

Weekend Message Small Group Study

- complementing the sermon given at St. Paul on **1/16/16-1/17/16**.
- a meeting agenda organized per St. Paul core values
- estimated for a 90-minute meeting



STRETCH – WEEK 2 (OF 5)

Equipping “the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ”—Eph. 4:12

Below is a tool to help delegate the leading/facilitating of meeting components between different small group members.

	Prayer (p.4)	Outreach (p.3)	Word of God (p.2)	Equipping (p. 4)	Worship - Our Redemption Response - (p.2)
Study component leader					

Prayer leader – Leads group prayer time

Outreach leader – Leads the charge of outreach (serving, inviting, filling the empty chair, etc.)

Word of God leader – Leads the Bible study time, encourages application of God’s Word to life

Equipping Leader – Coordinates and reminds who will lead the different meeting components.

Worship (Our Redemption Response) Leader – Leads worship time during meeting.

Worship – Our Redemption Response**5 minutes****All:**

**God, my shepherd!
I don't need a thing.
You have bedded me down in lush meadows,
you find me quiet pools to drink from.
True to your word,
you let me catch my breath
and send me in the right direction.
Even when the way goes through
Death Valley,
I'm not afraid
when you walk at my side.
Your trusty shepherd's crook
makes me feel secure.
You serve me a six-course dinner
right in front of my enemies.
You revive my drooping head;
my cup brims with blessing.
Your beauty and love chase after me
every day of my life.
I'm back home in the house of God
for the rest of my life. Amen.**

Psalm 23 (MSG)**Word of God****45 minutes**

1. How did you SEE God at work in your life this week?
2. What has God been teaching you in HIS WORD?
3. Read Ecclesiastes 5:10 (ESV):

"He who loves money will not be satisfied with money, nor he who loves wealth with his income; this also is vanity."

What connections do you make between this verse and what was read from Psalm 23?
4. How would you describe a "More Monster"? What satisfies the "More Monster"? (and...is that a trick question?)

5. When have you found yourself susceptible to the More Monster? How successful have you been defeating the More Monster alone?

6. Read Philippians 4:13 (ESV) – “I can do all things through him who strengthens me.” What success can you have, with Jesus, in defeating the More Monster?

7. With Jesus’ help, and the help of your fellow small group members, what is one doable step you can take to pull away from the More Monster? *Only if you wish to answer in group time, could that step be either tithing (giving back to God 10% of your gross income) or growing in the area of stewardship (taking a class like *Financial Peace University*)?*

Outreach

15 minutes

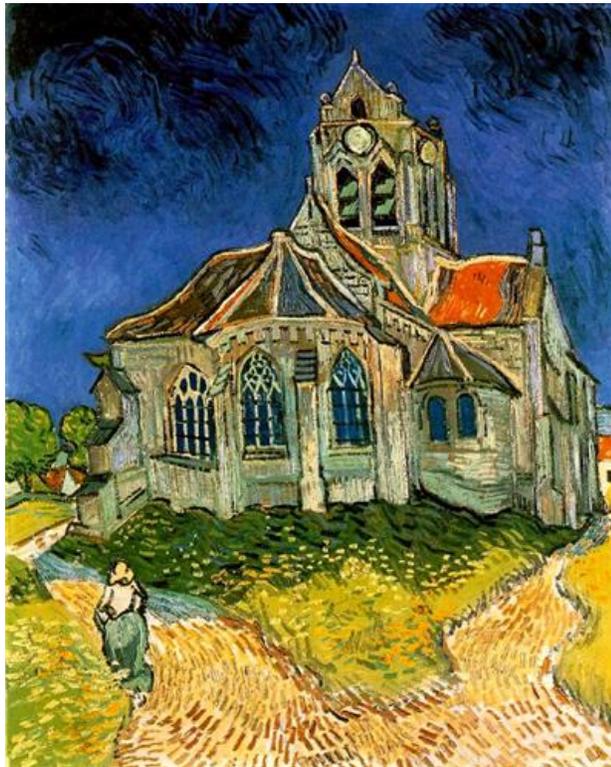
Look at this painting of a church by Vincent van Gogh. Notice that there is no light coming from its windows, the interior is as dark as the night sky outside.

Van Gogh painted this picture, *The Church At Auvers*, shortly before he died. The artist was born the son of a Protestant preacher and he began his career as a missionary to miners in Belgium.

He was so struck by the poverty he encountered that he gave away many of his possessions, including most of his clothes. The church decided that van Gogh was overzealous and his ministry was halted.

(You could say that they didn’t like his act of **STRETCHing**.)

In 1879 van Gogh left the church and turned to art, disillusioned by his experience of organized religion. *The Church at Auvers* is painted from the point of view of an outsider looking in.



Wikipedia says of this painting:

The foreground of The Church at Auvers is brightly lit by the sun, but the church itself sits in its own shadow, and "neither reflects nor emanates any light of its own." After Van Gogh had been dismissed from the evangelical career he had hoped to continue, he wrote to his brother Theo and quoted Shakespeare's image from Henry V Part I of the

*dark emptiness inside a church to symbolize "empty and unenlightened preaching":
"Their God is like the God of Shakespeare's drunken Falstaff, 'the inside of a church'"*

Jesus had a lot to say about what Shakespeare called "empty and unenlightened preaching", and religious organizations akin to private members' clubs, more concerned with rules and appearances than with truly reflecting God's light and love to those outside their walls:

When Jesus had finished speaking, a Pharisee invited him to eat with him; so he went in and reclined at the table. But the Pharisee, noticing that Jesus did not first wash before the meal, was surprised.

Then the Lord said to him, "Now then, you Pharisees clean the outside of the cup and dish, but inside you are full of greed and wickedness. You foolish people! Did not the one who made the outside make the inside also? But give what is inside the dish to the poor, and everything will be clean for you.

"Woe to you Pharisees, because you give God a tenth of your mint, rue and all other kinds of garden herbs, but you neglect justice and the love of God. You should have practiced the latter without leaving the former undone.

"Woe to you Pharisees, because you love the most important seats in the synagogues and greetings in the marketplaces.

"Woe to you, because you are like unmarked graves, which men walk over without knowing it."

Luke 11:37–54

- Do you think our church is welcoming enough?
- How would it appear to someone standing outside looking in?
- How does the wider Church appear to those outside it?
- Are modern religious organizations ever guilty of "neglecting justice and the love God" as Jesus accused the Pharisees of doing?

ASSIGNMENT: Next time you are there, on the outside of your church spend some time looking back at [insert the name of your church], either up close or from a distance. As you look, ask God to show you how you could better reflect his light to the people you come into contact with. Pray for his help to make the church even more of a welcoming and un-intimidating place, a place where someone like van Gogh, with all his complexities and issues, would feel accepted and at home. At our **NEXT MEETING**, let's report back our findings to one another.

an adapted version of Chloe Axford's *A Church In Shadow Art Reflection*, engageworship.org.

Prayer

20 minutes

Share a prayer request based on what was discussed during this meeting's *Word of God* and/or *Outreach* time. What is that next step in your faith life God is calling you to make? What convicted you from God's Word and/or our discussion of His Word? Please also share a way in which the group may support/encourage you regarding what you've shared. Of course other important matters can be prayed about as well. After all have shared, pray for the person on your left (whether aloud or silently). Pray together.

Equipping *for coordinating next week's meeting...*

5 minutes

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