

A DISCUSSION SERIES



VANTAGE  
POINT



# VantagePoint™

## A SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION SERIES

Where we stand, and who we are make a great deal of difference in how we see the world around us.

SAMPLE

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## A note from the author:

**“For what you see and hear depends a great deal on where you are standing: it also depends on who you are.”**

This line from C.S. Lewis' **The Magician's Nephew** (from his popular series – The Chronicles of Narnia) has stuck with me since the first time I read it many years ago. In this magical tale, Lewis is explaining why the safe and conventional Uncle Andrew had a far different impression of the enchanted animals in the forest than that of the Cabby and the children.

I love Lewis' explanation for the different understanding that they each have. First, where you are standing makes a difference. Imagine the different perspective that two witnesses have on a traffic accident. The witness on the southeast corner has a much different vantage point than does the witness on the northwest corner. The traffic accident is the same but their descriptions may be different....and let's be honest, understanding the two perspectives may give a more accurate understanding than either single view alone.

Secondly, Lewis explains that your perspective is also shaped by who you are. The culture, background, personality, values, all of these things determine how we see things. Uncle Andrew, and the Cabby and children are very different people. Their vantage point on how they see themselves and the world around them drive them to vastly different understandings about the enchanted animals.

Lewis' perspective on “seeing things differently” has application for us as we strive toward understanding biblical truth and applying it to our own lives. Each of us has had a unique journey to develop how we understand scripture and theology. Who we are and how we see a biblical truth is sure to determine our actions. Truth doesn't change. But what if how we understand that truth shifted - even slightly based on our vantage point – wouldn't that change our behavior as well? It

doesn't mean that our original viewpoint is necessarily wrong – but a fresh perspective could be very helpful in pursuing our own unique Kingdom purposes.

I suggest that these short essays and discussions take place in a small group setting, one per session over a number of weeks. Each discussion can stand on its own without building on previous content. I suggest that you utilize the questions to define the direction of the conversation, but remain alert and open to different conversation trails that may be helpful. There are no right or wrong answers to these questions, rather they are designed to help each of us ponder ideas and truth to direct our next right steps. I hope you enjoy, as you consider your VantagePoint™!

SAMPLE

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# MODULE ONE

## Session 1: A DIFFERENT VIEW OF OUR ROLE WITH OTHERS

In a childhood story, the Flower Man moves into an isolated, desolate village. Over time his faithful presence planting and sharing flowers changes the loneliness of the villagers into the vibrant community that God intends for us. His simple acts of kindness and beauty changed everything.

I think everyone asks themselves - “What is my purpose?” “How should I live my life?” “What does it look like to live my life as a person of faith?” The prophet Jeremiah had a lot to say about that in Jeremiah 29 – where the Lord explains to His people (living in exile in Babylon) that they are to engage in the world around them, in fact, to be an integral part of it. Many believers may take just the opposite approach and retreat to a “holy huddle” of other believers, pulling away from the “dangers” of the world.

It makes some sense though, doesn’t it? Our current vantage point may have us living and working with a perspective that is simple, safe and sound. It’s not a wrong viewpoint – after all, God does want us to protect ourselves and our children from temptation, from ungodly influence and He wants us to gather together to worship, and to encourage and learn from one another. All good things that may pull us away from the perspective that Jeremiah presents.

Jeremiah tells the Israelites to do some things that push against our existing vantage point. He tells them (us) to build houses and plant gardens. He tells them to marry, and have children and grandchildren. And he tells them seek the peace and prosperity, and to pray for the city – the very city made up of the people who murdered the Israelite’s family members, burned their temples, kidnapped them and took them into exile.

It's not hard to see the logic of pulling back, isolating and enduring the tough world around them – just wait it out and look forward to the day when they might return home from exile.

Our own situation is not that different from the Israelites exiled to the unpleasantness of Babylon looking forward to the day that they would return home to Jerusalem. As followers of Christ, citizens of Heaven, we live in anticipation of leaving this world filled with evil so that we can return to our eternal home. We may isolate ourselves with Christian friends, Christian schools, Christian entertainment and so on.... all good things, but not really following Jeremiah's perspective of engagement in exile.

I think about my own life. I think about my kids in Christian school and on Christian sports teams. I think about Sunday lunch with my church friends, neighborhood small groups and office bible studies. My perspective was good (and safe) for me and my family. It's simple to tithe and expect the church to be charitable, it's difficult to be generous. It's simple to be polite or friendly to everyone, but difficult to engage in a meaningful way with people who are different from me. It's simple to be critical of the world around me, but difficult to make a difference in matters of substance.

William Wilberforce, a British politician in the eighteenth century, is an example of engaging in culture to bring positive change. Believing God's call to him to abolish the slave trade in England, Wilberforce brought peace, prosperity, and flourishing just as Jeremiah stated. For 45 years he worked with others to make a difference in the world around him.

As simple as sharing flowers, or as complex as changing cultural views and laws we have a part in engaging the world for the better. Jeremiah's broader vantage point of our different role as exiles gives us challenge to meaningfully engage with the world around us. We will be home one day – but in the meantime it matters how we live.

## **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:**

1. How do you feel about a vantage point that shifts from our perspective being inwardly focused to a perspective that is more outwardly focused?
  
  
  
  
  
2. What would it look like for you to “engage” differently in the world around you?
  
  
  
  
  
3. Are there things that you might stop doing based on Jeremiah 29? Start doing?
  
  
  
  
  
4. The Flower Man is an example of simple acts that change the world. Are those things easy or difficult for you? What might they look like?
  
  
  
  
  
5. William Wilberforce’s efforts to rid England of the slave trade is an example of a complex and lengthy world change. What are you passionate enough about to work toward with such determination?