

SMALL GROUP QUESTIONS

“The Nature of Real Relationships”

Questions written by Mark Collins

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ANNOUNCEMENTS

Small Group Announcements – Aloha Rock Small group leaders! You are cordially invited to join us for a leadership luau on Friday, May 16, 2008 at 6:30pm at the Rock church in room 232. Come enjoy a delicious Hawaiian buffet, hula praise performance, live island music, free giveaways, some advanced leadership training and much more! This is a free event to celebrate your faithful service to the Small Group Ministry at the Rock. Email Danah at Danah.davis@therocksandiego.org for more details. Mahalo! (That means thank you!)

Small Group leaders are you encouraging your group members to join the Rock Army? Your group can catch the vision of becoming a part of a movement that encourages people to become World-Class Christians. To join, check out the ARMY requirements at www.therocksandiego.org/army/

MINISTRY PRAYER REQUESTS

As “small groupies,” you are the heart and soul of this ministry--who better than you to lift up the Small Group Ministry in prayer? So, it's up to you, you can spend time in your small group praying for these things (weekly or occasionally), or you can pray during the week on your own time. If you'd like to be added to our Pastor's Prayer Team, just let us know. Mark Collins, the Small Group Pastor, would love your prayers! We send out a monthly email of his personal and ministry prayer requests. Just contact Andy Rodgers at andy.rodgers@therocksandiego.org. May God work through your prayers mightily!

Reaching the Lost: Pray that all the small groups continue to develop relationships with those who are far from God, and invite them to their small groups.

Current Small Group Leaders/Small Groups: Pray that all of our Small Groups take time to follow up on all the new people trying to get into small groups.

Potential Small Group Leaders: Pray that our current leaders continue to give their ministry away and develop future leaders to reach their full potential in Jesus.

Small Group Staff: Pray that God gives us the favor and wisdom to rebuild the Small Group team. Ask Him to order our steps in every decision we make.

The Rock Body: Pray that the Rock Army grows deeper and deeper in accountability to one another.

MEMORY VERSE

“With the tongue we praise our lord and Father, and with it we curse men who are made in God's likeness. out of the same moth come praise and cursing” (James 3:9)

SMALL GROUP QUESTIONS – THE NATURE OF REAL RELATIONSHIPS

Psalms 133:1 says, “How very good and pleasant it is when brothers live together in unity.” One thing’s for sure, the Bible tells us over and over again that relationships have an amazing potential to transform our lives—for better or worse. One psychologist put it like this: “It takes people to make people sick, and it takes people to make people well.” Since the very beginning God has purposed community to transform our lives. In fact, the existence of community is a signature of God. God Himself, as Trinity, experiences perfect oneness even as three persons; and made us in His image to be able to know oneness, also. So then, the obvious question surfaces: “How do relationships help us to become more like Christ?” John in his little letter to the church (1 John) that he wrote in the twilight of his life provides an answer. He suggests two things that must be present in our relationships if our lives are to become more like Jesus: grace and truth. True grace that is expressed in relationships requires radical acceptance. It means that we accept people even with obvious shortcomings and failures. Grace allows us to come out of the closet where we often hide and coaxes us to bring our weaknesses into the healing light of Christ. Grace reflects Jesus’ forgiving nature. Truth equally reflects Jesus’ nature, but emphasizes holiness and righteousness. Truth presents us with a sense of boundaries in our lives and keeps us from falling into sinful and destructive patterns. 1 John maybe, from a biblical perspective, is one of the greatest blends of truth and grace. John in his old age, overflowing with grace and love, refers to his listeners as “my little children” and then proceeds to expand on some pretty straight forward truth. One of the greatest barriers to realizing true community in group life is an unhealthy balance of grace and truth.

For some people, words of encouragement and affirmation flow easily, but there’s a fear of truth telling especially if that would involve any kind of confrontation. I call these people “gracious truth avoiders.” On the other side of the coin, there are those who are more ready to confront. Although these members take spiritual growth very seriously, sometimes they put too little effort into speaking the truth in love. These “graceless truth-inflictors” can tend to lack empathy—and a willingness to put themselves in another’s place. Small Groups that genuinely transform the characters of their members create environments where grace and truth can flow freely over time. Only in the shelter of grace are we free to bring our weaknesses out of hiding and move beyond the pretense of always trying to be “godly” in front of others. God has an infinite number of ways to break into our lives with His message of truth and grace. Yet his Word reveals that more often than not He chooses to work through our relationships with other flawed and finite people. When grace leads to love and acceptance, real self disclosure can take place which is crucial for spiritual transformation. Even the simple act of offering counsel to one another becomes incredibly valuable, and because the participants understand the giving and taking of grace and truth, the advice is more likely to have a lasting effect. This is why group life—and all relationships—need to be characterized by grace and truth. And that is why your life must manifest these qualities as well.

Getting Started

What is the greatest sacrifice you remember a friend making for you?

Why is Jesus’ friendship with us not a typical friendship?

Digging Deeper:

Jesus and later the apostle John knew how to comfort the disturbed—and when necessary, how to disturb the comfortable. Review the following passages and discuss the ways that Christ brought truth or grace or both to the individuals he encountered.

John 8:3-11

Luke 18:18-27

Mark 7:5-8

Luke 7:36-50

Luke 23:32, 39-43

1 John 2:1-3; 12-14

2. When it comes to truth and grace what pattern(s) do you observe through Jesus' and his disciple (John) various interactions in the passages above? To what audiences did Jesus and John most often dispense confrontational, unvarnished truth? To what audiences did these men bring overwhelming grace?
3. Now assess your own relating patterns. Toward which side of the grace—truth continuum do you lean? How is this tendency manifested in your:

Your Job

Your marriage/family life

Your friendships

Your small group

Your relationship with God

The way you treat yourself

4. If you lean toward the truth-telling side, what valuable reminders do the following verses have for you?

Ephesians 4:32

Luke 6:41-42

1 Thessalonians 5:11, 14

5. If you lean toward the grace-giving side, how do these verses speak to your situation?

Luke 17:3

2 Timothy 1:7

2 Timothy 4:2

6. It's been said that one of the most difficult things to do is to be right without being hurtful. With this in mind, read Ephesians 4:15, 25, 29-32. What are some concrete ways to express truth even difficult truth in gracious ways? How is it possible to confront and still build up?
7. Who in your life is a person who exudes grace? Who can you count on truth? Does anyone around you display both in a healthy balance?

Bringing it Home

Finally, how about your group: How are you doing at being gracious with each other? How are you doing at truth-telling with each other?

Grace-giving. On a scale of 1-10 (one being low, 10 being high) how's your group grace towards each other?

Truth-telling. On a scale of 1-10 (one being low, 10 being high) how's your truth-telling with each other?