attendance contributes to our growth as Christians, in what way do these verses mean more than simply church attendance?
- 3) God has called us to intentionally intrusive, Christ-centered, grace-driven, redemptive relationships and community. In your own words, describe each of these terms and what they would look like in a practice.

Personal Application

A) In your own life, how has God been using someone to stir up your faith and how has God been using you to stir up someone else's faith?

B) Without including your church or small group, do you have other relationships or communities that stir up your faith? Are such other areas essential for growing in your faith? If they don't exist in your life, how might you begin to find them?

C) Do you have intentionally intrusive, Christ-centered, grace-driven, redemptive relationships and community? What needs to change in order to improve this essential element for personal growth?

Further Bible Study

- Ephesians 4:1-16

Session 5

Opening Discussion

- A) If you want to be effective in being a part of what God is doing in a person's life, what would be helpful to know?
- B) We all have moments of disappointment and frustration in life. What is usually the cause of such moments?

Bible Reading

- 1 Peter 1:3-9

DVD

Key Points

- a) In order to be part of what God is doing in a person's life in the here and now, you need to know what God is doing.
- b) Your life has not always worked according to your plan and you are always trying to figure your life out.

Discussion Questions

- 1) Sometimes we live more in our own little stories of life rather than God's big story. What does this mean and how does this hinder us from being a part of what God is doing in the lives of others?
- 2) How should we view and deal with the disappointments and frustrations of life, especially when life does not always work according to our plans?
- 3) When we view the Bible as a theologically annotated story, that is, a story with God's notes, how does it help us when trying to figure out life?

Personal Application

A) Can you recall moments where you fell into the trap of living out of your own little story rather than God's big story? How might these moments have changed if they had been viewed at the time from what God was doing?

B) In recent years, how has your life not worked out according to your plan? Are there dreams that you are still holding out for? What should your attitude be towards such dreams?

C) If your life is part of God's overall redemptive story, how does the Bible equip you to see life especially when your own plans fail?

Further Bible Study

- Romans 8:28-39

Session 6

Opening Discussion

A) God's desire is to produce holiness in His children. What do you see as His means of achieving this?

B) To help make life easier we often rely on the wrong things. What might these be?

Bible Reading

- 1 Peter 1:3-9

DVD

Key Points

a) God will take you where you do not want to go, in order to produce in you what you could not achieve on your own.

b) God is releasing us from our reliance on self and on temporary, created things so that we would fully rely on Him.

Discussion Questions

1) Peter uses the words grieve, trial and test to describe the means that God uses to bring about change in His children. How do we usually view these words and why would God use such means?

2) When we understand why and how God changes us, how should it influence the way we view circumstances in life and how we pray?

3) We all desire a comfortable and predictable life. How does relying on self and temporary, created things fool us into thinking we can achieve such a life?

Personal Application

A) Looking back on your own life, how has God used moments of grief, trial or testing to change your heart? How did you view it at the time and how do you view it now?

B) If you are currently experiencing difficult relationships (marriage, employment, family, friends) or if something has been removed from your life (job, relationship, status, health), how do you view these and how will you pray about them?

C) In what ways might you be relying too much on self or on temporary, created things to help you achieve a comfortable and predictable life?

Further Bible Study

- James 1:1-12

Session 7

Opening Discussion

- A) From your own experience, why do you think our everyday relationships can be hard?
- B) What is your understanding of humility and how does it begin?

Bible Reading

- Ephesians 4:1-6

DVD

Key Points

- a) The DNA of sin is selfishness and therefore makes relationships hard for us. The Gospel restores vertical community with God, which in turn restores horizontal community with others.
- b) Humility begins when God is in the center of our lives and not us. Without humility we will never be happy and we will never know community.

Discussion Questions

- 1) If we are honest, our relationships can be hard because we feel our lives are too important to be around messy or needy people. How does the practical application of 2 Corinthians 5:15 empower us to love and serve others?
- 2) Relationships and community will only be easy when we live out of the provision and hope of the gospel rather than trying to live up to the gospel. What is your understanding of living out of the gospel as opposed to living up to the gospel?
- 3) How does the gospel restore humility to our lives, our relationships and our community? What is the result when humility is not present in these areas?

Personal Application

A) Have you recently ignored someone or found a person difficult because they were messy and needy? If so, why was this and what does God call you to do?

B) In recent weeks, where have you found yourself trying to live up to the gospel rather than living out of the gospel? Why does this happen and what is the result?

C) In what ways do you make yourself the center of your life and therefore fail to reflect the humility of Christ?

Further Bible Study

- Philippians 2:1-11

Session 8

Opening Discussion

- A) What is your understanding of gentleness and why is it so often missing in our relationships?
- B) Patience is an important characteristic within our relationships. What causes us to often lack this characteristic?

Bible Reading

- Ephesians 4:1-6

DVD

Key Points

- a) People need gentle guidance and help. We display gentleness to others when we don't see their need as an interruption or hassle to us.
- b) Transformation is a process, not an event. We won't display patience to others if we try to change God's plan of redemption from a process into an event.

Discussion Questions

- 1) Within our relationships and during times of personal ministry opportunities, God calls us to display humility, gentleness and patience. How do each of these characteristics relate to God and His desire to change hearts, including our own?
- 2) When we fail to offer gentle guidance and help to people it usually does damage to them. What causes us to lack the quality of gentleness and what might be the result when it is missing from our relationships?
- 3) When we lack patience it is because we are trying to speed God's plan of redemption. When we attempt to change God's method of heart transformation from a process to an event, what might the results be?

Personal Application

A) In your own life, what has been the positive outcome when you displayed humility, gentleness and patience to those close to you? In the same way, what has been the damage when such characteristics are lacking?

B) In recent weeks, have you come across a messy or needy person and viewed him or her as an interruption or hassle to your life? In what way is God calling you to offer gentle help and support to their life?

C) Think of a time when you wanted God to change you or your circumstances overnight. Looking back, can you now see how His process of change was more effective?

Further Bible Study

- Galatians 5:16-26

Session 9

Opening Discussion

- A) Why do people so easily get caught or ensnared in sin? What does this say about the need for personal ministry?
- B) What is your understanding of God wanting to restore us? How do we play a part in this process?

Bible Reading

- Galatians 6:1-2

DVD

Key Points

- a) People have the condition of being easily caught or ensnared in sin because the evil inside of them hooks onto to the evil outside of them. This means people always need help and care.
- b) We are called to help restore one another to how God created us to be. Restoration starts within the heart and takes commitment and perseverance.

Discussion Questions

- 1) In your own words, what does it mean to be caught or ensnared in sin? In terms of our response to people caught in this condition, we can respond in a fruitful or unfruitful manner. Give an example of each of these responses.
- 2) What is the difference between trying to remodel a person and trying to restore a person? Why is trying to remodel a person the wrong response?
- 3) Restoration starts with a person's heart and works its way out. How might we try to change a person's heart from the outside in?

Personal Application

A) Think of a time when you encountered someone (family member, friend, work colleague) caught or ensnared in sin. How did you respond? Looking back, could you have responded in a more fruitful way?

B) In your own life, is there someone whom you are trying to change by remodeling rather than restoring? How will you make the necessary amendments to ensure he or she is restored rather than remodeled?

C) Have you ever tried to help restore someone but found it difficult and frustrating? How does it help to remember that God's method of restoration starts with the heart?

Further Bible Study

- James 4:1-12

Session 10

Opening Discussion

A) Why might we struggle to apply gentleness in our relationships, especially when trying to restore people caught in sin?

B) If we are going to help carry people during their times of trouble, what does it require?

Bible Reading

- Galatians 6:1-2

DVD

Key Points

a) When people are caught in sin, we need to gently restore them in order to avoid doing further damage. We do this as we watch our own hearts, knowing that like them, we are people in need of help.

b) We are called to help carry other people through the daily trials and sufferings of life. We can only do this as we die to our own plans and comforts.

Discussion Questions

1) What is the difference between a wrecking ball response and a gentle response when it comes to helping to restore people? What could be the consequences of a wrecking ball response?

2) How does an understanding of our own sin and our own need of grace help us to minister more effectively to other people? What temptations might we face when ministering to others?

3) What might it practically look like to help carry someone during a time of restoration? What might keep us from carrying others?

Personal Application

A) In your own life, has there been a time when you displayed a wrecking ball response to another person? What were the consequences of this moment and what can you learn from this experience?

B) We all have moments of self-righteousness, especially when it comes to our relationships. What will you practically put in place in order to help avoid such moments?

C) Is there someone in your life right now that you could help carry through a difficult trial or a time of restoration? How will you do this and how will this ultimately draw you closer to Christ?

Further Bible Study

- Luke 9:23-27, Luke 14:25-35