

"Old Testament for DUMMIES"

Understanding ALL of God's Word...

SMALL GROUP CURRICULUM

90 Minute Track

Allen Creek Community Church

Marysville, Washington

Small Group Leader's Guide

This curriculum is designed to run over 8 weeks, concurrent with a series of 8 sermons which will outline the structure, purpose and context of the Old Testament. While reading through this material in advance of a meeting should adequately prepare a SG leader to facilitate this curriculum, it is highly encouraged that the leader take time to familiarize themselves with the topic generally, i.e. committing to listening to and taking notes from each sermon, reading other reference material on the topic, etc.

The curriculum is designed to work within the “basic” Small Group structure which includes the four basic components of EVERY Small Group: Scripture, Prayer, Service and Care. The activities and study for each week are designed to:

- Include an element of each of these three components.
- Be completed in around 90 minutes.
- Follow the general flow of activity in MOST Small Groups.
- Include all the basic values important to AC3 Small Groups....group participation, fun, relevance, openness and growth.

Be flexible in its implementation. While it is designed to be concurrent with the Sermon schedule, it CAN run at a different pace. Leaders are encouraged to facilitate this material with freedom, in a style that is familiar and effective for THEIR team and for themselves.

The meeting time is broken down into a maximum of (5) segments, not including any social time that you may decide to include at the beginning. Each segment has a SUGGESTED time.

The segments are:

A. ICE BREAKERS

B. SCRIPTURE

C. ACTIVITY

D. APPLICATION

E. PRAYER

....and are followed by a suggested time, and instructions in **bold type**.

- ▶ Text preceded by this bullet is intended for only the leader to read, and is designed to be illustrative of the point, and give suggestions for elaborating on the given segment, establishing scriptural background, providing discussion questions, or guidance for the leader.

WEEK 1: THE PENTATEUCH PART 1

(Pen-tuh-tuke)

A. ICEBREAKER (20 min): Write the following words on a sheet of paper. Pass the sheet around the group and have each member choose one word to describe their last week. Ask them to briefly elaborate on their answer.

- Faith
- Hope
- Love
- Grace
- Truth
- Peace
- Suffering
- Sorrow
- Anger
- Gentleness
- Joy

B. SCRIPTURE / DISCUSSION (60 min): Read the following aloud to the group.

Pentateuch means 5 scrolls. The Pentateuch is that section of the Bible that Jesus often refers to as “The Law,” or “Moses.” It consists of the first 5 books in your Bible: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy. Moses is traditionally assumed to be the author of these 5 books though some later editors obviously put them in their final form. The 5 books span the time from creation to the death of Moses.

Genesis and Exodus are essentially chronological – that is, they are written like history books, intended to tell a story from beginning to end. Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy are NOT chronological and they are NOT intended to tell a “story” (though some historical re-telling of stories occurs). These three books are simply a record of the laws and rules of conduct that God gave Israel.

So why are these books important to us today when their only purpose is to tell a 6,000-year-old story about a relatively small and seemingly insignificant group of people who lived half a world away?

Because we get the first, elementary lessons in what God is like from these books.

God inspired the authors of the Pentateuch to write down what He wanted us to know about Him and has protected those writings, literally, for millennia so that today we can learn the most basic and arguably the most important parts of who God is – and that is the purpose of the WHOLE Bible cover to cover.

When reading the Pentateuch, 5 major themes immediately pop out at us – themes that teach beginner-lessons in what God is like.

Ask a group member to read each of the following passages aloud to the group, then stop to discuss what theme is represented in that passage.

▶ Encourage lots of discussion. Let people take off on tangents, explore possibilities!

◆ **Genesis 1:1-27**

1. **CREATION** – that is, God is behind everything. There is nothing in the universe that God did not make and is not in control of – including humans, who received the special distinction of being made in His image – literally “looking like” God!

◆ **Genesis 6:9-14; Genesis 12:1- 3; Exodus 3: 4-10**

2. **ELECTION** – that is, God chooses certain people in certain times to advance his causes (Noah, Abraham and Moses are prime examples).

◆ **Genesis 15:1-21; Exodus 19: 3-6**

3. **COVENANT** – that is, God binds himself to promises he makes. To our modern mind, a covenant is just a cold, legal contract that can be broken as easily as entered. To the ancient mind, covenant was more personal, more relational and therefore more binding. Covenants had the effect of binding people together forever in mutual obligations. The three big covenants in the Pentateuch are God’s covenant with Noah, with Abraham and with the people of Israel. Each time God obligates himself to do certain things He also demands that the human partners do certain things. This is so important because covenants were like spiritual kindergarten for humanity. It was our beginner lessons as a human race

in relationship; in learning what God is like. For example, covenants showed God initiates. Abraham did not go looking for God, God went looking for him. If you think of it like a wedding, God made the proposal, not us. Each covenant says, God is faithful. We let him down, but he doesn't let us down. Each covenant says, God is moral. The pattern is always, I promise to help you, if you behave in a way that honors my moral character.

◆ Deuteronomy 32: 45-47

4. **LAW** – is also central to the Pentateuch. Law is never seen in the Bible as sterile rules. Law is seen as an extension of God's character. God never made a rule and said, "just do it." He made rules and said, "do this because this is what I'm like and if you do, you will be blessed."

◆ Exodus 6: 1-8

5. **EXODUS** – the fifth theme is the exodus from Egypt. To the Jew this is the greatest saving act of God in the O.T. and every subsequent generation would look back on this event with gratitude. It underlined that the God of Abraham was an active God, not passive. He did stuff in history. He wasn't like other gods who were all theory and philosophy and teaching only... he was a practical God.

C. APPLICATION (5min): Over the next week, ask members to read the first 14 chapters of Genesis (from Adam to Abraham) and underline in the Bible every instance that tells something about what God is like. Write them down and bring them to the next group meeting.

D. PRAYER (5min): Lead the group in a prayer asking for God to reveal His character to each member through the study of His word – old and new.

WEEK 2: THE PENTATEUCH PART 2

A. ICEBREAKER (20 min): Ask group members to share whatever insights into God's nature they gained in their reading of Genesis chapters 1 through 14 last week.

► Encourage discussion. Did different people discover different things? Did everyone find some of the same things? Anything new or surprising? Anything confusing? Anything that seemed "timely" for what's happening in their lives? Does the group see purpose in this part of the Bible?

B. SCRIPTURE / DISCUSSION (40 min): Ask a group member to read Exodus 20:1-17 aloud to the group.

- ◆ **What do these commandments reveal to us about God?**
- ◆ **How do most people interpret the meaning or significance of God's commandments?**

Read the following aloud to the group:

The purpose of the laws given by God to humankind is not only to provide a means of governing human behavior and conduct. These laws do not make up a grocery list of rules that when obeyed to the letter, enable an individual to find favor with God. God is not impressed with our ability to follow His laws.

The law is actually designed to have the opposite effect. Disobedience to God's commands is inevitable. Someone please read Matthew 5:17-22 aloud to the group.

In that passage, Jesus is referring to the laws of Moses written down in your Bibles in the Pentateuch! The laws that he and every other Jew were trying to live by. The laws that still largely govern society today.

Have you ever been angry with your brother? Have you ever called someone “Raca” (meaning empty-headed, stupid, idiot)? Jesus clearly shows us that living up to the standards that the law represents is simply not possible – and that is the whole point! God provided His law to lead individuals to realize their need for God’s grace, not their need for better law-keeping.

Ask volunteers to read the following passages aloud to the group:

◆ **Romans 1:18-20**

◆ **Romans 4:1-5**

◆ **Galatians 3:23-25**

◆ **What does Paul say in these passages about the significance of the law?**

◆ **What spiritual significance does the law have for us today?**

Read the following aloud to the group:

In the Book of Romans, Paul goes on to describe vividly how his struggle with the law played out in his life. Parts of this passage can be confusing – but take time to read it in your own Bible later. For now, listen to this paraphrase from Romans chapter 7:

“If I had never known God’s law, I would have never really known the difference between right and wrong, and I would have never realized that I needed God’s spirit in my life.

It’s like I was going through life, experiencing the constant pain of living without real love, real purpose or real significance because I didn’t have a relationship with God. The thing is...I had no idea I was feeling pain! Kind of like going through life feeling the

real physical pain of cancer, but never knowing you had the disease or that you were in pain at all because you just didn't know any better...you think that this is just how life is.

I didn't know things could be better...that is until I found God's law! His law revealed that there was more to life. When I tried living by the law – I discovered that I was in pain! Once I knew that there was pain I also knew that there could be life WITHOUT pain and I wanted that!

I wanted ALL the pain to go away! But simply following the law didn't make it go away. It's just impossible! It's like thinking that discovering the cancer, makes the cancer go away! That's ridiculous. Discovering the cancer is not a cure. For the longest time, I thought just living by the law would bring healing. The cancer would go away if I just kept getting regular blood tests. Stupid huh? Funny thing is...I couldn't even do THAT! I grew tired of blood tests – or I'd forget, or I just couldn't bring myself to get stuck with a needle one more time. I couldn't even to do the wrong thing right! And the cancer raged on.

But Jesus brings a totally new way to rid our lives of pain. He took the cancer from me, and put it on himself – he didn't just do more tests.

He showed us that the law was never meant to relieve all the pain...it was just meant to wake us up to the fact that we're in pain in the first place! And once we know we're in pain – if we choose – we can go to Jesus – the great physician.

But you see without the law – we would have never even known we needed Him!

So, is the law bad? OF COURSE NOT! The law is good! The law shows me where all the aches and pains are in my life – and sometimes I get overwhelmed by all the pain – headaches, toothaches, sore back, broken bones, frost bite, rashes! ARGGHHHH!

What am I supposed to do! I want to die! Who can relieve this pain!?

Ah...thanks God that you gave me Jesus – my doctor, my healer and my King.”

C. APPLICATION (20 min): Re-read Exodus 20: 1-17, pausing after each commandment is read to ask the group what kind of “pain” or what sin does each law reveal in our lives. How does each commandment point us toward a relationship with God?

- ◆ **Over the next week ask each member to read Leviticus chapters 17 and 18, and ask themselves the same questions about the laws written there. Write down their answers and bring them to next week’s meeting.**

D. PRAYER (10 min): Have each member pray for the person to their right.