

Leaders' Notes

Dear Growth Group Leader:

I've been reading a book, *Making Small Groups Work*, by Henry Cloud and John Townsend. In one section, they point out that there are two seemingly opposite characteristics that are both necessary for the growth of the members of your group: grace and truth. John 1:14 says, "The Word became flesh and dwelt among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth." You and the others in your group need to give each member grace and truth. Another way to say this is that we need to speak the truth in love.

These do seem to be opposite priorities. If someone is making bad choices and messing up his life, you could either confront him and exhort him to change his path or you could comfort and accept him. But the conflict between these two ideas is only an illusion. In fact, the more you love the members of your group, the more you will be willing to actually confront them when you think they need it. For example, if your friend is hooked on cocaine, you would be foolish to say, "That's okay, you probably need a pick-me-up to make you feel better. Don't be so hard on yourself." No, you would say, "Stop doing cocaine. Get into a program. You are too precious to me and to God to just destroy your life." You see there is a difference between enabling and grace. The difference is the truth.

Truth without grace is even more destructive than grace without truth. If you say, "You're nothing but a drug addict. You don't even deserve to be in this group," then your friend will probably be less likely to consider getting help. The rest of the group will also be less likely to share their problems. You need both grace and truth.

Addiction is just one example and one I chose because it is fairly clear-cut. You should be willing to speak truth into your group's discussion whenever necessary.

If you would like to borrow the book, let me know.

Blessings,

Pastor David

Freedom of blessing life

Exodus 20:13

The reason for the command

The better translation is murder, not kill.

Human life is sacred because we are made in the image of God.

	Materialism	Christianity
Human origin	Chance	Special creation of God
Human nature	Animal	Image of God
Human value	Utilitarian/usefulness	Sacred/priceless
Right to life	Granted by culture	Indalienable—from God
Authority	Autonomous or community	God

The spirit of the law may demand more than the letter

Jesus put anger in the same category as murder.

Matthew 5:21-24

Our standard is love, not just refraining from murder.

Romans 13:9-10

Home Bible Study

Freedom of blessing life

Getting started

1. Did any part of the sermon make you think? Was there anything with which you strongly agreed or disagreed? Was there anything that was new to you?
2. Christians have been accused of teaching a negative view of humanity because of doctrines such as original sin, universal sin and God's coming judgment. Do you think Christianity or materialism has a higher view of humanity? (NOTE: Materialism is the dominant world view of our culture. It's view of human life and nature is from the table in this week's sermon outline.)

Christianity teaches about sin and judgment because they are true. Anyone who believes that mankind is basically good is living in denial. However, Christianity calls us to a higher standard of behavior precisely because our lives are too precious to waste on sinful activity. Christianity sees us a special creation of God. Materialism believe that we are just mutated primates that ended up with less hair and bigger brains. We are essentially just animals. Christianity has a much higher view of humanity.

3. Genesis 1:26, 27 says, "Then God said, 'Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.' So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them." What do you think it means when it says we are all made in the image of God?

Most scholars and theologians throughout the ages have rejected the idea that we are physically like God. For one thing, humans come in all shapes and sizes. This passage makes it clear that both men and women are made in the image of God. But God probably doesn't even look like the ideal human being. God is spirit and it is probably too simplistic to think that we look like him. Instead, we are like him in deeper ways. We rule like he does because he has given us dominion over the earth. We have a moral nature, understanding good and evil. We have free will. We

make choices that have a moral impact. We can be creative. Of course, God is greater than any of us in every way. This just means that we are like lesser copies of him in some important ways.

Going deeper

4. What do Psalm 8, Psalm 139:13-16 and other Bible passages teach us about the value God places on human life?

God cares about us and makes us a little lower than the angels. God is also intimately involved in making us in the first place. He is not "watching us from a distance"; he is closer to us than a brother.

5. Read Ephesians 4:29-5:2. Most of us won't ever face an overwhelming temptation to actually commit murder. However, we are called to a more challenging standard: love. Bill Hybels wrote, "There is little difference between the dripping knife and the juicy gossip." Do you agree? Why or why not?

The damage a knife does is different than the damage of a gossip but they are both damaging and motivated by hate and anger. As *Chicken Soup for the Soul* says, "Sticks and stones may break my bones but words can break my heart." Christians *are* called to a higher standard than just avoiding murder.

Putting it into practice

6. What could/should you do to bless the lives of others (or even your own life) more?