



PLEASANT HILLS
COMMUNITY PRESBYTERIAN
CHURCH

SMALL GROUP QUESTIONS

Week of Sunday, November 14

*Questions with asterisks are meant to be answered by everyone in the group.
Leave enough time for prayer at the end of your time together.*

Icebreaker

******What less-common food or drink is an important part of your Thanksgiving dinner experience?******
This could be something from the distant past or a new tradition that you discovered more recently.

*Read **Hebrews 12:22-29** to provide the context for the discussion questions.*

Here's a version that provides a paraphrase of the passage with more familiar language:

Unlike your ancestors, you didn't come to Mount Sinai—all that volcanic blaze and earthshaking rumble—to hear God speak. The earsplitting words and soul-shaking message terrified them and they begged him to stop. When they heard the words—"If an animal touches the Mountain, it's as good as dead"—they were afraid to move. Even Moses was terrified.

No, that's not your experience at all. You've come to Mount Zion, the city where the living God resides. The invisible Jerusalem is populated by throngs of festive angels and Christian citizens. It is the city where God is Judge, with judgments that make us just. You've come to Jesus, who presents us with a new covenant, a fresh charter from God. He is the Mediator of this covenant. The murder of Jesus, unlike Abel's—a homicide that cried out for vengeance—became a proclamation of grace.

So don't turn a deaf ear to these gracious words. If those who ignored earthly warnings didn't get away with it, what will happen to us if we turn our backs on heavenly warnings? Back then, His voice shook the earth to its foundations; this time—he's told us this quite plainly—he'll also rock the heavens: "One last shaking, from top to bottom, stem to stern." The phrase "one last shaking" means a thorough housecleaning, getting rid of all the historical and religious junk so that the unshakable essentials stand clear and uncluttered.

Do you see what we've got? An unshakable kingdom! And do you see how thankful we must be? Not only thankful, but brimming with worship, deeply reverent before God. For God is not an indifferent bystander. He's actively cleaning house, torching all that needs to burn, and he won't quit until it's all cleansed. God himself is Fire!

1. If you committed to a gratitude discipline from last week (sending a thank you card, writing a few things that you're grateful for each day, etc), how did you do?
2. Pastor Mark strongly encouraged us to ground our gratitude in God's character rather than the ever-changing particulars of day-to-day life. How might this shift in perspective change your understanding of giving thanks to God?
3. As a group, dig deeper into the following character traits of God. Consider questions like:
Why is this essential character trait worthy of our thanksgiving?
Can you think of a verse or passage of Scripture that exemplifies this character trait of God?
If you routinely reflected on this essential character trait of God, how might it change you?
 - a. God is love.
 - b. God is patient.
 - c. God is sovereign (nothing happens outside his power or authority).
 - d. God is just (God pursues justice and fair, righteous judgments).
 - e. God is merciful.
 - f. What other essential character trait of God are you thankful for, and why do you think it's worth adding to this list?

4. *Is your group ready for a challenge? Explore this question. If not, feel free to skip to question 5.*

Now that you've explored biblical qualities of God, reflect on a more widely accepted spirituality within our culture described as *Moral Therapeutic Deism*.

As defined by Christian Smith, Moralistic Therapeutic Deism consists of beliefs like these:

1. A god exists who created and ordered the world and watches over human life on earth.
2. God wants people to be good, nice, and fair to each other, as taught by most world religions.
3. The central goal of life is to be happy and to feel good about oneself.
4. God does not need to be involved in one's life unless god is needed to resolve a problem.
5. Good people go to heaven when they die.

How does this common, cultural spirituality borrow from the Christian worldview?

Compared to the God revealed in Scripture, what are the limitations of this understanding of god?

If we bought into Moral Therapeutic Deism, how would it change our discipline of gratitude?

5. Next Sunday, the topic is "cultivating an ungrateful heart." The passage of Scripture we will be exploring together is Philippians 2:12-18. Read that passage together now.
If your group had to prepare next week's message, what are a few important points you would emphasize as you relate this passage to the topic of thanksgiving?

If you would like to purchase an Advent daily devotional book to follow along with our Advent sermon series, the book is called "God is in the Manger," by Dietrich Bonhoeffer.

Next week is a bye-week. No small groups.

Close your group in prayer.