

missional
sanctification
Big Words
predestination

SERMON-BASED
SMALL GROUP
STUDY GUIDE
SPRING 2010





An Introduction Worth Reading

Big Words: Bigger God

Dear SPC Small Group,

Welcome to another season of studying God's Word together as a group! Small Groups like the one you are in are a vital component in our life of faith, allowing us to blend friendship, scripture, and conversation to bring our teachings from Sunday into our everyday lives. Your commitment to study and be together in faith on a consistent basis makes a huge difference. Nice work!

This spring, our sermon series is called, "Big Words: Bigger God", as we study the big words of the Christian faith.

Trinity, Justification, Sanctification, Sacrament, Salvation, Predestination—these are words rich with purpose and meaning, but they can also feel like a foreign language if we don't understand them.

But here's the thing—God wants us to understand him. God wants us to know who he is, what he is all about, and what he calls us to be. These "big words", therefore, can be great tools for growth in our understanding of the God we worship and serve. Every week, we will

examine a different "big word" and its Scriptural explanation. By doing so, my hope is that each of us will have a greater understanding of our big God, and know more fully his grace and call on our life.

Get ready to go Big!



Jeff Lincicome, Senior Pastor

Keys to Getting the Most out of this Study Guide:

Key #1 – The Study Guide Serves the Group; the Group Does Not Serve the Study Guide

Your group may meet for the better part of an evening or it may meet for just an hour. You may meet every week or you may meet a couple of times a month. Regardless of how frequently or how long you meet, it is unlikely that you will be able to work through every question in this study guide in great detail. That's ok. Find the questions and topics that resonate with your group and pursue them together. Don't feel a need to make it through every question or topic. The goal is to grow in your relationships with God and with one another and to mature together in faith. There may be a week you spend the whole of your time talking about the scripture passage, the sermon, your lives and praying for one another without ever touching the questions in the study guide. Be sensitive to the leading of the Holy Spirit. As you will read in the passage for week #1, He has promised to be with you on this journey.

Key #2 – Be Willing To Wait

Some of the deepest and most significant thoughts and feelings can only be accessed after a period of reflection. If you engage a question or topic together and no one shares right away; be patient. Be thoughtful. Allow for times of fruitful silence as you and others in the group truly consider these scriptures and the discussion questions.

Key #3 – Be Willing To Risk

Our lives are filled with conversations without any real significance. It's easy to talk about sports, the weather, TV shows, and the things that keep us busy. There certainly is a place in life for those sorts of conversations and often these topics are a part of beginning relationships. But this study will invite you at times to participate in another sort of conversation. You will be invited to share together the things that lie below the surface. You may not be ready initially to engage in these kinds of conversations together and that's okay. But, when you are ready to do so, you are invited to risk sharing with the group the kinds of things you would share only with friends. You are invited to grow together by coming to know one another at a deeper level through Bible Study, prayer and authentic conversation. But that won't happen without your being willing to risk sharing with the group.





Sammamish Presbyterian Church
Sermon-Based Small Group Study Guide

TRINITY

John 14:15-27

Sammamish Presbyterian Church Vision Statement

Knowing God, Growing Together, Doing Something About It.

Purpose of our Time Together

To live out together God's call for us to know Him, grow together, and serve in the name of Christ.

Scripture for the Week's Sermon

Acts 18:1-18 and 1 Corinthians 1:1-9

The Big Idea

TRINITY. The Bible reveals a God who is at His very essence in relationship. One God, Three Persons—why is it important for our lives?

Taking it to the Streets

Find ways to connect your small group to mission at the end of each chapter.

●●● FOR SMALL GROUPS

Entry Activity...

Have you ever had a hard time articulating a difficult concept to a child or to someone from a different culture? What was the concept or idea? What made explaining it a challenge? What strategies can one employ when attempting to explain a complex idea?

Knowing God

Read together John 14:15-27

1. As you reflect on this passage and the related sermon, what key points were meaningful to you? What ideas were new to you?

“An ordinary simple Christian kneels down to say his prayers. He is trying to get in touch with God. But if he is a Christian he knows that what is prompting him to pray is also God: God, so to speak, inside him. But he also knows that all his real knowledge of God comes through Christ, the Man who was God—that Christ is standing beside him, helping him to pray, praying for him. You see what is happening. God is the thing to which he is praying—the goal he is trying to reach. God is also the thing inside him which is pushing him on—the motive power. God is also the road or bridge along which he is being pushed to that goal. So that the whole threefold life of the three-personal Being is actually going on in that ordinary little bedroom where an ordinary man is saying his prayers.” C.S. Lewis, Mere Christianity.

2. What illustrations or metaphors have you heard that try to explain the Trinity? How are these illustrations helpful? How are they inadequate?

3. One illustration that has been suggested is a musical chord of three notes. It includes three separate notes, but one harmonious sound. Is this illustration helpful? If so, how? How is it also inadequate?

4. It is important to remember that the triune God, or the Trinity, will always remain a mystery, and all language about God is inadequate. Yet seeking understanding is an essential part of our life of faith.

In verses 17 and 20 how does Jesus describe his relationship with his Father and their relationship with us? What do you think this means? What questions do you have about what it means?

5. How does Jesus describe the Holy Spirit and our relationship with the Spirit? Translations differ in the name Jesus uses for the Holy Spirit (Advocate, Counselor, Friend, Helper, Comforter). What do these words convey to you?

6. Jesus says that the Father will send the Holy Spirit to remind the disciples of what Jesus has said to them. How does this statement demonstrate the unity and harmony of the Trinity? How does it demonstrate distinction between the persons of the Trinity?

7. The classical teaching of the Trinity is that God is "one in essence, distinguished in three persons." How can we reconcile the two statements: "God is one"; "God is three persons"?

8. Several times Jesus says that those who love him will keep his commandments or will keep his word. To what commandments is he referring?

Growing Together

9. "We do not truly respect doctrines if we simply repeat them as trained parrots might. Indeed, such mindless repetition often results in the subversion of the real intent of church teachings." (Daniel Migliore)

Which Person of the Trinity has received the most attention in your faith journey? Is one of the Persons ignored or neglected?

10. Why does it matter that we seek to understand the doctrine of the Trinity? What difference does it make in our lives individually and together?

11. C. S. Lewis said, "If God was a single person, then before the world was made, he was not love." What does he mean by this statement? How does the doctrine of the Trinity help us understand the declaration, "God is love"? (1 John 4:8)

12. What does the doctrine of the Trinity say to us about the power of God and the way God uses power?¹ How does it help us understand the love of God?

13. How real is the person of the Holy Spirit to you? Would it make any difference in our lives if the Holy Spirit were not mentioned in the Bible? Do we live as if the Spirit is active in our lives?

Doing Something About It

14. In our daily lives, how does our understanding of the Trinity, “the great love story of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit”, affect the way we treat one another? In our families? In our small group? In our church? In our relationships?

15. How does knowing that God is relational in His essence affect our commitment to work for justice and wholeness for all people?

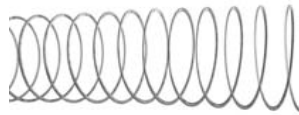
16. How does our understanding of the Trinity affect our attitude toward and stewardship of the creation? (See Romans 8:19-23.)

17. How do we reflect the genuine community present in the Trinity in our community? What ought to be present in our relationships with one another?

18. For all eternity God's very being has been and is in relationship. We are created in God's image. What does this tell us about our very being? For what have we been created?

19. James Torrance writes, "The human person is someone who finds his true being in relation, in love, in communion." "In order for me to be 'I', there must be a 'you'." (Martin Buber)

Are you finding your true being in relation to others? How is this taking place in your life? How have meaningful relationships helped you to discover who you really are?



Extension Ideas

for those who might want to read, consider, or discuss further, either individually or as a group...

For Further Consideration

Christians affirm their faith in God as the sovereign Lord of all creation who has done a new and gracious work in Jesus Christ and who continues to be active in the world through the power of the Spirit. God is the majestic creator of the heavens and the earth, the servant redeemer of the world gone astray, and the transforming Spirit who empowers new beginnings of human life.... To use the familiar terms of the biblical and classical theological tradition, God is "the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit."

Rightly understood, the doctrine of the Trinity is not an arcane, speculative doctrine; rather, it is that understanding of God which is appropriate to and congruent with the gospel message. The doctrine of the Trinity is not a revealed doctrine. It did not fall down from heaven, nor was it etched in tablets of stone. It is the product of the reflection of the church on the gospel message over many centuries.

The God known in Jesus Christ is God over us, God for us, and God in us—the loving God, the gracious Lord Jesus Christ, and the community—creating Spirit of God (2 Corinthians 13:14). These are not three Gods, but distinct personal expressions of the one yet differentiated love of God. —Daniel Migliore, *Faith Seeking Understanding*, pp 59-61

¹To speak thus of God as triune is to set all of our prior understandings of what is divine in question. God is not a solitary monad but free, self-communicating love. God is not the supreme will-to-power over others, but the supreme will-to-community in which power and life are shared. To speak of God as that ultimate power whose being is in giving, receiving, and sharing love, who gives life to others and wills to live in community, is to turn upside down our understandings of both divine and human power. The reign of the triune God is the rule of sovereign love rather than the rule of force. A revolution in our understanding of the true power of God and of fruitful human power is thus implied when God is described as triune. God is *not* absolute power, *not* infinite egocentrism, *not* majestic solitariness. The power of the triune God is not coercive but creative, sacrificial, and empowering love; and the glory of the triune God consists not in dominating others but in sharing life with others. In this sense, confession of the triune God is the only understanding of God that is appropriate to and consistent with the New Testament declaration that God is love. (1 John 4:18) —Daniel Migliore, *Faith Seeking Understanding*, pp 63,64

Taking it to the Streets Connecting our Study to Mission

Trinity—God in Relationship

Mission Emphasis—Agros is committed to breaking the cycle of poverty for rural families in Central America and Mexico by enabling landless communities to achieve land ownership and economic stability. We have learned that the root causes of poverty extend across communities and are passed down from generation to generation, and so the Agros developmental model is holistic, sustainable, and focused on long term results. This commitment to the long-term sustainability of a whole community serves to break the cycle of poverty in all its forms.

Action—Support for the Agros team in Mexico, the local Agros staff, and the families of people who are on an Agros mission trip.

Ways your small group can participate—Your small group could adopt a family in the SPC congregation while members of that family are on an Agros mission trip. Prayers are always welcome for the person in Mexico. For the family remaining at home, your small group could ask them to dinner, check in with a phone call, visit personally, or bring a meal for the family's reunion dinner. Other ways you could encourage the Agros ministry include sending a note of appreciation to the Agros staff, thanking them for the work they do or by donating an item to "The Journey Continues" auction supporting Agros on May 22. Auction items can be donated by contacting auktion@spconline.org.



SALVATION
2 Corinthians 5:16-21

Sammamish Presbyterian Church Vision Statement

Knowing God, Growing Together, Doing Something About It.

Purpose of our Time Together

To live out together God's call for us to know Him, grow together, and serve in the name of Christ.

Scripture for the Week's Sermon

2 Corinthians 5:16-21

The Big Idea

SALVATION is about God reconciling our relationship with Him through Jesus Christ.

Taking it to the Streets

Find ways to connect your small group to mission at the end of each chapter.

●●● **FOR SMALL GROUPS**

Entry Activity...

Describe a time when you were truly "saved by the bell"—saved by a friend who showed up, saved by a change of plans, saved by a bit of good fortune. What was the first thing you did after the crisis was averted?

Knowing God

Read aloud 2 Corinthians 5:16-21

1. As you reflect on this passage and the related sermon, what key points were meaningful to you? Were any ideas new to you?

2. What does the word reconciliation mean? What is the message of reconciliation that has been entrusted to us?

3. Where does this reconciliation come from and through whom does it come?

4. This passage says that God “made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.” What does it mean that Christ was made sin? What does Paul mean when he says that we “might become the righteousness of God”?

5. Martin Luther prayed, “Lord Jesus, you are my righteousness, I am your sin. You became what you were not, that I might become what I was not.” We have recently observed Good Friday and Easter. How do these observances help us understand Christ becoming sin for us and our becoming the righteousness of God? What was significant for you about these worship experiences?

Growing Together

“Mention salvation, and almost all Western Christians assume that you mean going to heaven when you die. Salvation, of course, means rescue.” —(N.T. Wright)

6. If the meaning of salvation is “rescue,” what have we been rescued from? What have we been rescued for? Is our salvation simply a ticket to heaven when we die? When and where does salvation begin?

7. Jesus said to Nicodemus, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born anew, he cannot see the kingdom of God. Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born anew.'" John Stott writes, "Paul's statement is in some ways even more dramatic, for he blurts out in a sentence which has no verbs: 'If anyone in Christ—new creation!'" How does this new creation take place? What all becomes new? What are the characteristics of this new creation?

8. How does this "new life" change our relationship with God? With ourselves? With one another?

9. What in your old life are you glad is gone? Is it a struggle to keep parts of the old life gone?

Doing Something About It

week two

10. In verse 16 Paul writes, "From now on, therefore, we regard no one from a human point of view, even though once we knew Christ from a human point of view." How does new life in Christ change, not only the way we see Jesus Christ, but also the way we view and treat one another?

11. If the message of reconciliation has been entrusted to us, in what practical ways can we serve as Christ's "ambassadors" (or representatives) to one another and to those around us?

12. Have you personally said yes to the message of reconciliation to God? If so, what has this meant in your own life? Describe your experience.

If not, how might you respond to this message?

13. Do you always feel reconciled to God? What contributes to your feeling "new," "reconciled," and "forgiven"? What detracts from these feelings? Do our feelings about our relationship with God change the way God sees us?

Related Scriptures

Behold, the Lord's hand is not shortened, that it cannot save, or his ear dull, that it cannot hear; but your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you so that he does not hear. Isaiah 59:1, 2

God is light and in him is no darkness at all. If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not live according to the truth. 1 John 1:5, 6

Jesus answered them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who commits sin is a slave to sin." John 8:34

You shall call his name Jesus for he will save his people from their sins. Matthew 1:21

The Son of man came to seek and to save the lost. Luke 19:10
We have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son as the Savior of the world. 1 John 4:14

Related Quotations

"We have high ideals but weak wills. We want to live a good life, but we are chained in the prison of our self-centeredness. However much we may boast of being free, we are in reality but slaves. It is no use giving us rules of conduct; we cannot keep them. Let God go on saying, 'Thou shalt not', yet we shall to the end of time. A lecture will not solve our problem; we need a Savior. The education of the mind is not enough without a change of heart.... Man cannot work it within himself. He cannot operate on himself. Again, he needs a Savior."

John R.W. Stott, *Basic Christianity*, pp 77, 79

"Salvation is a wonderfully comprehensive term. It is a great mistake to suppose that it is merely a synonym for forgiveness. God is as much concerned with our present and future as our past. His plan is to first reconcile us to himself, and then progressively liberate us from self-centeredness and bring us into harmony with our fellow men. We owe our forgiveness and reconciliation chiefly to the death of Christ, but it is by his Spirit that we can be set free from ourselves and in his church that we can be united in a fellowship of love."

John R.W. Stott, *Basic Christianity*, p. 98

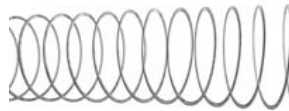
Taking it to the Streets **Connecting our Study to Mission**

Salvation—Reconciling relationship

Mission Emphasis—*International Justice Mission* is a human rights agency that secures justice for victims of slavery, sexual exploitation and other forms of violent oppression. IJM lawyers, investigators and aftercare professionals work with local officials to ensure immediate victim rescue and aftercare, to prosecute perpetrators and to promote functioning public justice systems.

Action—Learn about SPC’s commitment to IJM and provide financial support.

Ways your small group can participate —As a Small Group: attend the talk Sunday Night, April 18th, on IJM. Perhaps you could agree to meet together as a group to share what you learn that night and how you feel called to respond. Another way to support IJM would be to collect your loose change for a designated period of time and give it to IJM (Loose Change to loosen the chains of slavery).



Extension Ideas

for those who might want to read, consider, or discuss further, either individually or as a group...

“When human beings are saved, in the past as a single coming-to-faith event, in the present through acts of healing and rescue...and in the future when they are finally raised from the dead, this is always so that they can be genuine human beings in a fuller sense than they otherwise would have been. And genuine human beings, from Genesis 1 onward, are given the mandate of looking after the creation, of bringing order to God’s world, of establishing and maintaining communities. To suppose that we are saved, as it were, for our own private benefit, for the restoration of our own relationship with God (vital though that is!) and for our eventual homecoming and peace in heaven...is like a boy being given a baseball bat as a present and insisting that since it belongs to him, he must always and only play with it in private. But of course you can only do what you’re meant to do with a baseball bat when you’re playing with other people. And salvation only does what it’s meant to do when those who have been saved, are being saved, and will one day fully be saved, realize that they are saved not as souls but as wholes and not for themselves alone but for what God longs to do through them. The point is this. When God saves people in this life, by working through his Spirit to bring them to faith and by leading them to follow Jesus in discipleship, prayer, holiness, hope and love, such people are designed...to be a sign and foretaste of what God wants to do for the entire cosmos. What’s more, such people are not just to be a sign and foretaste of that ultimate salvation; they are to be *part of the means by which* God makes this happen in the present and the future. That is what Paul insists on when he says (Romans 8:19) that the whole creation is waiting with eager longing not just for its own redemption, its liberation from corruption and decay, but *for God’s children to be revealed*: in other words, for the unveiling of those redeemed humans through whose stewardship creation will at last be brought back into the wise order for which it was made.”

—N.T. Wright, *Surprised by Hope*, pp 194, 199, 200



JUSTIFICATION

Romans 3:21-31; Romans 4:24-25

Sammamish Presbyterian Church Vision Statement

Knowing God, Growing Together, Doing Something About It.

Purpose of our Time Together

To live out together God's call for us to know Him, grow together, and serve in the name of Christ.

Scripture for the Week's Sermon

Romans 3:21-31; Romans 4:24-25

The Big Idea

Justification is about God paying the penalty for our sin, thus making us right before God.

Taking it to the Streets

Find ways to connect your small group to mission at the end of each chapter.

●●● FOR SMALL GROUPS

Entry Activity...

Share with your group a favorite fictional courtroom scene from a movie, a book, or a television series. What is so memorable or compelling to you about the scene? Why does a courtroom make such a good forum for high drama?

Knowing God

Read Romans 3: 19-20

1. What does Paul say about man's supreme problem or dilemma?

2. If we apply the metaphor of a courtroom to these verses, who is Paul declaring is on trial? Who is the jury? What law is claimed to have been broken? What defense is available to the defendants?

3. Why do we need to be made righteous?

Read Romans 3: 21-26

4. What is God doing by declaring a person justified?

5. How can a guilty person be justified?

6. John R.W. Stott in *Authentic Christianity* writes: "If God justifies sinners freely by grace, on what ground does he do so? How is it possible for a righteous God to declare the unrighteous to be unrighteous without compromising his righteousness or condoning our unrighteousness?"

How does Christ's death in our place prove God both just and merciful?

Read Romans 3:27-31

7. What three points does Paul make in this passage?

Growing Together

From *Truths That Transform, Christian Doctrines for Life Today*, by D. James Kennedy, Coral Ridge Presbyterian Church: "...we come to holy ground. We come to the great central theme of the doctrines of redemption in the Church of Christ. We come to *Justification*.This is the doctrine which became the very heartbeat of the Protestant Reformation... John Calvin said, 'This is the foremost pillar of religion.'....The immortal Bavinck said, 'This is the article of the creed by which the Church either stands or falls.'" (p. 73)

"In this doctrine lies the truth that answers the greatest need that man has: How can man be rightly related to God?" (p. 74)

8. If we are justified by faith, what then should our attitude be about "the law"?

9. If we are justified by faith, what then should our attitude be about good works?

10. Why was justification a hard doctrine for the Jews? Why is it a hard doctrine for some people today?

11. Imagine yourself in a courtroom, accused of a crime and found guilty. Now imagine the judge sentencing himself to serve the sentence instead of you. What sorts of things would you be thinking and feeling as you walked out the doors of the courthouse? How might you live differently moving forward?

12. What feels important about understanding how we have been justified before God? How can we continue to remind one another of the heart of God's action for us in Jesus Christ?

Doing Something About It

Read Romans 4:24 - 5:5

13. What are some results of being justified?

14. How does understanding this doctrine affect our attitude about good works toward unbelievers and toward Christians we think are hypocrites?

15. Have you ever felt yourself able to "rejoice in our sufferings"? To what extent do you think you believe in the power of hope?

16. People occasionally want to “justify” their actions or decisions. Why do they want to do that, i.e. what do they hope to accomplish? Does understanding the way that God has justified us through Jesus Christ make justifying your actions to others feel more or less necessary?

17. Think back on your conversation today in your small group. Work to translate that conversation into one prayer request for yourself to share with the group.

Quotes to Consider

D. James Kennedy, *Truths That Transform*: “The doctrine of Justification is infinitely more than mere forgiveness. A governor or executive may forgive a criminal; a judge may pardon one; and yet no judge has ever yet constituted a pardoned criminal righteous. Nor has he ever adopted him into his family; nor has he ever given him an inheritance; nor has he given unto him his name. But all of these things and many others God has done for us. He declares us to be righteous only through the righteousness of Jesus Christ our Lord.” (p. 79)

John R.W. Stott, *Authentic Christianity*, : “Justification describes the position of acceptance with God which he gives us when we trust Christ as our Saviour. It is a legal term, borrowed from the law courts, and its opposite is condemnation. To justify is to acquit, to declare an accused person to be just, not guilty. So the divine judge, because his Son has borne our condemnation, justifies us, pronouncing us righteous in his sight. ‘Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus (Rom. 8:1)’” (p. 173)

Taking it to the Streets Connecting our Study to Mission

Justification—Restoring people’s lives to God’s desired wholeness

Mission Emphasis—*Habitat for Humanity* (provides decent housing for low income families), *Eastside Domestic Violence* (provides counseling and shelter for victims of domestic abuse), *Providence Marianwood* (provides high-quality nursing care with love, compassion and respect for the dignity of all individuals), *Faith in Action* (brings volunteers of different faiths together to care for their homebound neighbors who may be isolated and living with chronic health conditions or disabilities).

Action—Aiding those in our community who are living a life severely impacted by poverty, violence, or the physical and/or mental limitations of aging.

Ways your small group can participate—*Volunteer to build* the Taunton’s home in Issaquah Highlands through Habitat For Humanity. Small groups can sign up to work on the third Saturday of any month for Habitat for Humanity. *Help Eastside Domestic Violence* restore the lives of women and children who have suffered the trauma of domestic violence. *Providence Marianwood has opportunities* for small groups to provide a group social activity for the elderly residents at Marianwood. It could be a night of bingo, a sing-a-long, a creative art project, or something unique from your small group. The homebound and elderly are often the forgotten members of our society. *Volunteer through Faith in Action* to restore some of those lives to right and what God desires for them.

Other Resources

William Barclay, *The Letter to the Romans; Daily Bible Studies*; Westminster Press, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; 1975

David F. Wright, Sinclair B. Ferguson, J.I. Packer (eds); *The New Dictionary of Theology: Justification*; IVP (pp 359-361)



SANCTIFICATION

Philippians 2:12-13, 3:7-16

Sammamish Presbyterian Church Vision Statement

Knowing God, Growing Together, Doing Something About It.

Purpose of our Time Together

To live out together God's call for us to know Him, grow together, and serve in the name of Christ.

Scripture for the Week's Sermon

Philippians 2:12-13; 3:7-16

The Big Idea

SANCTIFICATION. God is interested in making us more like him, starting now. The process of our sanctification opens up our awareness and experience of God.

Taking it to the Streets

Find ways to connect your small group to mission at the end of each chapter.

●●● FOR SMALL GROUPS

Entry Activity...

Read together Philippians 2:12-13 and 3:7-16

Scripture contains athletic metaphors for living the Christian life. One is found in I Corinthians 9:24-27. Paul says, "Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize. Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last; but we do it to get a crown that will last forever. Therefore I do not run like a man running aimlessly; I do not fight like a man beating the air. No, I beat my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize."

1. Have you ever competed for an athletic prize? What all is involved in training for an important athletic event?

2. Do you see your life of faith as one that requires the same kind of training and dedication? How is living out the Christian life similar to training for an athletic competition? How is it different?

Knowing God

Read aloud Philippians 2:12-13 and 3:7-16

3. As you reflect on the passages in Philippians and this week's sermon, what ideas are new to you and/or particularly significant to you?

4. Last week, we learned that justification is the act of grace whereby we are made righteous (regarded to be without sin) before God. It is important to know that sanctification is a process for those already having faith in Christ. If we are already declared righteous, what does Paul mean in Philippians 2:12 when he says, "Work out your own salvation"?

5. Who does Paul say is the one doing the work in us? If God is the originator of our faith (justification) and the perfecter of our faith (sanctification), what is our role?

6. When is our sanctification complete? How do we keep from growing weary on this journey?

The overarching idea of sanctification is that God wants to transform all believers into the image of Jesus Christ and set us apart for himself through the power of the Holy Spirit. This is a process that lasts our entire life. "Our sanctification does not depend upon changing our works, but in doing that for God's sake which we commonly do for our own...It is a great delusion to think that the times of prayer ought to differ from other times. We are as strictly obliged to adhere to God by action in the times of action as by prayer in the season of prayer". Brother Lawrence, *The Practice of the Presence of God* (quoted in Dallas Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy*)

7. What do Brother Lawrence's words mean, "...doing that for God's sake which we commonly do for our own"? How can we realistically practice God's presence in our lives on a daily basis?

8. Who is the one actually doing the work in us?

Doing Something About It

9. In *The Divine Conspiracy*, Dallas Willard said, "As his disciple I am not necessarily learning how to do special religious things, either as a part of 'full-time service' or as a part of 'part-time service'. My discipleship to Jesus is, within clearly defined definable limits, not a matter of what I do, But of how I do it. And it covers everything, 'religious' or not." Is this new thinking for you? If so, what do you think about this all-encompassing characterization of sanctification?

10. How can we approach living our daily Christian lives as the athlete who "trains hard"? Are you "running hard for the finish line"?

11. What role does discipline play in training hard and “pressing on toward the goal” to which God has called us? How is that similar to the role of discipline in athletic training?

12. What “spiritual disciplines” are you currently pursuing? Have you sought to bring a sense of discipline to your prayer life? To your reading and reflecting on scripture? To your sharing in fellowship with other Christians? To your giving and serving habits? How does discipline influence each of these pursuits?

13. If your small group were to take on the role of your “spiritual athletic trainer” and push you to work harder, sweat more and go faster in your spiritual disciplines, what would you like them to ask of you? Is there any discipline where you feel you might need a “spotter” to make sure you don’t pull something?

14. As you reflect on your journey of faith as a follower of Jesus Christ, do you see yourself becoming more and more like Jesus Christ as time has passed? What things are most responsible for your Christian growth over time? What patterns of growth and or atrophy do you notice?

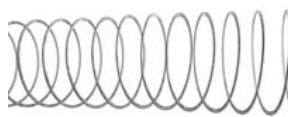
Taking it to the Streets Connecting our Study to Mission

Sanctification—God’s desire for making us more like Him. Opening up our awareness and experiences of God.

Mission Emphasis—V.O.I.C.E. (mentors provide one-on-one support for students in the Issaquah School District), MOPS (is a support network ministry of women who share the common bond of preschool age children).

Action—Loving children is a refining process and teaches us a lot about ourselves, God and who we are called to be.

Ways your small group can participate—Make a long term commitment to a child by volunteering to mentor a child one hour a week through the VOICE program or volunteering for a short term/one time experience as a child caretaker during a MOPS program.



Extension Ideas

for those who might want to read, consider, or discuss further, either individually or as a group...

Related scripture texts: John 17:13-23, Matthew 11:28-30, James 2:14-20

Books or commentaries: *The Divine Conspiracy* by Dallas Willard

Quotes to Consider

"William Temple used to illustrate the point this way. It is no good giving me a play like Hamlet or King Lear and telling me to write a play like that. Shakespeare could do it; I can't. And it is no good showing me a life like the life of Jesus and telling me to live a life like that. Jesus could do it; I can't. But if the genius of Shakespeare could come and live in me, then I could write plays like that. And if the Spirit of Jesus could come and live in me, then I could live a life like that. That is the secret of Christian sanctity. It is not that we should strive to live like Jesus, but that his Spirit should come and live in us. To have him as our example is not enough; we need him as our Savior. It is thus through his atoning death that the penalty of our sins may be forgiven; it is through his indwelling Spirit that the power of our sins may be broken." John Stott, *Basic Christianity*

"Sanctification...describes the process by which justified Christians are changed into the likeness of Christ. When God justifies us, he declares us righteous through Christ's death for us; when he sanctifies us, he makes us righteous through the power of his Holy Spirit within us... sanctification concerns our inward growth in holiness of character. Further, whereas our justification is sudden and complete, so that we shall never be more justified than when we were on the day of our conversion, our sanctification is gradual and incomplete. It takes a lifetime even to approach Christlikeness." *Authentic Christianity* by John R.W. Stott

"...we are active in our sanctification, though it is still all of grace. We are to make use of the means of sanctification which are the Word of God, prayer, obedience to all of God's commandments, the sacraments, and worship. The Holy Spirit takes our use of these means and makes them the method by which He sanctifies us. But let me remind you that you could read the Word of God until you were green in the face, and you could pray until your knees were worn smooth, and you would not be sanctified one bit if the Holy Spirit of God does not sanctify you. Therefore, you can see that there is the required instrument of faith to reach out and take hold of God. It is faith that looks unto the Spirit of God and cries out that God would make us holy, would sanctify us, would make us pure, and would cleanse us from our sins." D. James Kennedy, Coral Ridge Presbyterian Church, *Truths That Transform, Christian Doctrines For Your Life Today*



PREDESTINATION

Ephesians 1:3-6

Sammamish Presbyterian Church Vision Statement

Knowing God, Growing Together, Doing Something About It.

Purpose of our Time Together

To live out together God's call for us to know Him, grow together, and serve in the name of Christ.

Scripture for the Week's Sermon

Ephesians 1:3-6

The Big Idea

PREDESTINATION. God said "Yes" to us before we were able to respond to Him.

Taking it to the Streets

Find ways to connect your small group to mission at the end of each chapter.

●●● FOR SMALL GROUPS

Entry Activity...

The popular TV show *Lost* has been both fascinating and frustrating its viewers for six seasons. One of the most intriguing twists in the show has been the element of time travel and predestination. This phenomenon is addressed by a blogger named Sean on the online version of *Discover* magazine¹. He puts it this way:

This is where I think *Lost* really shines. One of the major themes of the show is **destiny vs. free will**, as embodied in the characters of Locke and Jack. Are there places where we are "meant" to be, or can we choose our paths for ourselves?

The article goes on to ask its readers some questions:

"Why does time travel fascinate us, anyway? Why do we find it so interesting? Part of it is the interest in changing the past — all of us have things we'd like to do over. But part of it is the fear of predestination. We like to think that, while the past is set in stone, we can make choices about our future — we have free will."

Where are you in the debate of "destiny vs. free will"? Do we have choices or is every moment of our lives already determined?

Knowing God

Read aloud Ephesians 1:3-14

1. Some people think that in order to "come to God", that there is a long list of things that we must do. Paul writes that the opposite is actually true, that God was the first to take action in creating the relationship that we have with Him. What other things has God done for us?

2. When Paul writes that we were chosen "before the foundation of the world", when exactly do you think he means? Does this mean that God knew each of us and the details of our lives even before He created the heavens and the earth?

3. For what purpose did God choose us?

4. How do you feel when you read verses 5 & 6? What does the passage tell us about the way God sees us?

Growing Together

The Rev. Dr. Fred R. Anderson from the Madison Avenue Presbyterian Church writes,

"The joy of being chosen: do you remember it? My earliest memory of it was on a vacant lot somewhere--I was eight or nine--bats, a ball and gloves scattered about. A bat was tossed into the air by Wilbur Larkin, and Johnny Francisco caught it. They took turns, hand over hand up the bat, until Wilbur was holding the tip and got first choice, and chose me--I hit a pretty long ball for a nine year old!--the joy of being chosen. Or was it seated about a campfire, high in the mountains, eyes closed awaiting someone to come tap you on the shoulder, lead you away and initiate you into an honored secret society of the Y.M.C.A., so that you too were now a Ragger? Was it a sorority tap, or having your name read out in a

competition; you were a finalist--perhaps the finalist of all finalists? Was it seeing your name posted on the bulletin board next to the role you had been chosen for in the school play, the phone call that came saying your audition had gotten you the part, or the envelope, when opened, told you that you had been accepted to that college or graduate school you so longed to attend; the joy of being chosen. This is what Jesus is saying to us in today's gospel: we are the chosen, and it will bring us joy."

5. Discuss a time in your life when you were chosen. What were you chosen for? How did this make you feel? Was it a surprise or did you work for it?

6. Paul says that we are predestined to adoption as sons and daughters through Christ. What does it mean to you to know that you have been chosen by God?

7. Does being chosen by God make life easier or harder? How might this knowledge change how we view each other?

8. Have you known someone that you considered to be “lost” who then later came to know Jesus? How does this passage give us hope for ourselves, for others and for our world?

9. Think about how you came to faith in Jesus Christ. Where do you see God at work in that process of choosing you and calling you to Himself?

Doing Something About It

10. Think about some various groups that you have been a part of in your adult life. Talk about examples where you have been chosen to be a member, as well as those situations where you have done the choosing to join a group. Which process is more affirming? Which places more responsibility on you?

11. As we make choices about our behavior, relationships, jobs, faith and communities, how does knowing that God has chosen us make a difference in our decision making?

12. How might we be instruments of God's grace so that others may enjoy His gifts as well?

13. What might it mean to see ourselves as being chosen to be a light that shines in the darkness rather than a light that escapes the darkness? Read Philippians 1:6. Paul writes that God chose you for a purpose, and that God promises to work out that purpose in you. How does this knowledge give us hope? What is your role in the process? What is God's role?

For Further Consideration

For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.

—Ephesians 2:10

Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me His prisoner, but share with me in the sufferings for the gospel according to the power of God, who has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was given to us in Christ Jesus before time began.

—2 Timothy 1:8-9

The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.

—2 Peter 3:6

WE ARE TO HAVE A GOOD HOPE FOR ALL. And although God knows who are his, and here and there mention is made of the small number of elect, yet we must hope well of all, and not rashly judge any man to be a reprobate. For Paul says to the Philippians, "I thank my God for you all" (now he speaks of the whole Church in Philippi), "because of your fellowship in the Gospel, being persuaded that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ. It is also right that I have this opinion of you all" (Phil. 1:3 ff)

—The Book of Confessions (5.055)

Also: John 3:16, Luke 11:9, 2 Peter 1:10, 1 Corinthians 1:3, Philippians 2:12-13.

¹<http://blogs.discovermagazine.com/cosmicvariance/2010/01/28/time-travel-in-lost-the-metaphorics-of-predestination/>

Taking it to the Streets Connecting our Study to Mission

Predestination—The knowledge that God chose himself for us frees us from having to earn His love.

Mission Emphasis—*Issaquah Food Bank* provides food and clothing and related services to individuals and families who find themselves in need of basic necessities. The organization strives to help people remain self-sufficient in their community and to maintain a sense of individual worth and dignity.

Action—Help to free a family from the burden of providing food.

Ways your small group can participate—As a small group, decide to support the Issaquah Food Bank by shopping together for items to donate to the food bank or purchase a grocery gift card to give to SPC to use to assist families in an emergency situation.



SACRAMENT

Acts 2:37-42

Sammamish Presbyterian Church Vision Statement

Knowing God, Growing Together, Doing Something About It.

Purpose of our Time Together

To live out together God's call for us to know Him, grow together, and serve in the name of Christ.

Scripture for the Week's Sermon

Acts 2:37-42

The Big Idea

Sacraments are visible signs of God's invisible grace.

Taking it to the Streets

Find ways to connect your small group to mission at the end of each chapter.

●●● FOR SMALL GROUPS

Entry Activity...

Frederick Buechner, in his book Wishful Thinking, suggests that sacramental or "holy" moments don't always happen in church.

Can you think of some "sacramental moments" in your life—moments when something tangible connected you with the transcendent reality of God? Such moments might be the birth of a child/grandchild, an "aha" connection with a friend, being with someone who's dying, experiencing an unexplained sense of hope or peace, etc.

Share with your group some of the "sacramental moments" you have experienced.

Knowing God

Background: In the verses that precede this passage of scripture, Pentecost has occurred and Peter has preached to all those gathered in Jerusalem, telling them of the fulfillment of the prophecies concerning Jesus, and in v. 36, he declares to them that God made Jesus both Christ and Lord.

Read aloud Acts 2:37-42

As you reflect on this passage and Sunday's sermon, what ideas are especially significant to you?

1. Who were Peter's listeners?

2. How did his listeners respond to his preaching?

3. What did Peter instruct the listeners to do?

4. What did Peter promise them? How far do these promises extend?

5. According to verse 42, what did people do after being baptized?

Growing Together

6. What happens to us when we study the Bible, share our lives, eat and pray together? How are those experiences different when we do them in community versus doing them on our own?

7. When there are baptisms in our worship services, how do you respond? What are you reminded of during baptisms?

8. What is the communion experience like for you? What do you think about during communion?

9. Talk about your own baptism experience and/or a significant communion experience.

10. Are there questions about baptism or communion that you carry with you? How might you go about finding answers to those questions?

Doing Something About It

In her autobiography, *Take This Bread*, former journalist Sara Miles, raised an atheist, wandered into a church one day. Communion was being served that morning. This is what she experienced: "We gathered around the table. And there was more singing and standing, and someone was putting a piece of fresh, crumbly bread in my hands, saying 'the body of Christ', and handing me a goblet of sweet wine, saying 'the blood of Christ', and then something outrageous and terrifying happened. Jesus happened to me."

Miles took her faith out into the community. She "turned the bread she ate at communion into tons of groceries, piled in the front of the church, to be given away. Within a few years, she and the people she served had started nearly a dozen food pantries in the poorest parts of their city." (Sara Miles, *Take This Bread*, p. 58)

11. If we view the sacraments in part as a way to remember and follow Jesus, how should our lives reflect him in the world? Put some clothes on your answer. What tangibly will it mean for you to reflect Jesus in your life this week? What will it mean in the context of your marriage? What will it mean at work this week?

12. As a small group, what sorts of things are we continually “devoting ourselves to” (as in Acts 2:42)? Is there anything we might want to add or change?

13. What prevents our celebration of the sacraments from being “empty rituals.”

14. How would our church experience be different if we didn't have the sacraments?

15. How would our lives be different if we viewed all of it as being sacramental?

16. How do you know God's grace has taken root in you? What visible, tangible signs are there?

Taking it to the Streets Connecting our Study to Mission

Sacrament—Visible signs of God's invisible grace

Mission Emphasis—Communion, reconciliation.

Action—To better understand the sacrament of communion.

Ways your small group can participate—As a small group, bake the communion bread to be used in SPC's communion service. Contact an Elder or Deacon and inquire about taking communion to some shut-ins. (This must be approved by session). Work on reconciling a relationship in your life before you receive communion.



MISSIONAL
John 20:19-23

Sammamish Presbyterian Church Vision Statement

Knowing God, Growing Together, Doing Something About It.

Purpose of our Time Together

To live out together God's call for us to know Him, grow together, and serve in the name of Christ.

Scripture for the Week's Sermon

John 20:19-23

The Big Idea

MISSIONAL. The God revealed in the Old and New Testaments is Himself a God on a mission who calls us to go in to the world with a mission.

Taking it to the Streets

Find ways to connect your small group to mission at the end of each chapter.

●●● **FOR SMALL GROUPS**

Entry Activity...

Think back to when you learned to ride a bike. Who held onto the back of the bike? Did you know when the person let go? What did you feel like when you could start riding on your own? How did it feel when you began to go straighter and further from home? What did you need to remember in order to be successful?

If you've had the experience of teaching someone to ride a bike, what was it like to be the one to "let go"? What was it like to watch the rider fall, knowing that he or she would fall? What words of assurance did you give or receive?

Knowing God

Read aloud John 20: 19-23

1. What stands out to you from the sermon or the scripture reading?

2. What was the mood in the room before Jesus showed up? What was the mood in the room after the risen Lord appeared to the disciples? Why?

3. What phrase did Jesus repeat to the disciples? How might that have changed the mood in the room?

4. What did Jesus do to give the disciples assurance about who he was?
How did the disciples respond?

5. What are the most important elements of Jesus' message in this passage?

6. What authority is given to the disciples? What do you think this means?

7. Up until now, Jesus has been with the disciples “holding on” so to speak, now he’s “letting go” and sending them out. How do you think the disciples felt then?

Growing Together

In Donald Miller’s book, *Blue Like Jazz*, he talks about a time he and his tiny Christian posse set up a “confession booth” during a bacchanal spring festival on the grounds of ultra-liberal Reed College in Portland. The confessions to be heard, however, were not those of the rowdy raucous college students; instead, those students got to hear Miller’s confession of how he, as a Christian, had failed THEM. One incredulous student after another was stunned as Miller honestly shared his failures to love and to serve as Jesus asked. As he said he was sorry, those students, tears in their eyes, forgave HIM.

8. If you were one of those non-Christian students, do you think the experience of having a Christian ask you for forgiveness would affect you and your perception of Christianity?



9. Jesus tells the disciples that he is sending them out into the world. Where and when have you felt God's call to be sent out?

10. Do you believe that we have the same power and authority to go out and bring forgiveness as the disciples did? Why or why not?

11. What might be the motivation for us as disciples to go out into the world to serve and proclaim the gospel? Love for the lost? Obedience to Jesus' commands? Guilt? Something else entirely?

12. How were the disciples equipped for their ministry in the world? How are we equipped? Is that enough equipment to complete the work?

13. Where might we get the energy, strength, courage and skills for ministry in the world?

Doing Something About It

We know what it's like for the world to "go to church." What would it look like for the church to "go to the world?" Check out "The Missional Church: Simple," on You Tube that (literally) sketches out this concept in black and white. Visit www.youtube.com and search "the missional church simple" for this 2 minute explanation by Jeff Maguire.

14. Which of these two church portrayals do you most identify with? Which are you most familiar/comfortable with?

15. Where do you think SPC is on the missional spectrum as portrayed in the video? Where are YOU?

16. If the world is our mission field, what holds us back from acting? Are there road blocks to going to the world in the name of Jesus?

17. How would you define or re-define your own mission field?

18. As a small group, what might we do to make a difference in Sammamish and elsewhere?

19. What might be our motivation for serving others? How do we guard against self-serving motivations?

20. Where do you think Jesus expects you to go? What does he expect you to do? Who does he expect you to serve? Are you game?

21. How might we pray for one another in this area of our lives?

Taking it to the Streets Connecting our Study to Mission

Missional—We are called into God’s world

Mission Emphasis—To empower a small group to adopt a mission to work on together.

Action—Explore the variety of mission projects SPC supports

Ways your small group can participate —Learn about the mission projects SPC supports by visiting <http://www.spconline.org/pages/Mission/Passionate.html>. Talk together as a group about places of need in the world where you are passionate to make a difference. Decide upon a mission project that your small group can participate in together for the next year. Contact Associate Pastor of Congregational Life, Becki Barrett, and tell her what you have decided: beckibarrett@spconline.org.

For Consideration

Book: Donald Miller, *Blue Like Jazz*

RE: Mission—“If we needed to reach youth, we wouldn’t do a pizza feed and a game night; we would get together and pray and fast and ask God what to do...” (Now they serve over 100 downtown homeless kids a week). “I love that sort of thing because rather than the church serving itself, the church is serving the lost and the lonely.” (p. 136)



ESCHATOLOGY

II Peter 3:1-13

Sammamish Presbyterian Church Vision Statement

Knowing God, Growing Together, Doing Something About It.

Purpose of our Time Together

To live out together God's call for us to know Him, grow together, and serve in the name of Christ.

Scripture for the Week's Sermon

II Peter 3:1-13

The Big Idea

ESCHATOLOGY. In the end, God wins.

Taking it to the Streets

Find ways to connect your small group to mission at the end of each chapter.

●●● FOR SMALL GROUPS

Entry Activity...

Eschatology literally means "the study of the last." In some ways, all of life is a series of beginning and endings. What are some significant "beginnings" that you've recognized in your own life? What made them important? Talk about how you felt about them. What are two "endings" you have experienced? Did you feel a sense of loss, closure, victory, or something else as you experienced these endings?

Knowing God

Read aloud II Peter: 3:1-13 (you may want to try reading from various translations)

1. What does Peter want to remind us of (v.2)?

2. Who first told the disciples about those things (v.4)?

3. Who does Peter warn us about in v.3?

4. What have the "naysayers" forgotten? Why should that make a difference?

5. How is God's time different from our own? Why is that important?

6. In v.9, what is God's desire for us?

Growing Together

7. Have you ever felt in conflict with God's timing? What did you do about that conflict?

8. How does knowing that God is patient with us affect the way we regard spiritual matters? Does this make attending to our spiritual health less urgent?

9. How do you respond when someone says, “Nothing ever changes” and “What difference does it make anyway”?

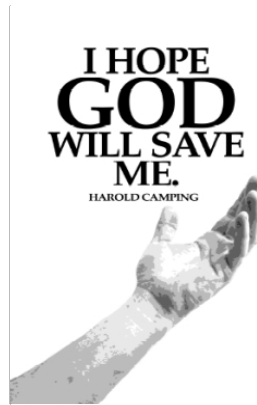
10. If you were to describe the “new heavens” and “new earth” that Peter is writing about, how would you describe them?

11. Verse 11 asks a question concerning what sort of people we ought to be. It also answers the question by saying that we ought to live holy and godly lives. What would our relationships with one another look like if we lived holy and godly lives? What would our relationship with the world look like if our aim was to live in this way?

12. According to Peter, what is the basis for hope in the future?

Doing Something About It

Here's the latest from bible scholar, Harold Camping. According to his precise calculations, *the world will end May 21, 2011*. (Hopefully his predictive skills are more accurate than those of his spellchecker.) From his website, <http://may-21-2011.com>.



*The biblical proves of Judgement day and Rapture occures on May 21, 2011. No visions, No dreams, No voices in the air but just the **Word of God**. Please download these ebooks and **compare the scriptures** to see it yourself.*

**May 21, 2011
Judgement Day.**

13. What do you think about those who invest their time and energy in predicting the end of the world?

14. What is the point of reflecting on the perishable nature of the world and those who inhabit it?

15. How would you live differently if you knew you would die shortly?

16. Knowing that we will all die, do you think about our own death? If so, what are your thoughts?

17. What would you like to have said at your Memorial Service?

18. What from the sermon on Sunday was new or significant to you?

19. How does knowing how the story of the ends, affect the way we live our lives now?

Taking it to the Streets Connecting our Study to Mission

Eschatology—In the end, God wins.

Mission Emphasis—To put our faith into action, practicing together our hope in Jesus Christ.

Action—Make a commitment to support or serve one of the future mission activities.

Ways your small group can participate—

Seek Justice Challenge – SPC’s annual bike/run/walk in September. Join the support team (or build a team to bike/run/walk!) in providing an opportunity for SPC to put our faith into action and receive sponsorship that will support the ministry of International Justice Mission (IJM). IJM works to provide freedom and aftercare for men, women and children around the world who are victims of abuse or slavery.

Ride For A Reason: SPC’s Ride For A Reason Bicycle Team will ride the Seattle to Portland ride July 17-18, 2010 in support of Habitat for Humanity. Make a pledge to the team or join them in the ride itself. The team will be at worship on Sunday, July 11.

Teen Feed: Teen Feed Seattle feeds homeless teenagers throughout the week in the University District. SPC serves the third Sunday of every month and summer is traditionally a difficult time for people to commit. Sign up as a small group to serve in the coming months and make a real difference in the lives of youth.

Youth Ministry this Summer: This summer, our youth are embarking on a variety of mission and camp experiences. Trips include a Senior High Mission Trip to Chicago, Mid High to Campbell Farm or Young Life Camp. Contact our Youth Ministry Department (Erin Griggs, Josh Schack, Amber Slate) or Young Life to find out how you can support our youth and leaders this summer by helping with pre-trip work or support.



Appendix 1— Chartering Your Small Group

Getting Started

At the beginning of your first small group meeting, it is a good idea to create a group covenant or charter. This can be a physical document or simply a conversation that arrives at a consensus. As a group, you will want to discuss what you are hoping to get out of the group and, just as importantly, what you are willing to commit to together in order to get there.

Sample Covenant

The covenant is designed to stipulate the expectations and responsibilities of the group members. This list is only a suggestion, you are welcome to create your own covenant or add to this one.

Meeting Day: _____

Meeting Time: _____

Location of meeting (does not always need to be at one house): _____

Refreshments (can be more than one person):

Length of meeting: _____

Frequency of meetings: _____

Group Facilitator(s): _____

We agree to the following:

1. ____ To come to the Bible Study prepared to participate and discuss. For some groups this may mean studying the passage and questions ahead of your meeting time. For others, it will simply mean coming to the group ready to learn, share and grow.
2. ____ To participate in the discussions. This includes participating by listening to others, and helping all members have the opportunity to discuss and share.
3. ____ To respect the confidentiality of the group, keeping personal information shared within the group.
4. ____ To care for one another by listening, affirming, asking questions of, encouraging, protecting and praying for one another.
5. ____ To be open with one another by sharing feelings, joys, struggles and hurts; acknowledging that reaching the goal of authentic relationships begins by being open with one another.
6. ____ To collaborate with one another to create a healthy group by being honest, sharing in the creating of the vision for what the group ought to be and pursuing our objectives together.
7. ____ Any other key commitments we would like to make to one another
(examples might include: to grow the group numerically, to serve together, to be available to one another outside of group times, to communicate freely and frequently about how the group is going, etc).

Creating a Vision Statement

Some groups have found it helpful to craft a Vision Statement for the group which they can refer back to as well as edit and add to over time. If you decide this would be helpful to your group, you will want to think about a concise couple of sentences that expresses a clear, easily communicated reason for your being a group.

Your group does not have to create a Vision Statement. But every member of the group should have a good idea of why it is that you are meeting. And every member of the group should be committed to working together to pursue those goals.

If you are having trouble getting started on a Vision Statement, you may want to think together about what you want your group to look like six months from now and then articulate some action steps for getting you there.

A Word on the Personality of a Small Group

Your group does not need to look like other groups. This one is yours. It is as unique as you are. Don't feel pressure to behave like another group or to make use of any one particular group formation tool (i.e. vision statement, group covenant, etc).

The important thing is that you are together pursuing intentional, authentic, Christ-centered relationships. All healthy small groups will share some important characteristics and values. Some examples of these are things like:

- | | |
|---------------------------|-----------------|
| Commitment to meeting | Safety |
| Commitment to one another | Availability |
| Affirmation | Confidentiality |
| Openness | Sensitivity |
| Prayer | Accountability |
| Honesty | Joy |

But the path you will walk to a place where you share together in true spiritual friendship will be as distinctive as the people in your group. If you are committed to walking alongside one another as you seek to follow Jesus Christ, and if you are committed to asking God to help you become together an authentic, Christ-centered community; you will get there.

May God bless your journey of faith together.



notes

notes



notes





notes





notes





notes





notes





notes





notes





notes



