

What Matters - Small Group Materials

“I know what matters. And I commit my life to it.”

Introductory Discussion

Begin with prayer

- 1) Make a list of activities you find yourself doing on a daily basis.
 - a. What are the essentials in any given day? : (could be anything from brushing teeth to, drinking coffee every morning, picking up children, going to work etc.)
 - b. Share with your groups what is on your list
 - c. Based on your list, how do you find yourself investing your time on any given day?
 - d. Who are the people you invest in?
- 2) How easy or difficult would it be to take something off your list for a couple of days? For an indefinite period of time?
- 3) Based on your list what would you say are the top three most important things in your life?

Our study, over the next several weeks will be focusing on *What Matters* in our lives. We'll look at who matters, why they matter, why *we* matter.

Read Isaiah 43:1-7

- 4) Have you ever gotten a “whatever” response from someone when you ask a question or give an opinion?
 - a. How else can you define that response? (ex. I don't really care, etc.)
 - b. How has this mindset found it's way into our attitudes towards everyday life?
 - c. How can a “whatever” attitude be detrimental to our ideas of what is valuable and worthwhile?
- 5) What does Isaiah convey about the idea of our worth and value?
 - a. In what way has God invested in our lives?
 - b. Why is that investment important in your life right now? How has it brought you to where you are now?

Closing

- 6) Think again about the essentials of your everyday life –
 - a. Imagine you are Jesus – based on your life what would the essentials of His daily life be?
 - b. What would He invest in?

As you go about the next week, consider what it means to be the presence of Christ in the places you go and toward the people you are with.

Close with prayer

Week One Devotional Questions

Made by God: We Matter

Open with prayer

- 1) What does it mean to matter to someone else?

Read Genesis 1:26-28 and Genesis 2:4-7

- 2) The Creation story is the starting place for conversation about God's connections with us. We live, however, in a culture, where Darwin's ideas of evolution by natural selection rather than creation inform our worldview at its deepest levels. Evolution suggests that we are simply profound accidents. How has this shift impacted our contemporary understanding of
 - a) Law, ethics, and morality?
 - b) Purpose? What would it mean to be a "profound accident"?
 - c) What really matters?

Read Ephesians 2:1-10

- 3) Reflect on the idea that each of us is a signed original of the Master. What does it mean to be a "living testimony" of our Creator's genius, power, and love?
- 4) In what environment do you most notice that you are different from other people (be it looks, your opinions, family etc.)?
- 5) Consider again these words of St. Paul, "*Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who had blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, even as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world*" (Ephesians 1:3-4). What does, "Chosen by God before the foundation of the world" say to you and why you are in this world?
- 6) Consider again Satan's lies to Eve. What does, "You're in it alone" mean to you? Have you ever felt that way?
- 7) You were asked to picture the Creator's hands with nail scars in them. What does that tell you about what you mean to Him?

Read Genesis 3:9

- 8) How does the idea of a Seeking God inform the "what matters" in your congregation?

Close with prayer.

Week Two Devotional Materials

Restored by God: We matter more than we can imagine.

Open with prayer

Read 2 Corinthians 5:16, 17

- 1) Jean-Jacques Bernard's craft as a furniture restorer requires that
 - (1) he appreciate each article to be restored as unique, a one of a kind,
 - (2) he 'know' the article by learning everything he can about it,
 - (3) he bring the article back to the original design and purpose of its creator, and
 - (4) his work is intended to bring great joy to the owner.

In St. Paul tells us that in Christ we have been restored. How does Mr. Bernard's work help us understand what God's work is all about?

Read Matthew 16:24

- 2) How would you understand the sentence, "Bearing our cross, then, is not so much about *accepting our suffering* in this life as it is *owning our sin*"?

Read Romans 5:6-8

- 3) How did God "outlove" you in your life?

Read 2 Timothy 1:12.

- 4) Paul speaks of God entrusting the Gospel to his care. Paul rejoiced in the fact that God trusted him with something that precious. Does God trust you? What or whom has God entrusted to your care? What does that say to you about His trust?

Close with prayer

Week Three Devotional Materials

Called by God: Lives that matter

Open with prayer

- 1) When we speak about the Gospel—the good news of what God has done for us in His Son—we usually think of what God has saved us *from*. Scriptures also teach us that God saved us *for* something.
 - a. How would you describe the “from” in your own life?
 - b. How would you describe the “for?”
 - c. Why are both of them good news for you?
- 2) Most materials written about Christian stewardship emphasize that God is the sole owner of all things. We serve as the managers of His creation. While the Bible teaches that God is the author and creator of everything and that everything depends upon Him, it also teaches that we are His children and as such we are co-heirs with His Son Jesus.
 - a. What does being a co-heir with Jesus mean to you?
 - b. How do the Biblical teaching of being co-heirs with Christ and being managers of God’s creation connect together?
 - c. How does being a co-heir with Jesus of this creation impact the way you go about managing your life, family, work and Christian service in the world?
- 3) Describe your understanding or experience of working in a family business.
 - a. God is in the restoration business. As co-heirs with Jesus we are, too. What do you see as your role in the family business? How do you see the business of restoring broken people and relationships being lived out in your daily life?
 - b. How does the idea of God’s work being a family business impact your decisions of how to invest your time, talents, and financial resources?

Close with Prayer

Week Four Devotional Questions

The Family Business

Begin with Prayer

- 1) Jesus gave us a wonderful promise: *“I came that they might have life and have it abundantly”* (John 10:10).
 - a. How do you understand His idea of having an abundant life?
 - b. How does His idea compare with your own?

- 2) Jesus gave us the secret to bearing much fruit, especially in the harvest of restoring people to the new life God wants them to have: *“Truly, truly I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit”*
 - a. What actually dies in a seed or grain of wheat when it falls into the ground?
 - b. What part of the seed does not die?
 - c. How does Jesus’ illustration apply to your investing your life in other people?
 - d. How does it apply to your congregation investing itself in your community, especially with those who do not know Jesus?

- 3) During this week of devotions you were to ask yourself, “In whom and how am I investing my life?” How did you answer the question?

- 4) 1 Peter is an instruction manual for how God runs the family business on earth. It opens with these words, *Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to those who are elect exiles of the dispersion . . . according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in the sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ and for sprinkling with his blood* (1 Peter 1:1-2). These few words introduce us to a number of “Family Business” basics. Spend some time in your group discussing them
 - a. “Sanctified in the Spirit . . . for the sprinkling with His blood.” Peter tells us that we have been sanctified or set apart as Royal Priests. How does his understanding of the word sanctification compare with the way we often use that word in our church?
 - b. Priests are in the business of connecting people to God. God has placed a number of people in your life who, like all of us, need connecting to God. Name some of those people. How can you help connect them to the Lord?
 - c. A word “exile” can be understood as foreigner, alien, stranger. A devotion this week suggested, “living on passport.” When do you use your US Passport? What does it symbolize to you? How does the idea of “living on passport” help you understand living as a Christian in our present non-churched world?
 - d. Dispersion or Diaspora was a word that meant destruction and loss for God’s people. As God’s people were scattered in the Diaspora throughout the Babylonian Empire they feared the loss of their personal identity as God’s people and their sense of community as the nation of Israel. The word Diaspora can also be understood as the scattering of seed on the ground, what we call sowing or planting.

- i. How does such an understanding of Diaspora change the meaning from negative to positive?
- ii. How does it address the fears that we might have of losing our identity as Christian people in a world that does not know God?
- e. We would all agree that seeds are meant to be planted. Storing them in a barn to keep them safe rather than planting them in the ground to produce much fruit is counterproductive. How does this picture compare with our expectations of the Christian life in our congregation? What do we expect of ourselves and our fellow members?

Week Five Devotional Questions

Working The Family Business

Begin with prayer

- 1) You recall Dietrich Bonhoeffer's words, in his book *Life Together*, "I need my brother because of Christ." Whom do you serve as brother or sister in the place of our Lord?
- 2) St. Peter wrote, "*Keep loving one another earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sins.*" How do you understand covering or forgiving someone who has sinned against you as a personal investment in them?
- 3) Read 1 Timothy 2:1-5. St. Paul instructs us to pray for all people, including those tasked with governing us.
 - a) How can you specifically incorporate such prayer in your regular worship service?
 - b) What specific situations or people in your community need to be connected to the Lord through your prayers?
- 4) St. Peter wrote, "*[In] your hearts regard Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect, having a good conscience*" (1 Peter 3:15-16). The hope that Peter is talking about is the difference Christ makes in our lives.
 - a) Share with the group your response to the question, "What difference does Christ make in my life, or your family, and other relationships?"
 - b) How might this "difference" be used in sharing your "hope" with another person?
- 5) In our devotion this week regarding spiritual gifts it was suggested that you think about this question as a starting place for discovering the gifts God has given you: If you were kept awake some night thinking about other people in need, who would come to mind?
 - a) Share with the group your answer.
 - b) How might your answer connect with the spiritual gifts God has given to you?
- 6) What does the story about the farmer and his small son say to you about your significance in the Family Business?

Week Six Devotional Questions

Stuff gets in the way

Open with prayer:

You were asked to reflect personally through the week on several thoughts that emerged from each devotion. Those thoughts form the basis for our small group reflection. Discuss as many or all of them as you have time.

- 1) St. Paul once wrote, *I do not understand my own actions. . . I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing.* He summed up his dilemma with the words, *“O wretched man that I am.”* I think we can understand both Paul’s struggle to live the abundant life God intended for him in Christ and the sheer frustration he experienced in failing on a regular basis. Talk about the struggles you face in living the abundant life.

How does Christ’s words, “If the Son sets you free, you are free indeed” apply to these struggles?

- 2) The Tower of Babel story teaches us about our need to build “comfort zones.” What are the “comfort zones” in your own life that compete with your ability to live an abundant life? How are they working for you? What promises has God made that offer the security you need?
- 3) Abraham and Sarah wanted to do God’s will but often do it their own way. In so doing they “shortened the hand” of God in supplying all that they needed to carry out the work He had given them to do. What shortens the hand of God in your own life? That is, what keeps you from doing the things God has placed in your heart to do?

Were you able to step outside for a good look at the heavens? What did the stars have to say to you about God’s resources for you to do what He has placed in your heart to do?

- 4) Luke 15:1-2 tells us that “sinners were all drawing near to hear Jesus.” Why do you think they were comfortable coming to hear Jesus in His home, but not comfortable to meet with God or His people in the Temple or local church? Is this same situation taking place today with us and our congregation? If so, how do we address it?
- 5) During Holy Week Jesus told His people that they had turned His Father’s house into a den of robbers. In what ways have you or your congregation been tempted to do the same thing?
- 6) What does the “Sign of Jonah” mean for you?
- 7) Luther told us that the Christian life is one of daily repentance. Discuss how the GPS’s idea of “Recalculating” can shape your understanding of true “Repentance?”

Week Seven Devotional Materials

Love Matters

Open with prayer

Read Genesis 3:1-9

- 1) Share with the group what our Lord's words to Satan concerning Eve say to you?
- 2) Jesus saw people as harassed and helpless. What do you see as causing people to feel harassed and helpless? What do we want to do about it?
 - a. Personally: Who around me is harassed and helpless? What do I want to do about it?
 - b. As our church family: Who around us is harassed and helpless? What might we do about it?
- 3) Share with your group what you discovered when you made your "list of priorities." Did anything change in the way you invest the time, talents, or treasures that you have been given?
- 4) Discuss with the group the idea that the "Family Business" should be understood as an investment opportunity as seriously as the other investment opportunities we make today. What would that mean for you and how you presently invest the time, talent, and treasure that you have been given?

Read 2 Corinthians 5:14-15

- 5) Discuss together what the phrase, "The love of Christ compels us" says to you about your participation in the Family Business?

Read Luke 15:11-32

- 6) Read together the story of the "Prodigal Son(s)." Which family member do you most identify with in the story: Dad, big brother or little brother? Why?

Close with Prayer