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LEADER'S GUIDE

WELCOME!

We are glad that you've decided to lead a community group through our "Astonishing" series. Over the next six weeks, our Lead Pastor Justin Kendrick will unpack some glorious truths about what Jesus accomplished for us on the cross. You can expect to dive into life-transforming topics such as covenant, atonement, justification, representation, adoption and resurrection. We fully expect many to come to Christ and be strengthened in their faith through this series.

For the next six weeks, you and your group will meet weekly to watch a short video teaching. We have provided this Leader's Guide with application questions to help you facilitate discussion with the group. Before your group meeting, it's important that you preview the video teaching, and read over the application questions and leader instructions. This will help you familiarize yourself with the content and be ready for your group. Also, there are resources to distribute to your group members for specific weeks. You'll find that information in this Leader's Guide as well.

Again, we're excited to be on this journey with you. The CityChurch staff and CGL coaches consistently pray for you and your group. Please don't hesitate to contact your coach if you have any questions, concerns or need support throughout this series. God bless!

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SESSION ONE: COVENANT

This week we are introduced to the idea that God's language is one of promise, or covenant. This new covenant that God makes with man through Jesus Christ is the way to true reconciliation and relationship with God.

Please be sensitive and ready to pray with group members to receive Christ. Use the "Leading Others to Christ" resource provided to help you prepare.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Is the idea of a covenant-keeping God, or one who makes and keeps His promises, easy or difficult for you to grasp? Explain why you feel this way.
2. The story of humanity begins in a garden. The book of Genesis tells us God spoke to the Earth and vegetation grew. He spoke to the waters and it swarmed with fish. He spoke to Himself and created Man. All of creation thrives in its natural environment. We see that God Himself is that natural environment for Man. Talk about a time when you experienced God's presence and felt at home. How did this experience impact you?
3. Justin talked about Moralism and Relativism as popular religious views today. Moralism tells us to do good and we will earn God's approval. Relativism lowers our view of God and makes Him a reflection of us. What areas of your life have been influenced by either of these two views? (i.e. Have you found yourself striving to be good or comparing yourself to others for God's approval? Or rejecting Biblical truth and setting your own standards?)

4. God's way for Man to know Him is found in this familiar scripture:

John 3:16 "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life.

Have you embraced this truth in your heart yet? Do you believe that God has made a way for you to know Him through the death and resurrection of His Son, Jesus Christ? Take a few minutes of silence to examine your heart before God. Then, pray this prayer if you'd like to commit your life to Christ:

(Leader, please pray this out loud and ask others to repeat if they are ready to surrender to God)

*Thank You God for loving me.
I turn away from my sin that separates me from You.
I believe that You created me, sent Jesus to die on the cross for my sin and I believe that He rose again.
I surrender my heart and life, and I receive Your forgiveness and start a new life in covenant with You. In Jesus' name.
Amen.*

LEADERS: Please distribute Bibles to those who need them, and "Following Jesus" pamphlets to all.

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SESSION TWO: ATONEMENT

During this session the truth of the atonement is introduced, that is, the reconciliation of God with Man through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. Justin talks about Jesus' distress and agony in the garden of Gethsemane, and His willingness to drink the "cup of wrath" that we all deserve. It's a sobering talk that will give everyone in the group a chance to respond to the Gospel. Please review the "Leading Others to Christ" resource and be ready to lead your group members into a prayer of commitment to God.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Since we met last week, has any one insight or principle we discussed had an impact on your everyday life? Please briefly share how life has been different for you because of our time together.
2. We learned last week that God is perfectly loving and good, and loves us so much He sent Jesus to die on the cross for our sin. In this talk we see that God is also perfectly holy and just, and no sin goes unnoticed by Him. How would you define justice? How would you define love? Where do your definitions come from?
3. Read aloud Mark 14:32-36. Justin spoke of Jesus' experience in the garden of Gethsemane. Jesus felt terror and alarm as He saw this cup of the wrath of God. He responded in obedience and became our Representative when He chose to drink the cup that was filled with every compounded past, present and future sin. As Justin shared these truths, what was going on in your heart and mind? How did hearing about this incredible act of sacrificial love impact your view of God?

4. When we hear this great news of Jesus taking our place, that is, suffering and dying for our sin so that we might surrender our hearts and have a relationship with God – our hearts long to respond. Throughout history, men and women have asked the same question: What must I do? The answer is to repent (or turn away from sin and turn towards God), and believe that He loves you and wants a relationship with you. Let's take a few moments to open our hearts to God, and then we'll pray.

(Leader, please pray this out loud and ask others to repeat if they are ready to surrender to God)

God, I admit my need for You. I believe that Jesus took all my sin, died in my place on the cross and rose again. I turn away from living for myself and I surrender all that I am to You. I receive Your love and forgiveness. I believe You love me and I have a new life starting right now in You. In Jesus' name. Amen.

LEADERS: Please distribute "New Believer's Guide to Effective Christian Living" to all who prayed.

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SESSION THREE: JUSTIFICATION

This week, we learn that by abandoning all self-efforts to reach God and embracing faith in Jesus we are justified (or in right standing with God). The result of this truth is that we are not only forgiven but we have peace with God.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Briefly share one difference you've experienced in your life (i.e. relationships, emotions, choices etc) since you put your trust in Christ.

2. Read 2 Corinthians 5:21. Justification is an instantaneous legal act whereby God counts your sins forgiven because of faith in Christ, imputes Christ's righteousness and then declares you justified in His sight. What do you struggle with most in this doctrine of justification? What patterns of thinking stop you from fully embracing this justification by faith? (for example: striving to get God's approval, ignoring God's truth and living by your own, etc.)

3. Break into groups of 2 or 3. Read Romans 5:1-2. How would your life look if you experienced peace with God? If you believed that you were in right standing with God by faith in Jesus, what would be different? Talk honestly about the choices, relationships, affections, and attitudes that would change. Is there someone you need to forgive? A behavior you need to turn from?

Pray for one another that God would reveal this truth of right standing and peace with Him.

LEADERS: As you are wrapping up this week, continue to be sensitive to those who have not yet surrendered their lives to God. Is this the week you need to have a bold, one-on-one conversation with them?

Also, in regard to those who have made decisions for Christ – please be sure you are reaching out to your coach and letting them know what’s happening in your group. They are here to support you!

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SESSION FOUR: REPRESENTATION

In session four, we learn that as we place our faith in Christ, God sees us in the same perfection that He sees Jesus. Now that Jesus is our Representative, the Father loves us to the same degree that He loves Jesus! With the access provided by Jesus, we can be as close to God as we desire. These truths are astonishing and life-transforming!

Please note that there is an optional application this week to take communion together. Taking the Lord's Supper is an act of faith only for those who have accepted Christ and put their faith in Him. It's important as a leader that you discern whether this is a good option for your group. Regarding the elements for communion, all you'll need is some grape juice and bread or crackers. If you're not certain or have any questions about this, please reach out to your coach and talk through this application before making a decision.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. As you reflect on your spiritual journey, what is one positive difference you can see in your relationship with God? (for example: no longer trying to be good enough, freedom from feeling God is distant, living in the peace of His presence, etc.)
2. Read John 17:22-23. This verse tells us that God loves you with the same love He has for Jesus. Can you embrace this truth? What causes you to struggle believing it? Take a few moments together and, in prayer, let go of anything that's hindering you from fully receiving God's love.

3. Break into groups of 2 or 3. Read John 16:23-24. We learn from this scripture that our prayers to God are powerful. Think about the people in your life who are far from God, or someone who is sick, needs a job or is struggling with anxiety, depression, etc. Take a few moments and each pray a bold prayer to God on their behalf. Ask God to do something for someone that seems impossible. Then thank God for hearing your prayer!

LEADERS: Please distribute the “Freedom in Christ” cards to everyone. Encourage them to use these cards during their time with God each day. You may suggest that they pick one verse each week and memorize it.

OPTIONAL APPLICATION

Justin talked about a second cup in today’s talk; a cup of a new covenant that was instituted through the cross of Jesus. Read 1 Corinthians 11:23-26. Remember the truth of Jesus’ sacrifice on the cross for you. Take some time to silently reflect on the condition of your heart. Repent of any unconfessed sin and receive forgiveness. After you receive the bread and juice, take some time together to thank God for His love for you.

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SESSION FIVE: ADOPTION

This week we dive in the astonishing truth of our adoption by God into His family. Approaching God as our Father invites us into a deeper personal relationship with Him and frees us from our deepest fears.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. This week we heard about adoption by God into His family. Take a few minutes and think about your relationship with your parents. What has been the most positive aspect of your relationship with them? What has been the most challenging aspect?
2. Relationship with God consumes the deepest fears in our hearts because we now have a Heavenly Father. What does it mean to you to view God as Father? How does this change the way you interact with God?
3. Read Romans 8:15-17. These amazing verses tell us that we are no longer slaves, but children of God. Have you experienced that inward witness or assurance of your salvation? Why or why not? What is keeping you from accepting this “spirit of adoption”?

4. Break into smaller groups of 2 or 3. We have all experienced the “spirit of slavery” mentioned in the verses we just read. This can be seen in various addictions, fears, unhealthy need for approval, lust, timidity, worry, codependency, compulsions, etc. What fears have you struggled with in this last year? What internal entanglements of slavery have you wrestled with? Take this time to confess your struggles to one another, and then pray in faith for forgiveness and freedom.

LEADERS: Please distribute the “Praying To Our Father” cards to all members.

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SESSION SIX: RESURRECTION

This session gives us insight into the resurrection power found in Christ. This power provides the ability for every believer to live a progressively victorious life in wholehearted surrender to God.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. In his talk, Justin said that the progression of holiness in someone's life is evidence of commitment to Christ. Talk about the areas of your life where you see this evidence. What are some areas of struggle? As you answer this consider every realm of your life: relationships, thoughts, choices, attitudes, how you spend your time, money, the words you speak, etc.
2. Read Romans 6:5-7. What do you think the writer Paul means when he says your old self has been "crucified with Christ?" Do you see this as truth in your own life? Why or why not? What steps can you take this week to live that "free from the slavery of sin" life you long for?
3. Read Romans 6:11. In this verse we read that we must consider ourselves as dead to sin. What does that look like in your everyday life? How does Justin's statement "belonging transforms behavior" relate to this concept of living free from sin?

4. In God's eyes, when Jesus died I died, and when Jesus rose I rose, too. God has given you freedom based completely on His covenant and He has severed sin's right to torture you. Have you fully embraced this new life? If so, take a few minutes and share some change you've already experienced as a result of participating in this "Astonishing" series.

LEADERS: We will be providing sign-ups for baptisms, as well as some resources for you to use as you encourage your group members to take this step of obedience and be baptized.

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