

Small Group Discussion Guide — May 9, 2021

- Series: if/then
 - Sermon: Prioritize Relationships
 - Scripture: Ecclesiastes 4: 8-12, Hebrews 10: 23-25
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FOLLOW-UP FROM LAST WEEK

Did you have an opportunity last week to make progress in pursuing forgiveness with anyone? If so, what was that like?

CONNECT

1. What stood out to you from this past week's service, and why?
2. Who do you imagine would have a harder time making and maintaining close personal relationships, introverts or extroverts?

ENGAGE

1. Read Ecclesiastes 4: 8-11.
 - In verse 8, what is the status of the man? How materially successful is he, and at what cost? What is he questioning?
 - In this passage the writer gives several reasons why "two are better than one." What are they?
 - How do you interpret the phrase, "A cord of three strands is not quickly broken?"
2. Read Hebrews 10: 23-25.
 - In verse 24, what is one of the benefits that close relationships provide for our lives as Christians?
 - Verse 25 warns against giving up meeting together. What do you think are some benefits of being together in worship? How has the pandemic affected your thinking about this?

APPLY

1. If the only thing that goes to heaven with us is *people*, why is it that we spend so much time pursuing accomplishments, money and fame?
2. David mentioned that the church is essentially a community of relationships. Discuss this idea. How important is belonging to a small group in making that statement a reality?
3. Our shared experiences during the COVID pandemic have demonstrated just how much we need each other. On the other hand, it has also demonstrated how easily divided we can become. David pointed out how the early Christians were known for their love despite living under the occupation of the Roman Empire, and most likely big differences in the way believers wanted to respond in that situation. What have you observed in yourself during the past year, as your own brothers and sisters in Christ likely have had perspectives that are different from yours? How can we show love to each other, even when we disagree?

PRAYER

Heavenly Father, we know how much we need you, but sometimes we forget how much we need one another. Help us to desire closer relationships with others, to pursue them, to nurture them, so that we may walk closer to you, as we come alongside others through your love. Amen

GOING DEEPER

David mentioned the tendency among all of us to become *consumers* at church, clinging to our *individualistic* needs. He pointed out that only through close relationships with other Christians will we begin to *grow* in our faith, and that accountability only comes in relationship with others. Who are you accountable to in regard to your faith? How has your participation in a small group helped you become accountable? If you're not in a group, how does spiritual accountability happen in your life?

SCRIPTURE

Genesis 17:7

Proverbs 27:17

Proverbs 18:24

John 13:35

Philippians 2:2

QUOTATIONS

"To love at all is to be vulnerable. . . If you want to make sure of keeping [your heart] intact, you must give your heart to no one, not even to an animal. Wrap it carefully round with hobbies and little luxuries; avoid all entanglements; lock it up safe in the casket of your selfishness. But in that casket--safe, dark, motionless, airless--it will change. It will not be broken--it will become unbreakable, impenetrable, irredeemable. . . The only place outside of Heaven where you can be perfectly safe from the danger of love is Hell."

Henri Nouwen

"St. Augustine writes, 'A friend is someone who knows everything about you and totally accepts you as you are.' Is this not the dream that we all share? Someday, somewhere, I am going to meet that person who really understands me- understands the words I speak and even the words I leave unspoken. The gospel proclaims that Jesus of Nazareth is the fulfillment of that dream."

Brennan Manning

"We have been friends now for many years. In the beginning there was some comparing, some jealousy, some competition. But as we grew older and became more sure in our own uniqueness, most, if not all, of this rivalry vanished, and we were more able to affirm and call forth each other's gifts."

Henri Nouwen