

Small Group Discussion Guide--Some questions may be taken from "Change and Your Relationships: A Mess Worth Making"

Opening Question

What do you like most: being at the beginning, in the middle, or at the end of something? Why?

Page 106 "It is always harder to live in the middle of something than it is to live at the beginning or the end. When you are at the beginning of something, you are filled with a sense of hope and potential. You are engaged by a vision of all that can be. People at the start of something tend to be dreamers; they want to get started fulfilling the dream. People at the end tend to be filled with relief, gratitude, and a sense of accomplishment. The hardships along the way don't seem so hard anymore. The sacrifices all seem worth it, and they are glad the work is over. People in the middle usually discover that more work is involved than they ever expected."

Book Discussion (Chapters 10-11)

Read the section called "Love's Difficulty" on page 108.

Q1: How do you feel about the fact that all relationships "take place right smack-dab in the middle of something"?

Q2: Does the idea of "already/not yet" encourage you or discourage you? Why?

Relationships in the Middle (see pages 109-110)

Q3: Even though our relationships will never work according to our plan, live up to our expectations, always grappling with some kind of difficulty, and needing improvement, what hope do we have in Christ?

Page 111-112 “Our relationships are not simply designed to make us interdependent with one another. They are intended to drive us to Him in humble personal dependency. At some point, every relationship brings you to the end of yourself, and with God there is no healthier place to be. When I am willing to confess how weak I am, I am most ready to reach out for the grace that can only be found in Christ.”

Q4: What is the point of difficulties in relationships according to this quote? How important is this and why?

Q5: What are the two mistakes we make in encouragement? (Page 112) What should “encouragement in the middle” look like?

Page 119 “I am married and have four children, and most of the time I am committed to thinking about how they can make my life more fulfilling. I know this is true because of how easily I get irritated when I have to give up personal comfort to serve them.”

Q6: Do you think irritation, frustration, or anger may be signals that you are more committed to the serving of your needs than the needs of others? Why?

Page 122 “After a discussion of Jesus serving the 12 by washing their feet, the authors write, “It would have been very tempting for Jesus to say, “Don’t you guys know what is about to happen to me? Get a grip and comfort me!” Yet he says nothing about what is about to happen to him; he just serves, without self-pity. He is utterly selfless at the moment it would be most tempting to be selfish.”

Q7: How do your circumstances effect your willingness to serve another?

Page 123 “Jesus is calling you to move into people’s lives and become vulnerable. He does not say it will be easy, but he does say that this is the only place to find life. You find your life by dying to yourself and caring for others in risky ways.

We can thank God that Jesus moved toward his disciples whether they deserved it or not. Romans 5:8 says, “While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”

Q8: What is it about the gospel that moves you toward Christ and others in self-sacrificing ways?

Q9: What does self-sacrificing service look like? (see Pages 126-130)

Bible Discussion

Psalm 46:1–3 ESV 1 God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. 2 Therefore we will not fear though the earth gives way, though the mountains be moved into the heart of the sea, 3 though its waters roar and foam, though the mountains tremble at its swelling.

Q1: What is the image of difficulty the psalmist creates? What is the response? Why? In what ways would thinking through this passage in light of your own difficulties provide encouragement?

“When we struggle, we often begin to measure our potential. We assess ourselves to see whether we have what it takes to get through the difficulty.”

Galatians 2:20 ESV 20 I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

Q2: How does this verse help us to accurately view our potential?

Read Mark 10:35-45.

Q3: What leads to the conflict among the disciples?

Q4: What truth does Jesus teach them? What are the implications of this regarding your relationships with other people?

Q5: What boundaries, exceptions, stipulations might people put on Jesus' words "you must be slave of all"? Do you think these are valid given Jesus' teaching?

Read John 13:1-17.

One of our most common excuses for not being more loving and helpful is our circumstances. When we are weighed down with difficulties we want to be served, not serve.

Q6: What were Jesus' circumstances at the time and during the foot washing that could have affected his willingness to serve others?

Q7: How is Jesus' example and definition of greatness different from the examples and definitions the world gives us?

Prayer Focus

Page 126 "There will be times when you will wonder whether it is worth following Jesus. At these precise moments, you will need the work of the Spirit in your life to remind you of your own sin and the grace available to you. Repentance and faith must be your daily lifestyle."