



A SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION GUIDE



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INTRODUCTION

Thank you for facilitating the beauty of God through your group. The Kingdom of God will be advanced as you follow the Spirit's leading. The great thing about leading a small group is the fact that God desires to see Kingdom beauty manifested in the midst of normal messes of everyday life, which all of us face. To be a follower of Jesus (disciple) means that we practice Kingdom ways in the midst of the messy difficulties we face at work, in families and with our friends. When we put beauty on display in the mess, we change the world in small ways. If your group can begin to do some small things in following Jesus in the midst of the mess, then the Kingdom expands.

As a result, your job is to walk in step with the Spirit. You don't have to be the best teacher, you don't have to be a front-line leader type and you don't even have to possess an out-going personality. The best small group leaders are those who commune with God and pray for their group members. If you start here, God will lead you.

Our desire is to provide you with tools that will support you in this endeavor. For this reason, we have written small group lessons. Each week's lesson corresponds with the weekend sermon during the Beautiful Mess series. In addition, each group member will have access to daily devotionals that will reinforce the message. This is intentional. No one learns something new just because they hear it one time. The best way to learn something and to change is to hear it, read it, write about it and process it

with others. The small group experience provides the venue for processing the information.

Each lesson contains the same elements:

- Suggested Icebreaker
- Worship Suggestions
- DVD Weekly Introductions
- Focus Scripture
- Discussion Questions
- Ministry Time Idea
- Summary Point

These have been written so that you can use it exactly as it is written, but most of the time, God will lead you in slightly different ways. You might do worship first and move the icebreaker down. Someone in the group might bring a worship idea. The ministry time should always be a result of listening to God's leading.

Most likely you will not have time to discuss all of the questions during the small group time. Pray about what you will ask and follow what you sense the Spirit leading you to do. It is almost impossible to write questions that will fit every group. Therefore, you might ask question #1 and the group will answer the next two questions during the natural flow of conversation. If this is the case, skip the next questions and go to the next one.

To help you, we have also provided a DVD that includes short introductions to each week's discussion. Feel free to use this if you so desire. If you feel more comfortable introducing the topic yourself, go for it. We just want to support you and what God is doing in your group.

We have included these lessons on the church website so that group members can download them and print them out if they would like. Your copies are slightly different in that some of the questions are followed by leader's notes that are designed to help you facilitate the discussion.

Whether you are a seasoned Covenant Group leader or a novice leader who is venturing into new territory with a short-term group, rest in the fact that God is moving in your midst. As you see the Spirit doing what the Spirit does, record what you observe. This is a way to celebrate your God and it will build your faith and confidence as a leader.

MOVIE SUGGESTIONS

We have included discussion questions to go along with the following movie suggestions. These questions are also available on our web site at www.whchurch.org/mess. Each one is a different genre of movie. Toy Story is a family film, The Truman Show is a drama, Casablanca is a classic film and Raising Helen is a romantic comedy/drama. These movies address specific issues that are highlighted in the Beautiful Mess adventure. You may either pick one and invite your group to a special movie night on a weekend, or encourage people to get together in random ways and watch one of these movies and see what God might be saying through them.

TOY STORY (FAMILY)

Toy Story is an animated film centering around the toy characters, Woody and Buzz. Woody, a cowboy toy, has been the Number One toy of the house, whose popularity was never challenged... until Buzz Lightyear, the newest, hottest toy of the year, came into the picture. The movie shows how the relationship between Woody and Buzz develops through all the ups and downs of getting to know each other.

1. When Buzz Lightyear was first brought into Woody's life, Woody seemed to become Buzz's enemy. Why did Woody take this stance? How do we see dynamics like this in our own lives?
2. Woody was trying to tell Buzz the truth about himself. What do you think Woody's true intentions were? How does this relate to the idea of telling the "truth in love"?
3. How did Woody's friends react when they found out what Woody did to Buzz? How did they begin to judge Woody? What could have been some different ways to respond?
4. When Woody needed his friends the most, his friends doubted that he could be trusted. Why was this? What happened when they found out more truth about the situation?

5. Woody's judgment of the broken toys caused him to respond to them in a certain way. How would you describe his response to them? How do our fears and misunderstandings allow us to make other people enemies in our own minds?

THE TRUMAN SHOW (DRAMA)

The Truman Show is a dramatic film whose main character (Truman Burbank) has his world turned upside down...by discovering that his world may never have been real! It shows how Truman doesn't know that his entire life is really a "reality show" that is watched by people worldwide and how Truman struggles against the unreality of his past to find out who he is.

1. There is a deep sense in this movie that appearances are not always what they seem, particularly when it comes to how people treat us. We see this in the way Truman's family and friends treat him. What are some situations where others in our lives may treat us like this?
2. There was a tremendous amount of pain that Truman had to be willing to endure to face the truth of his life. How did Truman cope with what he was learning about himself and his life? How do we cope with learning hard truths about our lives?
3. Truman had a lot of people lie to him in his life. How would you feel if you had so many people lie to you? What would be some options for you to respond to these people?
4. Kristof makes a very interesting statement about reality as it relates to Truman and his search for truth. What does he say? Considering this, how does the way that we see the world impact what we do?
5. Truman was conditioned to minimize risk and conflict in his life. Without being willing to have conflict, would Truman ever have gotten "free"? How did he use his struggles to help himself get a new perspective on life?

CASABLANCA (CLASSIC)

Humphrey Bogart and Ingrid Bergman star in this classic film about love, loss and restoration. Bogart plays Rick Blaine, an American club owner in the Moroccan city of Casablanca in the war torn time of World War II. Rick's life takes a number of changes when he becomes the unlikely pos-

essor of important German documents, including the return of a painful past thought long forgotten.

1. Rick Blaine is a man who seems very bitter and jaded against life. What would it be like to be in a friendship with someone like that? What kind of grace would have to be shown to a person like this?
2. Why was Rick so bitter at life? Can you relate to Rick's experience? How so?
3. There are times that some people do things that we don't understand and we are in so much pain that we don't want to reconcile. How did Rick's treatment of Ilsa in the bar demonstrate something like this? What are some different ways that Rick could have related to Ilsa?
4. There is a moment where Rick demonstrates grace and forgiveness concretely to Ilsa. What happens? Why do you think that he did what he did? How can we do something similar with those whom we believe hurt us?

RAISING HELEN (ROMANTIC COMEDY/DRAMA)

Helen Harris has a fancy, fast-paced life as a single woman in a successful fashion career. That is, until the death of her sister places her late sister's children in her care. Through obstacles and in unlikely relationships, Helen comes to learn a lot about what really matters and where happiness really is.

1. Helen's nieces and nephew had a lot of pain to wrestle with as they related to Helen. How do you see the kids "acting out" of their pain? What do you think of Helen's various responses to them? How do we relate in grace and truth to people who are in tremendous pain?
2. Helen was trying the best that she could to live up to certain responsibilities but still struggled. Where do you see this in Helen's behavior? What is a situation that you recall where you have had that kind of experience? How did you deal with that time in your life? What part did healthy community play in that time?
3. Helen had to deal with her sister, Jenny, who made it abundantly clear that she had serious doubts about Helen's parental abilities. How does it

feel when your own friends and family seem to judge you and disbelieve in you? How can you relate to them in Kingdom ways?

4. How did Pastor Dan help Helen's messy life? What kind of grace was he showing through his actions?
5. Helen needed to be able to accept help from her neighbors to take care of the kids. How did a community of friendly people come around her? What are various ways that we push away helpful community?

ICEBREAKER

What is one messy thing in your life that gets on your nerves (i.e. car, office, closet)?

WORSHIP SUGGESTION

Beautiful One (CD 1, Track 2)

Here I Am to Worship (CD 1, Track 8)

DVD

Play DVD introduction to Week 1.

FOCUS SCRIPTURE

He went down with them and stood on a level place. A large crowd of his disciples was there and a great number of people from all over Judea, from Jerusalem, and from the coastal region around Tyre and Sidon, who had come to hear him and to be healed of their diseases. Those troubled by evil spirits were cured, and the people all tried to touch him, because power was coming from him and healing them all. Looking at his disciples, he said: “Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the Kingdom of God. Blessed are you who hunger now, for you will be satisfied. Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh.” (Luke 6:17-21)

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. In today’s world, what does it mean to be “blessed?”

There is not a right or wrong answer for this question. People in the group may come from different religious backgrounds where the word “blessed” means vastly different things. So, be open and prepared for a wide variety of possible answers.

2. In what ways are the “poor,” those who “hunger” and those who “weep” in messy situations?

It’s very important to have an environment of grace and understanding here. Some people may have passionate views about social issues and underprivileged people. Make sure to respect everyone’s comments while watching for areas of possible conflict.

3. The Bible tells us that to be blessed of God means that one is near to

God. Why is it shocking to us that God would come and draw near to people with messy lives?

4. How does our modern culture exclude those who are in a mess from God?

5. What are some different ways that we try to hide our messes from God?
You may want to encourage your group to write this information down. This may be a great opportunity for God to uncover hidden motives for some possible dysfunctional relational habits.

6. Why do you think we try to hide our messes from God?

MINISTRY TIME

Use the last two questions to transition into a time of prayer for one another. Pray that the Spirit will lead your time during these six weeks. If anyone asks for prayer regarding a specific mess in their lives, take some time to pray for it.

SUMMARY POINT

In the Sermon on the Plain, Jesus explains what it means to be a disciple or one who follows the ways of Jesus. We can conclude this because Jesus had just previously chosen the twelve disciples and the sermon begins after we are told that Jesus looked at the disciples and spoke.

The surprising thing is that this sermon does not address the typical things that most modern Christians associate with discipleship. There is nothing here about attending church services, reading the Bible or having a quiet time. Instead, the sermon speaks of those who are blessed of God and of those who are cursed of God, and then addresses how people should relate to one another. When Jesus spoke blessings and woes, he was identifying those who were near to God and those who were far from God. The interesting thing was that Jesus turned people’s expectations upside down. Those who were indeed blessed were those that the culture thought were far from God. In other words, those the culture thought were messed up actually had more potential to see God and receive God’s blessing than those that the culture perceived as blessed.

ICEBREAKER

What is one attribute of a friend that you most prize?

WORSHIP SUGGESTION

Holy Is The Lord (CD 1, Track 10)

In Christ Alone (CD 1, Track 4)

DVD

Play DVD introduction to Week 2.

FOCUS SCRIPTURE

“But to you who are listening I say: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you. If someone slaps you on one cheek, turn the other also. If someone takes your coat, do not withhold your shirt. Give to everyone who asks you, and if anyone takes what belongs to you, do not demand it back. Do to others as you would have them do to you. “If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners love those who love them. And if you do good to those who are good to you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners do that. And if you lend to those from whom you expect repayment, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, expecting to be repaid in full. But love your enemies, do good to them, and lend to them without expecting to get anything back. Then your reward will be great, and you will be children of the Most High, because he is kind to the ungrateful and wicked. Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.”
(Luke 6:27-36)

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Why is the way that we relate to our enemies such a big deal to Jesus?
Work through this question deeply. Some can attempt to give a pat, nice answer to this question, but persevere through that. This question can allow us to see why loving our enemies relates directly to our personal relationship with Christ.
2. Relationships are messy! We face messy situations on a regular basis. What is it that makes relationships so messy?

3. How can our response to an up-close enemy demonstrate our devotion to Jesus?

4. Re-read the passage again. What sticks out to you that might apply when responding to up-close enemies? How do these responses require creativity and prayerfulness?

For the second question, you may want to ask your group to give concrete examples of the forms that healthy response can take. This will help them to see concretely the creativity and prayerfulness we are discussing.

5. What are some situations that we commonly face every day that can be messy relationally?

It's a good idea to use examples that your group members have actually experienced themselves rather than just imagining abstract situations. Don't push the issue. Just suggest that group members share from their own experiences, if they so choose.

MINISTRY TIME

Spend time praying for any relational messes that people might share. Ask God to instill within each individual the courage to respond differently to the messes they face.

SUMMARY POINT

Following Jesus—being his disciple—means that we follow his ways. In the passage he laid out the specifics of how his way's impact relationships with those who do us harm, “enemies,” “those who hate you,” and “those who mistreat you.” Often when we think of our enemies we imagine an enemy of war or a criminal who took something valuable. We don't often rub shoulders with such people. While we should love every person that might present themselves as our enemies, we must also consider another group of people who mistreat us, the enemy that is near us. How do we respond to those whom we call friends when they do us harm? This is where our discipleship is tested everyday. If we are honest, we all face messy relational situations that require response, but they often go unaddressed because we are ill-equipped to respond in a way that represents the Kingdom. Jesus provides a lot of practical advice in these verses to help us navigate such messes.

ICEBREAKER

In high school, what did the inside of your locker look like?

WORSHIP SUGGESTION

Friend of God (CD 2, Track 7)

Wonderful, Merciful Savior (CD 2, Track 9)

DVD

Play DVD introduction to Week 3.

FOCUS SCRIPTURE

“Do not judge, and you will not be judged. Do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven. Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.” (Luke 6:37-38)

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Why does condemnation fail to actually change people?

Condemnation occurs when a person expresses deep disapproval of someone else and pronounces negative judgments on others.

2. Why do people typically depend so much on judgment and condemnation?

3. How does judgment promote isolation and loneliness?

Spend some time really thinking through concrete consequences where people who judge others end up experiencing the pain of loneliness. Some may have some personal experiences to share.

4. How has the forgiveness and grace you have received in your life caused you to change?

This is a chance for people to share their heart. While this is extremely important, it's also important for everyone to keep his or her testimony relatively brief. Otherwise, there might be more time taken for this question than desired.

5. How does forgiveness and grace create room for healthy relationships?

MINISTRY TIME

Take some time to pray for the group. Pray that the group will be a place where people are given room to be who they are and not feel the pressure of judgment or the sting of condemnation.

SUMMARY POINT

Judgment of others divides and isolates. It sets one person against another. Often it is done with the mindset of trying to fix another person's problems. We think we are in a better position to understand, so we judge and try to fix, but the reality is that we are not God. We cannot truly understand another person's situation, and we don't have all the answers to life's problems. It takes a God who sees and knows to provide that kind of wisdom. Jesus tells us that we are to be gracious with one another; that we are to give one another room to mess up. Judgment tries to control and confine. To forgive and give people the room found in grace is often messy and completely out of our control. However, this kind of messiness is just what good relationships are built upon. We give grace and forgiveness and it is returned to us. We all make mistakes. We all have messes. As we give, so also will we receive.

ICEBREAKER

Name one leader whom you respect. Why do you respect this person?

WORSHIP SUGGESTION

Worthy is the Lamb (CD 2, Track 14)

All Who Are Thirsty (CD 2, Track 8)

DVD

Play DVD introduction to Week 4.

FOCUS SCRIPTURE

He also told them this parable: "Can the blind lead the blind? Will they not both fall into a pit? Students are not above their teacher, but all who are fully trained will be like their teacher." (Luke 6:39-40)

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- How do people often set unrealistic expectations for leaders?
Many times, group members may think leaders are perfect or put them on pedestals. This just sets both them and the group leader up for problems later. It may be possible to use this question as a way of finding out about the hidden and not-so-hidden expectations of your group.
- How can these expectations cause leaders to become blind to their own messes?
Leaders often feel pressure to live a sterile life and feel shame if they actually have personal struggles. As a result, they can deny what is really transpiring in their lives.
- How does the realization that leaders walk with a limp impact you and your view of leadership?
- Why does a leader's blindness to his or her weaknesses hinder their leadership?
Don't be afraid to share some of your struggles as a group leader for this question. At the same time, be aware of healthy disclosure. There may be some things that it would be more helpful to discuss with a coach or pastoral presence first. Moreover, this may be a time

for group members to express some things that they may feel about your leadership. Be prayerful about this.

- If growing up in Christ is not elimination of the mess, what is the goal of Christian maturity?
- Unrealistic expectations can cause blindness in anyone, whether leader or not. How has blindness to personal messes crept into your life?

MINISTRY TIME

Allow this last question to move the group into ministry time. Pray for any needs that might arise. Spend a few minutes praying for the leadership of Woodland Hills Church.

SUMMARY POINT

Many assume that becoming a leader in God's Kingdom is about arriving at a level of sterile perfection where messes are excluded. While leaders should have maturity, this maturity is what gives leaders the ability to handle the messes that they face. It does not exclude them from the messes. Blind leaders are those who do not see themselves rightly. They lie to themselves and to others, believing that they are above the mess. Kingdom leaders understand that they are wounded healers, that they don't have it all together. They just have the maturity to look at the mess and face it, even if they make mistakes as they do so. In other words, they lead with a limp.

ICEBREAKER

How did you respond to the challenge to a fight as a kid?

WORSHIP SUGGESTION

Blessed Be Your Name (CD 1, Track 5)

How Great Is Our God (CD 1, Track 3)

DVD

Play DVD introduction to Week 5.

FOCUS SCRIPTURE

“Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in someone else’s eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? How can you say, ‘Friend, let me take the speck out of your eye,’ when you yourself fail to see the plank in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from the other person’s eye.” (Luke 6:41-42)

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What stands out to you from this passage?
2. How does God use relational conflict to point out your planks?
Whether or not we realize this, conflict can be very healthy because it provides an opportunity for self-discovery, particularly discovery of previously unknown behaviors that are not helpful. If there is an example of this in your experience, feel free to share.
3. Why do we typically run from conflict?
4. In what ways have you run from conflict? Do you wish you had responded differently?
Get concrete and write these down. Also, it may be helpful to ask your group to answer the second question by offering something that they would have done differently.
5. Share a time when you dealt with conflict in the right way. What happened as a result?
This answer is subjective. What one person may think was a “right” way to do something

may be offensive to someone else. It’s important to validate a person’s experience while keeping the conversation open to other perspectives.

6. What is God saying to you regarding this passage? Write down your thoughts.

MINISTRY TIME

Allow God to lead you to pray for one another regarding how you deal with conflict. If other needs are shared, spend time praying for those.

SUMMARY POINT

The image of the speck and a plank can be applied to judgment of others, but it also can be applied to relational conflicts. When we are in conflict with another person, we can see the speck in the eye of the other person, but the plank in our own eye is where we need to start. When we allow the relational tension to point out problems in ourselves, then we can deal with the other person without judgment and condemnation. The problem though, is that our culture teaches us to run from conflict. We judge and then flee from the person. The reasons for doing so are many. Unless we deal with the issues that keep us from working through relational tension, we will miss the blessings found in loving and being loved.

ICEBREAKER

If you were to use a fruit to describe your week, what would it be? Why?

WORSHIP SUGGESTION

Beautiful One (CD 1, Track 2)

The Heart of Worship (CD 1, Track 13)

Who Am I (CD 1, Track 11) Consider using this song in place of one of the others or for a separate reflection time.

DVD

Play DVD introduction to Week 6.

FOCUS SCRIPTURE

“No good tree bears bad fruit, nor does a bad tree bear good fruit. Each tree is recognized by its own fruit. People do not pick figs from thornbushes, or grapes from briars. Good people bring good things out of the good stored up in their heart, and evil people bring evil things out of the evil stored up in their heart. For out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks.” (Luke 6:43-45)

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Why is heart change much more important than behavioral change?
2. How does a fixation on behavioral change alone hinder your growth as a disciple?
3. How does evil in your heart come out and impact others? (See the end of verse 45.)
Sometimes when people hear the word “evil”, they think of truly demonic things like homicide, robbery or the like. Evil, however, comes in much simpler forms like jealousy, rage, self-centeredness and pride. Make sure to explain this to the group before answering this question.
4. How has God changed your heart during this series?
Testimony time! Your group has gone through a great journey together. Make sure that everyone has time to respond to this question and share what they’ve experienced. This

means that it will be very important for you as leader to keep everyone’s speaking to a reasonable amount. Allow everyone to be heard.

5. What are some additional heart changes that you want God to do in you?

MINISTRY TIME

Celebrate what God has done in the group. Pray that God will continue this work. If people have shared specific requests in response to question five, offer those to the Lord.

SUMMARY POINT

It is very easy to focus on behavioral or moral changes because we can see them. However, it is harder to change from the inside and then allow that change to impact how we act and talk, but if we want to see any behavioral change, we must first seek heart change, because eventually whatever is in our hearts will come out. Jesus says that what is in our hearts will come out of our mouths. Words are inherently relational in nature. So, if we want to change how we relate to others, we must allow God to change more than our behavior. We need deep change that impacts how we think, feel, and what we will do.

