

WAC Small Group Newsletter

October 2011

A WORD FROM THE ADMINISTRATOR Welcome to the small group ministry to those of you who are leading new home based small groups or are new to leading table groups! This newsletter is published the week following the first Monday of the month. I love to hear your stories of discipleship and service, your feedback as to how this newsletter can be beneficial to you, and questions or comments you have about the small group ministry. My contact info is at the bottom of the newsletter.

At the fall small group leader's training we talked about being intentional in our leadership. I discussed qualities that make a good Bible study so that our study time can make an impact on transforming lives. This was based on an article from smallgroups.com. I have copied the full article at the end of this newsletter for your reference.

Another way you can intentionally care for the people in your small group is to remember what they tell you! One tool you can use is the call sheet you have in your small group leader's notebook. Jotting down relevant notes can trigger your memory and help you follow up on past conversations. In case you have used up the call sheets in your notebook I have attached it to this newsletter so you can print off more.

Thank you for your devoted service to God's people who have been placed in your care. You are servants of the living King!

C&MA CORE VALUES CURRICULUM If your group is doing the core values curriculum don't forget that the C&MA website <http://www.cmalliance.org/resources/cma-dna/> has even more resources in the form of additional videos for some values and PDFs. If you aren't following the sermon series by using this curriculum, it isn't too late. Let me or your sponsor know and we can get you the materials.

A WORD FROM THE LEADERSHIP COUNCIL The Leadership Council met on Monday, October 3rd. There were exciting reports from all ministry areas as things are kicking off for the fall and alignment with the core values curriculum church-wide is having an impact. It was reported that 18 of our small groups, including student ministries, is utilizing the core values curriculum. God is working in lives through this curriculum. One man has come to know the Lord because he started questioning what it means to be lost and matter to God. Others are asking questions along the same lines. The work of the Go! ministry area is expanding in very exciting ways. If you've got questions about that, please seek out Matt Hesselgrave who would love to direct you to service opportunities for your small group.

MISSIONS AND SERVICE CORNER Last month I announced the launch of Justice and Mercy Ministries (JaMM). I'm proud to say that we have hit the ground running and are THRILLED with the results of our survey of "things WAC members are already doing." If you are wondering what in the world that is just look for the blue card in the bulletin this Sunday - and do please fill it out! This month I want to talk a little about what JaMM is up to and how we can help you find a place to serve with your family or small group.

Right now the JaMM team is working hard on a database of service opportunities ranging from helping the homeless to after school tutoring programs. Each JaMM member personally “champions” a particular organization and becomes the conduit for connecting you with the organization. In the very near future you can log onto our website and peruse the list of service options. When you find one that strikes your fancy, click on the link to find out more or call the JaMM champion who will tell you all you need to know and will even make the introduction to our contact person.

In addition to this the JaMM team will also “adopt” specific organizations and/or causes and provide ongoing ministry for you to work directly with us as together we serve the poor and needy. A couple things are near and dear to our team’s hearts, visiting residents of state run nursing homes and serving the local immigrant communities. If you are interested, are ready to serve or have an organization you are passionate about shoot me an email at hessel.matt@gmail.com. Also, if serving the poor and needy here and around the world is something God has put on your heart please consider joining the JaMM team.

Serving Christ together,
Matt Hesselgrave

RESOURCE CORNER Our small groups library inventory has been updated. Find it online on the small groups page of the church web site wachurch.us. As a reminder, we have single copies of the books that you can look at in the library and then you can order materials for your group as you need.

DATES TO REMEMBER

➤ **October 26th**, Small Group Sponsors meeting, 6:30-8:00 PM

In service to Jesus,

Laura Donelson,

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What Makes a Good Bible Study?

The answer may not be what you think.

By JoHannah Reardon

Henry (not his real name) tried really hard. He wanted to become a regular Bible study writer, so he sent me a rather impressive résumé of his theological training and experience. I happened to need a writer at that moment, so I gave him a trial assignment.

What I got back showed a good grasp of the subject matter and Bible text that it was based on. He obviously knew what he was talking about. In fact, he knew more than the average Bible-study member would be able to

decipher. He wrote in theological language that you needed a PhD to understand. He also had no idea how to put the subject matter into a form to discuss. He was a teacher and was used to imparting information, not creating conversation.

That experience with Henry sums up why it is so difficult to find a really good Bible study. Everyone wants the study to increase their knowledge, but they also want it to create a lively group experience that's applicable. Finding all those things in one study can be tricky. So look for a study that includes each of these elements.

Increase Your Knowledge

Nothing is worse than an overly simplistic Bible study. What makes us want to study the Bible in the first place is its complexity. That doesn't mean it's impossible to understand, but it does mean that it should get us beyond surface level. For example, a study on the Ten Commandments should include more than a simple recitation of all ten commandments. If we are studying those commandments, we want to understand what they are truly saying and how they apply to our lives today. Otherwise we could just list them and be done with it.

But many Bible studies today do the equivalent of just that. They direct us to a Bible text and then ask us to parrot back the exact words written there. This can be useful to set the context, but it can never move us beyond a simple observation to understanding the meaning and applying it to our lives. And it's an absolute discussion killer. All a person can do is answer the question and move onto the next one. There are no opinions expressed or deeper meanings gleaned.

Then again, we don't want to fall into Henry's problem of making the text so complicated that we have no idea what it is saying.

So what's the answer? Look for a study that is theologically sound but not difficult to understand. Try to find a study that includes solid passages of Scripture. If the study just throws in a verse here and there to support a point, you won't be getting into the meat of the Word. Instead, look for studies that put longer passages of Scripture into context. If someone just uses a snippet, they may be trying to bend the Scripture to prove their point, rather than the other way around. So if the study is talking about forgiveness, it should use a section of Scripture where forgiveness is the topic—not a random verse where something is mentioned in passing.

Also look for a study that is not afraid to admit that there are things we aren't sure about. It should let readers know that, for some issues, there is no definitive opinion and that the best of Christians disagree.

Create a Lively Group Experience

Most Bible studies are written for a group experience. And if it's going to be a good group experience, it should include great open-ended questions that require a thoughtful answer. Avoid Bible studies that include only yes or no questions, or ones that simply parrot back the information in the text. Instead, the questions should require a thoughtful answer.

For example, for a study on the Trinity, if the questions are along the line of, "Do you believe in a triune God?"—that requires only a yes or no answer and kills discussion. Instead it should ask something like, "What difference do you think it makes that God is triune?" or "How would you explain the Trinity?"

If a study does ask a yes or no question, it should always ask for an expansion. For a study on forgiveness, if a question asks, "Do you struggle with forgiveness?" Then it should follow it up with, "Share your story." Knowing that can help you turn less than ideal questions into ones that will create a better group experience.

A great study should also have engaging, excellent writing. In fact, Bible studies should be as engaging to read as any article or book. Here are some examples of great writing in a Bible study. It's from a study called "Pulling Weeds in the Church Yard":

Christian faith has been used to justify acts as violent as the Crusades, the lynching of blacks in America, and the bombing of abortion clinics. And maybe not as violent—but certainly as vicious—can be the rhetoric Christians use in public political and moral debates. However, faith requires Christ followers to put ourselves under the Word of God, not the other way around, to fit our agendas.

Doesn't that intrigue you and make you want to know more of what the study is about? It certainly sets the stage for a lively discussion. Here's another example from a study called "Can I Trust My Bible?"

The Bible is not an arbitrary collection of cute, nice, or even wise writings that simply amassed themselves together in some dusty corner of a Jewish rabbi's personal library; it is a set of literary creations built on the foundation of God speaking words of covenant relationship.

That makes me want to know everything I can about the Bible and to know this God who wants to have a relationship with me.

Make Sure It's Applicable

Finally, make sure the study is practical. Remember that the point of all Bible study should not be to simply impart knowledge. It should produce change. The study should present the Word of God as the living, active thing it is. It should help us to savor the Word of God as a precious morsel and allow it to ask questions of us, rather than we simply asking questions of it.

For example, if a study approaches the story of the rich, young man whom Jesus tells to sell all his possessions and follow him, it shouldn't make up an analytical interpretation to explain this away. It should force us to listen to Jesus' words as if they are directed to us and consider what that means for our lives. In other words, it should avoid making God in our own image and let him make us in his.

Look for a Bible study that digs into the meaning of the text but also provides a way to apply it. We can study the Ten Commandments until we've completely dissected them, but if we don't figure out how to obey them, that will be meaningless. We can debate all day what it means to "honor your father and mother," but unless we figure out how to do that, it's not going to do us any good. So keep in mind the highest form of knowledge is wisdom. As you are looking at curriculum, decide whether it is merely imparting information or moving you beyond that into wisdom.

Of course, the best Bible study in the world can fall flat. So pray that God will give you and your group a thirst that is never quenched in a mere hour a week, but that each person will want to know more because they can't get enough of it.

— JOHANNAH REARDON is managing editor of www.ChristianBibleStudies.com.

