

CONNECTION ACTIVITIES

Directions: Choose one activity below (or your own) to start your group time. These activities help the group members get to know one another a little better, learn what is going on in each other's lives, and also encourage connections. It's also a time to laugh and have fun!

Holiday Moments: Ask everyone to take out their phone and select a recent photo that represents one of their favorite holiday moments. Ask them to briefly share about the photo/moment.

Advent Sharing: Ask the group participants to quietly reflect on ONE thing they learned/grew or experienced in the Advent season. Remind them to keep their sharing brief so everyone can have a chance to share.

New Year: What is ONE thing they want to grow in / change in 2020? Encourage everyone to share briefly! What is ONE thing you'd like to see the group do in 2020?

Desert Island List: The group leader starts by posing the situation and question: You have just found out that you are going to be exiled on a desert island for an entire year. In addition to packing your essentials, you can bring ONE CD/album, one book (besides the Bible), and your favorite food. What will you bring?

High and low's: Ask the group to share a recent high point and low point that's happened in their lives. Remind them to be brief!

What are you thankful for today? No matter what is going on in our lives – there's always so much to be thankful for! Ask everyone to share one thing they are thankful for today.

Describe your past week in weather terms: Invite your group members to describe what is happening in their lives – was it sunny, cloudy, foggy, cold..... etc...

"Broken Bone" Story: Tell a story about a time you broke a bone. The group needs to guess if it's fact or fiction! Remind everyone to keep it brief to allow everyone a chance to share.

Most Unique: Go around the room and have each person share ONE thing that makes him/her unique, such as, "I've never left the state I was born in."

What's in a name: Ask everyone to share their full name and how they got that name. What does it mean, or why did your parents pick it?

My Name Means: Have each group member write out their name on a piece of paper, then ask them to come up with words describing themselves – by creating a phrase where each word begins with a letter of their first name used in order. For example, Theresa might say, "My name is Theresa and I am tiny, happy, energetic, red-haired, eager, strong, and amazing!"

Perfect Weekend: What does a perfect weekend look like to you? Be brief!

Object Stories: Give everyone a blank piece of paper and have them draw a random picture/object. Collect the papers in a bowl/bag and have everyone draw one. Tell them to build a story from their own picture. Another option is if you have random objects available, you can put them in a bag or on the table and have everyone grab one item. Ask them to tell a story using the item they selected. For example: a curler could be one item, and my story would be how I remember when I was growing up, my grandmother would always have curlers in her hair on Saturday mornings when we visited. Encourage them to make it personal, help them get to know one another better.

Once Upon A Time: Give each member three pieces of paper (slips), a pen/pencil. Tell them to write down the name of a person, place or thing on each and fold the paper in half. Group leader collects slips in a bag, bowl, etc... and shakes them around – then the leader begins the story by randomly drawing a piece of paper and using the word drawn in the first sentence of the story. Pass the papers around the group with each person drawing a paper slip and adding to the story. Give them 10 seconds or less to do so! Enjoy – this is usually a funny one!

Personal Scavenger Hunt: Take 5 minutes and ask members to find the following items in their wallet/purse. Something that:

-You've had a long time

-You're proud of

-Reveals a lot about you

-Reminds you of a fun time

-Concerns/worries you

When you're done, ask the first item to the first person, then move on to the second item for the second person, and so forth. Don't feel like you have to use the whole list for everyone, as it will take too long. Remind everyone to be brief!

Quick Question Conversation Starters:

1. Name one person that is not a family member that has had the greatest influence in your life. Be brief in sharing!
2. If you could ask God one question right now, what would it be?
3. What is your favorite TV show and why?
4. If you had to live this week over again, would you change anything? If so, what would it be?
5. If you could take a vacation right now, where would you go?
6. If you could visit heaven right now and talk with one of the people of the Bible (other than Jesus), who would you talk to?
7. If you had the power to change one problem in the world today, what would that be?
8. What is ONE gift/talent you have been gifted with?
9. What do you do for fun?
10. What quality do you most appreciate in a friend?

GUIDELINES FOR FACILITATING SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION

From: Small Groups.com "Tips for Facilitating a Group Discussion" by Carter Moss

Facilitating a group discussion can be intimidating for a lot of us. We may feel insecure in our ability to have all the right answers, or in our ability to handle whatever curve balls get thrown our way (there will be some!). It can also be challenging to know whether we're doing a good job or not. But, here's the good news: facilitating a group discussion is not about any of those things!!!! We don't have to have all of the right answers. We don't have to lead the perfect discussion every time. And, here's the best reminder – we never lead alone, or in our own power –we have The Spirit's help and power all the time!

As you facilitate your small group discussion, your main goal is to create discussion. We want to challenge people to think about the topic at hand, and create a safe environment for people to share their thoughts—to help everyone feel valued about the input they've offered. That's all we've got to do. Here are some practical guidelines and principles that can help you facilitate a good small group discussion:

ASK GOOD QUESTIONS

One of the most important skills in facilitating a small-group discussion is asking the right questions. Here are a few secrets to good question asking:

- **Ask open-ended questions.** Avoid the yes/no, true/false, and multiple-choice questions—"Is Jesus the sheep or the shepherd in this parable?" Similarly, avoid questions that let people off the hook with a simple Sunday-school answer—"Why did Jesus die on the cross?" You want to ask questions that require people to share some actual thoughts and feelings.
- **Ask follow-up questions.** Many people default to staying pretty surface-level with their answers to your questions, so get in the habit of not letting them off the hook. You want to get to the core of what they are saying. Ask more questions that follow up on their response. Here are some examples of good follow-up questions for the short/simple answers that people often give:
 - What makes you say that?
 - How do you feel about that?
 - How would you explain your answer to a non-Christian friend or neighbor?
- **Ask questions that bring forth various perspectives.** Sometimes, if we always agree with each other, and with every word that every author we read says, then it makes for a pretty boring group and a somewhat pointless discussion. The point of actually

discussing things is to get different perspectives and wrestle with the issues! Here are some examples of questions that can help create discussion that brings forth various perspectives:

-Do you really agree with what the author is saying in that chapter/passage? Why or why not?

-Why do you think God designed it to work that way? Why not just do (whatever else) instead?

-What would you say to someone who disagrees with that?

- **Ask application questions.** We need to make sure we apply what we're discussing to our current lives. Otherwise we just leave group a little smarter, rather than with changed lives. So whatever it is you're discussing, make sure to end with some application questions. You can typically find application questions in the online sermon questions, but below are a few other examples:

-So what does that have to do with our lives today?

-How can you change your perspective from today regarding that issue?

-What one thing can you do differently in this next week to start living that out?

CREATE A SAFE ENVIRONMENT

Trust is the most important key to really making your small group a place where genuine community can be formed. Group members need to be able to trust each other, and know that the group is a safe place—a place where they can get real and know that they will not be judged, gossiped about, and so on.

Here are three tips to help create this safe environment:

1. Address the privacy & safety issue in your very first meeting, and remind them each week, especially if you have any new members that show up! "What is said here and happens here, stays here." As the leader, be sure to model this safety and confidentiality yourself!
2. When someone shares in the group, affirm their answer/sharing, even if you disagree! Thank them for being open and sharing. Ask others for their insights.
3. Avoid giving unrequested advice within the group: "Well if I were you, I'd just do this.." That is one of the quickest ways to shut someone down from sharing. When you hear others in the group start to do this, gently remind them that "this is a safe group, and we're here to listen, not to give advice."

HANDLING CHALLENGING PEOPLE

The hard part of small groups is that they involve people, and dealing with people is always challenging! Here are some of the common "challenging people" that you may encounter, and some tips on approaching them with grace:

- **The over-talker.** This person always has plenty to say, and loves to be the first person to say it. Each time you meet, remind everyone in the group that this is an equal participation group, and encourage everyone to keep their sharing brief so that it allows everyone a chance to share.

If the problem continues, talk to the person outside of group. Affirm them in what they do contribute, and tell them you need their help in getting some of the other people in the group to open up and share. Sometimes you can go as far as to ask them to commit to not being the first person to answer a question, or to only answer when you call on them—or to even work out a subtle signal you can give them when they are talking too much. Each group is different. A good facilitator will know their group, and figure out what works best for your group members.

- **The non-talker.** This is the quiet person in the group who never wants to share. If you think that doing so won't scare them off even more—that they just need a little prompting—try calling on them periodically to share an answer. Also, be sure to affirm them big-time when they do respond.

If that doesn't work, talk to the person outside of group. Affirm them in what they do contribute, and let them know that you want more people to get to hear their perspective. Remind them how valuable all of the different perspectives are to the entire group.

- **The tangent-starter.** This person loves to get the group way off track by starting random tangents and rabbit trails. First of all, don't get upset at the tangents, and feel free to go off on them once in a while. When the time comes, firmly bring the group back on track.

If the problem becomes excessive, talk to the person outside of group. Affirm them in what they do contribute, and let them know about the challenge you have in trying to facilitate a good group and bring across certain points each week, and how the tangents make your job harder. Ask them how they can help you.

- **The insensitive person.** This individual gives advice, makes fun of answers and people, cuts people off, or does a variety of other things to offend members within the group. This person is dangerous to the health of your group! They can keep it from being a safe group more quickly than anything else. So always remind everyone of the group guidelines for being a safe group, and how important this is. Have a one-on-one conversation outside of group to let the person know how important a safe group is, and what they can do to help make that happen.

FINAL REMINDERS

The end goal of a group discussion is life change, not perfect discussions or getting through all the material! Stay open to the Holy Spirit during each group meeting and follow where he leads. Don't forget to spend time in prayer before each group meeting, ask God to lead the discussion where he wants it to go. Some of the most memorable group meetings occur when the leader is willing to scrap the plan for the night and address a specific need, or do something fun and spontaneous, following the Spirit's lead.

Remember that God is the one who does the work in people's hearts—we are not responsible for it! We are simply creating an environment for community and life change to happen.

SMALL GROUP TIME

Encourage your group members to use the January guide each week. Have them read the Scripture passages, and follow the daily devotional prompts throughout the week, taking notes about the things God has spoken to them through his Word. When you gather for your Small Group, you can use Lectio Divina with the sermon Scripture passages provided, and also use the online sermon questions to enrich your group discussion. In addition, choose 2-3 of the weekly devotional prompts to discuss. This is a great way for you to ask your members what they are learning as they dig into God's Word in their own time, and for them to share with others!

Directions for Lectio Divina: Use the provided passages to guide your group in a discussion of the sermon topic:

1. Have one person read the passage slowly.
2. Meditate on the passage silently for one minute.
3. Share key words, phrases, situations, or emotions you notice in the passage.
4. Repeat steps 1-3, reading with fresh eyes, and share any new observations or insights.

Week 1: Building A Life ***Matthew 5:13-16***

¹³ "You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled underfoot.

¹⁴ "You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. ¹⁵ Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. ¹⁶ In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.

Matthew 7:24-29

²⁴ "Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. ²⁵ The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock. ²⁶ But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. ²⁷ The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash."

²⁸ When Jesus had finished saying these things, the crowds were amazed at his teaching, ²⁹ because he taught as one who had authority, and not as their teachers of the law.

Week 2: The Beatitudes

Matthew 5:1-12

¹ Now when Jesus saw the crowds, he went up on a mountainside and sat down. His disciples came to him, ² and he began to teach them.

He said:

³ “Blessed are the poor in spirit,
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

⁴ Blessed are those who mourn,
for they will be comforted.

⁵ Blessed are the meek,
for they will inherit the earth.

⁶ Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness,
for they will be filled.

⁷ Blessed are the merciful,
for they will be shown mercy.

⁸ Blessed are the pure in heart,
for they will see God.

⁹ Blessed are the peacemakers,
for they will be called children of God.

¹⁰ Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness,
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

¹¹ “Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. ¹² Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

Week 3: Redefining Murder

Matthew 5:17-26

¹⁷ “Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. ¹⁸ For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished. ¹⁹ Therefore anyone who sets aside one of the least of these commands and teaches others accordingly will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever practices and teaches these commands will be called great in the

kingdom of heaven. ²⁰ For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven.

²¹ “You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, ‘You shall not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.’ ²² But I tell you that anyone who is angry with a brother or sister will be subject to judgment. Again, anyone who says to a brother or sister, ‘Raca,’ is answerable to the court. And anyone who says, ‘You fool!’ will be in danger of the fire of hell.

²³ “Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother or sister has something against you, ²⁴ leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to them; then come and offer your gift.

²⁵ “Settle matters quickly with your adversary who is taking you to court. Do it while you are still together on the way, or your adversary may hand you over to the judge, and the judge may hand you over to the officer, and you may be thrown into prison. ²⁶ Truly I tell you, you will not get out until you have paid the last penny.

Week 4: Adultery & Divorce

Matthew 5:27-32

²⁷ “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’ ²⁸ But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart. ²⁹ If your right eye causes you to stumble, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. ³⁰ And if your right hand causes you to stumble, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to go into hell.

³¹ “It has been said, ‘Anyone who divorces his wife must give her a certificate of divorce.’ ³² But I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, makes her the victim of adultery, and anyone who marries a divorced woman commits adultery.

Week 5: Yes or No

Matthew 5:33-37

³³ “Again, you have heard that it was said to the people long ago, ‘Do not break your oath, but fulfill to the Lord the vows you have made.’ ³⁴ But I tell you, do not swear an oath at all: either by heaven, for it is God’s throne; ³⁵ or by the earth, for it is his footstool; or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the Great King. ³⁶ And do not swear by your head, for you cannot make even one hair white or black. ³⁷ All you need to say is simply ‘Yes’ or ‘No’; anything beyond this comes from the evil one.

Week 6: Radical Love

Matthew 5:38-48

³⁸ “You have heard that it was said, ‘Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.’ ³⁹ But I tell you, do not resist an evil person. If anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to them the other cheek also. ⁴⁰ And if anyone wants to sue you and take your shirt, hand over your coat as well. ⁴¹ If anyone forces you to go one mile, go with them two miles. ⁴² Give to the one who asks you, and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you.

⁴³ “You have heard that it was said, ‘Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ ⁴⁴ But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, ⁴⁵ that you may be children of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. ⁴⁶ If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? ⁴⁷ And if you greet only your own people, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that? ⁴⁸ Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

Week 7: Secret Service

Matthew 6:1-7

¹ “Be careful not to practice your righteousness in front of others to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven.

² “So when you give to the needy, do not announce it with trumpets, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and on the streets, to be honored by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. ³ But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, ⁴ so that your giving may be in secret. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.

⁵ “And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. ⁶ But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you. ⁷ And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words. ⁸ Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.

Matthew 16-18

¹⁶ “When you fast, do not look somber as the hypocrites do, for they disfigure their faces to show others they are fasting. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. ¹⁷ But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, ¹⁸ so that it will not be obvious to others that you are fasting, but only to your Father, who is unseen; and your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.

Week 8: The Lord's Prayer

Matthew 6:9-15

⁹ "This, then, is how you should pray:

"Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,

¹⁰ your kingdom come,
your will be done,

on earth as it is in heaven.

¹¹ Give us today our daily bread.

¹² And forgive us our debts,
as we also have forgiven our debtors.

¹³ And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from the evil one.'

¹⁴ For if you forgive other people when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. ¹⁵ But if you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.

Week 9: Treasures in Heaven

Matthew 6:9-15

⁹ "This, then, is how you should pray:

"Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,

¹⁰ your kingdom come,
your will be done,

on earth as it is in heaven.

¹¹ Give us today our daily bread.

¹² And forgive us our debts,
as we also have forgiven our debtors.

¹³ And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from the evil one.'

¹⁴ For if you forgive other people when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. ¹⁵ But if you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.

Week 10: Worry
Matthew 6:25-34

²⁵ “Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothes? ²⁶ Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? ²⁷ Can any one of you by worrying add a single hour to your life?

²⁸ “And why do you worry about clothes? See how the flowers of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. ²⁹ Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. ³⁰ If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you—you of little faith? ³¹ So do not worry, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ ³² For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. ³³ But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. ³⁴ Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.”

Week 11: Judgment & Humility
Matthew 7:1-6

¹ “Do not judge, or you too will be judged. ² For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.

³ “Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother’s eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? ⁴ How can you say to your brother, ‘Let me take the speck out of your eye,’ when all the time there is a plank in your own eye? ⁵ You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother’s eye.

⁶ “Do not give dogs what is sacred; do not throw your pearls to pigs. If you do, they may trample them under their feet, and turn and tear you to pieces.

Week 12: Ask, Seek, & Knock
Matthew 7:7-12

⁷ “Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. ⁸ For everyone who asks receives; the one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened.

⁹ “Which of you, if your son asks for bread, will give him a stone? ¹⁰ Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake? ¹¹ If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him! ¹² So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets.

Week 13: The Wide & Narrow Gates
Matthew 7:13-23

¹³ “Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. ¹⁴ But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it.

¹⁵ “Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves. ¹⁶ By their fruit you will recognize them. Do people pick grapes from thornbushes, or figs from thistles? ¹⁷ Likewise, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. ¹⁸ A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit. ¹⁹ Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. ²⁰ Thus, by their fruit you will recognize them.

²¹ “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. ²² Many will say to me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name and in your name drive out demons and in your name perform many miracles?’ ²³ Then I will tell them plainly, ‘I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!’

REFLECTIONS AND GROWTH

Small Group Celebration ending Kingdom Come Series

Let God use your story in a powerful way to change the lives of others. Please encourage your group members to take the time and respond to the reflections and growth questions and PRAY on page 109 of the guidebook. Encourage your group to have a time of sharing and celebrate all that was learned during the Kingdom Come series.

Please email jackie@thechapel.org if you have anyone in your group with a great testimonial of how God grew them during the course of this series. We'd love to hear all that God is doing and use it for His glory.