



FOLLOWING JESUS

-DISCIPLESHIP-

Following Jesus

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CONNECT GROUPS MANUAL



Notes:

This manual is a product of excerpts from Sunday teaching notes and may not reflect full grammatical proficiency.

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CONNECT GROUPS: FOLLOWING JESUS SERIES

A. Preamble

The purpose of this manual is to help you build a firm foundation for your walk with the Lord Jesus Christ.

Without a proper working understanding of discipleship, many people with strong desire to follow Jesus Christ, become casualties of circumstances and fall along the wayside.

As humans, we are creatures of habits. If our faith does not make its way into our habits, it will eventually die.

Our faith must be tied to our habits, practices, and routines, to such a degree that it becomes visible to others. In discipleship, we are called to practice our faith until it becomes part and parcels of our lives.

Our heart desire is to come alongside you as you walk out your faith in Jesus Christ. We are not called to do it all by ourselves. We are called to do it together!

Psalm 133:1-3

¹ Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!

² It is like the precious oil upon the head, running down on the beard, the beard of Aaron, running down on the edge of his garments.

*³ It is like the dew of Hermon, descending upon the mountains of Zion;
For there the LORD commanded the blessing—Life forevermore!*

B. Small Groups Dynamics: How to Begin

1. **First Meeting:** Introduce yourselves to each other and give an abbreviated version of your story. How you became a Christian.
2. In time, each member would get the chance to share their full story.
3. Before you begin each meeting, greet each other with a brief eye-to-eye connection and tell them how happy you are to see them.
4. Start by having each person share a gratitude story from their week.
5. Frequently, tell each other what you find special in them.
6. Spend some time to pray and commit your meeting into God's care and invite the Holy Spirit to lead your conversations.
7. Always end with prayer – thanking the Lord for a fruitful fellowship.
8. There's no need to try to rush through the sessions. Enjoy the liberty to allow the Holy Spirit to lead your meetings, when you feel led.

C. Challenges of Community

Living in a community is enormously difficult. Living together like brothers and sisters means in actual practice, endless squabbles, unresolved conflicts, unceasing disagreements, incessant quarrels, hyped dramas, and aimless arguments.

1. And if we're going to sing "*How wonderful, how beautiful, when brethren dwell together in unity,*" we will not do it by being left to ourselves following our natural bent.
2. Our prototype of community relationship is based on a person, who knows how to give Himself to the rest of us all.
3. We are family but we are directed by one teacher and Lord – Jesus Christ!
4. We must learn to live our lives in harmony with one another.
5. Like members of a family, we need to learn how to handle conflicts and direct confrontation without becoming so offended that we break off relationships.
6. Jesus was very blunt with people including His disciples.
7. Having a "**teachable**" spirit means that a disciple will seek to learn from every encounter, especially when it would be easy to take offense at either the message or the method of delivery.

D. To be Successful as a Small Group, each individual needs to be F.A.T.

1. We need to be **Faithful**: *The success of any community hinges on each individual becoming committed and devoted to the cause of the entire group.*
2. We need to be **Available**: *Availability is making time for the things you deem important to you.*
3. We need to be **Teachable**: *To have an attitude of pure and complete humility. To surrender one's thinking, reactions, and responses to God. We need to remain hungry for the things of God. We must be willing to submit ourselves to God's Word, and each other, as we seek to grow and become more and more like Christ.*

Ephesians 4:13-15 [NLT]

¹³ This will continue until we all come to such unity in our faith and knowledge of God's Son that we will be mature in the Lord, measuring up to the full and complete standard of Christ. ¹⁴ Then we will no longer be immature like children. We won't be tossed and blown about by every wind of new teaching. We will not be influenced when people try to trick us with lies so clever they sound like the truth. ¹⁵ Instead, we will speak the truth in love, growing in every way more and more like Christ, who is the head of his body, the church.

E. Three stages of Growth:

1. Gifted leaders are responsible for **the equipping of the saints**.
2. The well-equipped saints to do **the work of the ministry**.
3. The result is that **the body of Christ** is built up.

The final goal is maturity, truth, and love.

Session 1: Following Jesus – The Call

A. “Follow Me”

1. All four Gospels give account of Jesus’ call to the disciples with the words: **“Follow Me.”**
2. With no hesitation, they laid everything they know as life down, and took up this new vocation that had no guarantees for them.
3. The call may seem ludicrous in its abruptness. There was no risk assessment. No accounting of their savings or their retirement portfolios.
4. The call to follow Jesus is a call to discipleship, which literally translates as: **“to follow after.”**
5. **The Model:** It is a call to become a follower of Jesus Christ. He is the model.
6. It is not a call to follow men who claim to represent him. It is not a call to follow humanly designed ideas that mimic the call to follow Jesus Christ.

Matthew 4:18-20 *¹⁸And Jesus, walking by the Sea of Galilee, saw two brothers, Simon called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea; for they were fishermen. ¹⁹Then He said to them, **“Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men.”** ²⁰They immediately left their nets and followed Him.*

- **Mark 1:16-20** – He calls Peter, Andrew, James, and John to follow Him.
- **John 1:35-51** – He calls Andrew, Nathaniel to follow Him.

Luke 5:9-11 *⁹For he and all who were with him were astonished at the catch of fish which they had taken; ¹⁰and so also were James and John, the sons of Zebedee, who were partners with Simon. And Jesus said to Simon, “Do not be afraid. From now on you will catch men.” ¹¹So when they had brought their boats to land, they forsook all and followed Him.*

Luke 9:23-24 *Then He said to them all, “If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me. ²⁴For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will save it. ²⁵For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and is himself destroyed or lost? ²⁶For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words, of him the Son of Man will be ashamed when He comes in His own glory, and in His Father’s, and of the holy angels.*

Luke 9:23 [NLT] *²³Then he said to the crowd, “If any of you wants to be my follower, you must give up your own way, take up your cross daily, and follow me. ²⁴If you try to hang on to your life, you will lose it. But if you give up your life for my sake, you will save it.*

B. Following Jesus: What does it mean to follow Jesus?

1. **To Become Fishers of Men (Matthew 4:19)** One of the greatest indications or marks of following Jesus is when you become **fishers of men**. [*Share your Testimony/Christ*]

- a. One of the things that has contributed to the downward trend of the church over the years is our lack of fishing.
- b. We have ignored Jesus' call to become fishers of men.
- c. Instead, we have become keepers of aquariums.
- d. Our call is to go into the world – the open seas and rivers of humankind and fish for men.
- e. The church has become very comfortable in our pews with little concern for the destinies of souls.
- f. **In the last century**, it feels as if a disease set in; an epidemic has spread throughout the church.
- g. Our sickness isn't one that keeps us out of our churches or from preaching salvation to those we encounter. It is much more subversive than that.
- h. Instead of showing the world the love of Christ, we more often wiggle our fingers at the things we stood for.
- i. We have tens of millions converted to Christianity, yet our influence on society is at an all-time low. How could that be?
- j. Did the Gospel lose its power, or did we lose the Gospel?
- k. The greatest threat to the good news is advancing and incoherent, half-baked version of the real thing.
- l. When we do that, it leaves a gaping hole that puffs us up and does little to advance what God really cares about."

"The virus that has overtaken our hearts and minds functions more like a cloud – a subtle distortion and a misunderstanding of the way of Jesus." – **Gabe Lyons**

2. To Lay Down One's Life (Luke 9:23)

- a. It is death to self and allowing the life of Christ to be lived through you.
- b. Unfortunately, many of us who profess to follow Him refuse to die to self.
- c. We let our own desires and selfish motives get in the way and drive our actions.
- d. The cross is laid on every Christian. The first Christ-suffering which every man must experience is the call to abandon the attachments of this world.
- e. It is that dying of the old man which is the result of his encounter with Christ.
- f. As we embark upon discipleship, we surrender ourselves to Christ in union with His death—we give over our lives to death.

"The cross is not the terrible end to an otherwise god-fearing and happy life, but it meets us at the beginning of our communion with Christ." – **Dietrich Bonhoeffer**.

Galatians 2:20 *I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.*

“When Christ calls a man, He bids him come and die. It may be a death like that of the first disciples who had to leave home and work to follow Him, or it may be a death like Luther’s, who had to leave the monastery and go out into the world. But it is the same death every time — death in Jesus Christ, the death of the old man at his call.”

Dietrich Bonhoeffer.

- g. Here is a man who believed that whatever a person claims to believe was not as important as how they lived it out.
- h. It was paramount in his desire to take his theological knowledge to real people, not just to be understood, but to be lived out as disciples of Christ.
- i. ***Failure to crucify the flesh*** and its precarious desires can lead us away from His call.
 - It destroys our relationship with God and harm others.
 - We become self-centered, seek self-preservation over the agenda of God.
 - Internal strife, politics, power struggle, and religiosity have eaten into the fabric of the church, because we simply refuse to die to self.
 - The enemy doesn’t have to work any harder, because Christians do his work for him.

3. To Sacrifice Comfort and Convenience (2 Timothy 3:11-12).

- a. Comfort and convenience have become our gods and idols and we worship them with a lot of protection.
- b. The world is dying and going to hell and the church doesn’t seem concerned.
- c. We need to move away from man-made doctrines, and our petty dogmas that have no biblical basis, and avail ourselves to the Master’s call.

“In our culture of convenience, slogans, and simplification, we’ve allowed the greatest story ever told to become impotent, little more than a slick telemarketer’s pitch. It was convincing; people were happy to sign up for the free giveaway – a final destination in heaven – but hardly taking time to read the fine print: this may cost you everything.” –

Gabe Lyons

Discussion Questions:

1. Discuss the idea of Jesus being ‘The Model’ of our call to discipleship.
2. What does it mean to follow Jesus?
3. How have we allowed the greatest story ever told to become impotent in our culture? What can we do?

Prayer:

1. *Pray for one another and for any family needs that people might have.*
2. *Pray for the Church in America – to return to the call to discipleship.*

Session 2: Following Jesus – The Way Part 1

A. Jesus is the Way

John 14:6 Jesus said to him, “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.

Matthew 28:18-20 ¹⁸ And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. ¹⁹ Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.” Amen.

1. Jesus’ last words in Matthew’s Gospel were not meant to be some good advice leading to personal fulfillment or putting more people in the pews...
2. Rather it was a command and a call to action – an action that will only **spring not from desire, but from our readiness to embrace responsibility**.
3. The only thing that can save the Church is responding to the call and following in the way.

Acts 11:26 And when he had found him, he brought him to Antioch. So it was that for a whole year they assembled with the church and taught a great many people. And the disciples were first called **Christians** in Antioch.

4. The term “Christian” was first used in connection with followers of Jesus in **A.D. 44**. Thus, 14 years after the resurrection and ascension.
5. The term was used as a mild form of derision or ridicule. The pagans sought to mock the followers as being “little Christs” or “Christ-ians.”
6. But the term has come to stay – now throughout the ages people who identify as followers of Jesus Christ are called Christians.
7. There were few followers in the early church, but currently the number has grown to a whopping 2.2 billion who identify as Christians or as followers.
8. But the veracity of the church has dramatically changed.
9. Something has happened to Christianity between then and now.

The change has been so obvious that **Mohandas [Mahatma] Ghandi** (19th-20th century Indian revolutionist) could say:

“I like your Christ; I don’t like your Christians. Your Christians are so unlike Christ.”

B. Decline of Christianity: The State of the Church

The church throughout the world is experiencing challenges that have never occurred from so many directions at once.

1. We are living in a time of radical change and rapid decline of Christianity in many parts of the globe.
2. Places that were strongholds of Christianity have become paganized/Islamized.
3. Example, a places like Turkey – modern day location of Asia Minor where the 7 churches were addressed by Jesus Christ through John on **Patmos**, has virtually no Christian presence. How did that happen?

C. Europe

1. The collapse of the Church in Europe is happening right in front of us.
2. The former hub and the breeding ground for great preachers, fearless missionaries, and fiery revivalists like **Charles Spurgeon, Charles Finney, Archbishop Sheen, William Booth, John Murray, George Whitefield**, etc. is becoming increasingly secular.
3. How does Europe, which 200 years ago, was the bastion of Christendom now has the least number of professing Christians of any continent in the world?

D. The US and Canada

1. The US and Canada are witnessing a decline in Church membership and attendance which in the next couple of decades will see the Church in America reduced to similar size of that of Europe.
2. We are living in a time of intense spiritual and physical attack on the church.
3. The forces of evil are being released from both within and without the church.
4. However, this doesn't take God by surprise. He is counterattacking with unstoppable force.
5. God is doing something much greater and more powerful than anything than armies, politicians, or businesses can accomplish.
6. He is teaching those who will listen how to become steadfast and immovable always abounding in the work of the Lord.
7. He is raising an army of faithful followers.
8. He is calling His church back to the original blueprint: **"to make disciples."**
9. But we need to lean in. We can't come to church like we'll go to a baseball game.

"Baseball is like church. Many attend, few understand." Leo Durocher

Discussion Questions

1. In your view, what have contributed to the decline of Christianity in the West?
2. Discuss some of the ways in which the church can reverse or slow down this trend.

Prayer:

1. *Pray one for one another, and for anyone who may have a need.*
2. *Pray for the United States of America – to return to the Lord.*

Session 3: Following Jesus – The Way Part 2

A. Introduction

1. In the US and most of western civilization, the term Christianity has become a cultural assumption because the history of their civilizations was rooted in Christian philosophy.
2. The problem, however, is that any kind of approach that minimizes Christianity undermines the meaning of Christianity it makes it difficult to define what it means.
3. **Being a Christianity is rooted in 2 fundamental Questions:**
 - a. *How Does One become a Christian?*
 - b. *What Does it Mean to be a Christian?*

B. Becoming A Christian – The Convert

1. Over time, the church has minimized Christianity in our attempt to make things simple and accessible to young aspirants, through religious affirmations like ***catechism, confirmation, baptism, first communion, penance*** [sacraments/religious rituals].
2. We have also minimized Christianity through the over-emphasis of **evangelical altar calls**.
3. We have minimized Christianity by reducing it to heaven or hell issue.
4. This is not to say that all these are not good. They are, but we cannot confuse the possible entry points to Christianity with the Christian life itself.
5. When we minimize Christianity through the over-emphasis of liturgical rituals or evangelicalism, we lose the true meaning of what it means to be a follower of Jesus Christ.
6. We cannot confuse the sign to a city with the city itself. Or the sign in front of this church for this church. You don't stand under the sign and say I've arrived.

B. How Does One Become A Christian? *Through Conversion*

1. The ***Way of Christ*** begins with conversion. Conversion is just the first step – the first step of the process or the journey of Christianity.
2. Conversion will lead you to become a believer and grow to become a disciple.
3. That is what Jesus had in mind when He called His young followers.

Matthew 18:2-3 ² *Then Jesus called a little child to Him, set him in the midst of them,* ³ *and said, “Assuredly, I say to you, unless you are **converted** and become as little children, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven.*

Acts 3:19 ***Repent*** *therefore and be **converted**, that your sins may be blotted out, so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord.*

C. Conversion: from Greek **ἐπιστρέφω** [*ep-ee-stref'-o*] and it means to revert, fig. to come (go) again, to turn or re-turn.

1. Related to the Greek **metanoia** from which we derive the word **repent**.
 - a. Etymologically, this word has unfortunately become laden with all kinds of Christianize meanings which have caused it to lose its actual meaning.
 - b. “**Meta**” means after and it bears the concept of “**shift**” or “**change**” (as in metamorphosis). “**Noia**” translates to “**mind**.”
 - c. **Metanoia** is a mindset that that happens after a life-changing experiences.
2. Greeks defined metanoia to denote a change of mind; a re-orientation; a fundamental transformation of outlook of man’s vision of the world and of himself; a new way of looking at life and things.

Matthew 4:17 *From that time Jesus began to preach and to say, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”*

D. Christian Conversion = *to turn to God through faith and in obedience to Jesus Christ.*

1. *Conversion is both instantaneous and progressive.*
2. ***The initial conversion is extremely important because that is what puts your life on the journey of becoming a disciple.***
3. *It begins the process of becoming a follower of Jesus Christ [Christian].*
4. *After the initial conversion, you constantly re-think your life and continue being converted until you come to the measure and stature of the fullness of Christ.*
5. ***A convert has changed their thinking in such a way that it has affected their life.***
6. *There are moments in your life when you gain profound insight about situations that would make you say: “now, this changes everything.”*
7. *A situation may occur in your life that will cause you to think your life over again and rethink how you’re going to respond.*
8. *Growing up in the church or a Christian home does not make you a Christian; it does not excuse one from becoming a convert.*
9. *You need to come to a point in life when you can make that conscious decision to follow Jesus Christ! Change the way you think – Change the way you live.*

E. Repentance: *a conversion of the mind that causes a change in your lifestyle or affects the way live and respond to reality.* This ultimately results in salvation!

1. To change one’s mind, to change the way you think.
2. To rethink your life in light of Who Jesus is and for what He has said, and for what He has done!

“Christianity is not merely a status to be obtained, but a life to be lived.”

“Christianity is a constant re-thinking of your life in light of Jesus Christ!” Brian Zahnd

3. Salvation has been presented to many who profess to follow Christ as a status to be obtained.
4. Did you receive Jesus Christ? Then you're in! There's some truth to that, but not in its entirety.

Conversion is not just one-time confession of Christ, but a constant re-thinking and re-examining your life in light of Jesus Christ.

5. To be a Christian is to constantly rethink and examine your life your life in light of Jesus Christ: who He is; how He lived.
6. Christianity is not just about learning the essential doctrines or facts of the faith, although they're important to know.
7. Neither is it just subscribing to a particular doctrinal lineage – **Calvinism** or **Armenianism**.
8. ***Christianity is about following a person who is the way, the truth, and the life. Truth is primarily a person, not a fact.***
9. When you follow Jesus in the way, you will discover truth, and when you discover truth, you receive life! **Just saying a prayer isn't enough!**

F. Docetism: The idea of leading people to say the sinner's prayer to presume they're in, is undergirded by the same concept that underlie **Docetism** (theological perspective)

1. ***Basic thesis:*** *If Christ suffered then He was not divine, and if He was God he could not suffer.*
2. *This doctrine denies the humanity of Jesus Christ.*
3. *It regards the sufferings and the human aspects of Christ as imaginary or apparent instead of being part of His real incarnation.*

G. IMPORTANT: Jesus Christ was as much human (100%) as He was God (100%).

1. Christ is the ultimate model of life – The only One who lived a perfect, sinless, life that is worthy of emulation.
2. After we become converted, we need to embrace the humanity of Jesus Christ and model our lives according to how He lived on earth.
3. Any attitude or action that denies Christ's humanity is anti-Christ!
4. **Whatever is anti-human is anti-Christ!** Disease, poverty, addiction, murder, suicide, materialism, racism, etc. are all anti-human and therefore, anti-Christ.
5. As Christians, we are expected to do the works of Christ – to heal the sick, raise the dead, deliver the oppressed, cast out demons. We should influence the world in a positive way.

6. Confusion between question: ***“What does it mean to be a Christian?”*** and ***“How does one become a Christian***
7. In the early church and in most places, defining the term is very easy because of their experience. ***In places where it is difficult to live as a Christian, it is very easy to define the term. And in places where it is easy to be a Christian, it is very difficult to define the term.***
8. Our experiences definitely bear sway to our understanding and definition of the term Christianity.
9. When there’s intense persecution, it’s easier for Christians to define what it means to be a Christian because it is something they do or live out.
10. But when there are no persecutions/opposition, it is difficult to define it, because it is something they just profess.

“The greatest danger to the Christian Church today is that of pitching its message too low.” **Dallas Willard**

H. Conclusion/Response

1. A commitment to discipleship requires a total turn away from the world’s values and toward God’s.
2. The Bible witnesses to the nature of this call again and again, be it in the story of Moses and the burning bush, of Elisha under Elijah’s mantle, or of the disciples’ setting down their nets.
3. I am reminded of the hymn ***“I have decided to follow Jesus,”*** which sums up this commitment to discipleship in starkly poignant terms: ***“The world behind me, the cross before me, no turning back, no turning back.”***

Discussion Questions:

1. Discuss the questions ***“What does it mean to be a Christian?”*** versus ***“How does one become a Christian?”***
2. Why has defining the term “Christianity” become difficult in the West.

Prayer Time:

1. *Prayer for each other and for anyone with any specific need.*

Session 4: Following Jesus – The Truth Part 1

A. Introduction

Matthew 5:48 [NLT] *But you are to be perfect, even as your Father in heaven is perfect.*

- The Greek and Aramaic word for “**perfect**” can also mean “whole, complete, fully mature, lacking nothing, all-inclusive, well-rounded, and spiritually mature.”

1 John 5:1-7 [NLT] *Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ^[a] has become a child of God. And everyone who loves the Father loves his children, too. ² We know we love God’s children if we love God and obey his commandments. ³ Loving God means keeping his commandments, and his commandments are not burdensome. ⁴ For every child of God defeats this evil world, and we achieve this victory through our faith. ⁵ And who can win this battle against the world? Only those who believe that Jesus is the Son of God. ⁶ And Jesus Christ was revealed as God’s Son by his baptism in water and by shedding his blood on the cross—not by water only, but by water and blood. And the Spirit, who is truth, confirms it with his testimony.*

1 John 5: 9-13 [NLT] *Since we **believe** human testimony, surely we can **believe** the greater testimony that comes from God. And God has testified about his Son. ¹⁰ All who **believe** in the Son of God know in their hearts that this testimony is true. Those who don’t **believe** this are actually calling God a liar because they don’t **believe** what God has testified about his Son. ¹¹ And this is what God has testified: He has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. ¹² Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have God’s Son does not have life. ¹³ I have written this to you who **believe** in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know you have eternal life.*

B. The Believer

The term Christian is also implied in Scripture as a **believer** [just like a convert]. To be a Christian is to **believe in Jesus Christ**, and also believe the truth about Him. It is not just about believing certain things and rejecting other things about Him.

1. **Believe** [4100]: from Greek **pisteuo** [pist-yoo’-o] = from 4102 meaning *to have faith (in, upon, or with respect to, a person or thing), i.e. credit; by impl. To entrust (espec. One’s spiritual well-being to Christ); believe (commit to trust, put in trust with).*
2. **Faith** [4102]: from Greek **pistis** [pis’-tis] = persuasion, credence, conviction (of religious truth, or truthfulness of God).
 - a. Especially reliance upon Christ for salvation. Assurance, belief, dependability,

- b. *To **believe** is to express faith in a concept or in a person.*
- c. *To be a Christian is to express **faith** Jesus Christ.*
- d. *And in this case Jesus Christ is the person in question.*

- 3. Faith is not necessarily knowing. Knowing is our response to what is expressed through empirical evidence. We are able to ascertain the authenticity of something through experiment or empirical evidence.
- 4. **But faith does not deal with empirical evidence. Instead, it deals with a different way of knowing things.**
- 5. Primarily, faith deals with the invisible. We cannot put faith in a test tube and ascertain it's certainty empirically.

Hebrews 11:1 (NKJV) *Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.*

(ESV) *Now faith is the **assurance** of things hoped for, the **conviction** of things not seen.*

- 6. Faith is not dealing with empirical evidence – thus, it does not deal with substantiating the physical reality of an object through experimentation.
- 7. You cannot put God in a test tube and determine whether he is real or not.
- 8. You cannot ascertain the reality of God just by your natural senses.

“Seek not to understand that you may believe, but believe that you may understand” (the source of Anslem’s famous formula ***credo ut intelligam***)

2 Corinthians 5:7 *For we walk by faith, not by sight.*

- 3. Faith is not inferior to knowing – because it is a different kind of knowing.
- 4. Not with the senses but by revelation. God does not reveal Himself through empirical observation; He reveals Himself by revelation.
- 5. ***Faith is our appropriate response to that divine revelation.***

C. Knowledge of God

- 1. The knowledge of God is naturally implanted in the human mind. All humans have the knowledge of God.
- 2. Some choose to suppress it by alluding to baseless philosophies in an attempt to banish all fear of God from their minds.

Romans 1:18-21 [NLV] ¹⁸ *We see the anger of God coming down from heaven against all the sins of men. These sinful men keep the truth from being known.* ¹⁹ *Men know about God. He has made it plain to them.* ²⁰ *Men cannot say they do not know about God. From the beginning of the world, men could see what God is like through the things He has made. This shows His power that lasts forever. It shows that He is God.* ²¹ *They did know God, but they did not honor Him as God. They were not thankful to Him and thought only of foolish things. Their foolish minds became dark.*

Romans 1:21 [GNT] *They know God, but they do not give him the honor that belongs to him, nor do they thank him. Instead, their thoughts have become complete nonsense, and their empty minds are filled with darkness.*

“That there exists in human minds and indeed by natural instinct, some sense of Deity we hold to be beyond dispute, since God Himself, to prevent any man from pretending ignorance, has endued all men with some idea of His Godhead, ...the memory of which He constantly renews and occasionally enlarges, that all to a man being aware that there is a God, and that He is their Maker, may be condemned by their own conscience when they neither worship Him nor consecrate their lives to His service.” **John Calvin** [Source: Institutes of the Christian Religion]

D. Encounter With Jesus!

When the head knowledge translates into heart knowledge, encounter ensues.

“I found Jesus,” or “Jesus found me,” “I met Jesus Christ,” “I had an encounter with Jesus,” “Jesus came into my life,” “I had an experience with Jesus,” etc.

1. These are some common statements people make in regard to their conversion.
2. Jesus Christ of Nazareth is a real historical person who lived a little over 2,000 years ago in the Middle East.
3. But today, people still encounter Him in a real way and their lives never remain the same.
4. I don't think we realize how radical these statements are. It's like someone saying in all seriousness *“I met Alexander the Great or Augustus Caesar, or some great historical figure.*
5. That may seem like a stretch of reality; quite sensational, and even stretches the realm of credulity.
6. But as preposterous as that may sound, that's what we depict when we profess or make those claims concerning Jesus Christ.
7. But in reality, He has been revealed by divine revelation to us and we have responded appropriately to this revelation.
8. Authentic Christian faith results from an actual encounter with Jesus Christ.
9. One may grow up knowing all the facts pertaining to Christianity and never come to the place of divine revelation. (Ref. John Calvin's Institutes of the Christian Religion).
10. They will only remain facts in your head until God in His mercy pleases to reveal His Son to you by divine revelation.
11. When that happens and you respond positively, you experience Christian faith.
12. Facts are not necessarily faith. There's a difference between head knowledge and heart knowledge.
13. When the facts of Christianity becomes illuminated in your heart, then you can respond in faith.
14. Faith is always a matter of choice. You can choose to believe it or not.

St Augustine (Nov. 13, 354 - Gave a masterful rhetoric on Christian Belief).

“Thou has made us for Thyself, and our hearts are restless until they rest in Thee.” (the “**God-shaped hole**” in every person).

- For all his exposition and polemic, and for all his attention to the relations of faith and reason, Augustine saw Christian love for God and neighbor as the supreme goal of life and learning.

Blaise Pascal (6/19, 1623-08/19, 1662): Pensées (Thoughts or reflections)

“The heart of man is a God-shaped void that nothing of this world can fill.”

“The heart has its reasons of which reason knows nothing.”

“It is the heart that perceives God and not the reason.”

When the heart perceives divine or special revelation, faith ensues. Romans 10:17
Your ability to believe is hinged on divine illumination.

John 11:25-26 ²⁵ Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live. ²⁶ And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die. **Do you believe this?**”

- Faith is always a choice after your heart perceives truth.

Discussion Questions:

1. What does it mean to be a believer in Jesus Christ?
2. Share with your group when and how you encountered Jesus Christ.

Prayer Time: Pray for anyone who is not sure of their salvation and lead them to re-dedicate their life and commit to Jesus Christ.

Session 5: Following Jesus – The Truth Part 2

A. What does it mean to be a Christian in terms of being a Believer?

1. To believe certain things about Jesus Christ and the non-negotiable tenets of the Christian faith.
2. Not just about believing the Bible, because certain Christian doctrines could be debatable – pre-trib, post-trib, mid-trib; speaking in tongues; etc.
3. People can give weird interpretations about various doctrines in the Bible but there are the non-negotiables that we need to hold firm.

B. What are the Non-negotiables? The Essentials?

1. The Scriptures reveal the essentials of the Christian faith that one has to subscribe to in order to be deemed a follower of Christ.
2. The Church has over the centuries, examined these essentials, and viewed them as contingent to one's belief in Christ.

C. The Early Church – The Credo [Latin for Creed] = "I BELIEVE"

1. During the first few centuries, the Church was faced with challenges/heresies that forced the apostles and the Church Fathers to establish what the essential beliefs of the church were.
2. The creed was a confession of faith made by the Early Church. The most ancient and most essential is the **credo** or **the Apostles' Creed** (late first – early 2nd centuries).
3. The term **Apostles' Creed** was applied to this confession in the **5th century**.
4. This was the confession made before one could be baptized.
5. The idea of being a Christian without being baptized first, was unheard of in the early church. *"Believe and be baptized."*

Mark 16:16 *He who **believes** and is **baptized** will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned.*

D. Rule of Faith

1. Prior to the term Apostles' Creed, it was referred to as the **Rule of Faith** = Christian Standard.
2. The **Rule of Faith** was the defining statement of belief in Christianity.
3. This was the confession one had to make to be received into the Christian faith.
4. The Creed is divided into 3 sections: **Father-Son-Holy Spirit**.
5. In later centuries, other creeds brought further clarification or as objections to certain heresies, mostly in regard to the Person of Christ:
 - a. The **Nicene Creed** in 325 A.D. – He was Truly Divine; Begotten of the Father.
 - b. Amended in Constantinople in 381 A.D.
 - c. The **Caledonian Creed** in 451 A.D. – He was Truly Man.

d. The **Athanasian Creed** in 500 A.D. – To establish the Trinitarian Doctrine.

6. The statements in the creed prescribed the essential doctrines of the Christian faith.
7. You cannot claim to believe in Jesus and not in the Church (post-modern worldview)
8. The primary reason for the creed was to give a concise definition of what it means to be a Christian. **If you can't define anything, then it is nothing.**
9. The first and most dangerous of the heresies was **Gnosticism** [new age version]: **"Sin is not the issue of humanity"** we only need enlightenment – modern day Gnosticism. There is nothing like Christian-Agnostic. [Arianism, Docetism, etc.]

E. Parameters of Belief

1. If you fail to define the parameters of a doctrine or belief system, anybody can try to bring their own definition to it.
2. That's why the Apostles and the Early Church fathers saw it necessary to define the essential faith statements of Christ and of the Church.
3. It is of necessity that anyone who professes to be a Christian believes these truth statements.
4. It is incumbent on the Christian to have a firm belief in these statements, irrespective of their denominational stripe.
 - **"Unity in things necessary, liberty in things doubtful, charity in all things."** *St. Augustine of Hippo*
 - *On the Essentials, there must be Unity; Non-essentials, there must be Liberty; In all Things, there must be charity.*
 - **Whatever your heart truly believes, it receives and allows to master and rule your life.**
 - Meditation: turning your heart toward God and seeking to make His Word a part of your life.

F. The Apostles' Creed [3 Parts – Trinitarian]

I BELIEVE in God, the Father Almighty, Creator of heaven and earth.

I BELIEVE in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord,

*Who was conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the virgin Mary.
He suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried;
He descended to hell. The third day He rose again from the dead.
He ascended to heaven; and is seated at the right hand of God the Father Almighty.
From there He will come to judge the living and the dead.*

I BELIEVE in the Holy Spirit,
the holy catholic church,*
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and the life everlasting. Amen.

** The term “catholic” is the true Christian church of all times and in all places.*

Discussion Questions:

1. What do we mean by the non-negotiables of the Christian faith?
2. How is the Apostles’ Creed important to our faith as Believers?
3. Why did the Early Church see the need to define the parameters of the Christian belief?

Prayer: *Pray for one another and confess the Apostles’ Creed together.*

Session 6: Following Jesus – The Life Part 1

A. Introduction

John 14:6 Jesus said to him, *“I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.*

The Way = The Convert; The Truth = The Believer; The Life = The Disciple.

James 2:19 *You believe that there is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe—and tremble!*

1. It is not enough to believe – to be a believer (a follower of Jesus Christ).
2. What you believe must influence the way you live your life. ACTION!
3. Your life’s actions must be in congruence with your belief system.

The greatest challenge the church faces today is to be authentic disciples of Jesus.” Dallas Willard

Matthew 8:18-22 ¹⁸ And when Jesus saw great multitudes about Him, He gave a command to depart to the other side. ¹⁹ Then a certain scribe came and said to Him, *“Teacher, I will follow You wherever You go.”* ²⁰ And Jesus said to him, ***“Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head.”*** ²¹ Then another of His disciples said to Him, *“Lord, let me first go and bury my father.”* ²² But Jesus said to him, ***“Follow Me, and let the dead bury their own dead.”***

B. Two Statements to Consider:

1. ***“Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head.”***

[Luke 13:32] *“foxes have holes” – metaphor indicating kings and rulers of the earth.*

[Matthew 13:19] *“birds of the air” – the evil one/demonic spirits.*

- a. Jesus makes it clear to those who desire to follow Him that things are not going to be rosy in this temporal pilgrimage.
 - b. Kings and rulers on earth, and the evil one (demonic spirits) have things good right now, but the Son of Man [***“the redeemer”***] seems to have no place in the earth that He created.
 - c. Why? Man, willingly gave it up through disobedience – and He needs to redeem it, through obedience.
2. ***“Lord, let me first go and bury my father”.....“Follow Me, and let the dead bury their own dead.”***

- a. It sounds like Jesus is unreasonably insensitive to the disciple’s request until you understand the cultural conundrum/dynamic that is at play here.

- b. Probably, the father was still alive but at the point of death. This disciple was concerned about the portion he was likely to receive if he was present to bury his father when he passed.
- c. Jesus gave no room for excuses – if any desire took precedence over the Kingdom of God, it undermines one's allegiance to Christ.
- d. You cannot put your hand to the plow and look back.

C. The Disciple's Call

Mark 8:31-38 ³¹ And He began to teach them that the Son of Man must **suffer** many things, and be **rejected** by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again. ³² He spoke this word openly. Then Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him. ³³ But when He had turned around and looked at His disciples, He rebuked Peter, saying, "Get behind Me, Satan! For you are not mindful of the things of God, but the things of men."

³⁴ When He had called the people to Himself, with His disciples also, He said to them, "Whoever desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me." ³⁵ For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake and the gospel's will save it. ³⁶ For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? ³⁷ Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul? ³⁸ For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him the Son of Man also will be ashamed when He comes in the glory of His Father with the holy angels."

1. **The Disciple's Call:** "Deny Yourself; Take Up Your Cross; And Follow Me." – JC
2. When Jesus called His disciples, it was a call to a movement – a movement that would eventually and ultimately transform them to become like Him [**Christ-ians**].

D. Disciple: from Greek **mathētēs** [*math-ay-tes*] which means:

- A student under a master. A committed learner.
 - A Christian disciple is a disciplined student under the tutelage of a master.
 - One who has submitted himself to the master – not just his mind or intellect to academic training, but his entire life.
1. Christianity is as much a **journey** as it is a **status**.
 2. When people are introduced to Christianity, they attain a status through conversion, but are most often than not, left to fend for themselves.
 3. Many experience stagnation in their growth, and many drop out of the race because of dissatisfaction.
 4. They were not equipped with the necessary tools for the journey.
 5. If one does not intend to walk the road, salvation is not complete.
 6. We cannot just confer status unto people without teaching them about walking the road. [**Salvation is in Three Tenses**]

E. Peter's Revelation

Matthew 16:16-17 [cf. Mark 8:27-30]

Simon Peter answered and said, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." ¹⁷ Jesus answered and said to him, "Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father who is in heaven.

1. Peter gets the revelation about who Jesus is – the Christ. And then Jesus begins to tell them about what is going to happen to the Christ.
2. That He must suffer many things at the hands of the chief priests/elders and then be rejected.
3. Jesus is now giving them the full menu of what it means to be His follower.
4. This offends Peter so much that he begins to rebuke Jesus: *"Jesus, please don't say that; the Messiah can't be rejected. We believe and we know that you are the Messiah. Maybe I can deal with the suffering part, but not the rejection."*
5. As soon Jesus begins to talk about His suffering and rejection, Peter becomes offended.
6. It wasn't so much the suffering but the rejection that made Peter become offended.

F. Christian Suffering & Rejection

1. Many Christians do accept the element of suffering knowing that produces endurance, character, and ultimately hope.

"So suffering is at the very heart of the Christian faith. It is not only the way Christ became like and redeemed us, but it is one of the main ways we become like him and experience his redemption. And that means that our suffering, despite its painfulness, is also filled with purpose and usefulness."

[Timothy Keller, *Walking with God through Pain and Suffering*]

Romans 5:1-5 [ESV] *Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. ² Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God. ³ Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, ⁴ and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, ⁵ and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.*

2. So, the idea of Christian suffering is at home with many who believe in Jesus.
3. Many have suffered a great deal for believing in Jesus – some have lost family members, friends, money, business deals, simply because their faith in JC.
4. Many have lost their dream jobs simply because they were unwilling to compromise their Christian values.
5. Many are willing to withstand and endure suffering– if the suffering is for a worthy cause.

*“Suffering is **unbearable** if you aren’t certain that God is for you and with you.” TK*
Suffering is bearable if you’re certain that God is for you and is with you.

6. God didn’t promise a suffering-free experience as a disciple, but He did promise that He will never leave.
7. He didn’t say the road would be easy, but He assured us of safe arrival.
8. *“I have called you by name”* God’s level of intimacy with His chosen.

Isaiah 43:1-2 [NLT] *But now, O Jacob, listen to the LORD who created you. O Israel, the one who formed you says, “Do not be afraid, for I have ransomed you. I have called you by name; you are mine. ² When you go through deep waters, I will be with you. When you go through rivers of difficulty, you will not drown. When you walk through the fire of oppression, you will not be burned up; the flames will not consume you.*

Discussion Questions:

1. What does the call to discipleship entail?
2. What is the purpose of Christian suffering?

Prayer: *Pray for one another and for anyone going through a difficult season.*

Session 7: Following Jesus – The Life Part 2

A. What is the Purpose of Suffering?

1. Suffering is purposeful as a Christian. It is wasteful to suffer as an evil-doer.

“Jesus took away the only kind of suffering that can really destroy you: that is being cast away from God. He took that so that now all suffering that comes into your life will only make you great.” **Tim Keller**

“A lump of coal under pressure becomes a diamond. And the suffering of a person in Christ only turns you into somebody gorgeous.” **Tim Keller**

2. Christian suffering does not offer merely a consolation but a restoration —
3. Not just of the life we had but of the life we always wanted but never had.

B. Categories of Suffering

1. **Correction – To Chastise and Correct:** Some suffering is allowed in order to chastise and correct a person for wrongful patterns of life (as in the case of Jonah imperiled by the storm).
2. **Protection – To Prevent Future Wrongs:** Some suffering is given not to correct past wrongs but to **prevent future** ones (Joseph sold into slavery).
3. **Love – To Love God Deeply:** Some suffering may seem purposeless other than to lead a person to love God more passionately and so discover the ultimate joy.

2 Corinthians 1:3-4 [ESV] ³ *Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort,* ⁴ *who comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God.*

4. **God’s Trust:** You become a trophy of God’s grace. [the Story of Job]
5. **You Are Able to Help/Disciple Others** – through their sufferings and afflictions.

C. Peter’s Denial – Rooted in Rejection

Why did Peter deny Jesus? Was it out of cowardice? Was it out of fear? Or was it out of lack of conviction? I think it’s none of these. [Explain]

1. Peter denied Jesus out of disappointment [**disillusionment**, letdown, regret, frustration, etc.].
2. He believed Jesus was the Messiah, and therefore, hoped that when all else failed, He would invoke His Messianic prowess to overcome the day.
3. He was going to let the world know Who He really was. You know, you feel bold if you know the one you’re following has what it takes to be victorious. [***an army of sheep led by a lion and an army of lions led by sheep***].

4. But when Jesus refused to fight and willingly gave Himself up, something died in him in the moment. "Why should I fight or die for someone who refuses to fight for Himself even though He's capable?"
5. is hope was dashed! Humanly speaking, he wasn't even sure about Jesus being the Messiah.
6. Many believers are faced with Peter's dilemma – if He is the Messiah and has the capacity to fight for me, why didn't He?

Why did....

7. Why did He allow my parents to divorce after all the prayers/weeping?
8. Why did that loved-one die after all the prayers and supplications?
9. Why haven't I still met Mr. or Mrs. Right after all the prayers/fasting/waiting?
10. Why am I still behind in bills? Why is He not doing anything?
11. Why did God not protect me from that abuse?

D. Rejection – The Deal Breaker

The deal breaker for Peter was the rejection. Peter thought to himself, at least, with suffering I know it's for a noble cause. But to be completely rejected as the Messiah is unbearable.

1. You will ultimately be recognized and declared the Messiah.
2. But Jesus said: *I'm going to **suffer** and be **rejected as the Messiah**.*
3. People are more offended by rejection than they are by suffering.
4. They're willing to endure suffering if the end goal is noble.
5. But to be told you're going to suffer and then loose on top of that in human terms, it is quite a hard pill to swallow.
6. This is the impasse Peter reached when Jesu told them He was going to suffer and then be rejected as the Messiah on top of it.
7. **Peter didn't believe one could still win if he didn't fight for their right.**
8. *He couldn't reconcile how one could still be victorious when defeat seems apparent.*

E. What is Rejection?

Rejection: from Greek [Strong 593] *apōdōkimazō* [ap-od-ok-ee-mad'-zo] meaning

- To disapprove; by implication is to repudiate.
- To feel dismissed
- Negative response; Denial.

*In the field of mental health care, rejection most frequently refers to the **feelings of shame, sadness, etc.***

1. It is the **grief** people feel when they are not accepted by others.
2. Rejection is a deeply rooted emotion in who you are.
3. It distorts your perception about yourself, about God, and about people.

4. *It is fueled by an orphaned spirit – that drives away love.*
5. *Finds it rather difficult to believe in genuine and therefore fails to attach.*

F. Rejection is an Emotional Sentiment:

1. It is a deep-seated emotion, and brain science has demonstrated that the experience of rejection is similar to physical pain.
2. The feeling is real, but it cannot be trusted. Feelings are blind -
3. If you try to live by your feelings you will die, according to one psychologist.
4. Emotional maturity is not neglecting the feeling, but learning to bring the feelings, desires, and emotions under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

But this is impossible if the **will** or **self** is not submitted to the Holy Spirit.

G. That's What Jesus came to Deal With: The "WILL" or "SELF"

Mark 8:34-35 ³⁴ *When He had called the people to Himself, with His disciples also, He said to them, "Whoever desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me."* ³⁵ *For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake and the gospel's will save it.*

1. Jesus is asking them, are you willing to lose it all for the sake of following Me?
2. Many of us believe that Jesus Christ came to save us from **sin, death**, and from **hell fire** – that's all true.
3. But more importantly, He came to save us from **ourselves**.
4. The **"self"** or the **"will"** is the biggest problem of humanity....and unless we're willing to give up our "will" or the "self," we're not ready to heed the call to discipleship.
5. The biggest problem in my life/your life is the self.
6. The biggest problem in my life is ME [The **"I"** or **"Me"** factor].
7. Until we're willing to let go of the **self**, we're not ready to become a disciple.
8. Jesus had to win the battle against the **self/will** in the Garden before defeating the devil on the cross.

Discussion Questions:

1. Discuss why rejection was such a deal breaker for Peter?
2. Have you had to deal with rejection before in your life? How did you handle or overcome it?

Prayer: *Pray for one another and for anyone dealing with rejection.*

Session 8: Following Jesus – The Life Part 3

A. Dealing with the “Self”

“When Christ calls a man, He bids him to come and die. It may be a death like that of the first disciples who had to leave home and work to follow Him, or it may be a death like Luther’s, who had to leave the monastery and go out into the world. But it is the same death every time—death in Jesus Christ, the death of the old man at His call.” – Dietrich Bonhoeffer

1. Jesus’ model of discipleship confronts the self-centeredness, egocentric, self-preservative nature of the humanity.
2. He had to deal with that for Himself in the Garden of Gethsemane: *“Not My will but Yours be done!”* (**Matthew 26:39**).
3. He had to deal with His own **will** first in Gethsemane; before He could defeat the devil on the Cross.
4. *The crucifixion took place in Gethsemane before it manifested on the cross.*
5. As long as the self is on the throne, it will be difficult to defeat the devil on the cross.

Luke 22:44 *And being in agony, He prayed more earnestly. Then His sweat became like great drops of blood falling down to the ground.*

6. Though very rare, the phenomenon of **hematidrosis** sweating blood, is well documented.
7. Under great emotional stress, tiny capillaries in the sweat glands can break, thus mixing blood with sweat.
8. When you see this call in light of eternity, it changes everything. There is no loss! The ultimate is encountering God’s fullness of joy. We can’t have the crown without the cross, neither can we have the gain without the pain.

Hebrews 12:1-2 *Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, ² looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who **for the joy that was set before him** endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.*

The Bible calls Him a *Man of sorrows...acquainted with grief* (**Isaiah 53**:

Why this description?

9. He is selfless and He feels the pains of others.
10. When you are not all absorbed in yourself, you can feel the sorrow, sadness, and the pain of the people/world around you.
11. The **joy** of the Lord happens inside the sorrow... joy is fulfilled in the sorrow.
12. It doesn’t come after the sorrow. It doesn’t come after the uncontrollable weeping.
13. The weeping drives you into the joy, it enhances the joy, and then the joy enables you to actually feel your grief without it sinking you.
14. In other words, you are finally emotionally healthy.

B. Faithful Martyrs

1. People in History who understood the mystery of joy even in sorrow, were willing to pay the ultimate price for their faith.
2. These were men and women who were willing to stand for their faith even in the face death.
3. They had a revelation of who Jesus was, and came to the recognition that:

- *“The cross is not the terrible end to an otherwise god-fearing and happy life, but it meets us at the beginning of our communion with Christ.”*

Dietrich Bonhoeffer

1. Their transformation was perfected in the exemplary commitment to emulate and demonstrate their communion with Christ even in His death.
2. So, whenever a martyr is mentioned in Scripture, he or she is associated with the Savior – **My faithful martyr!** [Acts 7:54-60; 22:20; Rev. 17:6]
3. Here’s the beautiful truth: Christ takes special ownership of His Martyrs.
4. They understood what true discipleship entails: *Making the Gospel story your own.*

C. Antipas: A.D. 92

Revelation 2:13 *“I know your works, and where you dwell, where Satan’s throne is. And you hold fast to My name, and did not deny My faith even in the days in which **Antipas** was **My faithful martyr**, who was killed among you, where Satan dwells.*

D. Polycarp – Bishop of Smyrna:

“Eighty and six years I have served Him, and He has done me no wrong. How can I blaspheme my King and Savior?” – Polycarp

1. Tradition holds that he was a disciple of the Apostle John – he was part of the generation of church leaders who succeeded the apostles.
2. The apparent defeat of his death becomes a triumphant witness to the resurrection.
3. His life and death became a trophy of God’s grace to many generations after.

E. Perpetua: Vibia Perpetua of Carthage becomes all the more remarkable.

1. Perpetua was a young woman of aristocratic lineage, born into the noble family. She was a newlywed with an infant son at the breast when at 21 she was imprisoned in a Roman dungeon for being a Christian.
2. There, she proved that not even the love of a mother for her son can take priority over her love for Christ.
3. Renouncing her family and even her baby, Perpetua went to her death as an heroic martyr. Her narrative of sacrifice and passion in the year AD 203 has inspired countless generations of believers.

F. Dietrich Bonhoeffer: *"The Cost of Discipleship."*

1. In the wake of the Nazi revolution, pastors in Germany were required to pledge allegiance to Hitler as a means of self-preservation.
2. The mandate seemed harmless until the Hitler's true colors came to light.
3. Founded *"The Confessing Church"* – he formed a coalition of churches with Karl Barth.
4. This group stood on their ground and confessed only Jesus Christ as Lord.
5. Only 800 out of 14,000 pastors were bold enough to pledge allegiance to Christ regardless of the consequence. The rest chickened out of self-preservation and in some form, took the "mark of the beast."
6. On this side of history, he's looked at as noble/hero, but in his day, it was very unpopular what they did.
7. They were looked on as being over-zealous and unwise.

"If pledging allegiance to Jesus at all cost is deemed unwise, then count be as the greatest fool." **Dietrich Bonhoeffer**

8. Every generation will have the opportunity to choose between Jesus and the spirit of anti-Christ.
9. We are **temporary residents on earth**, and we cannot become so attached that we loose focus of who we are and of our destiny.
10. We cannot sell our souls to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of this temporal residency.

Some people would fear losing favor or their life by declaring their faith in Jesus Christ, but they are willing to risk losing their eternal life.

G. What Does it Mean to be a Christian – A Disciple?

- *True discipleship is following Jesus Christ in such a way that the Gospel story becomes your own story.*

*"In our culture of convenience, slogans, and simplification, we've allowed the greatest story ever told to become impotent, little more than a slick telemarketer's pitch...It was convincing; people were happy to sign up for the free giveaway – **a final destination in heaven** – but hardly taking time to read the fine print: **this may cost you everything.**" Gabe Lyons [Author of "Good faith"]*

Discussion Questions:

1. What are some of the practical ways to deal with the 'self'?
2. How do the stories of these faithful martyrs inspire your commitment to the Lord?

Prayer: *Pray for one another to be strengthened by the Lord in your commitment.*

Session 9: Following Jesus – A Community of Disciples Part 1

A. Introduction

Community is the relational aspect of discipleship. Family is the basis for community and foundational to human life. To be a disciple is to be a part of the family.

1. God believes in family. He began with family; and His redemptive plan is family-focused.
2. Our Father in heaven works together with His Son and His Holy Spirit.
3. There is **unity in the diversity of the Godhead**.
4. You can say that God's identity is in family (Father, Son, Holy Spirit).
5. Everything about discipleship and the Kingdom is **relational**.
6. *We love one another, care for one another, correct one another, help one another, and learn from one another, etc.*
7. God is very interested in the local church community, because the church is a community of disciples.

B. The Local Church Community – Definition

1. **Community** is a group of people living in the same place or having a particular characteristic in common.
2. *It is a feeling of fellowship with others, as a result of sharing common attitudes, interests, and goals. [Oxford dictionary]*
3. **Local Church:** *"A local church is a group of Christians who regularly gather in Christ's name to officially affirm and oversee one another's membership in Jesus Christ and His Kingdom through gospel preaching and gospel ordinances."* – Jonathan Leeman

C. The Essence of Community

1. It is God's design that we would be a local church, not that we would go to one – that's different from belonging.
2. To just go to church is different from belonging to one.
3. In community, the Christian is open to the counsel of others.
4. The tangible/manifest presence of God is most often received in the communion of the saints.
5. Your guarantee to remain the faith is connected to your involvement in the church community.
6. Hebrews 10:23-25 is a hallmark Scripture of the "one another's" in the New Testament.

Hebrews 10:23-25 [NLT] ²³ *Let us hold tightly without wavering to the hope we affirm, for God can be trusted to keep his promise.* ²⁴ *Let us think of ways to motivate one another to acts of love and good works.* ²⁵ *And let us not neglect our meeting*

together, as some people do, but encourage one another, especially now that the day of his return is drawing near.

“Questions can make hermits out of us, driving us into hiding. Yet the cave has no answers. Christ distributes courage through community; He dissipates doubts through fellowship....He never deposits all knowledge in one person but distributes pieces of the jigsaw puzzle to many. When you interlock your understanding with mine, and we share our discoveries, ...when we mix, mingle, confess, and pray, Christ speaks.” - Max Lucado

D. A Community of Disciples

Jesus' call on our lives is for us to become devoted to the body of Christ – the Church.

1. As disciples, we have been **called into a Community**.
2. Into **Deeper Meaningful Relationships**. [rich friendships/relationships].
3. He calls us into a '**Communion of Saints**.' Individuals exist for communities.
4. ***If you know everyone, you don't know anyone.***
5. Jesus exemplified that in His circle of friends: 1, 3, 12, 70, 120, 500, multitude.
6. God never works with individuals in isolation, but always with people in community. Thus, if God ever deals with you as an individual, it is for the sake of the community.
7. God has called you to Himself; and in calling you to Himself, He has called you to others – both to be a blessing and to receive the blessing of others.
8. Meaningful relationships do not happen by chance. They require intentionality.

E. The Trinity – Genesis 1:26 *“Let Us make man in our image.”*

The Creation account is designed to demonstrate God's desire for relationships.

1. In the complexity of the Trinity, there is both an *“I”* and *“Us”* in the relationship even within the Godhead.
2. The Trinity demonstrates that relationships are not created by sheer choice but are built into the very essence of human nature.
3. Both individuality and community/relationship exist within the Godhead.
4. The Trinity demonstrates the dignity and uniqueness of individual persons against collectivism.
 - a. ***Collectivism*** is the practice or principle of giving a group priority over each individual in it [political theory associated with communism]
 - b. ***Collectivism*** seeks to destroy individual identity and uniqueness.

F. The Trinity – A Model for Social Life

1. Humans were created to reproduce on earth the mystery of mutual love that God the Trinity lives out in heaven.
2. The **CHURCH** as a whole is an icon of God the Trinity, reproducing on earth the mystery of unity in diversity.

3. ***Individuals cannot fully develop their true nature or identity unless they participate in social relationships, such as friendships, marriage, family, and the church.***
4. In fact, certain virtues necessary for both spiritual and emotional maturity – such as faithfulness and self-sacrificing love, can only be practiced in relationships.
5. As we learn to practice this unity-in-diversity within the church, we can bring that same balance to all our social relationships – families, schools, workplaces, and neighborhoods.

G. The Social Dimension of Faith

1. Our faith must have a social dimension – human relationships. Otherwise, it yields no value.
2. Your ability to show love is contingent on having someone to love.
3. Our need for face-to-face time with others is designed into our being and cannot be substituted with any other thing, including visual screens.
4. Our brains can distinguish between a real face and face on the screen even when we are infants.
5. Our neurological circuits do not react to screens the same way they do to live faces.

Discussion Questions:

1. Why is community important to our discipleship journey?
2. What is the difference between collectivism and true Biblical community?
3. How would you explain the difference between going to, and belonging to a local church?

Prayer: *Pray for one another as we seek to grow in community.*

Session 10: Following Jesus – A Community of Disciples Part 2

A. Character Formation: Ultimate Goal of Discipleship

1. Character formation is the ultimate goal of discipleship.
2. *The goal of discipleship, when it fulfills its purpose, is to bring people to maturity – both spiritual and emotional.*
3. *When you interlock your understanding with mine, and we share our discoveries, ...when we mix, mingle, confess, and pray, Christ speaks.” – Max Lucado*
4. When a person’s character is fully developed, it manifests itself in the way he or she relates with others.
5. Character formation is a dimension of relationship, and this is inextricably linked with building joy.

B. What is Character?

Defn. Character is the mental and moral qualities distinctive to an individual.

1. Our character is how we spontaneously respond to our surroundings.
2. Being a disciple of Jesus means reacting to the world as He would react.
3. When our identity is not well developed, our personality will change in different settings.
4. Christian discipleship is the ***“way to become the kind of person who does, easily and routinely, what Jesus said – does it without having to think much about it.”*** Dallas Willard
5. But how do we do this if this happens faster than conscious thought?
6. Ignoring the relational development of the RB produces Christians who believe in God’s love but have difficulty experiencing it in daily life, especially during distress.

C. Right Brain Versus Left Brain Dominance Theory

This is a theory of Cognitive Psychology¹ – a very popular idea that suggests one can unleash his/her hidden ***creativity*** of Right Brain or the ***deductive logic*** of the Left-Brain dominance.

1. According to the RB-LB dominance theory, the right side of the brain is best at expressive and creative tasks. So, it is described as being:
 - a. **RB: *Intuitive, Thoughtful, and Subjective*** [*creative, artistic, emotional, non-verbal, musical imaginative*].
2. The left side of the brain is adept at certain tasks – math, science, accounting, etc. It is generally described as being:
 - a. **LB: *Logical, Analytical, and Orderly*** [*verbal, factual, sequential, linear, critical thinking, reasoning*]

¹ Cognitive Psychology has to do with how we think and process the world around us.

3. The RB is referred to as the fast track and the LB as the slow track:

RB: Fast Track	LB: Slow Track
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Pre-conscious Thought</i> • <i>Relational Attachments</i> • <i>Individual Identity</i> • <i>Group Identity</i> • <i>Emotional Attunement to Others</i> • <i>Assessment of Surroundings</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Conscious Thought</i> • <i>Critical Analysis</i> • <i>Speech</i> • <i>Problem solving</i> • <i>Logical Thinking</i> • <i>Orderliness</i>

4. Like many popular psychology myths, this one grew out of observations of the human brain and became dramatically distorted and exaggerated.
5. Later research has shown that the brain is not nearly as dichotomous as was once thought. For e.g., research has revealed that abilities in subjects such as math are strongest when both halves of the brain work together.
6. Today, neuroscientists know that the two sides of the brain collaborate to perform a broad variety of tasks and that the two hemispheres communicate through the corpus callosum.
7. Both sides of the brain are essentially equal in their activity on average.
8. For example, in language, if the LB picks out the syntax of the phrase, the RB is more sensitive to the emotional features of language.

D. Right Brain

1. The RB governs a whole range of relational life: our ability to show love, show empathy, and our emotional reactions to the environment,
2. This means that loving attachments, joy, emotional development, identity, etc. are all located in the RB.
3. From a theological point of view, God put a lot of power in the responsibilities dominant in the right side of our brains.
4. These functions must be important to Him and crucial to our ability to grow as disciples of Jesus.
5. It manages our strongest relational/emotional connections – both to God and man.
6. It also manages character formation. Thus, if we are going to grow and transform our character into that of Jesus Christ's, we must involve activities that stimulate and develop the right brain – **“Connect Groups.”**
7. Character formation develops out of our community.
8. Our loving attachments and the values of our community drive our character.

E. To Be With Jesus

Mark 3:13-15 ¹³And He went up on the mountain and called to Him those He Himself wanted. And they came to Him. ¹⁴Then He appointed twelve, that they might be with

Him and that He might send them out to preach, ¹⁵ and to have power to heal sicknesses and to cast out demons.

1. Jesus' first and foremost call to His disciples was for them to be with Him.
2. Spending time and bonding with His disciples was crucial to their success as true witnesses.
3. This kind of bonding would lead to a transformation of their character.
4. However, the bonding cannot happen without a joyful relationship with them just as Jesus had with His Father. This is known as attachment love.
5. In fact, He prayed for the **joyful disposition** of His followers in His priestly prayer.

John 17:13 [GNT] ¹³ And now I am coming to you, and I say these things in the world so that they might have my **joy** in their hearts in all **its fullness**.

G. Joy and Identity/Community

Based on the observation of the lateralized configuration of the brain hemispheres, the RB is designated the fast-processor, and the LB as the slow processor.

1. Our right brain scans our surroundings, looking for people who we know are happy to be with us.
2. God designed our brains to run on joy like a car runs on fuel.
3. Our brains desire joy more than anything. The Bible is replete with and joy our identity.
4. ***"Our identity [as Christians] is built and formed by joy-bonded relationships."***
 - a. *God's face is connected with joy in the Bible.*
 - b. *The Jewish-commanded prayer of blessing is joy-focused:*

"Entertainment is the devil's substitute for joy. The more joy you have in the Lord the less entertainment you need." **Leonard Ravenhill**

Discussion Questions:

3. *How does joy affect the development of our character?*
4. According to Dallas Willard, Christian discipleship is the ***"way to become the kind of person who does, easily and routinely, what Jesus said – does it without having to think much about it."*** Discuss this.

Prayer: *Pray for one another that the Holy Spirit will help us emulate the character of Jesus Christ rightly.*

Session 11: Following Jesus – A Community of Disciples Part 3

A. Three Truths About Joy

1. **Joy Is Relational – In Its Essence.** Brain science reveals that this joy sensation is crucial for emotional and relational development. Joy is not necessarily an emotion. It is more than mere emotion.

“We might refer to it as supra-emotion, because it goes above emotion and combines with it.” **Jim Wilder**

2. **Joy is Expressible** (facially): Joy is primarily transmitted through the face (especially eyes), and secondarily through voice.
 - a. Joy is God’s face shining on us and we in turn, reflecting that shine on others.
 - b. The face is key when it comes to joy. God designed our brains to seek joy through eyes and facial expressions, through being with people who are glad to be with us.
3. **Joy is Important: (to God and to us):** Jesus expresses how He loves His disciples with the same love Father has for Him, and relates that joy.

John 15:11 *“These things I have spoken to you, that My joy may remain in you, and that your joy may be full.”*

Psalm 51:12 *Restore to me the joy of Your salvation, and uphold me by Your generous Spirit.*

- a. David understood the Importance of joy! And therefore, asked the Lord to restore to him the joy of His salvation.
- b. Joy does not replace unpleasant emotions such as anger, despair, shame; instead, it combines with our emotions to keep us relationally connected even in distress.
- c. We’ve been taught how to study the Bible, pray, and share our faith, but one thing that was not taught is the importance of joy and relational attachments.
- d. Joy is not something we teach – it is something we show or share together!
- e. The importance of joy to the brain highlights the fact that we are able to endure suffering in community or together as a group.
- f. Thus, joy helps us to regulate our emotions and endure suffering.

Romans 12:15 *“Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep.”*

Hebrews 12:2 *Looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.*

B. Sources of Joy: *How we get Filled with Joy through:*

1. **Healthy Relationships** – Spiritual, family, friendships, marital, etc.
2. **Community** – Ability to express yourself in a healthy way without feeling judged.
3. **Relational Exercise** – Relational exercises help people to love and connect with each other. These include:
 - a. *Small Group Gathering*
 - b. *Coffee/Tea Chats*
 - c. *Meal Share/M Meal Swap*
 - d. *Visiting with Each Other*
 - e. *Playing games together*
 - f. *Taking walks together*

C. Joy Substitutes (Addictions)

1. These can appear to be normal things on the surface – such as food, social media, shopping, etc.
2. The more obvious ones (pseudo-joys) are alcohol, drugs, sugar, pornography, etc.

D. Joy Leaks

1. **Emotional Deficit** – Lack of development of expressing the negative emotions of sadness, anger, fear, shame, despair, etc.
2. **Unresolved trauma** – People with emotional wounds seem particularly hampered in growing and sustaining loving, joyful, relationships.
3. **Visual screens** – Entertainments:
 - a. Our need for face-to-face time is designed into our flesh and cannot be substituted with a screen.
 - b. Our brains can distinguish between a real face and face on a screen even when we are infants.

“Entertainment is the devil's substitute for joy. The more joy you have in the Lord the less entertainment you need.” **Leonard Ravenhill**

E. “Right Believing versus Being Loving”

The proliferation of denominational splits can be attributed to an overreliance of espousing right beliefs and neglecting loving in maturity. People in church enjoy being right at the expense of being loving.

1. The root of this approach stems from the philosophical developments from the Enlightenment.²

² European intellectual movement of the late 17th and 18th centuries emphasizing reason and individualism rather than tradition. It was heavily influenced by 17th-century philosophers such as Descartes, Locke, and

2. It altered the way we looked at ourselves as humans. The mind was elevated to be the most important part of our humanity.
3. This emphasis on thinking and reasoning created an environment where knowledge and science flourished, with many benefits for humanity.
4. However, many Christians began to see themselves as mostly a mind: “brain-on-a-stick” [as James K.A. Smith puts it].
5. Christianity followed the Enlightenment culture and slowly became focused on correct thinking.
6. The importance of teaching people to love by creating loving communities was neglected.
7. In this new world, it became more important to be right than [to be] loving.
8. When we value being right over being loving, it kills joy.
9. The first step for increasing joy is establishing effective gratitude practices.

F. The Early Church Model

The early church understood the need and essence of training the increasing believers and bringing them into fellowship with the other believers.

Acts 2:42-47 ⁴² All the believers devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching, and to fellowship, and to sharing in meals (including the Lord's Supper), and to prayer. ⁴³ A deep sense of awe came over them all, and the apostles performed many miraculous signs and wonders. ⁴⁴ And all the believers met together in one place and shared everything they had. ⁴⁵ They sold their property and possessions and shared the money with those in need. ⁴⁶ They worshiped together at the Temple each day, met in homes for the Lord's Supper, and shared their meals with great joy and generosity— ⁴⁷ all the while praising God and enjoying the goodwill of all the people. And each day the Lord added to their fellowship those who were being saved.

G. The Four-Step Process:

1. **The Apostles' Doctrine:**
 - a. The new believers were to be trained in the apostles' doctrine.
 - b. Uniformity of belief concerning the person of Jesus Christ – based on eyewitness testimony of His followers. That was essential.
2. **Fellowship:**
 - a. The new believers were to be trained in the fellowship of the church.
 - b. The Greek word translated “fellowship” means sharing in the lives of other believers.
3. **Breaking of Bread:**
 - a. The new believers were to be trained in the breaking of bread, probably a reference to the Lord's Supper (1 Cor. 11:23, 24).

Newton, and its prominent exponents include Kant, Goethe, Voltaire, Rousseau, and Adam Smith [**Source:** *Oxford Dictionary*]

- b. Some believe this is a broader reference to the “love feast,” a meal of fellowship in the early church.

4. Corporate Prayers:

- a. The new believers were to be trained in the discipline of prayer.
- b. Corporate prayers were viewed as an essential part of the spiritual growth of the church.
- c. Signs and wonders were given by the Lord to the apostles to validate their divinely ordained position and to verify the truthfulness of their witnesses in the establishment of the early church (Hebrews 2:3, 4).
- d. The disposal and distribution of possessions in the early church was directed among all, as any had need.
- e. When a physical or spiritual need became known in the church, action was to address it (see also **1 John 3:17-19**).
- f. The NT believers demonstrated their love for one another by giving self-sacrificially.

Discussion Questions:

- 1. Discuss/deliberate on the sources of joy.
- 2. Discuss the Four-Step process of the early church model.

Prayer: *Pray that God would help us emulate the early church model.*

Session 12: Following Jesus – A Community of Disciples Part 3

A. Temple for the Lord

1 Peter 2:4-5 [NLT]

You are coming to Christ, who is the living cornerstone of God's temple. He was rejected by people, but he was chosen by God for great honor. ⁵ And you are living stones that God is building into his spiritual temple. What's more, you are his holy priests. Through the mediation of Jesus Christ, you offer spiritual sacrifices that please God.

1. Jesus is the superior living stone upon which God's Temple is built.
2. We are part of God's great spiritual building project.
3. Each individual stone is uniquely shaped and designed, and so are you.
4. But they are all put together by the mortar of grace to build a spiritual house.
5. Similarly, in spite of our individual unique identities, God is building us together into a spiritual house.
6. Together, we are one body in Christ.

Ephesians 2:16-19

¹⁶ Together as one body, Christ reconciled both groups to God by means of his death on the cross, and our hostility toward each other was put to death. ¹⁷ He brought this Good News of peace to you Gentiles who were far away from him, and peace to the Jews who were near. ¹⁸ Now all of us can come to the Father through the same Holy Spirit because of what Christ has done for us. ¹⁹ So now you Gentiles are no longer strangers and foreigners. You are citizens along with all of God's holy people. You are members of God's family.

B. Emotional Maturity

1. This is a dimension of your character. An emotionally mature person is one with a consistent character.
2. There are many Christians who are spiritually grown but are not emotionally mature.
3. Spiritual growth has to do with having knowledge of Scripture, having spiritual gifts, and being able to use those gifts.
4. Emotional maturity has to do with knowing how to deal with your feelings, desires, and emotions.
5. Feelings are blind – so if you try to live by your feelings, you will die.
6. Desires are focused on determinate objects – desires are usually conflictual.
7. They don't pay attention to each other. It fails to address what is right. It simply says I want this!
8. In our culture, one of the things we are most apt to miss is the difference between "desire" and "will."
9. The will is the arbitrator of desires. It is the will that gives you choice when desire rages.

10. Desire doesn't care about choice. For instance, children are dominated by desire – a characteristic of immaturity.
11. Desire alone, divorced from the will, ruins peoples' lives time after time.
12. Emotions – love, hate, shame, are deeply rooted in who you are – in your identity and in your character.
13. These are conflictual, so if you live by them, you'll ruin your life.
14. Emotional maturity refers primarily to having our feelings, desires, and emotions under the guidance and control of what the 'will' that is submitted to God!
15. The 'will' deliberates about what is right, and then speaks to our natural tendencies to say no to what is wrong.
16. Living for what is right is what characterizes the emotionally mature person.
17. Sometimes, this is called "self-control," one of the characteristics of the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23).

C. Attachment Love

The only kind of love that helps the brain learn better character is attachment love. **"hesed" / "chesed"** = "devoted", "faithful", and "unchanging love."

1. This can also be referred to as the "regeneration love."
2. In regeneration, we are made new creations in Christ (2 Cor. 5:17).

2 Corinthians 5:17

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.

3. Our salvation is a new attachment with God that forms and transforms our identities.
4. Attachment with God and with others is what helps to shape our character.
5. An emotionally maturity person does not easily yield to the demands of his/her feelings, desires, and emotions.
6. A transformed believer is one that reaches out and embraces and furthers all that is right in spite of the cost!
7. Attachment love is developed by practicing the presence of Jesus and by spending time with others.
8. God's face is what gives the believer joy. Whenever we encounter God's presence, His face is what we see first.
9. His face is what brings reassurance to the followers of Christ that His presence is with us.
10. When His face shines upon us, it brings joy to our hearts and we're drawn closer to Him.
11. Such intimacy with Him helps to develop our character.
12. He requested Aaron to bless the Israelites by putting His name upon them through the release of His face over them (IDENTITY)!

Numbers 6:22-27

²² And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying: ²³ “Speak to Aaron and his sons, saying, “This is the way you shall bless the children of Israel. Say to them:

*²⁴ “The LORD bless you and keep you; ²⁵ The LORD make His **face shine upon you** and be gracious to you; ²⁶ The LORD lift up His **countenance upon you**, and give you peace.”*

²⁷ “So they shall put My name on the children of Israel, and I will bless them.”

Psalm 16:11 *“You will show me the path of life; In Your presence is fullness. [abundance] of joy; At Your right hand are pleasures forevermore.*

Isaiah 12:3 *Therefore, with joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation. [NLT] With joy you will drink deeply from the fountain of salvation!*

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Discuss the building materials for God’s spiritual Temple.
2. What practical steps can you take to increase the opportunity for deep/deeper relationships with one another?

Prayer: *Pray for one another to grow in attachment (intimacy) with the Lord and with other believers.*

APPENDIX I

A. Creation–Fall–Redemption Grid

The Creation–Fall–Redemption grid provides a fundamental biblical worldview that functions as a diagnostic tool in our understanding of our world and of the condition of humanity.

B. Creation

In the beginning God created....

1. God created man in His likeness and image (Genesis 1:26)
2. God gave man dominion and rulership over the earth (Genesis 1:26)
3. He blessed man and gave provision (Genesis 1:28)
4. There was fellowship and intimacy in the Garden. God walked with man (Genesis 3:8)

C. The Fall

All of this was lost in the act of Adam's disobedience: (Genesis 3)

1. Fellowship and intimacy were cut off.
2. The source of life was broken – death was released.
3. Satan now took the dominion of man and became the ruler of this world, the god of this world – thus, darkness spread (Matt 4- Satan offered the kingdoms of the world to Jesus to worship him, 2 Cor. 4:4 calls Satan the god of this age)

D. Redemption: Why did Jesus come?

It is God's desire to:

1. Restore intimacy and fellowship between God and man.
 - a. *To seek and save that which was lost* (Luke 19:10)
2. To Ransom and Redeem man from the dominion of sin and bring them out from under the power of the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of light (Colossians 1:13-14)
3. To destroy the works of the enemy (1 John 3:8); including:
 - a. Sickness, sin, poverty (lack), death, every curse, etc.
 - b. John 10 says that the devil comes to steal, kill, and destroy, but I have come to give abundant life.
4. Restore us back into the kingdom with full rights as sons/daughters (Rom 8:15, gal 3:26,4:7)
5. We can see this manifested in the life of Jesus as he expressed the heart and will of the Father to humanity.

By the power of His resurrection, Jesus broke the power and dominion of sin, death and the enemy and released life, power/authority and fellowship back to us.

E. Who is Jesus?

Most people have heard of Jesus Christ and most people have an opinion of Him. When the question of “who is Jesus” is posed, you’ll likely get a variety of answers and reactions.

Was He simply a Jewish carpenter turned preacher? Was a false teacher who deceived the people? Was He a lunatic with a death wish? Was He one among many or was He one of a kind? At the end of the day, everyone must answer the question, “who is Jesus?”

C. S. Lewis popularized the argument that Jesus was either a liar or a lunatic or the Lord.

“I am trying here to prevent anyone saying the really foolish thing that people often say about Him: I’m ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don’t accept his claim to be God. That is the one thing we must not say. A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic — on the level with the man who says he is a poached egg — or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God, or else a madman or something worse. You can shut him up for a fool, you can spit at him and kill him as a demon or you can fall at his feet and call him Lord and God, but let us not come with any patronizing nonsense about his being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to.” — C.S. Lewis, Mere Christianity

1. The fact is, no one else has changed the course of history and affected the culture of humanity more than Him.
2. More books have been written about Him, more music has been composed for Him and about Him, more art reflecting Him, more architecture and buildings designed for Him, and more organizations and foundations created in His name than for any other person.
3. Hospitals and orphanages have been built, the care for the elderly and homeless have been emphasized, and organizations for the hungry and needy have been created in His name.
4. Churches have been established on every continent in the world – all for this one Man who lived 2,000 years ago, who never wrote a book, never attended a university, never ran for office, never led a company.

F. The Uniqueness of Jesus: (Read John 1:35-51)

1. Jesus was 30 years old and living in Nazareth when He left His work as a craftsman and began His ministry.
2. From this point forward, Jesus began to reveal His identity to a handful of men who would later turn the world upside down.
3. The uniqueness of Jesus stems from the fact that He was fully man and fully God in one person.

G. What does Jesus' life show us?

1. The life of Jesus shows us the exact expression of the father. (Hebrews 1:3)
2. Jesus said to many
 - a. My father and I are one- John 10:30
 - b. If you have seen me you have seen the father- John 14:9
3. Jesus came to demonstrate the life of one yielded to the spirit of God- the life of victory, the life of godly provision, spiritual guidance etc.
4. Jesus came to reveal the will of the father for humanity on earth
 - a. Matthew 6:10- your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.
 - b. This is a key revelation of the heart of the father. His desire is that his kingdom would invade the earth and release the nature of heaven.

H. What happened when Jesus died?

1. When Jesus laid down His life, he took our place as the sacrificial lamb of God. He took the punishment and wrath and released mercy, grace and life
2. He released the sozo of God- the complete salvation of heaven: physical, spiritual and in the soul
3. He restored us: placed us back in the original place

I. The Resurrection Power

1. 1 Cor 15:14 : if Christ is not risen, preaching is empty and our faith is in vain.
2. 1 Cor 15:22: in Adam all men die, in Christ all shall be made alive
3. John 2:13-22: Jesus based every claim to deity and messianic rights on the fact that He would be killed and rise again on the third day
4. It gives us new life(Rom 8:11)
5. It gives us 2nd chances (John 21)
6. It gives us purpose (John 20:21, Matt 28:18)
7. It gives us perspective (2 Cor 4:16-18)
8. It gives life and death meaning (Acts 1:8)

APPENDIX II

A. The Life, Death, Burial, and Resurrection Of Jesus Christ

To fully understand the context in which Jesus Christ appeared, we must see the whole picture. From eternity past there has been an epic conflict between God and Satan – light and darkness. Satan, in his pride, declared that he would be like God and ascend to His throne. This was the beginning of the end for Lucifer. Cast into outer darkness, Satan was roaming the earth, when a light broke through the darkness.

B. God Created Man In His Image. Out of nothing, God created all things. However, the crown jewel of His creation was known as “Adam” or man. The Father breathed into this breathless form and an eternal being was created. He declared to His new love, you shall be like me, made in my image. With this declaration, the Father bestowed upon man what his nemesis desired all along.

C. An All-Out Attack Was Launched Against Man. The serpent saw his chance to finally have what he had always wanted. With lies and deceit on his lips he seduced man to betray their Creator and come live in the shadows with him. With this, the father released judgment against His foe. Every minute was a step closer to the impending destruction looming over Satan’s head. With little time left, the enemy’s rage peeked as he sought to take every son and daughter down with him. Seeing the condition of his beloved, the heart of love was moved and he began to woo His people once again to know Him and love Him. Some came, but most ignored the invitation or even mocked the love of the eternal one.

D. Heaven Came Down. Finally, heaven could not contain His passion and out of the silence broke heavens response – glory to God, The Son is born and His name is Immanuel; meaning God with man once again!!! This God-man terrorized His enemy with every step, driving out the intruders: some called demons, casting out sickness with a word, even calling life into stiff cold bodies with a shout.

E. The Crucifixion. The story comes to a final climax when the light of the world is shrouded in darkness hanging naked and bruised on a tree. All of hell is laughing and mocking the pursuit of love – repeating the psalmist with a sneer, *“what is man that you care about him?”* With one last cry, He pierced everything in heaven, earth and below the earth. *“It is finished!”* What is finished?

F. The Resurrection. Suddenly the earth shakes, mirroring what is taking place below the surface in the unseen as the Lamb turns Lion and crushes His enemy. The Son breaks through the power of death and hell, and defeats the last foe – death! Once

again, the 2 are made ONE – God and Man, the epic romance continues, the family is restored and the Son returns home to sit beside His Father, constantly making mention of His beloved creation before the throne.

G. Pentecost. Days later in a rush of wind, the lifeless form is once again filled with his breath. Pentecost had fully come, and the crown jewel is shining once again with brilliant fire and passion. The earth will never be the same as light is now pushing back darkness, reclaiming a treasure once lost.

There is no controversy, Jesus Christ is Lord!

Recommended Resources /References

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