

SMALL GROUP ESSENTIALS

| THE REDEEMED LIFE

 **GROUPS**

THE REDEEMED LIFE

The redeeming work of Jesus can bring life to the Christ-follower. As John Eldredge writes in *All Things New* “The woman recently served divorce papers feels very different about her life than the woman who wakes the day before her wedding.” Knowing our future makes a difference in how we live our present. For those who follow Jesus how we live our present is only possible because of what Jesus has done. He invites us to live His life daily as he offers forgiveness to anyone who would accept a redeemed life.

THE REDEEMED LIFE

| *Purity*

by Clayton Aker

Leader: During your group meeting spend the majority of time gently encouraging people to share their reflections from the lesson. How can the group help?

Group Member: Jot down statements or phrases that stand out to you in the lesson this week. Posture your heart for full participation as you read through the assigned Scriptures. Be ready to share responses to any questions in the lesson.

DISCOVER

Typically, what comes to our minds when we think about purity is sexual purity. What if, though, purity had a richer and more profound meaning than what we attribute to it? While sexual purity is a part of purity, The Redeemed Life, pure life from a kingdom perspective, is all about keeping ourselves from being without blemish or sin. Purity is not just about lust or sexual impurity but our wholeness in Christ. Jesus uses the word “purity” in a way that Christians often don’t consider. He states in the beatitudes,

READ MATTHEW 5:8

Jesus is not pointing to a sexual purity or even a moral purity. Instead, he is pointing us to spiritual purity, or purity of heart. Once you start looking for this in the Bible, you see it all over its pages.

DEVELOP

To understand what Jesus means when he says “pure in heart,” we first have to look at the culture and tradition that He was living. Growing up as a Jewish boy, Jesus would have learned about the ritual laws about being clean and unclean (Leviticus 11-18). These ritual cleaning laws were established to consecrate,

or clean, the people of Israel and the priest so they would be blameless before God. You could become unclean by eating certain foods, illness/disease, or having an interaction with those who were deemed “unclean.” Yet Jesus in the middle of this context starts to reform these laws by touching lepers and those who are ritually unclean. In this, Jesus was imparting His purity, His cleanliness onto them. These people did not blemish Christ, but He passed His purity onto them.

To be pure, to be whole, to be clean is unattainable by our human effort. We, like the nation of Israel, try to clean up our act by performing outward expressions, or try to avoid sinning against God, only to negate dealing with a heart that is defiled. Jesus addressed the outward appearance of the Pharisees and called them “whitewash tombs” and said they cared more about the outer cleaning instead of the inward cleansing that God the Father was after. Our Lord God promises this inner cleaning, this inner purity in Ezekiel 36:2

Purity is about wholeness.

In Revelation 21:18, the Apostle John uses the term “pure” to speak of gold. For something to be pure gold means that it’s 100% gold - nothing else. There is no other element in it. Purity is about wholeness that it is not part one thing and partially another. For Jesus to say “pure in heart,” it means their heart is set on one thing and nothing else. To be concerned about being a “pure heart” means we are concerned about where our affections and devotions lie. We are concerned about every word, every movie/television show, every song or book that we input into our life. The life of following Jesus is wholistic, and His reign stretches to every section of our life. We are all being formed by the various media and interactions we have. As a follower of Jesus, we must pay attention to how various inputs are shaping us.

Purity is about devotion.

READ JAMES 4:4-8

James calls us in James 4:8 to purify our hearts because we cannot be devoted to this world and devoted to God. The practice of confession and repentance becomes a daily expression. One of the areas that we need to confession is our attention. Attention is the

beginning of devotion. We are losing our ability to keep attention on the main thing and move quickly to the next item. What if we were to become aware of where our attention is focused? What keeps us up at night may be a sign of what is drawing your attention and devotion. To keep God before us at all times is to live a life devoted to considering Him before all things.

Purity is about Jesus.

READ 1 JOHN 3:2-3

Jesus is both our reason and example for purity right now. We look forward to the day that we will be completely pure in Jesus, following God wholeheartedly; we purify ourselves at the moment.

The good news is that Christ has accomplished on the cross all that is needed to make us pure, and He has poured His Spirit into our lives giving us what is “needed for life and godliness” (2 Peter 1:3-4), so we can work out our purity here and now (Hebrews 10:14).

DEEPEN

What might be some competing philosophies of life in our world, and how do they influence you? Which do you find yourself most tempted toward holding as more important than pleasing God?

READ 1 PETER 2:1-3.

What are three action words in verses 1 & 2 that serve as warnings for Christians?

Would you say these are suggestions, helpful highlights, or necessities? Why?

How are you doing in following these warnings in your life? If you are not doing as well as you would like to follow these warnings, what needs to change so that you can grow as a Christian?

In 1 Peter 2:2, we are told of the goal of ridding ourselves of sin and craving spiritual food. What is the end result of this goal?

Do you see Christian growth as a goal of your Christian life? Is it enough to cling to salvation alone, or should we want to grow up in our salvation so that we can be what God wants us to be as his children?

What types of distractions keep us from growing? How can I reset my focus so that I can avoid distractions, and grow? Read Phil 3:7-14, Hebrews 12:1-3.

THE REDEEMED LIFE

| Freedom in Christ

by Clayton Carver

Leader: During your group meeting spend the majority of time encouraging people to share their reflections from the lesson. Focus on points of confusion for people. The Romans passage is quite long and its easy for people to get confused or lose interest.

Group Member: Jot down statements or phrases that stand out to you in the lesson this week. Posture your heart for full participation as you read through the assigned Scriptures. Be ready to share responses to any questions in the lesson.

DISCOVER

Freedom seems to have become a tricky subject in our day. What does it actually mean to be free? If you're like me, growing up you thought freedom means you can do whatever you want. That was the American way! Of course, once you get older you realize this is not at all what freedom means. Not to mention that trying to do whatever I wanted around my parent's house would've ended horribly for me!

When you think about it, freedom isn't necessarily being able to do whatever you want. However, freedom is being able to seek your best interest. For our society, freedom means the ability to choose the American dream of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. For the Christian, we also believe that we are free to pursue our best interest, but that we also have a very different understanding of what our best interest really is.

DEVELOP

The Apostle Paul explains the freedom we have in Christ in Romans 6:1-14.

READ ROMANS 6:1-14

This passage is great for teaching the believer what our freedom in Christ is and what it is not.

It is not a license to sin.

The first thing Paul does is pose a question to his readers. This builds off the statement he just made that no matter how great our sin is, God's grace will always be greater. So, he asks, "Should we continue in sin so that grace may multiply?" The answer is clear, "Absolutely not!" Our freedom in Christ does not mean that we are free to keep sinning. Like the common misunderstanding, we are not free now to live however we please just because we know that God will forgive us.

We are free because we have been made new.

Paul follows this by explaining that our freedom stems from the new life we have in Christ. "For we know that our old self was crucified with Him in order that sin's dominion over the body may be abolished, so that we may no longer be enslaved to sin, since a person who has died is freed from sin's claims." Paul uses this illustration of our old self dying and our new self being brought to life in many of his letters. Our old self was a slave to sin, but our new self is free from any claim sin had on our lives.

We are freed for obedience.

"So, you too consider yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus...offer yourselves to God, and all the parts of yourselves to God as weapons for righteousness." Paul closes this passage by telling us how to use our newfound freedom in Christ. We are to use it to obey all the He has commanded. In fact, it is only through Christ that we are free to obey in the first place. Now, because of our salvation we are truly free. We can choose to give into our flesh and selfish desires, or we can choose to obey God and live the life He has called us to.

DEEPEN

When you think about God forgiving anything you do, do you feel more inclined to obey or disobey?

THE REDEEMED LIFE

| *Joy Amidst Chaos*

by Stan Rogers

Leader: During your group meeting spend the majority of time encouraging people to share their reflections from the lesson. There are some group activities in the dream section. Reserve some group meeting time this week to do those activities

Group Member: Jot down statements or phrases that stand out to you in the lesson this week. Posture your heart for full participation as you read through the assigned Scriptures. Be ready to share responses to any questions in the lesson.

DISCOVER

We love the anticipation that comes before rushing out the door on good days! On these days, we wake up and dwell on the exciting things we get to experience. There is a little spring in our step and a song in our heart as we go through the routine of getting ready to head out the door. The events we are going to, the interactions we will have, the memories that will be forever sealed in our minds are enough to produce an eagerness to be out the door so we won't miss out.

How many of you have expected the day to be filled with excitement, only to be greeted by one difficult thing after another. This change can come quickly and unexpectedly from a conversation with a spouse, a phone call that doesn't go as planned, conflict with a coworker, unmet expectations, or any number of undesirable events a day can produce.

From time to time, we all go through a series of complicated events or difficult relationships that produce a season of turmoil in our lives. As we become weary in dealing with problems, we may get angry, frustrated, fearful, or even depressed. As Christ followers, we have been taught about an

abundant life, filled with joy and peace that is beyond our understanding. However, this day or season of life, the joy has left, and it seems so unattainable.

DEVELOP

Someone once said, "God may not deliver you from your problems, but he will walk alongside of you in the midst of them." The psalmist speaks of this in Psalm 138:7.

READ PSALM 138:7

As a Christ-follower, these words speak of hope during hardships. Hope found in Christ can produce an inexplicable joy in the middle of turmoil.

When we find ourselves in a season where joy has abandoned us, we should consider the source of our sadness. There is a spiritual battle taking place as described in Ephesians 6:12.

READ EPHESIANS 6:12

These powers of darkness and evil forces are led by an enemy that hates God and hates you. 1 Peter 5:8 describes the character of our true enemy: "Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour." When confronting the religious leaders of his day, Jesus says this about the adversary, "You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks out of his own character, for he is a liar and the father of lies" (John 8:44).

It is the adversary that steals the joy of our salvation by speaking lies. These lies distort who Christ is in our lives and the power He has over all things. We must recognize the root cause of our joylessness, stepping past all the lies and traps set before us. The way we do this is by embracing truth. Below are eight examples of God's truth:

- Neh.8:10
- Is.54:17
- Is. 55:12
- Ps.118:24
- John 10:10
- James 1:2

- Rom.15:13
- 1 John 4:4

As a follower of Christ, not only should we consider the source of why our joy is missing, but dwell on the character of God. The promises of God are not something we earn and are not dependent on our faithfulness, rather his character. 2 Timothy 2:13 says, “If we are unfaithful, he remains faithful, for he cannot deny himself.”

READ PHILIPPIANS 4:4-9

Philippians 4:4 tells us to “Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice.” We may ask, “How?” How is it that we can always be full of joy? By observing and practicing verses 5-9 of the same chapter. We can experience joy when we give God every anxious thought (vs. 5-7). We can also experience the kind of joy God so freely gives when we daily practice the “whatevers” the Apostle Paul describes in vv 8-9.

DEEPEN

Chaos takes place when something causes disorder and confusion. Many people experience disorder and confusion from time to time. Write down five things that may create chaos in your life.

Using the examples of God’s truth verses listed above, have each person assign a verse to each of the items they listed. Ask for volunteers to share their list and read the verses they assigned each item. Have the volunteer share why they chose the verses they did.

Why is it important to understand that we have an adversary who is at war with the God we worship and us as God’s creation?

Why do you think Paul is encouraging the Philippian believers to fix their thoughts on things that are true, honorable, right, pure, lovely, admirable, excellent and worthy of praise?

DREAM

Often, joy from the Lord comes as we serve others. Encourage the group to adopt an elderly person/ couple who cannot get out much or is in a nursing home. Plan an evening to share a meal with them, play games, sing, share stories, etc.

| End Notes

1. *Gilbert Bilezikian, Community 101: Reclaiming the Local Church as Community of Oneness (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997), 17.*
2. Retrieved June 12, 2018 <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/give-and-take/201309/goodbye-mbti-the-fad-won-t-die>
3. Scenario taken from Bill Hybels sermon "Choosing Platoon Members" Willow Creek Community Church: 1989.
4. *Bilezikian, Community 101, 49.*
5. *Gladden, Steve, Planning Small Groups With Purpose: A Field-Tested Guide to Design and Grow Your Ministry, Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2018. See table of contents for a listing of all twenty components. Steve presents them as questions.*
6. *Evans, Tony, Life Essentials, Moody Publishers, 2003.*
7. *Gladden, Steve, Leading Small Groups With Purpose, Baker Books, 2012.*
8. *Lewis, Gordon R., "Attributes of God" in Evangelical Dictionary of Theology 2nd edition, ed. W. Elwell (Baker, 2001).*
9. *Eldredge, John, All Things New (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2017).*