

Think Small

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Think Casey's Blog...

Title: They, them, and theirs

Well, it's week 3 for groups. I can't believe how fast life flies! I hope you are enjoying your life; I sure am enjoying mine. I have had about the busiest three days that I can remember in a long time, but it has been a good busy. I feel like I am involved in things that matter in the long haul. I have been working with a lot of people, which I love to do. Like last week, it is early in the morning and I feel that I have learned something worth sharing with you. However, what I want to share is difficult to convey because it deals with the heart. It boils down to the fact that I don't like the words *they*, *them* and *theirs* as much as I like the words *we*, *us* and *ours*! I know that sounds strange (I promise I'm not going crazy!!! ☺) Let me give you an example of what I am talking about. I have been around Group Leaders who, during their group discussions, occasionally say, "They want us to talk about this...." or "Their goal for the evening is that we discuss....." Statements such as these make it sound as though there are two separate parties at work in the kingdom. Guys, I am here to tell you that we are moving to a "we, us, and our" culture. Group has less to do with what "Casey and the Ministry Team" want and has more to do with what you want to do in and through your group time as a leader. Sure, we have guidelines and message-based curriculum to follow, but I want to teach you how to make it your own. Like I said last week, it is a cardinal sin for you to take your group leader notes to the group time and read directly from them. These notes are for your use only. Their purpose is to guide you in your own study. So if you can't take these notes to group and read from them, how do you make a group discussion your own? Glad you asked...

- Fill out your questions before you read through the leadership notes.

One of the best ways I have found to do this is to just work through the questions like everyone else in your group. This will give you insight as to how you feel about the group time and questions. After you work through the questions, pull these notes out as a reference to see if you missed something.

- Say "we, us and our".

One of the best things you can do to make the group lesson feel like your own is to use the words "we, us, and our" consistently. For instance, a group leader can lead into the night by saying, "Tonight, we thought it would be a good idea to discuss this passage of scripture because we know what people sometimes think about this subject." Or "Our goal tonight is simple; it is to" The opposite would be, "Casey (or my notes) says that it is a good idea to talk about this scripture because...." Or, "Their goal for our group is...." Another

word you can say that communicates that you have personalized the lesson and made it your own is “my”. You can say, “My heart for this group is that” These are just a few examples of how to make your group better. Trust me; your group members want YOU to be the leader of your group.

We are making a difference together. I can't wait to see you at Coffee with Casey, coming up over the next two weekends. It is going to be fun to be with you guys again! I hope this lesson helps and makes you a better leader.

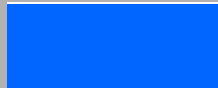


The Search for Real Relationships

Google Search

I'm Feeling Lucky

Transferring data...24% complete
6 out of 25 leaders committed



Objectives

- To read and dig into Matthew 25:14-30 as a group.
- To evaluate and discuss what talents and resources God has left us and how we can be more faithful with them.
- To share the rewards of investing well what God has left us.

Facilitators' Guide

Group Talk

- Talk about who is open to serving as the Greater Impact Coordinator for the fall service projects.
 - We will begin Greater Impact Projects in September. You will receive specific information about the organizations we are partnering with and the dates at Coffee with Casey. This week you need to decide who the coordinator for your group will be. The Greater Impact Coordinator will be responsible for communicating with the project coordinator about the details for your group. If you have not been to Coffee with Casey yet, explain to the group that you will bring the information about the organizations, dates, etc to them next week.
- During the week of September 3, we are doing “Invest and Invite Dinners” for the kickoff of our Google series. Leaders will explain!

- During the week of September 3, your group will not meet together. Instead, each member will plan to have dinner, a play date, or just hang out with someone that is disconnected from Christ and/or the church that week. It can be a neighbor, co-worker or family member. Take time to *Share the Vision* right here. We believe that people who are disconnected from Christ and the church are going to be impacted most by a relationship with you. We invest in that relationship to build it to the place where we have permission to invite them to church. We really want to make a meaningful impact on our community as we start the new Google series. We will talk about this further at Wednesday Night Live.
- Taste of Missions Sign UP! This is the week to sign up for Taste of Missions meeting which is our missions' information meeting on September 18th.
 - Please pass around the sign up sheet and either fax it back to us at 678-208-0402. Or submit names of people who are interested in going on your meeting report! The sign up sheet is attached. Just so you know this does not commit anyone to any mission trip. This is simply a missions' information meeting!

Get to Know You

- What are your five best traits or attributes and why? (Don't be shy; brag on yourself.)
 - We really want your group to know each other well and build strong relationships with one another so you can experience community together. Your group may have just begun the journey of building relationships, making this is a great question for learning more about each other. Some people may not want to share, but it will help if you share first. Even if your group has been together for a while, some people will not want to brag on themselves. I recommend sharing about yourself first. Then, if no one wants to speak up, point out an attribute you really admire/appreciate in someone else (perhaps your spouse). This is a great way to publicly encourage your spouse. Don't stay here too long, but enjoy how God has made each other.

Message Based Curriculum

1. Read Matthew 25:14-30 and answer the following questions.

*What in this parable surprises you? Encourages you? Challenges you?

- We desire for people to read the Bible and dig in to determine for themselves what God is saying and what it means for their lives. We want you to read scripture and talk about it as a group. There are many different things in this passage that stand out, and there are no wrong answers.
- Jesus is talking to his disciples here. They asked him what it would be like when Jesus returned to earth again and what the end of the world would be like. Jesus is telling them this parable to show what it looks like to be ready for his return and how we should live our lives until he comes back. He is showing them and us his desire for us to effectively use what God has entrusted to us.

- I am surprised that the master threw the one servant out and called him a lazy, wicked servant. I am encouraged that the master was so pleased with the two servants who invested their money well. That also challenges me to want to do the same so God is pleased with my life.

*Read Matthew 25:16-17. Why do you think these servants decided to invest their resources?

- Again, there are no wrong answers to this question. Dig into what the Bible is saying and let people share their thoughts about why the servants invested. Some people will relate with these two servants better than the other and will have thoughts to share. The master entrusted his servants with his property according to their abilities. He knew these two servants had the abilities to handle five and two talents. I think the servants knew what their master expected of them and so they were anxious to do the right thing with what he'd given them. They wanted to make him proud.

*Read Matthew 25:18. Why do you think this servant decided not to invest his resources?

- Your group members will probably have varying answers to this. The Bible says in verses 24 and 25 that the servant was scared he would mess things up with the master's property. Maybe he was lazy. Maybe he was scared of his master and messing up. Maybe it was a little of both. Maybe he was selfish and didn't care about the master. Maybe it was a combination of all of these possibilities. Ask your group members to share why they think the way they do about this servant.

*Which servant can you best relate to? In other words, how do you view what God has given you? ("Oh my goodness, I have been given so much..." or, "I have been given about the same as everyone..." or, "I don't have much to offer at all..." etc.) Why do you think this way?

- Be sure to explain that the "talents" in this parable represent the abilities and resources that God has entrusted to us. God has given each person a special and unique set of abilities, talents or strengths. He has also given each person time to invest. He has also given each person financial resources that ultimately belong to Him; He has simply put us in charge of them on this earth. He has literally given some people more "talent" than others, but no matter how much or how little, we are each responsible for what He's given us and how we use it. It is important for each group member to recognize that this is true for their life too.

2. What talents and resources do you think Jesus has left with you? How do you feel about the way you have invested them through Mountain Lake?

- This is not meant to be just about time and financial resources. Do not accept those as someone's answer. We want to really get personal with what gifts God has given each person and how they have invested or can invest them through Mountain Lake.
- There may be people in your group who are volunteering at Mountain Lake. That is great. But this is the time to evaluate if they are using their gifts to maximize the talents God has given them. Someone in your group may be serving at the café on the weekends, but God has given them the talents to lead the Café team by being a volunteer coach. Someone may be greeting at the front doors, but God has given them the talents to lead a children's small group. Someone may be doing exactly what they need to be doing and they need to be celebrated. This is a chance to *Encourage the Hearts* of your group members and challenge them to do something they maybe wouldn't do on their own. Really push people to talk about how they're investing. Ask them why they feel the way they do.

- I work full-time at Mountain Lake, but I still have the responsibility to use the talents God has given me. The ministry team is very sensitive about this, so we are constantly evaluating what we are doing with how God has gifted us. We use a book titled “Now, Discover Your Strengths” by Marcus Buckingham that has a survey readers can take that will help determine their top five strengths. Each person on the ministry team has taken this survey, and we are constantly looking at how to invest those strengths on the team to benefit Mountain Lake. My strengths are very relational in nature. God has wired me to relate with people and empathize with them and develop them to be more than they are on their own. That is why I work with people who are interested in being baptized or who have committed their lives to Christ.

3. Why do you think Jesus cares about how faithful we are with our financial resources and our time?

- This is probably the most important question for this group session, so make sure you make it to this one and spend the most time here. You could miss the whole goal of this week’s message if your group misses this. Jesus cares about how faithful we are with our financial resources and our time because our faithfulness means that God’s plan and the redemption of the world can be accomplished. God cares about people and wants them to know Him and commit their lives to Him so He can be their Leader and Forgiver. Without Jesus in people’s lives, they will spend eternity separated from Him. He desperately wants people to know Him and this truth. The church is God’s mouthpiece for that message to reach people. Without the church playing its part, God’s plan cannot be carried out. Without each person being faithful with their “talents”, the church does not play its part in God’s plan.
- Let people share their thoughts, but make sure you are able to talk about the bigger picture before you move on to the next question. It really is the small things that make a huge difference.

4. What are steps you can take to be more faithful in the way you invest your resources and your time through Mountain Lake?

- There are very simple steps that each person can take, no matter where they are today. The simplest is to ask God, “What do you want to do through Mountain Lake Church,” and “What do you want to do through me?” Ask God, believing that He has a big plan and it involves you and the “talents” He has entrusted to you.
- This is your chance to share the vision about the Visionary Giving Offering and commitments that we’ll be making as a church on August 26 & 27. People can begin preparing now for that offering and commitment. Take time to share the steps you are taking to prepare for that weekend and what God has in store for Mountain Lake.
- If people in your group are not using their gifts at all at MLC, they can attend the next Volunteer Orientation on Saturday, August 19 at 6:15 PM. They’ll get an overview of what opportunities there are. If they are currently serving, but see they could be more faithful with what God has given them, they can talk to their coach or to Louie Lovoy about ways they can better use the “talents” God has given them.

*Share any stories you may have about the rewards of investing your gifts and resources in God’s kingdom?

- God has our best in mind with His plan for our lives. Because of that, there are rewards for our faithfulness to Him in these areas. Before you go to group, think about the rewards you have experienced because of your investment in leading your Growth Group. You have developed relationships with other people. You have probably seen marriages be restored. You may have shared a baptism together in your group. Think through the blessing you have had because of your faithfulness in leading your group.
- I have to be honest with you. The current set of Connection Groups has been a huge investment of time and energy for me. But it is so rewarding to know that we have over 100 people coming on campus tonight to get plugged into relationships where they are going to belong and become. I know that my relationship with Christ is better because of my group experience, and I want that for each new person.
- Each time I sit backstage with people who are being baptized, I am rewarded for the financial investment Dan and I have made so there is a place for people to come. By coming, they experience a relevant God that loves them and wants to have a relationship with them, and they commit their lives to Christ and go public with their faith. That is a reward that lasts for eternity.
- End the night by praying together for each other.

