

Leaders' Notes

Dear Growth Group Leader:

I want to write today about the importance of what you are doing as a leader in the growth group ministry of the church. Since the birth of the church, soon after Jesus' ascension, small groups of people have gathered to worship God and develop close friendships and Christian fellowship. I enjoy Sunday morning worship very much. However, what happens in your small group will probably do more to develop relationships and lead to the spiritual growth of the members of your group than anything on Sunday morning could.

I hope your group went well last week but I haven't read your reports yet. Remember that I will happily talk out any problems that may come up in your groups.

Blessings,

Pastor David

Freedom to love God wholeheartedly

Exodus 20:1-3

God's top ten list

1. Have no other god's before me.
2. Make no graven image to worship.
3. Do not misuse my name.
4. Keep the Sabbath holy.
5. Honor your father and mother.
6. You shall not murder.
7. You shall not commit adultery.
8. You shall not steal.
9. You shall not lie.
10. You shall not covet what is your neighbor's.

Jesus' top two

Matthew 22:34-40

Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, and mind.

Love your neighbor as yourself.

Jesus' first command summarized the first four commandments.

His second summarized the last six.

The first commandment

God is to have primacy and exclusivity in our hearts.

God deserves this status because he is God.

Isaiah 45:5-6

Home Bible Study

Freedom to love God wholeheartedly

Getting started

1. How did you react to the sermon last Sunday? Was the description of the ten commandments in general or the first commandment in particular new or surprising to you in any way? Did you react strongly to anything in particular?

I'm wondering if anyone has a difficult time thinking that we are not under the law—basically that we are free from the obligation to the law.

Conservative Christians (like me) are often prone to legalism—we feel that God has rules and we had better follow them. But Paul makes it clear that we do not live by or for the law. We are under grace, not under the law. The only benefit of the law for the Christian is that the law warns us of danger and directs us to the best life God wants for us.

2. Since we live in a culture where Christianity is the dominant religion, we do not have much temptation to serve other gods. However, other things may take God's place in our lives. What do you think are our greatest dangers to take God's place in our lives?

Some obvious answers would be: money, possessions, addictive substances, work performance, worldly success, fame, etc. Even good things should not be valued above God, including family, friends, and even God's work. But your group may have less obvious answers.

Going deeper

3. Read Luke 18:18-30. Why do you think Jesus commented about the ruler calling Jesus "good"?

This ruler tried to compliment Jesus by calling him "good teacher." Jesus challenged him by saying that only God is good. Maybe he was giving the ruler a hint that he would have to decide who Jesus really was. Was he really good, which would mean he was really God? People today don't ever seem to say bad things about Jesus. They know that what he taught morally was amazingly good. But many don't want to take that extra step and believe that he is God himself. People have to answer the same challenge Jesus here gives to the ruler.

4. Why do you think Jesus told this ruler to sell everything and give it to the poor?

When he told him to follow the commandments, Jesus was setting up the ruler with his own belief system. The Pharisees and others thought that they would be acceptable to God because they followed the law. In effect, Jesus

agreed with them here. The problem? Jesus knew that this ruler was not following the law. No one ever has. The ruler was violating the first commandment because obviously his money was more important to him than God was.

5. Read Matthew 10:37-39. Does this saying of Jesus' bother you? How do you reconcile this with God's concern for others?

I don't have a problem with Jesus saying that he has to have first place even in front of our family members. I've seen families where people expected their family members to fill the vacuum that only God can fill. Bad things happen in such families. For example, a son who carries all the hopes and dreams of his parents often rebels against the unreasonable pressure of expectations and fails miserably. I love my kids very much but I don't want to put them before God in my life. It would do them great harm.

6. Read Malachi 1:6-14. In this prophecy, why is God angry with his people?

The people were bringing worthless animals to sacrifice for God because their hearts were not into worship. They looked at God as a burden, not a loving Creator and Lord.

7. How can you make sure that you are not making the same mistake as God's people did in Malachi's time?

We need to examine our hearts and find out if we are following God and, just as importantly, if it is out of joy, gratitude and devotion or is it out of mere duty and fear.

Self-examination

8. What is first place in my life, judging by my actions?

I doubt if most of us will want to say that God is not first place. You may need to generate discussion by asking what is God's nearest competitor for first place in our lives.