

CONNECTING Your Heart to Others': 6 Small Group Sessions on Fellowship

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Youth Specialties Books, 300 South Pierce Street, El Cajon CA 92020, are published by Zondervan, 5300 Patterson Avenue Southeast, Grand Rapids MI 49530

### Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Fields, Doug, 1962-

Connecting your heart to others' : 6 small group sessions on fellowship/ by Doug Fields and Brett Eastman.

p. cm.

Summary: Provides exercises, readings, and other materials for a six-week spiritual journey toward understanding and celebrating the differences between individuals and connecting with people different from oneself.

ISBN 0-310-25334-9 (pbk.)

1. Teenagers--Religious life--Juvenile literature. 2. Fellowship--Religious aspects--Christianity--Juvenile literature. 3. Toleration--Juvenile literature. [1. Teenagers--Religious life. 2. Christian life. 3. Interpersonal relations. 4. Fellowship. 5. Toleration.] I. Eastman, Brett, 1959- II. Title.

BV4531.3.F54 2003

248.8'3--dc21

2003005870

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Concept and portions of this curriculum are from Doing Life Together (Zondervan, 2002), used by permission from Brett & Dee Eastman, Karen Lee-Thorp and Denise & Todd Wendorff.

Editorial and Art Direction: Rick Marschall

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Cover and interior design: Tyler Mattson, NomadicMedia.net

Interior layouts, design management, production: Mark Rayburn, RayburnDesign.com

Proofreading: Vicki Newby and Linnea Lagerquist

Design Assistance: Katherine Spencer

Production Assistance: Roni Meek, Amy Aecovalle

Author photos: Brian Wiertzema and Art Zipple

Printed in the United States of America

04 05 06 07 08 09 // 10 9 8 7 6

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# CONNECTING THE DISCONNECTED

It seems pretty obvious that God's plan for the church is to have people connect with one another. That's the model of the early church that we read about in Acts 2. When God's power took over, people were connected together: sharing their possessions, eating together, meeting together, loving one another. What a great scene—and so soon after the resurrection of Jesus! That day was the beginning of the church, the church functioning as God designed it and as model for us.

One sign of a healthy youth ministry is when many different groups of students (groups who wouldn't normally hang out together at school) connect. That's a great expression of the early church model.

The church is God's design to bring people together. It's open to us all regardless of our pasts! I love it when churches reach students who don't look like they "belong" at church. Their body-piercings, tattoos, and clothing styles may not fit the church youth group stereotypes, but that's okay. A lot of people in the Bible didn't fit and yet Jesus called them to follow him too. You're about to read Matthew 9 and see that Jesus connected with "these types" even though the religious leaders didn't like it.

As you go through this book, it's my prayer that you'll catch a vision of what a Christian can do when he or she is connected to other believers. You can sharpen one another and open wide the doors of your youth ministry to keep it from becoming a club, clique, or community of people who are just like you.

As you begin the six-week journey discovering the biblical purpose of fellowship, it's important to realize that not everyone in your small group will be just like you. It may be weird at first, and you might think, "I don't have anything in common with that person. I can't believe we're in the same group!" That's okay. Actually that's great news because you'll really get to see what God can do with all the differences. You're on the right path for a great experience. Let's get started.



## FELLOWSHIP: ~~CONNECTING~~ Your Heart to Others'

[goal: to have students share about their lives and listen attentively to others]

1  
Share something that makes you different from other people. If your group members already know each other well, share something that no one in the group knows about you.

2  
If you haven't discussed the **Small Group Covenant** on page 88, take time to read it together and discuss it now. You'll find a lot of emphasis in this book on honesty and deepening relationships, so the covenant points on confidentiality and respect are especially important. Make commitments to one another that your group time will reflect those values. You may want to have one person read the covenant to the group before you begin each lesson as a reminder.

Use the **Small Group Roster** (page 90) to record the names and contact information of the small group members.



## DISCIPLESHIP: ~~GROWING~~ to Be Like Jesus

[goal: to explore God's Word, learn biblical knowledge, and make personal applications]

You won't be surprised when I tell you no one is perfect. No one has it all together. Even you. Even the others in your group (though sometimes you might feel like you're the only one who's imperfect). Everyone has had disappointments, bad attitudes, and imperfections. If Satan had his way, we would be stuck in our failures with no hope. Unfortunately many people do get stuck.

God's plan is different. We have hope because he loves us and wants us to be in a vibrant relationship with him—no matter how bad or unlovable we might be. He wants us connected relationally to other people too.

Matthew had a lot of money and more enemies. Jesus connected with Matthew when no one else even liked him. People hated this guy so much

they even criticized Jesus for hanging out with him. Matthew was a Jewish tax collector for the Roman government. He was a sellout. The way he made money was to overtax his own people, pay the government some of the money, and pocket the rest. Matthew wasn't a guy who was good enough to get an appointment with Jesus, but Jesus treated him like he treated everyone. On one fateful day Matthew's life changed forever.



<sup>9</sup>As Jesus went on from there, he saw a man named Matthew sitting at the tax collector's booth. "Follow me," he told him, and Matthew got up and followed him.

<sup>10</sup>While Jesus was having dinner at Matthew's house, many tax collectors and "sinners" came and ate with him and his disciples. <sup>11</sup>When the Pharisees saw this, they asked his disciples, "Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and 'sinners'?"

<sup>12</sup>On hearing this, Jesus said, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. <sup>13</sup>"But go and learn what this means: 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice.' For I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners."

—Matthew 9:9-13

Terms that look like this are described in **Learn a Little More** near the end of the session.

What does Matthew's occupation reveal about his character and his circumstances? What clues from the text might help answer this question?

How would Matthew's life have changed when he decided to follow Jesus?

The passage doesn't say why Matthew jumped at the chance to be with Jesus. What reasons might Matthew have had?

What do you think Matthew saw in Jesus that caused him to invite his “sinner” friends to have dinner with him?

What did Jesus mean when he said, “It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick”? His statement implies some people are healthy spiritually and don’t need Jesus. Who in this story might have agreed with that idea? Why does everyone need Doctor Jesus?

Reread verse 13. What does he mean by mercy? Sacrifice? What is the point Jesus is trying to make with this verse?

- ☐ How do mercy and sacrifice relate to each another?
- ☐ Why does God want mercy, not sacrifice?
- ☐ Does God’s preference for mercy mean sacrifice is unimportant?

In essence, Jesus is calling the Pharisees unmerciful. How were they failing to show mercy?

- ☐ Can you think of any modern day examples of this same mistake?
- ☐ When should you show mercy?

In your own words, summarize the main point of this passage in one sentence.



## MINISTRY: SERVING Others in Love

[goal: to recognize and take opportunities to serve others]

As your group continues to meet together, you may be tempted to close your group to outsiders—to be a clique—which is fellowship turned ugly. A clique draws a line between the in-crowd and the out-crowd. Make a commitment to include others so you don't become a clique.

11

Discuss ways you can prevent your group from becoming a clique.

Read **How to Keep Your Small Group from Becoming a Clique** (page 92) when you're at home.



## EVANGELISM: SHARING Your Story and God's Story

[goal: to consider how the truths from this lesson might be applied to relationships with unbelievers]

If Jesus were coming over to your house for dinner, which three friends would you like to invite who don't know Jesus? Jot their initials here.

12

13

As a way of thinking through how you might share about Jesus with one of these friends, turn to **An Invitation for You** (page 83). Write an invitation to your friend to meet Jesus.

At the beginning of small groups such as this one, you should decide whether your group is open to inviting friends to join. If your group is open, list who you would like to invite and make plans for talking with them. Your small group leader or your leadership team may have already determined the group is closed at this time. If so, a good group respects and follows that decision. You may be able to invite friends to join you in the next LIFETOGETHER book.



## **WORSHIP: SURRENDERING Your Life to Honor God**

[goal: to focus on God's presence]

Some people have called the church a hospital for sinners. What a great word picture! Your small group is a tiny version of a spiritual hospital—a place where sinners can get healing help. God does all the big work when it comes to changing lives, but he uses people like you to help one another become healthy and strong Christians.

Share one specific way the others in your group can pray for you. Write the requests on the **Prayer Request Log** (page 132).

Spend time thanking God for the people in your group and for the unique qualities each person has been given. The qualities of your group members contribute to making everyone stronger followers of Christ.



Before your group breaks, read **At Home This Week** together. (If everyone in the group has already done this in another LifeTogether book, you can skip the introduction if you'd like.)

You'll find three prayer resources in the back of the book. By reading and discussing them, you'll find your group prayer time more rewarding.

- **Praying in Your Small Group** (page 126). Read this article on your own before the next session.
- **Prayer Request Guidelines** (page 128). Read and discuss these guidelines as a group.
- **Prayer Options** (page 130). Refer to this list for ideas to give your prayer time variety.

## AT HOME THIS WEEK

Each week, you'll have at least four options to help you grow and learn on your own—which means you'll have more to contribute when you return to the group.

### Daily Bible Readings

On page 104 you'll find **Daily Bible Readings**, a chart of Bible passages that corresponds with the lessons—five for each week. If you choose this option, read one passage each day. Highlight it in your Bible, reflect on it, journal about it, or repeat it out loud as a prayer. You're free to interact with the Bible verses any way you want, just be sure to read God's love letter—the Bible. You'll find helpful tips in **How to Study the Bible** (page 105).

### Memory Verses

Memorizing Bible verses is an important habit to develop as you learn to grow spiritually on your own. **Memory Verses** (page 108) lists six verses—one per week—for you to memorize if you want to plant God's Word in your heart. Memorizing verses (and making them stick for more than a few minutes) isn't easy, but the benefits are undeniable. You'll have God's Word with you wherever you go.

### Journaling

You'll find blank pages for journaling ("**SCRIBBLES**") beginning on page 113. At the end of each session, you'll find several options and a question or two to get your

thoughts going—but you aren't limited to the ideas in this book. Use these pages to reflect, to write a letter to God, to note what you're learning, to compose a prayer, to ask a question, to draw a picture of your praise, to record your thoughts. For more suggestions about journaling, turn to **Journaling: Snapshot of Your Heart** (page 110).

This week reflect on these questions: *Recall fears you may have had the last time you interacted with someone outside your usual friendship circle. What made it difficult?*

## Wrap It Up

Write out your answers to session questions your group didn't have time to discuss.

This week share with the others in your group which option seems most appealing to try during the coming week. The variety of preferences is another reminder of how different the people in your group are.

During other weeks, take time to share with the group what you did **At Home This Week**.

## An Invitation for You

Remember to write **An Invitation for You** (page 83).

# LEARN A LITTLE MORE

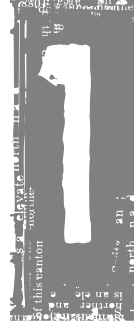
## Sinners

When this event happened, a "sinner" was a person who didn't follow the Jewish laws. Many people couldn't afford to keep the law because it required costly sacrifices. Because of that, the term represented a financial class as much as a spiritual condition. Poor people were seen as "sinners" and outcasts in their own country.

Jesus used a different definition for sinner: people who refuse to obey the spirit of God's scriptural commands. His harshest words were to people who gave the sacrifices but didn't live holy lives. Jesus met the needs of the people who recognized and acknowledged their shortcomings. Some were physically healed. Some were forgiven. Some went away empty-handed because they weren't ready to give up the things that separated them from God.

## Pharisees

This was a small group of highly respected and influential Jewish leaders during the first century. The word *Pharisee* means "the separated ones." They were also



called *Chasidim*, which means “loyal to God.”

Pharisees obeyed every word of God’s law based on their traditions. They opposed Jesus because he didn’t follow their strict interpretations of the law. The Pharisees were blind to their own sins and saw people who disagreed with them as the sinners.

## Mercy

Showing compassion to someone who has hurt you or helping people who are in need.

## FOR FURTHER STUDY

Luke 5:4-11

James 4:6

Psalms 34:18-19; 51:4-13

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