



CHALLENGED?

Why is following Jesus so hard?

NOVEMBER 2022

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Small Group Study Guide | 6th November

Topic: Contested: Why is following Jesus so hard?

Bible passages: 1 John 2:15-17, Ephesians 6:10-20, Romans 7:14-25

INTRODUCTION

It has been said that it's not so much that Christianity has been tried and found wanting, but that Christianity has been wanted but not tried.

Not tried because it is too hard?

Christianity means imitating Christ.

Discipleship means following and imitating the discipler. That's a high bar!

Without the Holy Spirit it is

impossibly high. But with the Holy

Spirit it is a pathway to follow, and a

partnership between our will, God's

help, with some tools and practices

which the Church has discovered

over centuries.

QUESTIONS

a) In Romans 7 Paul talks about the sense of being defeated in the very things we try to do in following Jesus. Where do you feel defeated right now? What practices (e.g. confession) or support might lead to some victories?

b) The 'World' is distracting (Matthew 6:25-33, 13:22)- not creation itself but 'worldliness' which relates to the systems of our 'human' realm. How does our 'worldview' align (or not) with the teaching of Jesus?

c) What does Jesus identify in Matthew 13:22 as things that 'choke' discipleship life? Which do you identify with? What are the 'noisy thoughts and concerns that rise up in your mind? What 'systems' and forces in our world help or hinder discipleship?

d) Eph 6:10. Suggests we have spiritual opposition. Have you sensed 'spiritual opposition? How does being a Christian affect your spiritual world view in terms of good and evil? What would you understand 'Kingdoms in conflict' to look like in practice?

There is always resistance to the Kingdom of God (Matt 11:12). What would sort of 'force' is needed to advance the kingdom of God?

e) Acts 2:42-47 describes community discipleship. How can community help overcome the challenges described above?

Practical take home. The historic Church describes 'The World, the Flesh and the Devil' as battlegrounds for believers. Do we take seriously the idea that we are in a battle? (John Mark Comer explores these issues in his book 'Live no lies')

We need vigilance in our discipleship, and we need to increase our capacity for God proactively- to take spiritual exercise. We need to be aware that standing still faith wise probably means going backwards!

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Small Group Study Guide | 13th November

Topic: The 5 P's of discipleship

Bible passages: Acts 2:37-47

INTRODUCTION

A disciple is an apprentice. In a trade a disciple learn to use tools of the trade. Discipleship is not just 'one thing', one approach or discipline to get hold of. Discipleship is a whole life adventure but these five 'P's are each extraordinary helps.

QUESTIONS

- 1) **Practical teaching.** In Acts 2 the church members were 'continually devoting themselves to the apostles teaching'. Jesus taught his disciples very practically (Teach us to pray). Teaching is a key part of discipleship - especially in context. What is your appetite to be taught? In what ways does Woodlands Church 'teach' you and help your discipleship? What sources of teaching (books, podcasts etc) are helping you right now?
- 2) **Private devotions.** (Matthew 6). We build a 'secret history with God' through private devotions that sustains us. What devotional practices do you know about and use on your own? How do you create time and space for devotional life? What can you share that has been helpful or unhelpful?
- 3) **Personal Ministry.** You are called not to be just a hearer but a doer! Matthew 7:26 and in 'recovery' language- 'we keep what we have by giving it away'. What does the word 'ministry' mean? Can you relate to the idea of being a 'minister'? What do you feel is your ministry now? Where do you feel the need to be equipped for ministry (Ephesians 4:12)?
- 4) **Providential Relationships.** Discipleship is relational. We need people a bit further down the road than ourselves- a Timothy needs a Paul. We need disciple makers! The relationship of community, being part of a small group, and the discipline of mentoring are huge gifts in the discipleship journey. Can you describe key relationships with people who have helped you follow Jesus? Do you have a mentor or have someone you are mentoring? Can you describe experiences of 'spiritual parenting' in your life? How important in your discipleship is having Christian friends? How can you make space in your own friendships and small group to help include someone who needs relationship?
- 5) **Pivotal moments.** Discipleship is the daily walk, the drip feed of devotions and teaching and practical ministry. It is also marked by pivotal moments. Sometimes these are mountain tops of experience, and decisions of commitment. Sometimes these are challenging circumstances that wake us up to our need of God. Sometimes these are high intensity times at places, conferences which we seek out in our diet, times of infilling. Think about some pivotal moments in your life. Can you share them with your small group?

Practical take home. Which of the five p's are present in my life right now? Which do I need to prioritise more, or which are missing? How have I processed pivot moments in my life?

Small Group Study Guide | 20th November

Topic: Steps of Discipleship

Bible passages: Galatians 5, 2 Peter 1:4-12

INTRODUCTION

One modern discipleship phenomena is the '12 step' movement of A.A. Christians influenced it and can learn from it! The practice of the 12 steps is to take incremental steps in the walk of recovery starting with the admission that you are powerless over your addiction and need the help of a 'higher power.' In recovery circles it's not unusual to hear someone say that they are going to take a deeper step (e.g. step 8 'Made a list of all the people we had harmed and became willing to make amends to them all')

QUESTIONS

- a) In Acts 2:38 Peter describes first steps in discipleship. What are they? Why is the step of Baptism so significant?
- b) Acts 2:45 and 4:36 describes the step disciples took of bringing their money and possessions before God. Why is the step of yielding our finances to God so fundamental?
- c) Romans 12 describes a self-offering to God which leads to transformation of thinking. In that process the Christian is encouraged to take a serious inventory of their gifts and talents and hand them over to God. What are your gifts and talents? Have you handed them over to God? Can you discern the difference between 'selfish ambition' and 'spiritual ambition'?
- d) 1 Corinthians 6:12-7:16 has some teaching about sexuality. What does the step of handing over our sexuality to God look like in our 21st Century culture?
- e) What steps of discipleship do you think are important to take in 'whole life' apprenticeship to Jesus? Are there some that our Church community needs to emphasise more?
- f) Is it OK to take different steps at a different pace in our Christian lives? What is the tension between encouraging steps of discipleship and being judgemental or legalistic? What can we learn from the 12 step movement?

Practical take home. Consider some of these steps. Are you ready to take the next one?

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Small Group Study Guide | 27th November

Topic: Community and Culture

Bible passages: Hebrews 3:13 and 10:25, Proverbs 22:24-25.

INTRODUCTION

Christianity is not a lone individualistic pathway. To be a Christian is to be in community. But to be in community is challenging. We learn about our selfishness. We get offended. We get to serve and pour our lives out for others. We get disappointed. Community can be hard. But it is vital (like family- best place for human thriving- but some family is painful and dysfunctional).

QUESTIONS

- a) Human community whether secular or spiritual always to some degree holds people to account. In what ways should Church community hold us to account in our commitment to follow Jesus? How should that accountability be exercised?
- b) If we are truly community we should encounter some conflict and pain. Why is this? How can this be used for good?
- c) How big is our community? How does size affect our experience of being noticed and loved in Church?
- d) How do our 'communities' of faith intersect with our other communities (eg. neighbourhood, sports, work, social)? Which communities influence us most? How can we live more wholistically?
- e) In what ways do I need encouragement now? How could community provide that?
- f) In what ways do I need Challenge now? How could community provide that?

Practical take home. Community is essential to Christian lifestyle. Can we commit to helping form and participate in a community sized expression, whether a pastorate or a team? Can we commit to multiplying these groups? How can they be safe and dangerous at the same time?

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Small Group Study Guide | 4th December

Topic: The Problem of Pain

Bible passages: Romans 6:1-11, Hebrews 12:4-13

INTRODUCTION QUESTIONS

The problem of pain is a huge one for people. It can be a 'theological' problem- the problem of suffering if God is good. It is however a deeply personal one, in that spiritual growth can (in the words of Hebrews 12) be painful!

- a) How much is suffering in the world a problem you wrestle with? What has your own experience of suffering been and where was God in and around that experience?
- b) Doing what is right is painful. Standing against the crowd, being honest in a corrupt culture, having integrity that sheds light on the lack of it elsewhere, owning the name of Jesus without judging others. It's painful to be generous with our time, money and energy. What particular things are painful in your life right now because you are following Jesus?
- c) Crucifixion (Romans 6) is a very strong word! It is the treatment for rebels! How do we identify and 'put to death' the aspects of our nature that rebel against God?
- d) In what sense are our current spiritual disciplines 'painful'? In what way are they becoming less so with practice?
- e) How can God use hardships that he hasn't necessarily 'sent' but has 'permitted' to be spiritual disciplines for us?
- f) Jesus for the joy set before him endured the cross' the writer of Hebrews said. How does the experience of joy change our experience of suffering? How do these two hold together? (Acts 5:41)

Practical take home. Identify some hardships in your life. Ask God what these hardships challenge in you where you need some degree of surrender, or some degree of growth in love, patience etc and ask for His help.
