



SPX Small Groups

Life is Better Together



Series Description – In this world, you'll have struggles. You'll face opposition. You'll be challenged. And there is a reason for that – this world is not your home. So answer hate with love, find joy in the midst of trials, and rely on a strength beyond yourself. You're meant to be ... *Different*.

Hello SPX Small Groups,

If we have not met I'd like to take a moment to introduce myself and let you know how excited I am to be here at St. Pius, supporting you in your small groups. I joined the staff in July and have been spending the summer learning as much as I could about what makes St. Pius awesome.

I love working with small groups, because they are where church becomes real – where people learn your name, miss you if you aren't there, grow with you, serve with you, and even hold you accountable. All of my best experiences of church have happened through small groups, or because of the people that I've met in those groups. I take seriously the opportunity to help others experience life together in small groups.

I'd ask you to bear with me as I learn the ropes of putting together these group guides. If you find something exceptional helpful or if it seems like something is missing, please let me know. Your feedback is really important as I figure out what to include, what to emphasize and, what may not be needed. Don't worry if your group doesn't get through all the questions – my goal is to include more questions than you will have time for so your group can pick and choose the most interesting questions. You may also notice that two questions may seem similar to each other. I've found that if you ask a question in more than one way, some people might connect better to the first version and others connect to the second. Don't feel the need to repeat yourself if it feels like your group has already answered a question.

I look forward to any feedback you have to share, and call down God's blessing on your group that it might be a fruitful place to grow.

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Suggestion Session Outline

- Gather & Catch up: How was your week?
- Opening Prayer: Make one up of your own or use this prayer:
- Heavenly Father, we come to you today asking for your guidance, wisdom, and support as we begin our time together. Help us to engage in meaningful discussion; allow us to grow closer as a group and nurture the bonds of community.*
- Fill us with your grace, Lord God, as we explore your call to be stand out, rather than fit in -- to be Different. Help us to different in our values and morals, different as parents, different as husbands and wives, different in how we relate to others, different in how we spend our time and our money, and different in how we respond to those who mistreat us.*
- We ask these things in your name, Amen.*
- Discuss: What did you take away from this week's message? Use the provided questions to dive deeper.
- Any Resolutions: Is there anything you plan to do differently this week?
- Closing prayer: Close your session with prayer, making sure to find out whether anyone needs prayer in a specific area or for a specific person.

Week 1 - Sept. 8
You're Called to be Different

One of the challenges of growing up is learning how to fit in. It's a necessary skill – to be part of a family, we learn “what defines our families,” what is acceptable and what is not. From quirky things like everyone in our family loves pickles or we have pancakes every Sunday to shared interests - we all enjoy reading or camping. When we go to school we need to learn what is normal there too. We have to raise our hands before we answer a question, we walk places in line, and sometimes we even wear a uniform. Sometimes we even hear the voice of an older sibling in our heads – “would you just try and be normal?” But Christ didn't call you to fit in, but to stand out. This world is not your home.

- 1) When you were growing up, what things were normal or expected in your family?
- 2) Were there things that were normal in your family that you later discovered to be out of the ordinary or just a bit quirky?
- 3) Do you tend to want to fit in or stand out? Why?
- 4) When have you ever intentionally tried to be different? What happened?
- 5) What is your impression of being different? When is it good to be different? When is it good to fit in?
- 6) What images come to mind when you hear the word home? What does home mean to you?
- 7) In this week's Gospel (Lk 14:25-33), what might Jesus have meant when he said in order to be his disciple we must hate our father, mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, and even our own life?
- 8) Have you ever had to bear your own cross for Jesus? What was it and where did you find strength to carry it?
- 9) What possession might Jesus be asking you to renounce this week?

Week 2 - Sept. 15
Think as God Does

God's willing to do things for us that we don't even dream of asking for.
As we hear the story of the prodigal son, we consider what it would be like to be the younger Son, older Son, and the Father.
Our challenge is that we're called to think like God the Father.

- 1) What was the most outrageous present you ever asked for?
- 2) What was the most unexpected present you ever got?
- 3) Share a time when you thought about something differently from your friends, family or neighbors.
- 4) Have you ever lost something truly important to you and later found it? Did you celebrate that in any way?
- 5) Who do you most identify with in the story of the prodigal son (Luke 15:1-32) and why – the father, the younger (wayward and repentant) brother or the older (steady but jealous) brother?
- 6) How do you think the younger brother failed to think like God does?
- 7) How do you think the older brother failed to think like God does?
- 8) What qualities did the Father display that you associate with God?
- 9) How can you think more like God the Father does?
- 10) How is God inviting you to act on this story this week? If you get stuck, consider if God is inviting you to
 - let someone find their own way in life,
 - forgive someone,
 - seek out someone who is lost,
 - have bigger expectations, or
 - show bigger mercy?

Week 3 - Sept. 22
Make the Sabbath Matter

This week's gospel (Luke 16:1-13) calls us to use wisely the things of the world. While we often think of this reading solely in terms of money, sometimes we find a bigger obstacle to God is the frenetic pace of life. So we need to think about how to use things differently, especially the gift of the Sabbath.

Take some time to evaluate how you currently spend your Sabbath...

- 1) What is your favorite way to spend a day off?
- 2) Have you ever experienced a true respite¹ in your life? What caused it and what did you get out of it?
- 3) If you could have an extra week of salary or an extra week of vacation, which would you pick and why? Would your answer change if it were an extra month of either salary or vacation?
- 4) Which do you have a harder time budgeting – your money or your time?
- 5) Do you remember a time in your life when Sundays were “different” from other days? What made Sundays different?
- 6) What practices do you use to stay focused on God during the week? On weekends?
- 7) Not that long ago, Saturday was a work day, but now most of us have it off. Does having an extra day off make it easier or harder to make the Sabbath matter?
- 8) Do you spend your Sabbath (Sunday) differently from other days? How?
- 9) Think of Sundays as a gift from God to you – how could you use that gift wisely to maximize what God is trying to give you?
- 10) Is there anything you want to commit to this week to make Sundays a truly different day?

¹ Respite (noun): a short period of rest or relief from something difficult or unpleasant.

Week 4 - Sept. 29

You're Destined for a Different World, So Act Like It

God's greatest calling in this life is not our happiness, but our holiness. The word holy means to be different or set apart. This is not meant to be punishment (you don't get to do fun stuff), but to help us achieve eternal joy. We are also reminded to act differently – that how we treat others is the key to determining our eternal destiny.

- 1) What is the furthest you've ever been away from home? Why did you go there?
- 2) Have you ever been homesick? Where were you and what did you miss most?
- 3) Share a time when you held off on getting something good now in order to get something better later.
- 4) What to you is the most attractive part of heaven? Or what do you look forward to the most about heaven?
- 5) Do you think anybody is in hell? What do you think hell is like?
- 6) In the story the man who had suffered in life was rewarded in the next life, whereas the rich and self-absorbed man was punished. Do you find that comforting, frightening, or a little of both? Why?
- 7) We often need to make sacrifices to achieve a goal in life. What sacrifices do you think God calls us to make to get to heaven?
- 8) In the Gospel (Luke 16:19-31) a rich man virtually ignores a poor man dying at his doorstep. Who are the invisible people in your world? In light of this Gospel, how might God be calling you to see or treat them differently?
- 9) We've talked about various ways God calls us to be Different. As we end this series, is there a permanent change that you would like to make to embrace this call to be different?