

Group Leader Guide (Week: 9/26-10/2) – Vision: Whole Hearts

Sermon Text: Philippians 3:2-21 / Sermon Title: “The Pursuit”

BIG Idea: *The Christian life is an all-the-time, all-consuming, all-absorbing pursuit of greater joy in Christ and love for Christ.*

Focus this week: the first month of Growth Groups should always focus on **fellowship** more than anything. **Fellowship is the glue that holds the group together.** Be sure to spend plenty of time getting to know each other and grow in comfortability with one another. This is why it helps to have icebreakers, food, music, etc. at the beginning of your meeting. This will pay dividends in the later months.

FELLOWSHIP TIME (15 minutes)

Be sure to plan out some way to implement casual fellowship time as people come to your group. You can have snacks, drinks, nametags, music, etc.

STARTING OFF THE NIGHT (15 minutes)

After the fellowship time at the beginning of your meeting, have everyone find their seats and start off with an icebreaker. You can use one of the icebreakers from the leader resource page found here: <https://lifewayresearch.com/2020/02/19/75-icebreaker-questions-for-church-small-groups/>

Pow’s and Wow’s: After you do the icebreaker, one thing you can do to start your group off each week is called “Pow’s and Wow’s”. Have each person go around and share a “pow” (a low moment from the past week) and a “wow” (a high point moment from the last week). This can also be a great way to learn how you can pray for one another. *This is a great way to start the discussion off with something light and easy. You can even come back to these during prayer time at the end.*

DISCUSSION (45 minutes)

Start discussion by saying, “This past Sunday we started to get into the specifics of the renewed mission of Church at Bergen. Although every local church exists to glorify God, all must answer the question of how they will do that as a church. Church at Bergen will glorify God by **pursuing lives of wholehearted love for Jesus Christ and our neighbor**. This week we learned about the significance of the first word: *pursuing*. We learned that the Christian life is an all-the-time, all-consuming, and all-absorbing pursuit of growing in greater joy in Christ and love for Christ.”

1. Before we get into the specifics of the sermon text in Philippians 3, was there anything from last week’s sermon that either encouraged, challenged, or helped you grow in love for Jesus Christ?

This is always an easy question to pose at the beginning of the sermon discussion. People have all kinds of opinions about the sermon and this is an extremely open-ended question to get people talking easily before diving into the other specific questions.

2. Have someone read Philippians 3:2-21 then you can say, “Paul talks about the pursuit of Christ in verses 12-17, but before he talks about the pursuit he talks about the free gift of righteousness you receive by faith in Christ in verses 7-9. Why do you think it is so important for this to be the order of the Christian life: first, you receive the gift of righteousness, then second, you pursue greater love for Christ? How would Christianity be different if that order was switched?

This question doesn't necessarily get into main point of the sermon, but it is an important point nonetheless. Before anyone can “pursue” joy in Christ and love for Christ, they must forsake self-righteous religion and receive the righteousness of Christ by faith alone. The importance of this that we are not pursuing Christ to be justified, rather we are first justified by faith and then freed to love Christ without any fear of having to earn the love of God.

3. There were four reasons listed in the sermon for why we pursue. They are listed below. Have each person discuss which of the four reasons the Lord used most during the sermon. Have each person explain why it spoke to them personally.

- a. ***We pursue, because we are not perfect.*** (“Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect...” Phil. 3:12)

This point was about how we always have room to grow and mature in Christ. This also keeps us humble because no one is perfect. Maturity, then, is growing in holiness and humility together in Christ. The church should be a family of humble pursuers of Christ, because we will not be perfect until Christ returns or calls us home.

- b. ***We pursue, because we have already been pursued.*** (“I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own.” Phil. 3:12)

Our pursuit of Jesus Christ is never from an anxious heart trying to gain the acceptance of God. Jesus was the one who initiated with us before we ever initiated with him. This is crucial, because if we forget it then we will be exhausted in trying to earn something from God that he has already freely given to us.

- c. ***We pursue, because we are tempted to settle.*** (“But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead. I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.” Phil. 3:13-14)

In this point we talked about “Cruise-Control Christianity.” The call to pursue Jesus Christ with all our hearts will always expose any lukewarm and stale living for Jesus. Cruise-Control Christianity is not an amoral lifestyle; it is a disobedient lifestyle against Jesus and the gospel.

- d. ***We pursue, because it's what anyone can do.*** (“Brothers, join in imitating me, and keep your eyes on those who walk according to the example you have in us.” Phil. 3:17)

In this point we stressed that the call to pursue Jesus is literally for everyone. It doesn't matter where you are on the spiritual maturity level, anyone has the ability to take a step forward in the pursuit of Jesus Christ. No one is too far from God to pursue, and no one is too holy not to pursue. Everyone is invited into this call to pursue Christ with all our hearts.

PRAYER (15 minutes)

This is one of the most important things you can do for growing spiritually in your group. Always be sure to leave plenty of time to pray together as a group. ***Go around and have everyone share where they need prayer, then take plenty of time to pray for each person.***