

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.

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 3 – Love People



Location: Sometimes on the trail you have a guide that is so captivating you forget about other people on the trail. The guide is knowledgeable, skilled and personable. But the more you get to know the guide, the more you recognize the guide genuinely cares for every person on the trail (and those off the trail!). In fact, the guide is so compelling, you start looking for people to care about and you want to introduce them to the amazing guide.

This is true with the Lord. As we grow in loving Him as our Guide, He captivates our hearts and minds and we grow more and more in our love for Him. It can become easy to forget about other people because the Lord is so compelling. But the more you learn of the Lord, you recognize He has a deep-rooted love for each person He's made. He wants them to know Him just as much as He wants you to know Him. He has served them through sending His Son just as much as He served you through sending His Son for you. It becomes clear that we cannot truly love the Lord without loving other people.

1 John 4:19-21: "We love because he first loved us. Whoever claims to love God yet hates a brother or sister is a liar. For whoever does not love their brother and sister, whom they have seen, cannot love God, whom they have not seen. And he has given us this command: Anyone who loves God must also love their brother and sister" (NIV).

So for this leg of the journey we start by loving God and move toward the location of loving people. There are some particularly difficult hazards involved in this leg of the journey.

Leg of the journey: Seeking to love a perfect God who has loved us and sacrificed for us to be able to know Him is one thing. But seeking to love other people is an entirely different situation. In our relationship with the Lord, we only have to contend with our brokenness since the Lord has no brokenness in Him. We are the only barrier. In relationships with other people, we must contend with our brokenness **and** their brokenness. Even with the Guide, the path gets a bit more crowded and uncertain when you start paying attention to others on the trail.

Reminder: When we talk about loving God and loving people, this is not a command we strive to keep as if we ever could. None of us love God and love people in our own strength. We have the opportunity to seek to love God and love people out of the relationship with Jesus Christ. Loving God and people does not grant us more favor with the Lord. We already have the favor of the

Lord. Loving God and people is an outflow of someone's life who has been loved and granted the favor of the Lord.

Here are two particular challenges to this leg of the journey:

1. **Loving people who are hard to love.** Everybody encounters people on the trail who are difficult to love. They may be difficult to love because you are very different types of people or they may be difficult to love because they wound other people out of their brokenness.
2. **Loving people who are easy to love but our selfishness keeps us from loving them.** Think about the people in your life who are closest to you. Do you love them well? It is amazing how often our own selfish desires keep us from loving people we truly want to love well (spouse, kids, friends, etc.).

Questions:

- How is loving people intertwined with loving God?
- Who are some people in your life who are hard to love? What are you asking the Lord to do in your life to lead you to love them well?
- How have you seen your selfishness keep you from loving people who are easy to love?
- How can your group encourage each other in loving those who are difficult to love and those who are easier to love?
- How can you help each other depend on the Lord to love others through you rather than simply trying harder to love better on your own?

Gear: Harder trails have places that are known for people giving up and turning around. An incline is too sharp or the rocks are too loose. The best guides know the tough spots and help prepare the travelers for the particularly difficult stretches of the trail. These guides know the trail really well so they can navigate the travelers across and make sure each person has the right gear to work through the difficult obstacles.

The Lord knows loving people is a particularly challenging obstacle that sometimes leads to people turning around and deciding they don't want to follow the Guide any further. Someone experiences the brokenness of another traveler and instead of looking to the Guide for encouragement, they reflect the experience with the other traveler onto the Guide and use that as an excuse to believe the Guide really isn't very good. "If that traveler follows the Guide, then I don't want to follow the Guide!"

Knowing this leg of the journey is particularly challenging, here is some gear that will be incredibly helpful along the way:

Piece of gear #1 – Gospel-centered engagement: When we interact with other travelers and experience what comes from their brokenness and our brokenness, it is imperative that we start by looking at Jesus' example. Here are some keys to gospel-centered engagement:

1. **Recognize we are all broken and in the same boat.** Remember from the last leg of the journey, you talked about the gear of humility and how no one is righteous (Romans 3:10-12). If we can recognize the other traveler is no different than us, we start from a place of humility.
2. **See forgiveness in light of the cross.** What is forgiveness? The textbook definition is “to release or give up all claim on account of a debt or obligation” or “to grant a pardon for an offense.” When someone wrongs us, we feel a sense of being owed a debt. The greater the hurt, the larger the debt. The larger this debt is, the harder forgiveness becomes. In fact, forgiveness becomes impossible in our own strength. But look at what happens when we look at what Jesus did at the cross.
 - He paid a debt we could never satisfy on our own. Praise the Lord that, as our Guide, He has provided a way of reconciliation for us with Him!
Colossians 1:19-20: “For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross” (NIV).
 - When we recognize the forgiveness of the Lord in our lives we cannot help but be compelled to forgive others. (Reference the parable of the unmerciful servant in Matthew 18:21-35.) Nobody could do anything to us that is greater than what the Lord has forgiven in our lives.
Colossians 3:12-13: “Therefore, as God’s chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you” (NIV).
 - We are able to see that forgiveness is not simply releasing a debt, but is entrusting the debt to the Lord. We can entrust our debt to the Lord in great confidence that He can handle that debt much better than we ever could. The result is that we are able to move down the trail with the Guide being freed from the burden of that debt (see attached resource for practical steps to forgiveness).

- When we learn to entrust our forgiveness to the Lord, we are more willing to approach someone else in humility when we have wronged them in our brokenness.
- Starting with forgiveness opens the door for the opportunity to make amends with someone and the potential for reconciliation. Amends is simply seeking to make things right as best as possible. We typically cannot fully restore what was broken to its original state, but we can take a step to restore pieces acknowledging ownership of the cost of our brokenness (see attached resource for making amends). Note: Seeking to make amends should be evaluated in light of what that effort could cause the other person. If what you bring up to make amends to ease yourself causes the other person greater grief, first seek wise counsel.
- The other person may or may not respond. Reconciliation takes both travelers deciding together they want to reconcile. Reconciliation may never come in some circumstances, but that does not mean you continue to carry the burden. You entrust it to the Lord and leave it in His hands.

Questions:

- When have you found difficulty in forgiving someone? How has a focus on the gospel helped you move to forgiveness?
- In any small group, brokenness will enter the relationships. How can your group seek to be proactive in preparing to walk through broken circumstances together and respond in light of the gospel?
- Have you considered Christ's suffering as sufficient payment for the sins against you?
- Are there any steps you need to take to seek to make amends with someone you have wronged?
- Share a time the Lord brought about reconciliation where you thought it would never be possible.

Piece of gear #2 – intentionality with others: The difficulty of the journey can become our focal point as we hike the trail. But as we learn to love the Guide and begin to see others the way He does, we will in turn look at other travelers and intentionally seek ways to love them.

There are two key ways to be intentional with loving people. We want to **serve** them and **share** with them. We want to serve them right where they are. If they have fallen along the trail and busted a knee, we want to help them. Or if they've run out of water, we will share some of ours. Serving is finding a way to meet someone's needs along the way. Being intentional also means

sharing with people. When we see someone off the path, we want to share with them about who the Guide is, how much He loves them and that He is worth following.

These two go hand-in-hand and cannot be separated. If we serve without sharing, we reinforce the world's view that kindness by itself is the key to success. This is untrue and serving without sharing will lead someone to continue to walk in this lie. In fact, many people believe their good deeds will outweigh their bad so God will be merciful to them. In contrast, the Bible teaches that none are righteous and that we all fall short of God's standard. So serving someone out of kindness alone will simply allow them to stay in this broken belief and will ultimately do them more harm than good.

Sharing without serving can leave people feeling like they are a project and not someone you genuinely care about. There is the old phrase "People don't care what you know until they know that you care." The world is full of different beliefs and information. How does someone know what you are telling them about Jesus is true? By seeing you care for them the way Jesus cared by becoming our sacrifice. As you serve them sacrificially they will long to know the Guide who has loved you in a such a way that you would sacrifice for them.

Questions:

- How have you experienced serving and sharing working hand-in-hand?
- What would it look like for your group to focus on loving people by serving and sharing with them?
- Which is more difficult for you; serving or sharing? Why?

Team role: The reality is that we were never meant to walk the trail alone. The Guide is more than enough, but He created us to depend on and grow best in community with one another. Your small group family ought to be the travelers you depend on the most during the journey. As you learn to love other people well, these travelers should be the people who encourage you the most and continually help point you to the Guide in the ups and downs of your journey. Here are some ways your small group family can thrive together:

1. **Find ways to encourage one another.** As you encourage one another and build the foundation for community within your small group family, there will be a vital intimacy that grows. This will be necessary for the road ahead. Until there is intimacy, we have a difficult time trusting and when we do not trust the people around us, we find it all too easy to hide our brokenness. Once we hide, the door to intimacy and true encouragement closes. So the best way to open it is to consistently build patterns of serving and sharing with one another so trust can be built. We sacrificially serve so our group knows we genuinely care and we share about who the Guide is so we continue to recognize our need for Him as a small group family.

2. **Hold each other accountable.** While your group seeks to serve and share with others, you need people you trust to help you stay focused on the Guide. That may mean when you are walking in your sin, someone approaches you with care and grace to point it out and help you focus back on the Guide. It also means holding one another accountable to serving and sharing with other travelers outside the small group family. You are not in community to simply satisfy a need in you. You are in the small group family so you can care for and encourage one another to serve and share with other travelers who do not know the Guide.

3. **Be rigorously honest.** This has come up before along the journey. But if you refuse to be honest with your small group family, they cannot accurately help you focus more clearly on the Guide. Check your pride at the trail head and recognize your need to be rigorously honest with a small group of people who genuinely love you.

Questions:

- What patterns of encouragement can your group set?
- How have you seen close friends help you move closer to the Guide?
- Honestly talk about where your group is currently. Is it a safe place where rigorous honesty is taking place or is the trust still being built? How can you continue to build trust?
- What does accountability look like in your group? What are the challenges to it? How can you grow in it together?

Wrap-up: Loving people can be very difficult and at times feels like a detour away from the path we want to be focused on. But it is through people that we find the deep intimacy in community God designed us to be connected to. People are hard to love, especially because our own sin and selfishness will get in the way. But every time you find it hard to love someone, allow it be a reminder that you need Jesus all the more. Enjoy the journey with your fellow travelers and embrace the joy of following the Guide together!

Steps to Forgiveness

Biblical forgiveness frees you to love others in the Spirit and truth of Christ. Look over the acronym F-R-E-E. Use it to understand how to forgive and to remember forgiveness when you are struggling with hurts of the past:

Face the truth: Be honest. Evaluate sin by the truth of God's word. Do not deny sin or minimize it. Do not define, excuse, or justify sin by any standard other than God's word.

Release the hurt: Honestly give your hurt to God. God cares. Christ knows your pain; he too suffered for sin. Feel the pain and sadness of sin. Grieve sin's losses as you surrender it to God. Ask him to heal you.

Entrust justice to God: Transfer your claims to God and let him repay the debt – he will judge and avenge all sin. Give away your right for an apology, payback, and bitterness. Surrender your right to dwell upon or use the offense to your advantage.

Exalt Christ: Thank Christ for paying for your sins and loving you when you were lost. Praise him that his sacrifice is enough to cover every sin. Thank Jesus for loving your offender enough to offer him or her forgiveness through the cross. Ask him to help you love your offender with the Spirit's love in you. Praise him for freedom from all sins – yours and the sins against you.

From *re:generation*. Respond to God's Grace, Step 8, Page 69.

Characteristics of Biblical Amends

1. **A humble attitude of repentance, love, and obedience:** Acceptance that you have sinned, combined with a desire to turn from the sin, repair sin's damage, and make peace without excusing the sin. "I have no excuse for what I did. I want to turn from sin and do my part to make peace. I want to honor Christ and love others."
2. **An honest and specific confession of sin:** Willingness to tell the whole truth. Confession includes the faith to obey God, trusting him with the outcome, and dying to your sinful nature. "On Monday I looked at pornography on my computer," instead of, "I struggled with lust."
3. **An apology:** Admitting with sorrow that the sin caused damage because it violated *God's standard*. "What I did was wrong. I hurt you and dishonored God. I am sorry. I regret what I did."
4. **A request for forgiveness:** Asking the one you have hurt to forgive you. This important question gives an opportunity for the one you have hurt to release the burden of your sin. "Will you forgive me?"
5. **Willingness to make restitution:** Facing consequences by offering to do what is appropriate to repair the sin's damage and rebuild trust. For some sins, a confession and asking for forgiveness is enough. Yet, some offenses require more. For example: repaying financial losses, repairing damaged property, paying fines, imprisonment, etc. "What can I do to repay or repair the damage my sin caused?"
6. **Readiness to share Christ:** Prepared to tell why you are making amends: "What I did was wrong. Jesus died to make amends for my sins so that I could have peace with God. I want to follow Christ's example as a peacemaker. Christ offers you peace with God too."
7. **Steps of change:** Following through faithfully. Examining what led to sin, repenting, and following Christ to change sinful behavior. Continuing restitution until the debt of sin is settled or forgiven.

From *re:generation*: Respond to God's Grace, Step 9, Page 89.

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