



Life Group Work Sheet (Leader's Guide)

Family

November 10, 2013

The theme of family is one of the most important themes in the entire Bible. The Old Testament focuses on God's dealings with one family—that of Abraham. From his relationship with this one family, God plans to bless all peoples, which he eventually does in the person of his Son.

Now in the New Testament, the people of God are considered to be a part of God's family (Eph. 1:5), co-heirs with Christ (Rom. 8:12-17), and as such they have all the benefits of being God's sons and daughters. Our Life Group lesson this week is split into two parts: understanding our identity in our new family, and how this new identity impacts our interactions with our earthly family.

Be sure to read this section, as it sets the foundation for the rest of the study. We will spend the bulk of our time looking at the family of God, and then at the end transition into how that relates to our interactions with our earthly families. Family can be a delicate issue for many in the church, so be sure to tread lightly, as people may be struggling with singleness, barrenness, estranged children, etc. Be sure to include these people in your conversation and affirm their worth in the body of Christ, regardless of marital status or number of children.

Getting to Know Each Other

1. With Thanksgiving being a family holiday and right around the corner, share a memorable experience from a past Thanksgiving. What made it special? In what ways does that memory make you thankful for your family?

Be careful to cap this, as everyone probably has plenty of stories to tell about past Thanksgivings. If you feel like that may be a problem with your group, it may be wise to split people up and have them share with a smaller group so that everyone gets a chance to share.

Our New Family

Read Romans 8:12-16.

2. What are some of the reasons that God uses the imagery of family to describe our relationship with him through the person of Jesus?

Your group will likely answer this question in one of two different ways (both of which are right). First, God uses the imagery of family to describe our relationship with him because in a very real sense, we are adopted into his family. It isn't so much imagery as it is truth.

Second, your group may say that God uses this imagery of family because it is the best way to describe our relationship with him. We can look to our relationship with God as a helpful example of what our relationships in our own families should be (to an extent—no one is saying that children should worship their parents!).

Whichever one your group emphasizes, be sure to point out the other approach, as both are helpful in understanding our relationship with our heavenly Father. God not only is our heavenly Father in a real way, but his long-suffering kindness and love for his children is an excellent example for our relationship with our own.

Read 1 John 2:9-11; 3:11-15; 4:18-21.

3. What do these passages from 1 John tell us about relationships in this new family of God ?

In his first epistle, the Apostle John reminds the church that the ruling characteristic of church relationships should be that of love. John gets at the root of why we love our church family—because they are family, not because of what we have done but because of what Christ has done in bringing us all together.

A possible follow-up question may be to point out some issues that often divide churches. Ask how people can disagree yet still show love to one another. If your group is mature enough (or not one-sided in opinion), bring up the question of the name change (provided you feel confident that this would be beneficial and not harmful). This will prepare your group to act with grace as we approach this important decision in the life and history of our church.

4. How does our understanding of who we are in God's family impact our relationships with our earthly families? Consider the following situations:

The same principles that govern our relationship with those in the family of God should govern our relationships with those our earthly families. Lord willing, there will be a large overlap here, as those I pray that those in your family are also a part of the family of God. But if there are some in your family who are not Christians, the same principles apply, though the reasons may be different. When we show love to those in the church, it is because they are our brothers and sisters. When we show love to those outside of the family of God, we do so to show the love of God to a lost people. Our prayer is that this love will instill in them a desire to be a part of the heavenly family.

- a. You have an estranged family member who refuses to interact with the rest of your family.

Unfortunately, nearly every person in your group can probably name one or more people in their family who is described by this “hypothetical” situation. With that in mind, ask everyone in your group to be thinking of a specific person in their families, if possible.

The answer is easy: show them love. The means of doing so are not as simple. How are you to show love to them, especially if they refuse to interact with you? How can you hope to bring reconciliation to your family through love? A humble, repentant approach (even if there is no fault on your part), is the most effective in restoring these broken relationships, but the reality is, many times there is so much bitterness built up that these relationships cannot be restored. If that is the case, encourage your group that things are in God's hands at that point.

- b. You have a family member who is a professing Christian and enters into a relationship with a non-Christian.

For those in your group with children in high school or older, this question is particularly relevant. Explore the person's reasons for wanting to date this person. This type of situation shows the importance of having relationship “margin” built up with your children (or brothers or sisters) so that you can say things they may not like to hear but are willing to listen to you because they respect you and trust you have their best interests in mind.

Our Earthly Family

Read Deut. 6:4-9; 11:18-21.

5. What is the church's responsibility in instilling children with a biblical worldview and knowledge of the gospel? What are parents' responsibilities?

Looking throughout Scripture, it is primarily the responsibility of parents to teach the “paths of God” to their children. “Outsourcing” this responsibility from the home to the church is ineffective, as children do not receive the proper modeling and time that they would from learning from their parents.

With that being said, the church has responsibility in this as well, though the church's responsibility is more of an equipping role rather than a ‘frontlines’ role. The church supplements the primary teaching that is received in the home and equips parents to teach their children the ways of God.

If there is a lot of pushback on these points from the people in your group, explore their reasonings. Often you will find that there reasons are due to inadequacy. Because they haven't been properly disciplined themselves, many in your group may feel as though they would be ineffective and the best thing for their children will be to “refer” them to the church. If that is the case, encourage your people to be disciplined while

discipling their own children at home. This will be the most effective teaching children the gospel and a biblical worldview.

- a. What are some ways that Faith Church does this well? What are some areas where it can improve?

As a leader, would you be willing to write down your group's responses to these questions? As you hear from your group and record their answers, please forward their answers on to the church via email. You can email Pastor Jordan at jordan.gowing@icloud.com and he will make sure the information gets to the appropriate people.

- b. For those with children, what are some practical ways to raise your children in a godly way? How can you help one another in this process?

Be sure to affirm those in your group who have raised up godly children. This gives them the time to instill wisdom in the others who are a part of your group.

As you close, be sure to take some time to pray for the children of your group, that God would give wisdom to the parents in your group in how to raise them in the "paths of God". Pray that each of the children in your group would come to know who God is in the person of Jesus Christ.

The importance of praying for your children cannot be overstated. Because of this, make sure that you devote 5-10 minutes to pray for your group's children (or future children!).