

Life Group Topic #15 April 19, 2009
The Day I Quit Changing

WELCOME: (15 minutes)

Could you identify one way in which you have changed over the past year?
(In perspectives, attitudes, or behavior)

WORSHIP: (15 minutes)

Use whatever means possible to turn the group's attention to the wonder and majesty of our God- including music, prayer, meditation on the Psalms, and other art forms.

WORD APPLICATION: (45 minutes) – includes excerpts from Erwin McManus's book: *Soul Cravings*:

Consider the following story from J.D. Salinger in his classic: *The Catcher in the Rye*:

“Anyway, I keep picturing all these little kids playing some game in this big field of rye and all. Thousands of little kids, and nobody's around- nobody big, I mean- except for me. And I'm standing on the edge of some crazy cliff. What I have to do, I have to catch everybody if they start to go over the cliff- I mean if they are running and they don't look where they are going. I have to come out from somewhere and catch them. That's all I do all day. I'd just be the catcher in the rye and all. I know it's crazy, but that's the only thing I'd like to be.”

All of us have a deeply rooted longing not only for our lives to be different, but to make a difference in the lives of others. If it wasn't true, we would probably have never joined a Life Group. We are created with a need to have hope and to give it. When we become jaded, we ignore the voice to catch those who are falling over the edge, but it is still there within us and it haunts us. And even then we know something should be done.

The farther we move away from God, the more likely we are to actually give up on progress. When we stop believing the world can be a better place, when we stop caring about the lives and conditions of others, we lose a part of ourselves.

God created us for progress. His intention for us was always that we would be conduits of good. We can insulate ourselves from the problems of the world, but in doing so, we become less than human. When we give ourselves to create a better future, when we become instruments of change, when we refuse to accept the status quo, something resonates within us.

Among everything else we can say about Jesus, he was surely an activist for change. To be a follower of Jesus is to believe that everyone's life can be different. No one is defined by the status of their birth or occupation. No one must remain a prisoner of

fate. Beginning in the gospels, when anyone met and embraced Jesus, He set them on a course of transformation.

1. Read 2 Corinthians 3:17,18 How do these verses describe the work of the Holy Spirit?
2. Is there any evidence in this passage (or other Scriptures) that the transforming work of the Spirit is ever completed in the life of a believer?
3. Read Philippians 3: 12-14, keeping in mind Paul wrote this personal testimony towards the end of his missionary career. How would you describe the yearning of Paul's heart?
4. Is God transforming you at the same pace today as he was in the days when you were young in your faith? If not, what do you think are the barriers that stagnate change in our lives?
5. God often begins transformation in our lives, by exposing attitudes or practices in our life that are not pleasing to Him. He creates dissatisfaction, which leads to repentance and ultimately transformation. Do you sense God is pointing out to you attitudes or practices that He wants to change?
6. One of the most tragic things in the world is a stagnate Christian that has stopped growing and changing. But Life Groups too, can get into patterns and ruts that need transformation. What do you think might be the subtle dangers of stagnation in your group?

WITNESS: (15 minutes)

This section is a vision-casting time designed to get the group strategizing and making concrete plans towards reaching outward to a lost world. Relational outreach always has the goal of ultimately enfolding those we reach into the Life Group.

OPTIONAL Subject: **Do Life Groups Need A Vacation?**

I'm quoting Joel Comiskey below- and endorse his sentiments on this important subject. I welcome your discussing this in your groups:

Between 1995-1997, I had the opportunity to visit and study small group based churches around the world. I discovered that these churches didn't advocate programmatic breaks (vacations) for the small groups during the year.

These churches asked their small groups to meet throughout the year (while allowing for individual groups to decide not to meet on specific holidays, etc.)

I noticed that these churches prioritized the small group on the same level as the Sunday celebration. Since the weekly worship service met throughout the year, the small group ministry must do the same. These churches were concerned about the spiritual growth of the members and felt it would be irresponsible pastoral care to close down cell ministry for an entire summer, for example.

If small groups are another program in the church (howbeit an important one) there is no problem closing and opening them as another cycle in the church, just like the Awana program, Sunday School class, or Evangelism Explosion.

But in small group based churches, cell and celebration are equally important and are necessary for continual growth, edification, and evangelism.

Don't Make an Official Decree

I now advise church leaders not to make an official church decree that all groups will close during such and such a holiday, season, etc. Small groups should be the life of the church, not subject to programmatic cycles of church calendars or work schedules.

But will small groups meet all fifty-two weeks of the year. I don't believe so. My point is this: let the individual group decide. Upper level leadership should not decide for them.

If the church has officially decreed that small groups will not meet during the summer, what happens to the person who receives Jesus during the summer? Will she have to wait until September to join a small group? Our church doesn't close small group ministry during the summer, although we have fewer groups meetings for a variety of reasons.