

PBCC LifeGroups: *I See a Church...*



Lesson #3 - ... That Grows Smaller as It Grows Larger

Introduction: How do you grow smaller?

When a church or organization is healthy, it grows. That's a great thing—but sometimes, a church can grow so much that it begins to feel "too big." For folks who are new, it may seem overwhelming. They may feel anonymous in the crowd and wonder where they fit among such a big group.

How do you grow smaller as you grow bigger? The key is finding ways to connect people so that they can share their stories with one another. When you know someone's story, and they know yours, a big place can begin to feel like home.

Focus Verses: Luke 8:38-39 (ESV)

³⁸ The man from whom the demons had gone begged that he might be with him, but Jesus sent him away, saying, ³⁹ "Return to your home, and declare how much God has done for you." And he went away, proclaiming throughout the whole city how much Jesus had done for him.

Open it! Start with prayer!

1. Have you ever judged someone on a first impression, but after you heard their story you changed your mind? What made you change your mind?

2. How can a story have power? Describe a time when you had to find your place in a "big" place: maybe when you started high school, or college, or a new job. How did you navigate that time? How did you make connections that made it feel more comfortable and familiar?

Explore it!

3. Watch the video for Session 3. Take some notes about interesting quotes, questions, or ideas:

3.a. **Read 2 Corinthians 11:23-33.** ²³ Are they servants of Christ? I am a better one—I am talking like a madman—with far greater labors, far more imprisonments, with countless beatings, and often near death. ²⁴ Five times I received at the hands of the Jews the forty lashes less one. ²⁵ Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I was adrift at sea; ²⁶ on frequent journeys, in danger from rivers, danger from robbers, danger from my own people, danger from Gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea, danger from false brothers; ²⁷ in toil and hardship, through many a sleepless night, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure. ²⁸ And, apart from other things, there is the daily pressure on me of my anxiety for all the churches. ²⁹ Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is made to fall, and I am not indignant? ³⁰ If I must boast, I will boast of the things that show my weakness. ³¹ The God and Father of the Lord Jesus, he who is blessed forever, knows that I am not lying. ³² At Damascus, the governor under King Aretas was guarding the city of Damascus in order to seize me, ³³ but I was let down in a basket through a window in the wall and escaped his hands.



Reflect on it! 2 Corinthians 11:23-33

5. How might knowing Paul's story, shared in the passage above, help others connect with him? How would it impact his credibility as a teacher and evangelist?

5. In the video, we heard that a big church grows smaller not only when we learn other people's stories, but also when we share our own story. Which is harder for you to do—listen to others or tell your story?

6. Do Americans tend lean towards telling stories or listen to stories? How does hearing about others' struggles draw us closer to them?

Apply it to your life...

7. Take some time now to share your stories. An easy way to do this: Have each person in the group share three life "milestones"—one significant event from childhood, another from adolescence, and a third from adulthood. Designate one person in the group be a time-keeper, and limit the sharing time to about five minutes per person.

While others share, simply listen attentively. Don't interrupt, give advice, preach or try to interpret their story for them. Simply use this exercise as a chance to practice listening and learning more about the people in your group. As we heard in the video, "let the stories speak for themselves." Encourage and affirm one another as you listen.

To go deeper, check out the resources on the church website under the LifeGroups tab.

Pray for each other within your group...

How can we pray for you this week?



Going Deeper

READ LUKE 8:26-39

- ✓ This unusual story of a healing tells of a man who was set free from demon possession. What has God set you free from?
- ✓ What does the healed man want to do?
- ✓ What does Jesus tell the man to do instead? Why do you think he told him this?
- ✓ How do you think this man's story impacted those in his hometown?

READ TITUS 3:3-7

- ✓ This short passage gives us a model for how we tell our stories. It has a "before" and "after." Can you identify each?
- ✓ What is the turning point that shifts the story?
- ✓ What is the turning point of your story?

Daily Reflections:

Day 1. READ PSALM 66:16 Come and hear, all you who fear God; let me tell you what he has done for me.

CONSIDER: Our story is not just about us but what God has done for us. Who could be encouraged by the story of what God has done for you?

Day 2. READ PSALM 66:17 I cried out to him with my mouth; his praise was on my tongue.

CONSIDER: Think about a time when you cried out to God, perhaps in a time of difficulty. Thank him right now for hearing your cry.

Day 3. READ PSALM 66:18 If I had cherished sin in my heart, the Lord would not have listened;

CONSIDER: What does this verse tell us about the impact of unconfessed sin on our relationship with God?

Day 4. READ PSALM 66:19 but God has surely listened and has heard my prayer.

CONSIDER: Your story is more than what happened to you. It's your life, intersected with the action of God and with prayer. What part of your story do you need to spend some time talking with God about today?

Day 5. READ PSALM 66:20 Praise be to God, who has not rejected my prayer or withheld his love from me!

CONSIDER: Even in difficult circumstances, God gives us his love. And when we share our stories, we share that love with others. Their stories show us God's love, and ours show them God's love. How can you show someone God's faithfulness and love through your story?

Day 6.

Reflect on any thoughts God has put in your heart and mind about the things we have looked at in this session and during your devotional time this week. You may also want to write down observations or questions that you'd like to share with the group at your next meeting.