

## CoreGroup Guide | Christian In Name Only - Part 3

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### Welcome

Hello friends and welcome to week 3 of “Christian in Name Only.” Over the last few weeks, we have discussed distortions in faith that have led some to wrongly justify positions of power and commit acts of violence based on faulty interpretations of the Bible. This week might be even more challenging to us personally because there will be some self-reflection involved. We will be discussing a distortion of faith that results in the exclusion of others. In other words, a distortion of faith that leads to practicing prejudices against our neighbors; a distortion that would have made Jesus upset. Let’s pray to God for help first as we navigate this difficult topic.

### Opening Prayer

God, we thank you for this time together to talk even if the conversations are hard. We want to be better followers of your word in thought and in action. Please guide our conversation to deeper understanding and humble our comments so that we can grow together in understanding. It is in your name we pray Lord, amen.

### Ice Breaker

At a restaurant or cooking at home, what things are you most likely to exclude or leave out of your meal? What ingredients are least on your list? Is it flavor, texture, or something else?

### The Head

This week, we are referring back to Matthew 23:13, a familiar verse from the first week of this series. You may recall that Scribes were experts in religious law and Pharisees were religious purists. Neither group wanted to change their status or their influence and they were heavily engaged in excluding others. Because of this hypocrisy, Jesus called them out.

#### Matthew 23:13

*“But woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you lock people out of the kingdom of heaven. For you do not go in yourselves, and when others are going in, you stop them.”*

- The “woe” beginning in this statement is really meant as shame thrown towards the Scribes and Pharisees. How would Jesus say this quote if it was spoken today?
- Locking people out of the kingdom of heaven was a reference to excluding people from worship. What types of people would have been excluded back then?
- The visual of Scribes and Pharisees keeping people from worship while not worshipping themselves is powerful. What type of worship was Jesus referring to?
- What do you think motivated these leaders to lock people out?

As a point of comparison, here are a few additional Bible references with summaries from the New Testament that show how Jesus interacted with the same “excluded” groups of people:

### **Matthew 8:5-13**

Jesus encountered a Roman Centurion needing help with a servant's paralyzed son. The Centurion expressed a level of faith that deeply impressed Jesus and the boy was healed.

### **Mark 7:24-30**

Jesus encountered an immigrant woman needing him to remove an unclean spirit from her daughter. Jesus praised her faith and healed the little girl.

### **Luke 5:12-13**

A man with a deadly skin disease approached Jesus with faith that he could be healed. Jesus, without fear or hesitation, touched the man and healed him.

### **Matthew 9:10-13**

Jesus ate with sinners and tax collectors. Pharisees saw this as wrong behavior, but Jesus said he desires mercy for sinners.

### **John 4**

Jesus intentionally visited a woman – rejected by society – at a well in the heat of the day. He explained that God seeks people who worship in spirit and truth and he let her know that she was not rejected by God.

- How are these actions of Jesus different from the actions of religious leaders?
- All of these encounters happened before the scene described above in Matthew 23. How do Jesus' words of "Woe" compare to the way he conducted his ministry?

## **The Heart**

Excluding others from worship seems utterly preposterous in modern times, however most of us can name a church experience in our lifetimes when a group of people were not welcomed or loved in a church setting. In fact, we may have even gone along with those exclusions without giving much thought to how that would have made Jesus feel. People excluded like this may have been in the LGBTQ community; or maybe they were divorced; maybe they were immigrants or a different race; maybe they were addicts; maybe they committed certain sins or had doubts in their own faith; or maybe the exclusion targeted women!

- How is the Christian faith still used in modern times to exclude others? How is this even possible given how much has changed since Jesus was here on earth?
- What do you think motivates some churches and other faith-based groups to exclude certain groups of people?
- In what ways have you felt excluded in Christian spaces? How did that impact your faith?
- What exclusions of people live in your heart? Who is hard to love in your life? Why?
- What messages do you need to hear or what thoughts do you need to process to change your own exclusion feelings?

## The Hands

When you read about Jesus in the New Testament as we did above, you notice a pattern he establishes that emphasizes radical inclusion. Jesus made intentional choices to elevate women, children, and others generally excluded from places of worship. Jesus met them where they were and made sure to let them know they were loved. We can use his examples to model what our actions should strive toward when seeking ways to live a Christian life.

- Recognizing that we are all made beautifully different, what would practicing radical inclusion look like in your life?
- What meaningful steps would you need to take to feel like you are making a difference to include others?
- What efforts have you already made with radical inclusion that we can celebrate as a group?
- How can we be praying for you this week as we seek ways to match our actions with our faith?

## Closing Prayer

Hey God, we get caught up in wayward thoughts and actions that do not match the love or devotion you have for us. We somehow think it's right to love some people and not others. Please forgive us. Lead us to compassionate ways. Open our minds to new thoughts to radically welcome everyone to the grace you have for us. Please send your Spirit to nudge us this week as we seek to live as your people. It is in your name we pray, amen.

## Going Deeper

The memory verse for this series is 1 Peter 2:9 from the Common English Bible (CEB):

*"But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people who are God's own possession. You have become this people so that you may speak of the wonderful acts of the one who called you out of the darkness into his amazing light."*

Here are three simple ways to practice memorizing a verse:

1. **Write it** (one time a day on a notecard, in your notes app, or on your mirror).
2. **Say it out loud** (at the same time daily - driving, brushing teeth, before bed).
3. **Pray it** (turn the verse into a one sentence prayer for yourself or someone you love).

## From Pastor Charity

ICYMI there's a fun food collab for *One CoreGroup One Day* plus my big dare when we reach 350 sign ups! Watch the video here: [1CG1D Promo](#)

Please take a moment for your group to sign up while you're together.