

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

Opening Question

Place a check next to the statements that relate to you. Discuss your answers.

I often try to avoid conflict when I feel I should say something.

I usually do not look for my own sin.

I rarely confess my sin.

I often am quicker to fulfill my needs than consider the needs of the other person.

I have not been as willing as I should be for God to use conflict to mold me into His image.

I often feel hopeless or disappointed in the midst of conflict.

I expected my closest relationships to be conflict-free.

When I am in conflict with another, my greatest desire is often to be proven right.

Book Discussion

Page 78 "Conflict with others is one of God's mysterious, counterintuitive ways of rescuing us from ourselves."

Q1: What do you think the authors mean by this statement?

Page 81 "Conflict broke out between me and my wife the other day in our kitchen. I was putting dishes in the dishwasher and she was cooking dinner. We both got in each other's way and then got sarcastic with each other. I said, "I would hate to

get in your way while I load the dishwasher!” She replied, “I would hate to get in your way while I cook dinner!”

Q2: Can you identify the good desires? How did those good desires become bad desires?

Page 82

Comfort. I want, must have, and deserve comfort and you’d better not get in the way of me getting it! I fear hard work.

Pleasure. I want, must have, and deserve pleasure and you’d better give it to me! I fear pain.

Recognition. I want, must have, and deserve recognition or I will be devastated. I fear being overlooked.

Power. I want, must have, and deserve power and you’d better do what I say! I fear being told what to do.

Control. I want, must have, and deserve control and you will feel the brunt of my disappointment if you mess up my tidy little universe! I fear unpredictability.

Acceptance. I want, must have, and deserve acceptance and you are responsible to give it to me. I fear rejection.

Q3: Which of these can you identify with most? Or is there something you would add?

Page 83 “When I was loading the dishwasher, I went from serving someone else to serving myself. I was seeking self-glory and was guilty of self-love.

Q4: What innocent and good things do you live for more than God?

Page 94 “The Lord’s prayer commands us to pray, ‘Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors,’ right after it instructs us to pray for daily bread. Practicing forgiveness is something we must do daily in the same way we ask for the daily provision of food. It is a part of everyday life, not something reserved for life’s ‘big’

sins and events....The Bible is a book about a God who forgives; it calls those who have been forgiven to be forgiving people.”

Q5: Do you find it harder to forgive or harder to ask for forgiveness? (*Forgiveness is different than feeling sorry.*) What causes it to be difficult? How does God’s forgiveness of our sins help us to be forgiving people and help us to ask others for forgiveness?

Page 94-95 Forgiveness Involves Canceling a Debt “You promise that you will not bring up the debt to use it as leverage....You promise that you will not bring up the offense to others and slander the person who sinned against you....Finally, you promise not to dwell on the offense yourself.”

Q6: What do these three promises mean and don’t mean?

Q7: On page 98-99, the authors discuss the horizontal and vertical dimensions of forgiveness. What is the difference between the two? How do they work?

Page 100-101

Q8: How are apologies and forgiveness different? What does it sound like to ask for forgiveness?

Bible Study—Conflict and Forgiveness

Read James 4:1-10

Q1: Looking closely at vv 1-3, why do we fight with one another?

Q2: What are the typical ways people respond to conflict instead of taking responsibility?

Q3: What does the reference to “friendship with the world” mean in v4? Is it related to vv1-3? If so, how?

Q4: From vv6-10, what is the role of humility in regards to conflict? What in these verses help you move toward humility?

Read Matthew 18:21-35

Q5: From these verses, explore what forgiveness looks like?

Read Mark 11:25 and Luke 17:3

Q6: Compare these two verses regarding forgiveness.

Read Eph 4:31-32 See also Col 2:13-14.

Q7: It can be easy for us to take forgiveness for granted. Take some time and consider the idea that “God in Christ forgave you.” What did it take for God to forgive you?

Q8: What aspect of forgiveness do you struggle with most? (Letting go of the hurt; absorbing the cost; not bringing up the sin again to the offender, to others, to yourself; admitting your own sin; asking for forgiveness?) How does meditating on what it took for God to forgive you help you with your struggle to forgive?

Prayer Focus

Page 102 *“The king in Jesus’ parable absorbs the loss of thousands of dollars. What a generous king! Imagine if you owed \$100,000 or even several million dollars in back taxes to the government. You would most likely be facing a serious prison*

sentence. Now, suppose a wealthy person offered to pay your debts and leave you with enough money to live like a billionaire. You would be overcome with gratitude toward this person. He would be constantly on your mind, and you would probably share this story with everyone. With your new wealth, you would likely be a very generous person, helping others who were in trouble, even those who had taken advantage of you.”

Take some time to thank God for what it took to make forgiveness possible, the personal cost to Himself, and the fact that the Creator has any interest at all in forgiving us personally.