

Small Group Discussion Guide

1. Is your identity and worth firmly attached to Jesus and the life He gives you?
2. How am I currently building my relationship with Jesus?
3. What step closer to Jesus am I being invited to take?
4. How are you doing with letting God's word abide in you? Do you have a goal you want to share with your group or with someone close to you?
5. Is God pruning you right now? Are there ways you can submit to Him in this season so that you can anticipate a greater harvest of fruit?
6. Is God inviting you to abide and obey in new ways? How?
7. How well are you loving your Spiritual family? How will others know we belong to Jesus if we love each other?
8. What is the work of the Holy Spirit according to Isaiah 11:2-3?

As it is written: "The Spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him, the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD, and He will delight in the fear of the Lord."

Isaiah 11:2-3

Week 4 Homework

WEEK 4 DAY 1

We see throughout scripture that God is relational and now it is through Jesus, His son, that we enjoy that relationship. This opens up access to God for everyone, not just people of the Israelite nation. When we read through scripture, we see how God has been building up to this since the beginning of creation.

But with the precious blood of Christ,
a lamb without blemish or defect.
He was chosen before the creation of the world,
but was revealed in these last times for your sake. Through him you believe in God, who raised
him from the dead and glorified him, and so your faith and hope are in God.

1 Peter 1:19-21

Before everything, God had set His will to create humanity. Knowing the hearts of man, He still risked loving us and creating us. Some people struggled with the worship song Reckless Love of God. It is a tough song, isn't it? He knew our hearts before the beginning of time and regardless of unfaithfulness, rebellion, and rejection, He gave His whole being to loving us.

The key verse in John says it all.

For God so loved the world
that he gave his one and only Son,
that whoever believes in him shall not perish
but have eternal life.

John 3:16

When I contemplate that I realize my love, devotion and faithfulness is the only thing I must respond to such a reckless love. I am ashamed at times of how poorly I abide in Him after all he has done for me.

Abiding is relational at heart.

1. How does John 15:1-17 Help you understand Deuteronomy 6:4-5 and Matthew 22:37-40 better?
2. How does John 15 highlight my need for Jesus? What am I to do in response to this?

3. Remember, redemption means Jesus paid the price of sin for us, the impact of this in the life of a follower is that through him, we are released from bondage to sin and death. How does John 15 affect my understanding of salvation and redemption? What is an appropriate response to this increased understanding?
4. What does the imagery of Revelations 3:20 add to the idea of being close to or abiding in Jesus?
5. What does 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18 have to add to this? What tools or ideas do you think you could use to develop this or do it more effectively?

I mentioned in the last Video Session how a tiny little book of collected letters from Brother Lawrence transformed the mundane tasks of homemaking. It is called The Practice of the Presence of God and this is one of the quotes that I love.

“That we should establish ourselves in a sense of GOD’s Presence,
by continually conversing with Him.
That it was a shameful thing to quit His conversation,
to think of trifles and fooleries.”

I also shared with you how Solitude through the practice of Centering Prayer and Contemplation (Practicing the Presence of God) have been meaningful and transformative practices to help me abide in Jesus.

Journaling, Silence, Meditation on the presence of God with you, and Retreat, pulling away from others to and or Memorization can be other practices that can be used to help us bind ourselves to Jesus through our days.

6. Are you practicing any of these? What benefits do you see in your life from these disciplines?
7. Do you feel drawn to any of the other practices?
8. What step can you take to learn about that practice?
9. What needs to be adjusted in your schedule to create space for this?
10. Who are you going to talk with to keep you accountable to This commitment?

11. Read this verse from Jeremiah and write down your response to it.

This is what the LORD says: “Let not the wise man boast of his wisdom or the strong man boast of his strength or the rich man boast of his riches, but *let him who boasts boast about this: that he understands and knows me.*

Jeremiah 9:23–24

WEEK 4 DAY 2

Jesus developed the idea of abiding by expanding it to include allowing his Word to abide in us and for us to abide in his love through obedience to his commands.

1. Daniel is one of my favorite Old Testament characters. As an exile in a foreign land that rejected God. Where pride, opulence, and excess were a way of life, Daniel chose to abide in God.
 - a. Read Daniel 2:16-19, Daniel 6:6-10, and Daniel 9:1-3.
 - b. List the habits that you see Daniel practice.
 - c. How does his example inspire you to grow in abiding in God?
2. We see in Daniel chapter 9:1-3 the phrase, "I understood from the scriptures". This demonstrates a knowledge and time spent in God's Word. John 15:7 tells us to allow Jesus' word to abide in us. How do we let God's word abide in us?
3. Read Psalm 119:9-11. How does this relate to John 15:7, 10?
4. In what ways do these verses inspire you?
5. Do you struggle to be in the Word? Why or why not?
6. Spend some time praying to God, either for letting you find joy in his Word or about your desire to find joy in his Word.
7. Read James 1:22-25. Restate these verses in your own words. How do these verses challenge you?

Meditating on scripture, memorizing it, devotional reading of scripture, and study of the Word are all means of letting God's Word abide in us.

Spend some time with God listening to whether he is calling you closer to Him through the development of one of these practices.

1. Does one stand out?

2. What step can you take to be obedient? Who will you share this commitment with?
3. Read the following verses and write a prayer to God about how you experience or long to experience the Word of God as the Psalmist does.

I long for your salvation, Lord, and your law gives me delight.
Let me live that I may praise you, and may your laws sustain me. I have strayed like a
lost sheep. Seek your servant, for I have not forgotten your commands.

Psalms 119:174-176

WEEK 4 DAY 3

As Jesus heads to the cross, commanding his followers to love one another is a priority. The church, God's people, are the means by which God has chosen to spread the hope we receive through Jesus to the world. It is clear that how we treat one another has an incredible impact on how well we accomplish the mission.

I understand that this is hard. Some of my deepest wounds are from people in the family of God. I shudder to think of how I may have hurt others without knowing it. This is one of the greatest difficulties of longing to imitate Christ but fighting our frail, broken humanity.

1. Read John 13: 34-35 How do these verses support John 15:12,17?
2. In your own words, what do these verses say?
 - a. Romans 12:9-13
 - b. 2 Corinthians 13:11
 - c. Ephesians 4:1-3, 30-32
 - d. James 4:11-12
 - e. 2 Peter 1:5-11
 - f. 1 John 4:7,11-12
3. What is standing out as you read these verses? What portions are being illuminated? Write down these things and spend some time responding to God through journaling or prayer regarding what He is saying to you.
4. Read 1 Peter 4:8, James 4:3, and Proverbs 17:9. What do these verses say? What are the consequences?
5. Spend some time allowing God to reveal your attitudes towards His children.
6. Read Colossians 3:13-14, Psalm 133:1, and 1 Corinthians 1:10. What is the body of Christ called to? What can you do to obey these calls?
7. Take some time with God to confess and respond to what He has been saying to you. Thank Him for His forgiveness and commit to follow through. He desires to renew you in His image.

WEEK 4 DAY 4

We explored living in unity, love, and peace as the Body of Christ yesterday. We are broken people who will and can hurt one another. As followers of Jesus, we do not necessarily have a well-established, biblical understanding of forgiveness.

From the Old Testament to the New Testament God forgives those who have sinned and reveals certain behaviors are expected.

The steps God requires are

1. Recognition of sin and confession: Romans 1:20-21, 1 John 1:9
2. Repentance: Romans 10:9-10 2 Chronicles 7:14
3. Restitution when it can be made: Hebrews 9:22, Roman 5: 8-9 the price of sin had to be paid.
4. Forgiveness: 1 John 1:9 Luke 17:3-4, Ephesians 4:31-32 we receive forgiveness from God when we confess, and we are to forgive one another as God forgives
5. Reconciliation: Hebrew 4:16 John 1:12 through Jesus, we are reconciled to God

The goal of these steps is always to recover the relationship.

We see this pattern in how God dealt with Adam and Eve in the garden (Genesis 3-4, 2), in Samuel 12:1-25 with David, and all the way through the Bible up to Jesus and the early church.

What happens when Confession doesn't happen?

Scripture tells us that before we confess and repent, make restitution and reconcile, we are enemies of God (Romans 5:7-10). However, even while we were his enemies, he still loved us. Similarly, people who have wronged us and do not confess and repent, make restitution, and reconcile, have placed themselves against us. They are behaving like an enemy. God never ignores sin and says, "It's ok." Sin is serious. God does not forgive without confession. To do so fails to acknowledge the seriousness of sin. Sin has consequences.

Jesus gave specific direction to his followers on how to treat our enemy.

"You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you" (Matthew 5:43-44).

God still shows love to his enemy, but he does not forgive without confession and repentance. A turning away from the behavior. So when confession, repentance, restitution and reconciliation cannot happen. We pray for those who have wronged us.

This means we do not brush wrong behavior under the rug and pretend everything is OK. Neither do we hate, seek revenge, or give into the desires of our human nature.

“But I say to you, love your enemies.” How are we to love? “Therefore, whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets” (Matthew 7:12).

Instead of revenge, we recognize that we have also hurt and wronged others. We recognize that just as we desire grace from God and others, we need to extend grace to others. We recognize it is not our right to seek payment. God will avenge if he deems it necessary (Leviticus 19:18, Romans 12:19-21).

God will hold sin accountable. We need to recognize that it is not our job to bring justice to the wrongs committed against us, that power lies with God alone. An important step in healing from unamended hurts is to release our need for justice and acknowledge that it is God’s right to bring justice (Romans 14:12; Hebrews 4:13).

We can find healing, validation and comfort that our pain is acknowledged by our Lord (Psalm 147:3) and that Christ has experienced it in life on earth. This is why Emmanuel, God with us is so powerful. He was betrayed, he experienced grief and abandonment firsthand. He was slandered. He suffered at the hands of men. He knows what it is to feel pain, Yet he demonstrated praying for his enemies.

“Then said Jesus, Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do”
(Luke 23:34).

It is in prayer for our enemy that God softens our hearts. He uses our faithfulness in prayer for those who have wronged us to feel love instead of hate, mercy instead of bitterness, and extend grace in place of revenge. Through prayer, He brings us to a place where we are ready to forgive if and when the other chooses to confess and repent, make restitution and reconcile. As God is always ready to forgive, we must be too. He enables us to release the outcome to Him without watering down the severity of sin and cheapening forgiveness and its requirements.

When confession and repentance, restitution and reconciliation cannot occur, we set up boundaries. Boundaries keep us from unnecessary harm. God’s boundary is that we do

not have communion with Him when we have not recognized Him as Lord (1 John 3:10). We do not receive forgiveness unless we confess 1John 1:9. When people sin against us and do not follow the biblical model of repentance, we set limits that are appropriate. This communicates that a transgression has occurred that needs to be addressed.

Relinquishing our need for justice and trusting God to be the trustworthy judge that he is, is how we seek to live in accordance with God's example. Praying for the ones who have slighted us in spite of what they have done is how we release and love as God loves. This is how we seek to live when others sin against us and do not follow the biblical model laid out by God.

These are tools we use with our fellow believers as well as with the world.

After you have read this. Take some time to sit with God and have him examine you.

If God revealed anything to you in your time of examen, spend some time asking Him how to love His people and what steps He is guiding you to take towards unity and peace in the body. What steps is He calling you to take? Be obedient. Do not hesitate!

Continuing on, how do we live in the world? How are we to respond to persecution?

1. In your own words, briefly write what these verses say
 - a. 1Timothy 2:2-4
 - b. 1 Thessalonians 4:11
 - c. Colossians 4:5-6
 - d. 1 Corinthians 4:12-13
 - e. 1 Peter 4:12-19
 - f. 2 Timothy 3:12

2. What has challenged you or stood out to you in these verses?

3. What actions are required from you in response to what the Word is saying to you?

4. What steps will you take and who will you share this commitment with?

5. Set a date to return to evaluate this commitment and come back to it. Consider repeating question 3,4 and 5 until you feel God is releasing you.

WEEK 4 DAY 5

We read in James 1:22-25 that we are not merely to hear the Word, we are to be doers of the Word.

Take time to look at all the homework.

1. Write down what stood out the most each day.
2. Look at the list and spend some time asking God what the common thread is.
3. What is the most dominant theme?
4. How is God calling you?
5. What is Jesus inviting you to?

He loves you and longs for your love in return. He bids you come. Abide.

