

Excellence: Life at its Best

FBC Small Group Materials; Week of October 15th, 2006

Jeremiah 7:1-15; Discernment

For Small-Group Leaders

Dear Leaders,

The story that Jeremiah found himself in was remarkable. After 57 years of sheer godlessness and spiritual chaos, King Josiah came on the scene. Josiah made sweeping changes to "right the ship." He restored the temple worship to a state of order and dignity. But what Jeremiah soon realized is that the changes were superficial. Listen to Eugene Peterson:

"It didn't take Jeremiah long to realize that the reform was only skin-deep. Everything had changed, but nothing had changed. The outward changes had been enormous; the inward changes were imperceptible."

As we join Jeremiah in his story, we realize what he was being asked to do - he was asked to lead the people of God to worship the Lord not simply with words, but with the entirety of their hearts. God longed for a people that honored him not just with their lips, but with their very lives. Skin-deep religion? No way. God wanted whole-heartedness. He still does. That's why the Jeremiah story is relevant to our lives and to FBC today. We too, like the Israelites are called to love our God with all of our hearts, with all of our minds, and with all of our strength. May God use our groups this week to call us to the radical life of faith in Christ.

Praying for you,

Scott

These small group materials are available at the info table each Sunday and at www.fbcdavis.org.

Before this Week's Meeting:

As we mentioned last week, there are generally three parts to your group meeting:

- **Fellowship:** What follows is an idea that will help people get to know one another better (especially helpful if your group is just getting acquainted). The name of the mixer is, "Common Ground." It begins by dividing the larger group into two or more smaller groups of 3 (or 4). Then ask each small group to brainstorm things that they share in common. For example, a group may discover that they have all been to Oshkosh, Wisconsin. Or, they may discover that they have all broken their right arms. The goal is to come up with something that is truly unusual that the group members have in common. Give groups about 4 minutes to brainstorm common ground, and then have each group share the most unusual thing they share in common.
- **Bible Study:** This week we continue our look into the life of Jeremiah by looking at chapter 2 of Eugene Peterson's study guide on Excellence. If your group needs more study guides please visit the office or the information table on Sunday.
- **Worship:** There is nothing quite like prayer for bringing a group together and helping group members develop a heart for one another. If you share prayer requests, you might consider having people partner up and share a prayer request with their partner. This will save time so that your group has time to actually pray together. Then you can ask people to pray with their partner or you can bring the

group back together for a time of group prayer. Remember, if you do pray together as a group, encourage but don't mandate participation. Some group members will be ready to pray and others not.

At the Group Meeting:

Discussion Starter:

- **Book Covers** – The old saying goes, “you can't tell a book by its cover.” Have a few people share about a time when they completely misjudged someone or something.

Discussion Questions:

Introduction: As a group read Jeremiah 7:1-15. If it seems appropriate to provide some context, read the opening introduction to the group (above).

1. The Israelites were in danger of having a faith that was only skin-deep. What clues does this passage provide about the state of their spiritual health (or lack thereof)?
2. How would you describe the tone of Jeremiah's message?
3. The Israelites were in danger of being deceptive in their worship and relationship with God. How would you explain their deception in your own words?
4. In what ways do we as contemporary Christians use deceptive words or actions? In other words, how might we fall into the trap of living a faith that is only skin-deep?
5. In Jeremiah's message, God is calling for his people to change. Does it surprise you to discover “what” God is asking the Israelites to change? Why or why not?
6. Jeremiah was not the only one to run into people with a deceptive faith. Jesus too encountered people whose faith lacked depth. Read together Matthew 15:8-9. What similarities does Jesus' message have with Jeremiah's?
7. Read John 14:23-24, Jesus' words about the importance of obedience. After reading Jeremiah's teaching on obedience and then reading what Jesus has to say about obedience, what can we conclude about the role of obedience in our relationship with Christ?
8. Why is obedience so important to God?

Getting Personal:

- Question 7 in the study guide asks a very penetrating question. As you reflect on your life, what prevents you from hearing God's instructions or his Word?
- Let's consider the importance of obedience again. There are two mistakes commonly made when it comes to obedience. The first mistake is deciding that obedience is unnecessary for faith. Such a person might say, “I am saved by grace alone whether I obey or not.” The second mistake is to do our acts of obedience for the wrong reasons or motives. Which of these two mistakes are you more prone to make?

Putting it into Practice:

- The last question in the study guide invites us to ask God how we might change our ways or actions during the coming week. Please share your answer with the group. (Note to Group Leader: This final question can be done as a large group or you can have people turn to a neighbor to share their answer).
- Close in a time of prayer asking the Lord to strengthen each one for the week ahead.

At the End of the Meeting:

Remind group members to work their way through chapter 3 of the study guide for next week. Make sure everyone knows where the small group will be meeting next week. Encourage people to pray for one another during the week.

During the Week:

If you have the time, please email Scott (swieking@fbcdavis.org) during the week to let him know how your group is progressing. If you have prayer requests for your group or yourself please let him know.