



Group Expectations

Alabaster Vessels understands that the following will come easy for some and be difficult for others. We encourage all to work toward the following in order to gain the most healing and achieve a deeper relationship with God from this small group experience.

The following are excerpts taken from the book: *The Purpose Driven Life*, by Rick Warren. Copyright 2002. (Pages 151, 176, 212, 213, 214, 220, 275, 276, & 277)

As a member of a small group you are urged to make a group covenant that includes the nine characteristics of biblical fellowship:

1. We will share our true feelings (authenticity)
2. We will encourage each other (mutuality)
3. We will support each other (sympathy)
4. We will forgive each other (mercy)
5. We will speak the truth in love (honesty)
6. We will admit our weaknesses (humility)
7. We will respect our differences (courtesy)
8. We will not gossip (confidentiality)
9. We will make group meetings a priority (frequency).

Genuine fellowship is rare because it must consist of these nine characteristics. This means giving up our self-centeredness and independence in order to become interdependent. The benefits of sharing life together far outweigh the costs, and it prepares us for heaven.

There are benefits to being in a small group. Many people assume all that is needed for spiritual growth is Bible study and prayer. But some issues in life will never be changed by Bible study or prayer alone. God uses people. He usually prefers to work through people rather than perform miracles, so that we will depend on each other for fellowship. He wants us to grow together. Spiritual maturity is all about learning to love like Jesus and you can't do this without being in relationship with other people.

Reveal your struggle to a Godly friend or support group. You will not get better on your own. You need the help of other Christians. Authentic, honest fellowship is the antidote to your lonely struggles against sin, guilt, shame, anger, un-forgiveness, bitterness, resentment, etc., that won't budge. Don't repress it; confess it. Don't conceal it; reveal it. Revealing your feeling is the beginning of healing. Hiding your hurt only intensifies it. Problems grow in the dark and become bigger and bigger, but, when exposed to the light of truth, they shrink. Through a support group, you walk into freedom.

Yes, it is humbling to admit our weaknesses to others, but lack of humility is the very thing that is keeping you from getting better. The Bible says, "God sets himself against the proud, but He shows favor to the humble". God "gives grace to the humble", but many misunder-



stand humility. Humility is not putting yourself down or denying your strengths; rather, it is being honest about your weaknesses.

The more honest you are, the more of God's grace you get. You will also receive grace from others. Our strengths create competition, but our weaknesses create community. God uses your weaknesses for His glory. Paul said, "I am going to boast only about how weak I am and how great God is to use such weakness for His glory. Fill your heart with praise for Jesus, who "understands every weakness of ours," and for the Holy Spirit, who "helps us in our weakness."

The fear of what we might discover if we honestly faced our character defects keeps us living in the prison of denial. Only as God is allowed to shine the light of His truth on our faults, failures, and hang-ups can we begin to work on them. This is why you cannot grow without a humble, teachable attitude. There is no growth without change; there is no change without fear or loss; and there is no loss without pain. Every change involves a loss of some kind: you must let go of old ways in order to experience the new. We fear these losses, even if our old ways were self-defeating, because, like a worn out pair of shoes, they were at least comfortable and familiar.

Our weaknesses also encourage fellowship between believers. While strength breeds an independent spirit ("I don't need anyone else"), our limitations show how much we need each other. When we weave the weak strands of our lives together, a rope of great strength is created. Vance Havner quipped, "Christians, like snowflakes, are frail, but when they stick together they can stop traffic".

The more you let down your guard, take off your mask, and share your struggles, the more God will be able to use you in serving others. Paul modeled vulnerability in all his letters. He openly shared his failures, his feelings, his frustrations, and his fears. Of course, vulnerability is risky. It can be scary to lower your defenses and open up your life to others. When you reveal your failures, feelings, frustrations, and fears, you risk rejection. But the benefits are worth the risk. Vulnerability is emotionally liberating. Opening up relieves stress, defuses your fears, and is the first step to freedom.

Your small group will encourage you, support you, pray for you, care about you, and hold you accountable. You can do the same for them.

I have read and understand the above. I will do my best to achieve these goals within my group.

Print Name: _____

Signature: _____ Date: _____