Small Group Guide
Christian Discernment: True North
Being formed in the image and likeness of Christ!

Overview

This week's sermon explored Christian discernment through the lens of what it means to be made in the image and likeness of God. Drawing from Mark 12:13-34, Pastor Paul examined how Jesus answered the challenges of the Pharisees, Herodians, Sadducees, and a searching scribe — always responding from "true north," which is the foundational truth that humanity was created in God's image and likeness. The guide below is designed to help your group go deeper into these themes together.

Key Takeaways

- The greatest commandment — loving God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength — is rooted in Genesis 1:26-27, where God declares his intention to make humanity in his image and likeness.
- "Image" in the Hebrew carries the idea of a ruler's statue placed at a border, representing authority, ownership, and status. "Likeness" speaks to similarity in character and action.
- Jesus consistently answered questions and engaged people from "true north" — the unchanging reality that we are made in God's image — rather than from the shifting "magnetic north" of politics, religion, or cultural pressure.
- The gospel is not a life-to-life remodel. It is death to life — dying to what is not of God so that Christ can be fully formed in us.
- The purpose of the church is to facilitate the formation of Christ in his people. As the pastor stated: "We gather on Sunday mornings because our passion is to be formed into the image and likeness of Christ."
- Your value before God has never been removed, no matter how marred or defaced your life may feel. Your worth was established before creation.
- Being formed into Christ's image is the work of the Holy Spirit, but it requires our willing surrender and cooperation.

Opening Quesion
Take a few minutes to check in with one another before diving into the material.

- When this week did you feel most like yourself — most alive, most at peace? When did you feel least like yourself? What was different between those two moments?

Discussion Questions
Section 1 — Image: Who Do You Belong To?
Pastor Paul drew a connection between the image on Caesar's coin and the image of God stamped on every human being. In Genesis 1:26-27, God declares his intention to make humanity in his image — representing his authority, ownership, and status.

1. What does it mean to you personally that you were made in the image of God? How does that truth change the way you see yourself on a difficult day?
2. Pastor Paul observed that the Pharisees and Herodians were "formed by religion and politics rather than relationship." In what ways do you see that same dynamic at work today — in culture, in the church, or in your own life?
3. Jesus answered the coin question not just with clever debate, but from a deep, pre-incarnate understanding of what it means to bear God's image. How would your daily decisions look different if you consistently operated from that same foundation?

Section 2 — True North vs. Magnetic North
The metaphor of compass navigation describes the difference between living from God's unchanging truth (true north) and living from shifting cultural, emotional, or religious pressures (magnetic north). Even one degree of misalignment can take a hiker miles off course.

4. What are some of the "magnetic north" forces in your life right now — things that pull your sense of identity, purpose, or direction away from what God says is true about you?
5. The Sadducees misread Deuteronomy 25:5-6 by interpreting it through a lens that denied the resurrection and eternal life. Jesus told them they were mistaken because they did not know the scriptures or the power of God

(Mark 12:24). Where in your own life have you noticed that a limited or incorrect understanding of Scripture has taken you off course?
6. How do you personally recalibrate when you realize you have drifted from true north? What practices, relationships, or habits help bring you back?

Section 3 — Likeness: Character and Action
While "image" speaks to status and authority, "likeness" speaks to similarity in character and action. Being formed into Christ's likeness is the ongoing work of the Holy Spirit in cooperation with our surrender.

7. The pastor said: "The gospel message is a gospel of death that precedes life. Death to life. Not life to life." How does that statement challenge or affirm the way you have understood the Christian life?
8. The scribe in Mark 12 had an awakening when he heard Jesus respond to the other questioners. He recognized that loving God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength is more than all burnt offerings and sacrifices (Mark 12:33). Jesus told him he was "not far from the kingdom of God." What do you think it would take for you to move from "not far" to fully inside that kingdom reality in your daily life?
9. Pastor Paul shared a personal moment from his journal: "The Lord asked me, Paul, why don't you allow me to love you the way I want to love you? The answer in me was, because I don't feel lovable." Can you relate to that struggle? What does it look like in your life to obstruct God from loving you freely?

Section 4 — Formation and the Role of the Holy Spirit
A video illustration described a mentor surgeon who did not take over the operation but guided the trainee's hands through a crisis. This illustrates how the Holy Spirit works in our formation — not doing it for us, but guiding, nudging, and assisting as we cooperate.

10. In what area of your life do you most sense the Holy Spirit nudging you toward greater Christlikeness right now? What is making it easy or difficult to follow that nudge?
11. Western church often prioritizes action and theology over heart and soul formation — loving God with body and mind before heart and soul. Do you see that pattern in your own spiritual life? How might reversing that order change things for you?

12. Pastr Paul's closing invitation: "Will you allow me to form Christ in you?" What would saying yes to that question cost you right now? What would it give you?

Practical Applications
Choose one or more of the following to practice individually or as a group before your next meeting.

1. Identify Your Magnetic North Spend fifteen minutes this week writing down the top three to five things that most frequently pull your sense of identity or direction away from what God says is true about you. Pray over each one, asking the Holy Spirit to help you recalibrate.

2. Sit in His Presence Without an Agenda Set aside ten to fifteen minutes this week to simply be still before God. No prayer list. No music. No requests. Just sit and allow him to love you. Notice what comes up — resistance, peace, emotion, distraction — and bring that to your group next week.

3. Memorize the Anchor Commit Genesis 1:26-27 to memory this week. Each morning, read it aloud and ask yourself: How does living as someone made in God's image and likeness change what I am about to walk into today?

4. Speak Image Into Someone When Jesus met people, he called out the image and likeness in which they were created. This week, intentionally speak a word of identity and worth into someone in your life — a family member, a coworker, a friend — who may not be seeing themselves clearly.

5. Journal a Permission Prayer Write out a prayer in your own words giving the Holy Spirit permission to remove whatever obstructs his work of formation in you. Be specific. Be honest. Return to it throughout the week.

Closing Prayer Focus
As you close your group time, pray together around these themes.

- Gratitude that your value before God was established before creation and has never been removed.

- Surrender — giving the Holy Spirit permission to form Christ in each group member, even in the difficult and uncomfortable places.
- Intercession for anyone in the group who is walking through a season that feels like death, trusting that God can only produce life.

Looking Ahead

In the coming weeks, Pastor Paul will unpack what it means to love God with your body, mind, soul, and heart — working from the outside in. Come prepared to reflect on how each of these dimensions of your being is being shaped by Christ, and where you sense the greatest need for formation.