

NewSpring Church Groups Guide

Upgrade – Week 8 – Second Chances

Directions: This guide provides a menu of teaching and discussion materials to help in leading your group. Please select and use the materials that best suit your group.

Group Leader Guide for Use April 17–April 23, 2011

FOR THE LEADER:

The Main Point - When God reveals something to us, we are responsible to act on it, including reaching out to someone who has fallen away from church or faith. God is a God of second chances. We must battle every reason or excuse for not going after them.

Sermon Recap - Four main reasons keep us from reaching out to those who've fallen away from church or faith. (1) Relaxation - We need to get uncomfortable because going after someone may require us to confront him or her (in love), or have intense conversations. (2) Condemnation - God gives second chances, and we must, too. We must approach people prayerfully and humbly. We must not talk about them, only to them. (3) Delegation - We must stop asking staff where these people are and go get them ourselves. Revelation equals responsibility. The Holy Spirit doesn't delegate; He equips. Spiritual maturity is saying yes to God. (4) Spiritualization - We can not use prayer as an excuse for inactivity. We must couple our prayer with action and go after people and bring them back (James 5:19-20).

Biblical Background - (Acts 12:24-25; Acts 13:1-14; Acts 15:36-41; Philemon 24; Colossians 4:1) Early in their ministry together, Paul and Barnabas take with them Mark (John Mark), a cousin of Barnabas and future writer of the Gospel of Mark. In Acts 13, Paul and Barnabas' ministry picks up steam as God uses them to strike blind a sorcerer and bring the governor to faith in Jesus. But in Acts 13:13, their assistant Mark drops out and returns to Jerusalem. Paul and Barnabas continue on and complete their first missionary journey, see many churches planted, and succeed greatly for the Kingdom of God. In Acts 15:30, they decide to begin their second missionary journey and return to each city where they had previously preached. Barnabas wanted to take Mark along; Paul did not. Their disagreement was so serious it caused them to part ways. Barnabas took Mark and sailed for Cyprus; Paul chose Silas to accompany him.

Most scholars believe Mark was also mentored by Peter (I Peter 5:13). In time, Paul and Mark were reconciled (Philemon 24, Col. 4:10). Mark became Paul's co-worker and proved himself worthy of Barnabas' second chance.

OPENER:

Controversial Icebreaker - Jaycee Lee Dugard was 11 years old when abducted from a school bus stop in California on June 10, 1991. In the hours, days and even years that followed her disappearance, local and national media covered the story, dozens of local volunteers assisted in the search effort, and tens of thousands of fliers and posters were mailed to businesses throughout the United States. In the later years there remained a general continuous effort to keep her story before the public. For 18 years Jaycee lived in a tent behind the home of her abductors, Phillip Craig and Nancy Garrido. She bore two daughters to Garrido. A perceptive campus cop noticed Garrido's and his daughters' unusual behavior and alerted Garrido's parole officer. On August 26, 2009, an investigation led to the positive identification of Jaycee Lee Dugard and the Garridos' arrest. (1) Imagine if you had been living in Jaycee's community when she was abducted. What emotions would you have felt? What might your reaction or response have been? (2) Every day we are surrounded by lost people. Some don't even know it. What should be our search and rescue plan? (3) Jaycee's family and community never gave up until she was found and given a second chance. Who are some people you need to invite to church again?

Segue: God is a God of second chances. He loves us enough to never give up His pursuit for our hearts. In turn, we should do the same for others. Today we'll talk about how to succeed in giving others a second chance.

Activity Option - Ask your group to share examples of people they know (including themselves) who turned their lives around because of a second chance they received.

QUESTIONS:

Leaders' note: Answers provide Bible verses for the group to look at together as you reinforce the Bible as the guide and source for victorious living.

Q: Why do we have such a hard time giving people second chances?

A: Matt. 7:1-5; Acts 15:36-41 Unfortunately, Christians can be judgmental. We seem to be able to spot others' sins a mile away but can't see our own looking straight in the mirror. Barnabas wanted to give Mark a second chance, but Paul did not. Perhaps it was pride; or perhaps the Holy Spirit had shown Paul a flaw in Mark that could hinder their Gospel mission. God, nor Scripture, tell us. But the truth is, many times people can't see (aren't aware of) the second chances they've been given. Because we rarely see our own second chances, it's hard to offer them to others. We often pigeonhole someone with whatever sin he/she has committed (adulterer, porn addict, drug addict, etc). We can't see that person as anything different.

Grace always has a better outcome than justice, however. Just think if we all got what we actually deserved.

Q: As believers, our life witness is powerful. People watch us and see everything, especially bitterness and unforgiveness that seep through. Why is it so important for the world to see us as people who forgive others?

A: Matthew 18:21-35 Jesus, through a parable, told his disciples that they should forgive every offense of our neighbors....not just once, but as many times as needed. Our showing patience and self-control, not to mention keeping short accounts and showing mercy, are vital to a Christ-like witness.

Q: Think of people around you who are struggling with some sin or discouraging circumstance. Can you use your own personal examples of second chances to share hope and truth with them? If so, how?

A: Job 33:23-30 Although none of Job's counselors got their advice or perspectives completely right, Elihu shared with Job, in the midst of Job's suffering and confusion, how God is a God of second chances. Elihu pointed ultimately to Jesus, who rescues us. When God rescues and redeems us, we should tell others. Our past experiences and restoration will let others see a God of mercy and compassion, slow to anger and abounding in love.

CLOSER:

Prayer Time Idea - (1) Have the group think for a few minutes about people they know who have left or drifted away from church or, even, the faith. Let them share aloud these people's first names only. (2) Then have the group think about people they know who are trapped in sin and in trouble - people who need grace and a second chance. Again, let them share these people's first names aloud. Then say: God has revealed to us these people; now it's our responsibility to go to them and ask them to come with us to church. Easter is a prime Sunday for unchurched people to go to church. As you close, pray aloud two things: (1) for the hearts of the names spoken to be receptive to God and to group members; and (2) for our group's obedience, humility and boldness in reaching out to these people and inviting them to church on Easter.