

Discipleship Groups

Week 15

As your people gather, welcome them, and help them to greet one another.

When it's time to begin, welcome them as a group. Since you are the one who knows what the previous weeks' conversations have been, you are in the best position to judge what follow-up may be appropriate at the beginning of each week's session. You are the one in a position to make sure that there is a personal connection from week to week.

You may include the question that the early Methodists asked one another in their small groups: *How is it with your soul?* It is a personal sharing question. Assure your members that they are free to answer it in the way that they interpret it individually. The only wrong answer is an untrue one.

After the initial conversation and the "soul question," lead a brief follow-up discussion of this past week's prayer exercise. Our assignment was to practice praise and adoration in our praying. As you reflect on the past week, consider the following questions together:

- What was your experience of setting aside 20 minutes for praise?
- Did praising get easier or harder with the passage of time -- during a given day and/or over the course of the week?
- How long was your list of attributes? Did it grow during the week?
- What exercise was especially helpful?
- What exercise was especially difficult?
- What did you learn? How did you grow?

Next, transition the group to watching this week's video together. The video can be downloaded or it can be played from the web site. This week's video is a little longer than usual, and so there will be less time for group discussion afterwards. With the time remaining, though, perhaps explore these questions together:

- How much is confession currently a part of your prayer life?
- What did you learn from the video? What was new or different or helpful?
- What excitement or apprehension do you feel about focusing on confession for a week?

Distribute to your group members copies of the next two pages, which offer some guidelines for this week's focus on confession.

Close your time with a brief prayer on behalf of the whole group.

Before everyone is dismissed, remind the group members about your next meeting time and place, as well as encouraging them to pray for one another each day between now and then.

These sheets represent a week-long exercise in confession. As you embark on it, please keep in mind these two guidelines.

1. Don't read ahead. Focus each day on what is written and assigned for that day. To read ahead is to short-circuit the process.
2. Give yourself ample time each day. Some things cannot be achieved in a hurry. Set aside fifteen minutes each day for these exercises. Set a timer so that you don't keep looking at your watch. And find a space where you won't be distracted by the things around you.

Day One

It is not essential that you focus on a set period of time for these exercises in confession (e.g., the past 24 hours). Our endeavor is to let the Holy Spirit make us more sensitive. To that end, our first day will be spent meditating on a hymn-prayer by Charles Wesley. Pray through these verses carefully. Devote the full 15 minutes to contemplating the words and making them your own.

I want a principle within
of watchful, godly fear,
a sensibility of sin,
a pain to feel it near.
I want the first approach to feel
of pride or wrong desire,
to catch the wandering of my will,
and quench the kindling fire.

From thee that I no more may stray,
no more thy goodness grieve,
grant me the filial awe, I pray,
the tender conscience give.
Quick as the apple of an eye,
O God, my conscience make;
awake my soul when sin is nigh,
and keep it still awake.

Almighty God of truth and love,
to me thy power impart;
the mountain from my soul remove,
the hardness from my heart.
O may the least omission pain
my reawakened soul,
and drive me to that blood again,
which makes ~~as~~ the wounded whole.

Day Two

Christians have often spoken of sin in terms of thought, word, and deed. Today's focus is on "word." Ask the Lord to show you how you have sinned by word. Reflect prayerfully on the past few days -- conversations you've had, things you've said -- and confess those words which have grieved God's goodness.

Day Three

Today we turn to sins of thought. Ask the Lord to help you distinguish between temptation and sin when it comes to your thinking. Consider the passing thoughts you've had that are uncharitable. Consider the lingering thoughts you have cultivated that are unholy. Confess those thoughts which have crossed the line from temptation into sin.

Day Four

Today we turn to sins of deed. These are, as the old liturgy said, "things which we ought not to have done." Reflect prayerfully on the past day or so, asking the Lord to help you identify those deeds that were contrary to His will. As they become apparent to you, confess them to Him.

Day Five

Christians have often recognized that there are not only sins of commission ("things which we ought not do have done") but also sins of omission ("things which we ought to have done," but did not). Reflect prayerfully on the past day or so, asking the Lord to help you identify those times when you failed to do His will.

Day Six

Read 1 John 2:16 in several versions. Consider the meaning of the three things that are said to be of this world but not of the Father. Ask the Lord to show you what each of those three things looks like in your life. Confess what comes to mind.

Day Seven

At its best, Christian confession is not only about our sin but also about His grace. If it is only the former, then we are telling the truth, but not the whole truth. Spend today's confession time affirming the truths about God's love, mercy, grace, and forgiveness.

• • •