



Welcome to a new year and a new semester of Growth Groups at Journey Church! I hope everyone had a great holiday break. I am really pumped about what God is about to do through our church and in our Growth Groups ministry.

We have begun the new year with a series called “HD Living – An Inside Look at the Sermon On the Mount.” This week, Jesus’ message leads us into a discussion about our *impact* and our *influence* in the world around us. So, let’s get started!

- **How do you tend to like your food: mild, spicy, salty, sweet, sour, etc? Which is your least favorite?**
- **How do you feel when your favorite type of food has TOO LITTLE of your favorite flavor? (i.e. not spicy enough, not salty enough, not sweet enough, not sour enough, etc.)**
- **How do you feel when your favorite type of food has TOO MUCH of your favorite flavor? (i.e. too spicy, too salty, too sweet, too sour, etc.)**
- **What is the funniest thing that has ever happened to you while trying to get around in the dark?**
- **READ: *Colossians 4:5-6* and *Matthew 5:13***
 - **What does *Colossians* teach us about investing in the lives of disconnected people?**
 - **What do these passages teach us about how to influence the world around us?**
 - **What does the *Matthew* passage teach us about how our spiritual health affects our ability to influence people?**
- **READ: *John 8:12* and *Matthew 5:14-16***
 - **What does *John* teach us about the source of our ability to influence people around us?**
 - **What does *Matthew* teach us about our responsibility to invest in the lives of disconnected people?**
 - **What does *Matthew* teach us is more important: words, or actions? Why do you think that?**
- **On a scale of 1-10, with 1 being bland, and 10 being salty, how would you rate your "saltiness" to the people around you? Why?**
- **On a scale of 1-20, with 10 being best, how would you rate the quality of light you are shining to the people around you? Why?**
- **Name at least one person you can make a conscious effort to invest in and talk about spiritual matters with in the coming week. What is one practical thing you can do to plan on impacting their life?**
- **If you can't think of at least one person to invest in, what is one regular activity that you do where you can begin to make a conscious effort to get to know some people so you can invest in them down the road? (i.e. gym, hair salon, store clerks, waiters/waitresses, work, classes.)**



Welcome Back Growth Group Leaders!

I can't thank each of you enough for making Fall Semester 2007 a great success in the Growth Groups Ministry at Journey Church! I was glad to have a couple of you over for desert on Wednesday. It gave us a time to pray for each other, understand where each group is succeeding and where challenges still exist. It also gave me a chance to cast my vision for the ministry in the coming months.

Since several of you were not able to make it on Wednesday, I want to lay out a few goals for Spring Semester. Please pray for God to reveal your part in making these goals a reality:

1. We need a Lady to step up to establish and lead a Growth Group for College Ladies. This will enable the existing Ladies' Growth to concentrate on our single moms and other ladies in a similar station in life. We have several college ladies attending on Sundays that have not yet plugged into a Growth Group, several of them probably would if a group existed for them.
2. Several of the groups are doing fairly well with weekly meetings, but the discussion can sometimes be limited due to unfamiliarity within the group. To help overcome this struggle, we will be looking for very specific and practical ways to help the groups "do life together" outside of regular Growth Group times. As we find more things we have in common, our groups will be significantly more effective in accomplishing our vision.
3. I hope to build up both of the existing younger couples' groups over the course of this semester so that they can regroup and be healthy in the fall. At least one additional leader for this age-group will need to be identified and begin the apprentice process to become a leader in the fall.
4. I want to continue to build up the older couples' group so that it will be multiplied in the fall. At least one additional leader will need to be identified quickly so we can begin the apprentice process to become a leader in the fall.
5. We are working with the guys' group to involve as many guys as possible, while prioritizing the group to accommodate some guys who are either not yet over the line of faith or have just begun to really follow Christ fully with their lives.
6. Several of these goals are set up to lead the Growth Groups ministry into success long-term. However, it is not a secret that Emily and I are planning to move sometime in 2008 to plant a church near Baltimore. To prepare for this transition, I will need your help in identifying some key people at Journey Church who will make up a team of folks to write the Travel Guides, coordinate communication between the Growth Group leaders and members, and to take on other miscellaneous responsibilities I have.
7. These goals are a very reachable "starting point" to help maintain a healthy Growth Groups ministry at Journey Church. If we as a church meet all of the goals the Ministry Team established at our Staff Retreat, we will need to find significantly more Growth Group Leaders within a short period of time. The more apprentices we can identify, the better prepared we will be for the wave we are asking God to bring us.

As you can see, we have a lot to do in 2008! I am pumped up about it. I am glad you all are coming a long for the ride! If you have any questions, concerns, or prayer requests, please let me know. I also look forward to getting feedback from each of you *every week* following your Growth Groups so I can keep a good gauge on how we are doing with reaching our goals.

So, let's be on the ride!

Andrew

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We have begun the new year with a series called “HD Living – An Inside Look at the Sermon On the Mount.” This week, Jesus’ message leads us into a discussion about our *impact* and our *influence* in the world around us. So, let’s get started!

This first set of questions are simply ice-breaker questions. These questions are an opportunity to get to know each other in the group, laugh, and have a good time. Be sure to have a couple good stories of your own ready. The more you prepare yourself to be open, the more your folks will be open. The more your folks open up on the ice-breakers, the more you will get out of them on the in-depth questions.

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- **What is the funniest thing that has ever happened to you while trying to get around in the dark?**
- **READ: *Colossians 4:5-6* and *Matthew 5:13***

The primary goal of the following questions is to understand that both our actions and the things we say are extremely important in influencing the people around us.

- **What does *Colossians* teach us about investing in the lives of disconnected people?**

Verse 5 teaches us that how we act is extremely important to reaching disconnected people around us. If we “go about our business” without paying attention to those around us, we could easily miss a very real opportunity to meet a need or to share our stories. Verse 6 teaches us that how we speak can often be just as important as what we speak. If we are spending time learning more about our faith from the Bible, we will increase in understanding and wisdom, and be better prepared for the conversation ahead of us. However, even the newest Christ-follower can share in simple terms the story of what God is doing in their life.

- **What do these passages teach us about how to influence the world around us?**

Both passages teach us that our ability to have an impact on the people around us is our ability to function like salt. Salt adds flavor. So often Christians have a reputation of being boring or judgmental. Instead, our lives should be full of grace and should be exciting and a refreshing change from the mundane lives of the “normal” disconnected person around us. Our lives become salty when they reflect a passion for something beyond ourselves (God), and a challenge to bring others along for the journey.

- **What does the *Matthew* passage teach us about how our spiritual health affects our ability to influence people?**

When we lose our passion for God, lose sight of the challenge of touching others, or allow compromise and/or hypocrisy to sneak in . . . Disconnected people will notice. When disconnected people notice our lives being less extraordinary and more mundane, our ability to influence them begins to wane. Once somebody around us labels us a hypocrite or similar, it becomes significantly more difficult to overcome barriers to their spiritual well-being.

- **READ: *John 8:12* and *Matthew 5:14-16***

The point of the following questions is to understand that our source of influence is the influence of Jesus in our lives. Consequently, as Christ-followers, we reflect Jesus’ influence to the people around us. The reflection occurs primarily in the way we interact with disconnected people day-to-day.

- **What does *John* teach us about the source of our ability to influence people around us?**

JESUS!

- **What does *Matthew* teach us about our responsibility to invest in the lives of disconnected people?**

If we are around disconnected people, we are going to be noticed (*can't be hidden*). If we are living lives that don't put us around disconnected people, we're a lot like a lamp under a basket. When our actions follow-through on our profession of Christ, Jesus is reflected to those around us and disconnected people become attracted to the life we have in Christ.

- **What does *Matthew* teach us is more important: words, or actions? Why do you think that?**

Verse 16 says, "*So they may see your good works . . .*" (ESV). While there comes a place where we need to explain why we act the way we do, those actions are what sets the stage for us to impact and influence peoples' lives with our words.

- **On a scale of 1-10, with 1 being bland, and 10 being salty, how would you rate your "saltiness" to the people around you? Why?**

This and the next question are diagnostic questions to help your folks evaluate how they are doing and to set the stage for you to help them establish some goals to take the NEXT STEP to *invest and invite* in the people around them every day.

If most of the folks in your group have been Christ-followers for a significant period of time, you may want to take the rest of the discussion in a slightly different direction. You may want to ask, "Do you ever think that your life is 'too salty'?" This would mean that the spiritual influence you have is sometimes so foreign to the people around you that it puts a bitter taste in their mouth and actually pushes them away from God instead of closer. An example of this might be how certain Christians are "forcing their hand" in political circles so hard that those of a different viewpoint totally dismiss the possibility of following Christ simply because of one particular issue (no matter whether the issue is really right or not, their current position is a barrier to the Gospel.)

- **On a scale of 1-20, with 10 being best, how would you rate the quality of light you are shining to the people around you? Why?**

This question may be a challenge to deeper personal devotion and/or personal growth. This may be an opportunity to find out who in your groups is really trying to practice the spiritual disciplines. Try to find out who is reading their Bibles, who is really understanding what they are reading, who is spending time in prayer beyond a basic "wish list," and overall who is really seeking to be Christ-like in every area of life.

- **Name at least one person you can make a conscious effort to invest in and talk about spiritual matters with in the coming week. What is one practical thing you can do to plan on impacting their life?**

This is our first "Challenge Question." I am shifting from "application" to "challenge." I believe this is a little more than semantics. I believe the difference will be that the questions will be a little more specific, a little more action-oriented, and easier to bridge from the conversation in Growth Groups to everyday life.

Therefore, focus on the action part of this question. Encourage your folks to find something to *DO* to impact peoples' lives. Give practical examples such as babysitting so they can go on a date with their spouse. Or do silly little mundane things like refill their water glass or run to the office supply closet and replenish their supplies for them, or help load groceries in a parking lot, or whatever little thing they can *DO* to stand out in a positive way.

- **If you can't think of at least one person to invest in, what is one regular activity that you do where you can begin to make a conscious effort to get to know some people so you can invest in them down the road? (i.e. gym, hair salon, store clerks, waiters/waitresses, work, classes.)**

Help your folks find ways to begin relationships with disconnected people. Encourage them to talk to cashiers instead of going through self-checkout. Tell them to use their hobbies as opportunities to meet people long term, etc. Our goal is to help people see that they do not need to radically change the way they live their life in order to influence people around them, instead they just need to be intentional about doing what they do in a way to influence people around them.