

## FBG Vision Series Small Groups

We want to remind you that each session has some key components we want you to be familiar with before you get started:

**Location:** There are two primary locations on a map you definitely need to know. The first is where you are and the second is where you are going. Each session will begin with pointing out where you are and locating where you are going during that session.

**Leg of the journey:** A good team looks at the map and identifies the different elements and challenges of that particular leg of the journey. Your group will talk about what those challenges and key elements are and how you can navigate them.

**Gear:** Anybody who has done much adventuring knows that the gear you carry can make all the difference. The right gear can make a difficult journey enjoyable. The wrong gear can make even the easiest journey painful. We want to help you identify the right gear for the journey ahead.

**Team role:** The good news is that God didn't design you to make this journey alone. He has provided the church family (and smaller groups within that family) to specifically help each other along the way. A good team knows each other's strengths and weaknesses and learns how to work together to help each person on the team play a significant role in getting to the goal. You'll work through some ways your smaller team within the FBG family can help each other move forward together.

The journey ahead is incredibly exciting! These sessions are building blocks for how you can walk together as a small group and as a part of the FBG family. So please make the most of your time together by being honest and seeking to engage in a way that allows every person who would like to share to have that opportunity.

Enjoy this leg of the journey!

## Session 2 – Love God



**Location:** As you head out on the trail, there is a sense of excitement and adventure. You don't quite know what the adventure holds; you just know you want to be a part of the journey ahead. The same is true for our lives. God has called us to a great adventure. How do we know?

Because God created you for a purpose:

1 Corinthians 8:6: "yet for us there is but one God,

the Father, from whom all things came and for whom we live; and there is but one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom all things came and through whom we live" (NIV).

God created you to reflect His goodness:

Genesis 1:26-27: "Then God said, 'Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.' So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them" (NIV).

The best way for our lives to have significance that provides lasting joy is through a relationship with the Lord.

When we last got together, we talked about our "You Are Here" point on the map. We talked about how we need to stick close to the Guide and how He walks with us right where we are. Once we recognize where we are and our need for the Guide, then we can start out on the trail. The goal this week is to move toward loving God. We know we need Him, but the challenge is figuring out how to truly love Him.

**Leg of the journey:** This particular leg of the journey has plenty of difficulties and challenges, but there is one main challenge that seems to encompass the others. How do we move from being self-centered to Christ-centered?

Questions:

- What are some issues that create difficulties in moving toward Christ-centeredness?
- Knowing this is an issue for everyone, how can your group be intentional about helping each other walk through this?

**Gear:** We understand that we need/want to move toward the Lord and toward loving Him more than we do right now. But getting there can prove to be a daunting task. There is some gear that can help us grow in loving the Lord more each day along the journey.

**Piece of gear #1 – Humility:** If we truly want to learn to know and love the Lord, we have to start by admitting we cannot love Him on our own. We have a deep need for Christ every moment of every day. In our own power our lives are unmanageable.

- Romans 3:10-12: “As it is written: ‘There is no one righteous, not even one; there is no one who understands; there is no one who seeks God. All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one’ (NIV).
- Romans 7:18: “For I know that good itself does not dwell in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out” (NIV).
  - Our self-centeredness comes from our sin nature. We are broken people who do not seek God on our own nor do we have the ability to carry out the good we want to do. We begin to move forward when we have a clear picture of who we are and who God is.

Contrast this with who Jesus is:

- Colossians 1:15-17: “The Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together” (NIV).
- Hebrews 1:3 “The Son is the radiance of God’s glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word. After he had provided purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven” (NIV).

Questions:

Based on these verses, who is Jesus compared to who we are?

- Humility is not seeing ourselves as less than we are, but instead, seeing ourselves the way we truly are. None of us are God and we are dependent upon Jesus every moment.
- When we recognize our need for Christ, the trail opens up for us to move toward loving the Lord.

**Piece of gear #2 – Regular patterns of life that reinforce our dependence on Christ:** Throughout the Bible, the Lord led the people to establish patterns in their lives that were intended to lead them to recognize their dependence on the Lord and in turn grow their relationship with Him. Every feast had an intentional purpose. The sacrifices and the way people made those sacrifices all pointed to the people's need and dependence on the Lord. We all need patterns to remind us who God is and who we are.

The patterns God established were distorted in a couple of ways by His people:

1. For many people, these patterns moved from being reminders of their need for the Lord to being steps to earning God's favor. Isaiah 1 points to the Lord's desire, not just for sacrifices in themselves, but for a humble heart that recognizes the Lord's position and submits to a holy God. We do not earn the favor of God by practicing these patterns. However, we seek to put ourselves in a position to allow the Lord to remind our heart continually of who He is, who we are before Him and how He's changed our identity through His Son.

Isaiah 1:13-15 "Stop bringing meaningless offerings! Your incense is detestable to me. New Moons, Sabbaths and convocations—I cannot bear your worthless assemblies. Your New Moon feasts and your appointed festivals I hate with all my being. They have become a burden to me; I am weary of bearing them. When you spread out your hands in prayer, I hide my eyes from you; even when you offer many prayers, I am not listening. Your hands are full of blood!" (NIV).

2. Some simply stopped the patterns all together and created their new patterns that led to a focus on themselves instead of on the Lord. Isaiah 5 recognizes when the people simply had no regard for the deeds of the Lord and goes on to show the consequences of their disregard for the Lord.

Isaiah 5:12: "They have harps and lyres at their banquets, pipes and timbrels and wine, but they have no regard for the deeds of the Lord, no respect for the work of his hands" (NIV).

The patterns God gave us are easily distorted to seek to earn His favor or to disregard them and substitute our own patterns. However, neither of these approaches will help us move more toward loving the Lord and growing in our relationship with Him. So what are some patterns that can help us move forward down the trail?

**Patterns:**

**The Word (Bible):** As you develop a pattern of getting into the Bible, the Lord will open the doors for you to know Him more intimately resulting in building a biblical framework for your life. The Word is a compass on the trail that points to truth and eliminates the need to navigate the trail alone or by the group's opinions. This compass prevents you from getting lost along the way.

2 Timothy 3:16-17: "All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work" (NIV).

**Questions:**

- How can your group keep a focus on allowing the Word to be your compass over personal opinions?
- What are some ways you can encourage each other in the pattern of being in the Word?

**Prayer:** A pattern of prayer helps to align our lives with what God says is right, true and good. We have been invited to approach the Lord in prayer with confidence that He hears us. Ultimately, prayer helps move our hearts from what we desire to what the Lord desires. This pattern is another humble step toward recognizing who God is and His authority over all of creation and our dependent need of Him. In fact, one primary reason we neglect a pattern of prayer is because we can often feel like we are useless while we are praying and we want to be "doing something" to fix what's broken in our lives. Prayer is a reminder that God is the one who can work in our brokenness and difficulties better than we ever could. Setting this pattern daily is a humble acknowledgement of our ongoing need for Him.

Ephesians 6:18-20: "And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the Lord's people. Pray also for me, that whenever I speak, words may be given me so that I will fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may declare it fearlessly, as I should" (NIV).

**Questions:**

- What are some patterns of prayer you can implement as a small group family (e.g., group prayer journal, email list, prayer text chain specifically for prayer, set aside time to pray together, etc.)?
- Talk about some different ways you can grow in prayer individually (praying Scripture, prayer-walking, journaling prayers or cataloging them, etc.).

**Worship:** A pattern of worship helps to keep the focus on the Guide and His worthiness to be praised instead of seeking praise for ourselves. A personal, daily pattern of worship is where you intentionally set your heart on ascribing praise to the Lord. Corporate worship is where the local believers in Jesus gather together to ascribe praise to the Lord and be encouraged and equipped as a part of the same family. These two go together. When we only worship privately, our worship becomes about what is most comfortable to us and that easily leads to pride. We end up missing the unity with other believers we were designed for. When we only worship corporately we will miss the intimacy of the relationship we were designed to have with the Lord.

Psalm 109:30: “With my mouth I will greatly extol the Lord; in the great throng of worshipers I will praise him” (NIV).

Questions:

- What are some patterns of worship you can set in your life personally and corporately?
- How can your small group family seek to worship the Lord together when you meet?
- In which area of worship do you need the most accountability from your group? Personal or corporate?

**Regular experiences from the patterns:**

As these patterns take hold in our lives, they build the humility we talked about earlier. We begin to see God for who He is more clearly and in turn we see ourselves for who we are. When this happens we cannot help but see changes in our lives. The patterns of pursuing the Guide help produce some regular experiences in our lives.

**Admit and believe:** We begin to experience a regular admittance of our broken state before a perfect God as we draw closer to Him. We see more of who He is and how magnificent He is and in turn we recognize how broken we are. We cannot draw closer and closer to the Lord and stay in our pride.

Romans 7:18: “For I know that good itself does not dwell in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out” (NIV).

This admission breaks down the walls of pride and leads to an opportunity to believe that “God is the one whose power can fully restore us.”<sup>1</sup> This produces a growing faithfulness in our lives. When we are regularly pursuing who God is, we have an increased desire to faithfully follow Him.

Questions:

- What indicators in your life show you know God, agree with God and trust God?
- Where are you struggling to agree with God and trust Him?

**Confession:** As we continue in the patterns of the Word, prayer and worship, it produces a genuine experience of confession. This means confessing to the Lord, to ourselves and to another human the **exact nature** of our sins. Confession means not hiding in our sin and hoping nobody else notices. The goal is to bring into the light what wants to hide in the darkness. Drawing our sin into the light is one of the most difficult and vital results of the patterns we previously talked about. Confession comes from admitting our brokenness, believing in God's great holiness and recognizing the gap between us and Him. As we walk closer to Him our brokenness becomes easily apparent and we cannot help but confess our inadequacies and run to Him. It comes from a heart of humility, gratitude and worship. Without it we become arrogant and self-focused.

Isaiah 6:5: "Woe to me!' I cried. 'I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the Lord Almighty'" (NIV).

Remember this – each confession of sin is a profession of faith in Christ – an agreement with God about who He is, what He has done and who you are because of Him.

1 John 1:7-9: "But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin. If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness" (NIV).

Proverbs 28:13: "Whoever conceals their sins does not prosper, but the one who confesses and renounces them finds mercy" (NIV).

We confess not only to the Lord, but to another believer in Christ. The Lord uses this confession to another believer as a powerful catalyst in our lives in bringing sin into the light. This is incredibly difficult and yet the Lord blesses this type of confession as a part of the healing process.

James 5:16: "Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective" (NIV).

Questions:

- What does confession look like in your life right now?
- What could confession look like?
- What could this look like for your small group family?
- What does this not look like? (Go and share everything with everyone. The focus is on confessing to the Lord and two or three other believers who can encourage you along the trail.)

- Who are the two or three people in your life you can confess to and count on their encouragement and accountability?
- If you don't have these people, what steps are you taking (can you take) to find them?

**Resources to help with confession:**

- Confession guide – attached is a confession guide to help you think through confession in your life; individually and as a group.
- Five categories that may help you identify what you need to confess:
  1. Resentments: Who am I holding resentments against?
  2. Fears: Where am I exhibiting fear instead of trusting the Lord?
  3. Harms to me: Who am I harboring bitterness against because of the past?
  4. Harms by me: Who have I harmed along the way?
  5. Selfish desires: Where have my desires taken precedent over the Lord and others (greed, sex, ambition)?

As we draw closer to the Lord, we not only **confess** our brokenness, but because of who Christ is, we seek to **repent** and turn away from the sin in our lives.

**Repentance:** Confession is recognizing the brokenness, while repenting is seeking the Lord to help you turn away from the brokenness. Confession without repentance is possible. You know you are moving into repentance when you become entirely ready to turn away from your patterns of sin and turn toward the Lord. The experience of repentance can only come from continuing to listen to, worship and pursue the Guide.

2 Timothy 2:22: “Flee the evil desires of youth and pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace, along with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart” (NIV).

Acts 26:20: “First to those in Damascus, then to those in Jerusalem and in all Judea, and then to the Gentiles, I preached that they should repent and turn to God and demonstrate their repentance by their deeds” (NIV).

**Questions:**

- How can we help each other along the road of repentance?
- What could allowing someone else to walk with you along the road of repentance look like?

**Team role:** As you gather together regularly, the goal is to help each other know and love the Lord more. Every time your group meets, God wants you to know Him more. Your group is not simply a random gathering together. The Lord has brought your small group family together so you can intentionally help each other down the path toward loving the Lord more clearly. The

journey is long and difficult. Everyone needs encouragers along the way to help them keep going.

As you think about this leg of the journey, here are a couple of keys for your group:

1. **Be rigorously honest** – Talk about what this means. One definition says “severely accurate.” In order for your group to be able to help each other truly move more toward the Lord, it will take rigorous honesty with each other. This means not telling “half-truths” or hiding the parts you don’t want someone else to know. It means an intentional commitment to be rigorously honest with each other. There will be times when something is best shared with one or two people of the same gender from the group and not the entire group.

Questions:

- What does rigorous honesty look like for the group?
- How do you feel about this? What reservations do you have? How can the group help each other overcome these hesitations and reservations?
- Is this something you’ve done before?
- Why is this so important to helping each other out along the journey?

(Suggested guidelines for the leader to consider around being rigorously honest):

- It does not mean sharing everything with the whole group all the time. It means having one or two within the group who you are completely honest with. Not every conversation is best had within the whole small group family. Some are best in a one-on-one or one-on-two setting.
- Talk about confidentiality within the group and protecting the small group family. The goal is for the small group family to be a safe place. Confidentiality means trusting each other to do what is best for others in the small group family. So if someone shares something and the group doesn’t know how to help and the leader goes to a staff member for help, that is not breaking confidentiality. It is seeking the best for your small group family. However, confidentiality is broken when a group member tells someone outside the group what someone shared simply because they want to.
- When someone shares something very difficult to share, the first response from the small group family is support and care. The first response is not to offer immediate fixes to their situation. Time will come to help them walk forward in a solution. But right after they first share, reaffirm the group is a safe place to be rigorously honest by the way you respond to them. If people experience safety when they share, they will share again in the future. (Likewise, if they experience animosity, instructions, condemnation or dismissive solutions, they will not share in the future.)

2. **Incorporate the patterns of the Word, prayer and worship into your time together asking the Lord to lead you to regular experiences of confession, repentance and faithfulness.** These patterns may be difficult at first but they will help your small group family stay on the path of moving more toward knowing and loving the Lord every time you come together.

Questions:

- What could incorporating these patterns every time we meet look like?
- What does the environment and ground rules of our gatherings need to be in order for this to be a safe place for people to feel they can confess and repent together?
- How will we be able to tell, as a group, if we are growing in faithfulness to the Lord?

**Wrap-up:** As you seek to move down the trail in loving God with the gear of humility and the regular patterns and their products, your small group family will encourage each other more and more in the daily dependence you all have on Christ.

1 *re:generation*. "Realize Your Need For God's Grace," page 40. Copyright © 2016 Watermark Community Church.

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