

Small Group:

Why and what are they:

The purpose of small groups is to grow in the faith, to fellowship with believers, to encourage and be encouraged, and to discern the word of God in our life that we might live with purpose in our quest to be made in the image of God.

Small groups provide

1. Community: "None of us is supposed to live the Christian life alone. We gain strength and help from others
2. Intentionality: Our purpose is to become better disciples of Jesus Christ.
3. Accountability: We need others to ask hard questions about our prayer experience, temptations and struggles, and plans for spiritual growth. ¹

A few rules:

1. **Confidentiality is crucial.** What is said in small groups stays there unless permission is given to share. You want to foster safe places to grow in the faith.
2. **Give:**
 - a. encouragement as often as possible
 - b. advice, once in a great while
 - c. reproof, only when absolutely necessary
 - d. Judgement, NEVER ²



¹ Graybeal/Smith 1999, p. 9

² *ibid.*

Gather:

In person or on Zoom, use this time to catch up with each other. If this is the first time with each other, share names, inquire about one another. Be curious (not nosy)

Share:

Share how you have seen God at work recently. Has he brought peace in the midst of trouble, healing, used you to be generous or kind, or has someone been generous or kind to you, etc.

Prayer:

Use the following prayer or have someone open up in prayer.

Lord Jesus, we bring our life before you this day that we might discover the depths of your love, experience your presence, be encouraged by your Spirit, and be humble enough to hear your word for our life. We come as individuals and community to become the people you have called us to be. Amen

Lesson:

Discipleship involves **CALLING** on God, **LISTENING** when God speaks, and **RESPONDING** to God's direction.

Stewardship is discipleship. Stewardship is about being caretakers of what God has given us in order to enrich our lives, our environment, and the lives around us **to reflect the Kingdom of God**. Our resources are our **time, talent, and fruit of our labor**. Our **life** is our #1 resources. No matter who we are, the amount of talent we have, the circumstances we are born in, our mental and physical capabilities, we all have the **ability and responsibility** to be good stewards of our life.

Watch Video: 17 minutes

Self Reflection:

Do my life practices reflect who I imagine God is and what I imagine God's Kingdom to be?

Discuss:

- 1. How often do you reflect upon and consider how your daily habits and routines such as goal setting, inner dialogues, consuming news, exercise habits, eating, conversations, entertainment, etc impact your spiritual development? Do you contemplate your spiritual development?**
- 2. What are some descriptions of what you imagine describe God's Kingdom?**

(Hints of some things. Please add to the list: Forgiveness, justice, hope, mercy, Love, Peace, etc. Is there poverty? Is there hunger? Is there oppression?)

- 3. After Discussing some of what you imagine God's Kingdom to be like, if we are called to reflect that Kingdom now, what are ways we can participate today in the work of Jesus that people might see evidence of his Kingdom now?**

In the video Pastor Cory quoted Anglican Bishop and Theologian N.T. Wright comparing Paul's radical realignment of life into walking with Jesus and belonging to his kingdom as exploring a new country, "as fertile, beautiful and exhilarating, above all as real and tangible in its working, as any that a sixteenth-century sailor might have run across in his voyages of discovery."³

- 3. Have you ever thought about exploring God's kingdom in such a way? What does exploring your faith with this kind of curiosity look like and what would its impact be on your own faith?**

We are to explore our faith as is we are becoming new citizens of a foreign country. We must eat what the locals eat, read what the locals read, socialize, learn, and imitate. As they say when in Rome... But in this case when in the Kingdom of God.

- 4. What does that look like in practice? Do you find God speaking to you about held beliefs that might be incompatible with scripture?**

³ Wright 2019, p.336

5. Reflect on this statement

Richard Rohr, priest, author, and theologian, said, **“To pray and actually mean ‘Thy Kingdom Come,’ we must also be able to say, ‘my kingdoms go’.”**

How often do you examine your life as to which kingdom you mirror more, God’s kingdom or your own?

Talk about the quote and what it makes you think and feel. Is it challenging? Troubling? Liberating?

Read Romans 12:1-2

NIV

1 Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship. **2** Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.

The Message

12 1-2 So here’s what I want you to do, God helping you: Take your everyday, ordinary life—your sleeping, eating, going-to-work, and walking-around life—and place it before God as an offering. Embracing what God does for you is the best thing you can do for him. Don’t become so well-adjusted to your culture that you fit into it without even thinking. Instead, fix your attention on God. You’ll be changed from the inside out. Readily recognize what he wants from you, and quickly respond to it. Unlike the culture around you, always dragging you down to its level of immaturity, God brings the best out of you, develops well-formed maturity in you.

Take 5 minutes to Read silently through one or both of these translations a couple of times. Write down at least 3 observations. What words ‘jumped out’ at you? What sentence spoke to you? Did anything seem odd or challenging, or inspiring?

6. Share with each other some observations you made?

Author Richard Foster notes that a living sacrifice tends to want to get off the altar. Without continual reflection on the state of our citizenship with Christ, we might slip off that table. Staying on that table is hard. Especially if we are holding back on what we offer to Jesus.

Romans 12 talks about stopping with lifeless sacrifice, but living for God and giving our entire life.

Author and Theologian Eugene Peterson reflects on this new Kingdom of God with Jesus that “Substitute sacrifices will no longer do. It’s your life God wants, and it’s mine. Cows, birds, goats, and sheep will no longer be acceptable. It must be your life. By using the word life, Paul leaves no room for escape. Life includes our whole self, the entire collection of feelings, actions, ideas. Brain, nerves, muscles, drives, instincts, perceptions. Life. It’s me that is offered up - all of me.”⁴

- 7. How does this fit in with being good stewards?**
- 8. What do you find difficult in giving over to God? Money? Ideas? Calendar? Agenda? Political ideology? Leisure? Relationships? Etc?**
- 9. Thinking back on the Romans passage, what are ways you can apply those words and observations to your life this week?**

Plato said that the unexamined life is not worth living. Scripture is very clear that we need to bring our life before God

This series is about asking 3 questions of God to help us in our daily examen. Scripture is full of prayers in which the people call upon God especially when they realize that doing things the way they had been doing them wasn’t working anymore.

We need to follow their example if we want to be renewed and have a transformation of the mind.

The Three Questions:

1. Who are you calling me to be?
2. Where are you calling me to go?
3. What are you calling me to give?

Remember, when the people of scripture walked well with God, they:

1. Called Out to God
2. Listened to God
3. Responded to God

⁴ Peterson 2012, p. 1760

Here are 3 prayers from the book of Psalms I would encourage you to memorize and include them in your daily examen. Have someone, or several someones, look up and read these verses.

Psalm 119:133-136

Psalm 119:105

Psalm 139:23-24

Homework:

1. Reflect on these verses.
 2. Take inventory of your habits and if they match your goals
 3. Make a commitment to adjust your habits to meet your goals.
For example:
 - a. **Reading scripture more**
 - b. **Praying more**
 - c. **Blessing someone this week**
 - d. **Listen for God's prompting and acting on it**
- 10. How can we as a group best pray and support you this week?**
(this is for each person to answer as they are comfortable)
- 11. Share any prayer requests in the group**
Remind everyone that what is said in small group is confidential unless permission is given to share. Respect each others privacy and build a safe place in which you each can grow in your faith in mutual encouragement and accountability.
- 12. Choose someone to pray for the group**

Next week we will look at Genesis 1 and 1 Peter 1 & 2 as we explore the first question

WHO IS GOD CALLING YOU TO BE

Footnotes:

Peterson, Eugene. 2012. 'The Message Study Bible: Capturing the Notes and Reflections of Eugene Peterson'. NavPress.

Smith, James Bryan. 1999. 'A Spiritual Formation Workbook: Small-group resources for nurturing Christian growth'. HarperCollins Publishers.

Wright, N.T. 2019. 'The New Testament in Its World. Zondervan Academic.