



Fundamental to the Christian walk is the pursuit of venturing deep underground to the cool bottomless wells of discipleship. God, in his grace, has given us a yearning to grow not just individually with Him, but in a community, a new community that He has established. Sojourn Groups are small, simple groups of 2-3 men or women who meet regularly to help one another battle for faith in the gospel. A primary way we steer clear of religious performance and spiritual indifference is by centering our faith in the gospel. The goal of Sojourn Groups is to repent from sin, rejoice in Christ, and reproduce disciples.

The word "sojourn" is a Hebrew term that literally means traveler or guest. It's a description of a person who is on a journey, a resident alien, who has been put in a foreign land and occupies a space and time, that is not theirs. We are all sojourners. God has sent us into time and space, on mission to journey together and pursue deep intimacy with Christ while we journey in a land that is not our home. The Psalmist asks the question "Who shall sojourn in your tent? Who shall dwell on your holy hill?" He answers by stating, "He who walks blamelessly and does what is right and speaks truth in his heart." Our Sojourn Groups seek to help us as the body of Christ embody the blamelessness and truthfulness of Christ in all the world.

### **WHAT SHOULD I EXPECT?**

Sojourn Groups are gender specific and meet 2-4 times a month. Sojourn Groups are mixed across lines of age, experience, and spiritual maturity and gather together to apply the truth of the gospel to every aspect of our lives. Groups are designed to be easily multiplied, and the value of multiplication is central to the structure of Sojourn Groups. Because there will be different levels of spiritual maturity in the group, a leader of the group, who helps direct discussions, often emerges. A leader of the group is not required but often helpful.

### **HOW DOES A SOJOURN GROUP WORK?**

Sojourn Groups are small, biblical, and reproducible. No more than two or three people to a group. If the group grows beyond three, it is important that after a few weeks of meeting together the group multiplies into two new groups who would then each pursue a new third member. This retains the intimacy and trust built in the initial group, while also fostering reproduction. They are designed to be simple and biblical in their content and promote lasting joy in Jesus. They follow a simple progression of:

***Life-Word-Theology-Life.***



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**Life:**

In any given meeting a person brings in their struggles and successes from the previous week. Allow plenty of time to share life with another through conversation and catch up from the previous week. Listen to where each person is and hear how they've experienced victory or if they've experienced defeat.

**Word:**

A Sojourn group agrees to focus on a common biblical text. Each person in the group commits to devotionally read the same chapter from a book of the Bible each week. For example, your group could read through Colossians in four weeks. As you read, make a point of asking the Holy Spirit to draw your attention to whatever He wants you to know. The Spirit may be prompting you to repent of a sin, rejoice in a promise or meditate on an insight. Each week when you get together make the text your focus.

**Theology:**

Work through the verses in community, trying to follow the flow of the author. From there, try to understand the central theological message of the chapter. Be sure you ask the questions: (1) What do I think the author is saying? (2) Why do I think this? (3) How does the person and work of Jesus interpret this text? Strive to be Christ-centered, not application-centered. Jesus is sufficient for our failures and strong for our successes. Promote godly accountability and faithful prayer. Be sure to share the names of people whom you are trying to bless with the gospel. Pray as a group, asking God to help you trust His promises, as well as asking Him to give unbelievers the same gift of faith.

**What Does This Look Like?****Movement 1: Know Your Sin and Suffering**

The first movement of Sojourn Groups is to *know your sin*. We often avoid or are simply unaware of our sin. In the first movement of our groups we use our weekly experiences and the light of scripture to expose areas of sin. If we don't talk about our lives, if we don't submit our lives to the light of scripture we will never see how God is calling us to repent, mature, and experience the freedom from sin that comes from Christ. As you gather with your group pray before, during, and after the meeting that the Holy Spirit would convict and free each of you from sin.

**HOW SCRIPTURE ILLUMINATES YOUR SIN OR SUFFERING:**

God's purpose for us engaging with his word is to grow into the image of Christ. God promises us that when we hear his word that it does not return to him empty or without effect. God works through his word to free us from sin and idols and to grow us in our satisfaction in Christ (Isaiah 55). God's word reveals where our lives and the desires of our hearts are out of sync with the life and desires of Christ. This is why when we study God's word we are not trying to gain a new level of mastery over the text, but instead we want God's word to gain a new mastery over our lives, hopes,

and fears. The following questions can help your Sojourn group identify sin and idols in your life. These questions also help your group understand how someone might be coping with suffering apart from God.

How does this passage reveal where there is sin and unbelief in your life?  
How does this passage speak to suffering you may be experiencing?

- What has caused stress, anxiety, fear, hurt, anger, or sadness in you?
- Where have your emotions been out of control this week?
- What are you hoping will fix or cure your stress, anxiety, fear, hurt, anger, or sadness?
- Are you looking to yourself for the cure?
- What do you say "if only this would happen" then I would be happy?
- Are you spending too much time on somewhere, something, or someone?
- Is there something you find yourself thinking or daydreaming about often?

### ***Movement 2: Fight Your Sin and Suffering***

The second movement of Sojourn Groups is to *fight your sin*. Once our sin and suffering has been illuminated by God's word we know where we need to fight back with the truth of God's word. Repentance is not just acknowledging our sin, but turning away from that sin by rooting out the desires and insecurities that cause our sinful behavior. If sin is a snake, you don't tame the snake or "struggle with it". You kill it. The weapons that God gives us to fight our sin are himself: the Holy Spirit who empowers us to change through applying the word of Christ to our hearts. We don't fight sin to earn God's favor, it's not a kind of work based salvation. We fight sin because the love we already have from God motivates us to pursue God's glory through communal holiness. Sojourn Groups are an ordinary way that our faith family develops the habit of identifying and fighting our sin with God's word.

James 4 tells us that the reason we sin is because our desires are at war within us. The root of our sin is not our sinful behaviors, but the sinful desires of our hearts that drive our sinful behaviors. Our sinful behaviors are just expressions of the sinful desires of our hearts. For example, people lie for many reasons. They lie to gain control, to gain or maintain social standing, or to people please. These desires for control, social standing, or people pleasing are idols, something we replace God with in our attempt to find peace, security, and happiness. The person might be able to exercise self-control and limit their lying but if the idol underneath the sinful behavior is never addressed they will still be controlled by it, and it will express itself in other sinful behaviors. The gospel of Jesus changes our hearts which leads to changed behavior. The goal of the next movement is to help your Sojourn group understand the "why" behind the sins you are struggling with or the un-Christlike ways you might be dealing with suffering in your life.

How does this passage reveal why there is sin or unbelief in your life? How does this passage challenge how you may be dealing with suffering in your life?

- What were you trying to get, change, or prove through your sin?
- How does your family of origin play into your sin or unbelief? Is there a pattern of thinking or behavior that you see in your family that might be influencing your sin?
- How does your current work play into your sin or unbelief?
- How is your marriage affecting or being affected by your sin or unbelief?
- How is your view of money, sex, influence, or social standing affecting your sin?

Consider Romans 8:13: "For if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, *you will live.*" While often difficult and painful, digging out the roots of our sin leads to life, even when it feels like death. As the Holy Spirit leads us to fight our sin with his power and the his word he is leading us into freedom, peace, and the "wide space" the gospel creates for us (Psalm 18:19, Romans 5:1-2).

*Fighting Your Sin and Suffering is the second movement in Sojourn Groups.*

### **Movement 3: How is Jesus Better?**

The final movement is simply this, how is the work and will of Jesus better than your sinful behaviors? The last two questions have helped you identify sin and the desires behind your sin, this question helps you apply the work and will of Jesus to those areas of sin so that you can combat your sin with the truth of the gospel.

Let's go back to the example of the person who has a habit of lying. Let's assume that the previous question revealed that they have a habit of lying because they want to impress their friends. They are fearful of not being seen as interesting as their friends and they are worried that their family life isn't as perfect as others appear to be. And so they stretch the truth, exaggerate accomplishments, and embellish stories in order to present a certain persona to their friends. Their lying is motivated by an identity built around what people think of them. Their identity is not centered in what Christ thinks of them but is instead centered on the thoughts, opinions, and perceived reactions of others. So we ask that person, gently, "how is that working out for you?" Sin always leaves us desiring more, it always causes more brokenness, more weariness, and more sin. Helping a person see that their sin is not fixing anything, or getting them the result they desired is important step to helping them see how Jesus is better than their sin.

The gospel is good news for the lying person whose identity is wrapped up in what others think of them because the gospel tells them that no matter what they do or don't do, because of Jesus they are always loved and approved of by God. The person caught up in the opinions of others needs to hear the good news that God loves and cherishes them, and that because of Christ his opinion never changes of them. And so they don't have

to lie to impress others, because Jesus has impressed God for us. They don't have to present a perfect picture of their family to the world, whether through social media or in conversation, because God sees their family, mess and all, and has still chosen to reconcile them to himself.

The gospel shows us that all the things we are trying to get through our sin: security, identity, love, peace, comfort are given to us perfectly through Christ. As we study scripture this is where we want to arrive, finding deeper security, identity, love, peace, and comfort, not in ourselves or others, but in Christ.

- How does this passage show you that Jesus is better than your sin or unbelief?
- How is that sin working out for you?
- How is Jesus kinder, greater, stronger, more fulfilling than your sin?
- What promises about God address your sin or unbelief? How can you run to those promises instead of sin?

#### ***Movement 4: Pray***

Along with reading God's word together praying together is the most important thing you can do as a group. It is not our wise counseling or exegesis that changes hearts, but the work of the Holy Spirit that changes us to become more like Jesus.

When you pray don't just pray for the behaviors of your fellow group members. Remember that the goal of all of this is to get at the heart issues underneath our sinful behaviors. Praying for heart motivations and beliefs trains you and the other group members to focus on heart change.

#### ***Here are some ways to pray for one another:***

- Pray in specific ways for those fighting sin and suffering to believe and experience how Jesus is better.
- Pray against the lies of the flesh and enemy that have been revealed. Pray the truth of the scripture against those lies.
- Pray that they would find identity in the person and work of Jesus, not their sin and the things it provided for them.
- Pray for those affected by the sin and suffering of the person in your Sojourn Group.
- Pray that God would be glorified through their repentance. Pray the specific way that God is glorified in their specific repentance.

**LIFE**

**WORD**

**THEOLOGY**

**LIFE**

**MOVEMENT 1:**  
*Know Your Sin and Suffering*

**MOVEMENT 2:**  
*Fight Your Sin and Suffering*

**MOVEMENT 3:**  
*How is Jesus Better?*  
**MOVEMENT 4**  
*Pray*