

CROSSWALK

# UNCOMF- ORTABLE





## Introduction

When my daughter was 4 years old, we lost my mother-in-law's dog at our house. She had been visiting for Christmas break and her dog, Little Bit, got a way. It was one of those little teacup kind of dogs, so it was not going to survive in the wild by any stretch of the imagination. You can imagine how my 4 year old daughter, who loved animals, felt. She was incredibly upset. I mentioned that maybe she should go with her grandmother around the neighborhood and ask the neighbors if they had seen Little Bit or maybe took her in.

Hannah jumped at the chance to do something. So for the next hour and a half she and her Grandmother went to every house in the neighborhood. When they came back empty handed, I asked how it went. Hannah, in all her four year old charisma said; "Well, we didn't find Little Bit, but it was still good, now all the neighbors know me!"

This has defined Hannah over the years. She is rarely uncomfortable in new situations. But this cannot be said of everyone. My other children are not quite so comfortable. I am not quite so comfortable with new situations, new people, or

even too many people. I think I solved being uncomfortable in those situations by simply making sure I was the center of what was happening. I know that may sound strange, but I didn't have to fit in if I was sticking out!

We all find ourselves in uncomfortable situations at times. Whether it is having too much attention, not enough attention, the wrong kind of attention, or just being in a place where we want to leave. We have all been uncomfortable, we know what it is like. And you would think that this would give us a sense of camaraderie with others. However, this is often not the case. We are too often alone in feeling uncomfortable, even if everyone in the room is feeling the same way.

Sara and I had these friends earlier in our marriage that didn't know a stranger. They were always the party in the room, whatever room we found ourselves in. A perfect example of this is when we were eating at a Claim Jumper restaurant and when our server finished her shift she didn't go home, rather, she came and sat at our table with us! It was crazy!

We are often called into uncomfortable situations, and being a community of believers and belonging can be that uncomfortable situation that we are called to exist in. It can be hard to be in community with those you don't know, might think a little differently than you do, and might have belonged to this community for years, and you for just a minute or two.

But Christian community was never meant to be comfortable. In fact, it might have been built to be uncomfortable so that we never get too comfortable, but are always called to the uncomfortable work of God through community.

To be in community means that we have to embrace the discomfort of things like the Cross of Christ, the discomfort of seeking holiness and truth, and the hard parts of finding ways to love. When we live the mission that God has placed on our hearts, we should be uncomfortable. However, this doesn't make it any easier.

Throughout this first season of the Uncomfortable Series, I want you to face what gives you discomfort, befriend it, and live with it. I won't use the word 'conquer' your discomfort, because I am not sure I want you to. I want you to become comfortable with the discomfort, to become used to being a little anxious, a little bothered, and a little off-kilter. I know it sounds horrible, but it is how we keep moving forward for the Kingdom of God.

These next 5 weeks should open our eyes. We will finish this series later in the year, so we don't have to take it all at once. I just hope that you can become comfortable with not being comfortable for a little while!

**Pastor Tim and the Crosswalk Team**

# WEEK 1

## Day 1

John 12:25

25 Those who love their life in this world will lose it. Those who care nothing for their life in this world will keep it for eternity

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C. S. Lewis once said, "I didn't go to religion to make me happy. I always knew a bottle of Port would do that. If you want a religion to make you feel really comfortable, I certainly don't recommend Christianity."

This first text plainly lays out the dilemma that we have as Christians. Christianity is a religion and faith system full of paradoxes. Give your life and you will gain it, first being last, and all that type of thing. It is confusing, it is exhilarating, and it doesn't always make sense. The one thing that we can depend on Christianity to be is uncomfortable. And I think this is the way that Jesus conceived it to be. He was never comfortable. Never laying his head in the same place for too long, never sitting, always moving, always healing, always challenging, always making others angry, always ducking those who would seek to do him harm. His ministry was not a ministry of comfort, it was completely the opposite.

Humans seek comfort in so many ways. Whoever figured out fire realized quite quickly that things were better warm than cold, and from there began the search for comfort. Should it surprise us that Jesus seemed to eschew any

type of comfort? Even when he was eating with his friends he took the time to get on his knees and serve them by washing their feet.

We all know that person who loves to do triathlons. Those people are comfortable with discomfort. Especially those who do Ironman triathlons! They are beasts, who like the feeling of exhaustion, of being sweaty, tired, and pushing through. While they will take comfort when the race is done, it doesn't take too long before they are out on the road, in the ocean, or on the bike, pushing themselves to a place of discomfort again and again.

Why do they do this? Do they do it because they believe it is healthy, because there are limits on what our bodies can take! No, they do this because they love the feeling of accomplishment and pushing through hardship. Being uncomfortable becomes comfortable to them after a bit of time. And maybe we should take a lesson from all of this.

While following Jesus should give us peace, it should give us a peace that also gives us discomfort. (Phil. 4:6-A peace that passeth all understanding) We should be content, hopeful, full of grace, and yet bothered, a little anxious, and constantly on the move. We are given a peace and an understanding about our worth and identity that should make us feel so incredibly safe and content, while at the same time we are urged to "go into all the world," which just might be the most uncomfortable



thing we can think of doing.

It is in this paradox of comfort/  
discomfort that we find ourselves most  
of all. And perhaps this is just what  
Jesus wanted to see happen. I think  
about the way that Jesus preached of  
the kingdom of God and of the gospel.  
He rarely answered questions, his  
sermons were full of doublespeak and  
confusing metaphors. He was a myriad  
of contradictions, and yet he was also  
the easiest person in the world to love  
and follow.

Uncomfortable yet?

Good...

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When are you the most comfortable?

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When are you the most uncomfortable?

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How is your faith? Comfortable or  
uncomfortable? Why?

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What should you do if your faith  
becomes too comfortable?

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What is wrong with comfort?

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## Day 2

Matthew 16:24

24 Then Jesus said to his disciples, “If any of you wants to be my follower, you must give up your own way, take up your cross, and follow me.

Fleetwood Mac’s song “go your own way”, Frank Sinatra’s “I did it my way”, “Shake it out” by Florence and the Machine, “Good as Hell” by Lizzo; all of these songs have one thing in common, the way I go about things is the right way, and don’t tell me not to! This sort of rugged individualism is good at times. We need to know where we are going and how we are going to get there. These anthems of self-love and direction are just what the Dr. ordered at times. However, there are other times when we need to heed the words of Jesus and realize that while we of course should have a direction and an understanding of who we are, we should also have an understanding of who we are in Christ and what he is asking us to do.

Too often, we “go our own way” and decide that there is no way that going the way of Jesus could coincide with our direction. I think we might be surprised. When we give up our own way, often God gives us a way that not only coincides with our direction, but it also enhances, amplifies, and accelerates the direction we were hoping to head anyway.

Let me give you an example. I played music in bands in college. I was hopeful that might be a direction that I would be able to head in my life. I contemplated moving to LA and putting a band

together that would play the clubs there so we could get noticed. The little band I had in college actually got to play a lot of the venues on the Sunset Strip and we had a little following in the Inland Empire.

When I was called into ministry, I thought one of the things that I would be called to give up was music. I did this willingly and was saddened that I was giving up something that I loved. But when I picked up my cross to follow Jesus, I knew I needed to lay something of mine down. It was music that I laid down, and it was hard, but I knew it was the right thing to do at that time.

Fast forward a few months and I met some guys who also liked to play music. We put a band together in seminary, and we were able to begin to do shows and get some traction around the areas we were playing. It turned out that we played together for the next decade. I did a great deal more in music by laying it down than I might have if I stayed in LA and tried my hand at the full-time music thing.

All this is meant to say that while this text may seem like it is calling you to an uncomfortable sacrifice, it is really calling you to an incredible opportunity to see God work in your life in ways that might be even more uncomfortable, but a great deal more exciting as well.

Have you given something up to follow God?

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What was it, and was it hard to give up?

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Do you regret it?

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How has God used you for his glory ever since your sacrifice?

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When you picked up your cross, what did it look like?

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### Day 3

Luke 9:59-62

59 He said to another person, "Come, follow me." The man agreed, but he said, "Lord, first let me return home and bury my father." 60 But Jesus told him, "Let the spiritually dead bury their own dead! Your duty is to go and preach about the Kingdom of God." 61 Another said, "Yes, Lord, I will follow you, but first let me say good-bye to my family." 62 But Jesus told him, "Anyone who puts a hand to the plow and then looks back is not fit for the Kingdom of God."

Luke 14:26

26 "If you want to be my disciple, you must, by comparison, hate everyone else—your father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters—yes, even your own life. Otherwise, you cannot be my disciple.

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These texts have always been difficult for me. Jesus is pretty brutal in the way that he answers these inquiries about following him. Can it really be true that he is wanting us to forget about our families and to act as if they are not really important to us at all. We have to forsake, even "hate" those closest to us?

I've never been a fan of these texts, but they are there, so what do we do with them?

If they make you as uncomfortable

as they make me, then perhaps we are onto something that we need to pay attention to. If we are called to be uncomfortable, then these words are par for the course, they are exactly what we need to hear.

The point of these texts is not the "hate" you are supposed to feel for your family, that is a dramatic use of words to make a point. The real emphasis is on the difficulty and commitment it takes to be a disciple of Jesus. Jesus was calling out those who asked to follow him in their comfort. He wanted them to understand that if they were considering being disciples and thought it might be a comfortable undertaking, they were sadly mistaken. Jesus was reminding them that the life of a disciple has to take priority over everything else in life. And at that time, in those circumstances, he wasn't kidding.

Every disciple, save John the Revelator, found a pretty inauspicious ending to their life. And John had spent years exiled on Patmos, where he wrote the book of Revelation, and that was not a comfortable place to be. I've been there—I mean, there are worse areas to be exiled in, but exile is still difficult, even on a Greek Island!

So does Jesus really want us to hate our families? To despise our Mothers and Fathers and Brothers and Sisters? No, but he does want us to make a priority of following him. And that comes at a cost.

"When Christ calls a man, he bids him

come and die.”

– Deitrich Bonhoeffer, The Cost of Discipleship

Does this speak to what we must give up in order to be a disciple?

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And this is important for us to understand, along with this second quote:

“Discipleship is not an offer that man makes to Christ.”

– Dietrich Bonhoeffer, The Cost of Discipleship

Both of these people in the scriptures were coming to Jesus, but Jesus made disciples by asking them to come and be a part of a new life, a new movement, and a new opportunity to share the grace of Jesus Christ

So the question is, is Jesus asking you to be a disciple, and what will your answer be?

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Have these texts ever confused you?

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What do you think they mean?

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How can we follow Jesus without “hating” our families?

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## Day 4

### 2 Timothy 3:12

12 Yes, and everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution.

### John 15:20

20 Do you remember what I told you? 'A slave is not greater than the master.' Since they persecuted me, naturally they will persecute you. And if they had listened to me, they would listen to you.

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So as we are to understand these texts, persecution is part of the discomfort of living a Christian life. I want to talk about persecution for a moment, because I think that we seem to have confused someone having a difference of opinion from us with persecution.

In this day and age, we live our lives often in the public square, that is the digital public square. For some reason, we have gone to take someone with a difference of opinion as someone who is persecuting us. Let us take a quick look at some of the previous persecutions that martyrs have suffered over the history of Christianity:

1. Stoning. I don't know what you think stoning is. But it is not just picking up a few stones in order to hit someone with them. It was putting someone down in a pit and then throwing the largest stones you could pick up onto their heads. Paul was stoned in this manner.

2. Sawing. Disciples of Jesus would be literally sawed in two pieces. At times the long way, not the short way.

3. Beaten with Rods. The Romans would take their short rods, about 2.5 feet long and the thickness of the heavy side of a baseball bat, and beat people with them. Paul, again, was persecuted in this way.

4. Burning at the stake. Unfortunately, the church used this method to deal with heretics as well once it was in power.

5. The lions in the Coliseum in Rome. This is relatively self-explanatory. But can you imagine what it would have been like to suffer in this manner?

6. Drowning.

7. Flaying. Literally taking the skin off of someone while they are still alive.

Okay, enough. Do you get where I am going here? We don't really suffer the kind of persecution that those who were followers of Christ had to suffer. At least not in this country. There are countries where it is difficult if not impossible to be a Christian and where violence perpetrated on Christians is pretty severe. Christianity today did an article with much of that information. (<https://www.christianitytoday.com/news/2021/january/christian-persecution-2021-countries-open-doors-watch-list.html>)

Here is the list where it is hardest or most dangerous to follow Christ.

Where It's Hardest to Follow Jesus:

1. North Korea
2. Afghanistan
3. Somalia
4. Libya
5. Pakistan
6. Eritrea
7. Yemen
8. Iran
9. Nigeria
10. India

The majority of us who will read this message today are not in danger for our faith. So I believe that we should lower our rhetoric about being persecuted at this point. We are truly blessed to live in a place where a difference of opinion is so rare that we see it as persecution.

Have you ever been truly persecuted?

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Did it weaken or strengthen your faith?

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What would you do if you were not allowed to exercise your faith today?

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How can you have meaningful

conversations with those who disagree with you?

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Why do you think people get so angry when we are talking about faith with them?

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Day 5  
Luke 9:58

58 But Jesus replied, "Foxes have dens to live in, and birds have nests, but the Son of Man has no place even to lay his head."

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Do you like the house where you live?

A simple question for you, do you like where you live?

When Sara and I first got married I made a promise that I wouldn't take her to live in the Inland Empire. We had been given our first church in San Diego and I loved living there! It was wonderful. I went for a full year without wearing socks except to church. Our house was a nice place, our little city, La Mesa, was great. It had the best Mexican restaurant I had ever been to (Mario's de La Mesa), and we were happy and content for a few years.

I began to get a little weary of my job and was ready for the next adventure that God would take us on. We looked at a few opportunities, but then the chaplain's job at Loma Linda Academy became available. It was a chance to build culture, hang out with students and be closer to family. I told Sara that we would only be there for a few years before we found the next step in a career that I was sure would take us all over, with opportunities to live in many different areas.

Fast forward to 2022, we have been living in the Inland Empire for the last 21 years, and we can't see a time that we

will be moving soon. We never meant to stay here that long. We bought each house as if it were a transitional house, and lived accordingly. We just moved to Riverside and we still wonder why God has kept us within a 20 mile range over the last two decades of our lives.

But this text reminds me that as followers of Jesus we will always be a bit uncomfortable in our living situations. Jesus never had a place to lay his head, so why should I be worried that I live here and not somewhere more beautiful? What do I have to complain about?

These texts remind us that Jesus never promised comfort, but rather, he promised that we would be uncomfortable in this life of faith. Sometimes making decisions against our better interests, moving to places we hadn't plan on moving to, and living with people we didn't know we could love. There is a clear understanding that comes from the words of Jesus that things aren't going to get easier as followers of Jesus, rather, they will probably get worse, more difficult, and harder.

But I can't complain. I've never gone hungry, thirsty, or unclothed because I couldn't afford new clothes. I've had everything that I have ever needed. So in the end, following Christ has actually been more of an adventure than it has been a struggle. I need to remember to count my blessings.

How about you?

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How have you experienced housing  
since you have followed Christ?

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Are you taken care of?

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What would it be like to follow Christ not  
knowing where you were going to lay  
your head?

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## Day 6

### Galatians 2:20

20 My old self has been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me. So I live in this earthly body by trusting in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

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And this is really it. It is about giving our lives over to God for his will and his bidding. We have given them up when we accept Christ, but this text is a great reminder that we are now living the life of Christ, the one that he gave us, rather than the one we have been forging to create all this time. We can even lean into the great things that God has for us.

How many of us can say that we live our lives this way? It is difficult for us to understand how we are to give our lives over to God and just let God have control. It is really and truly an act of faith that we would have to lean into.

This text even says more than your life is now Christ's, but rather it says that it is no longer even you who live, but Christ who lives in you. This is a total surrender. It is the discomfort of living a life that is no longer your own. We have to learn to be uncomfortable with Jesus not only in our hearts, but with Jesus inhabiting your whole being. It is going to get uncomfortable because you are going to live in ways you never have before. You will make decisions that seem crazy, and you will go on adventures that you never even dreamed possible. You will

live in big ways, in ways you couldn't have imagined and you will reap the blessings of living for Christ in a way you never have before.

I get excited even thinking about it for you.

I think it is time that we stop living these mundane lives that seek out comfort wherever they can find it. We should be seeking lives that don't make sense, that are on the edges of our faith, and that don't look like what the world has planned for us. Let's do something radically different from what people expect. Let's live as if we are actually disciples of Christ that are leaning into the discomfort. Let's give radically, let's love wildly, and let's change the world for Christ.

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What have you always wanted to do for Christ? Do it!

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What has God led you to that you never thought you would ever do?

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How can you find a way to give everything over to Christ in a way that you have never done before?

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Are you ready to be uncomfortable?

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Day 7  
Small Group Bible Study

INTRODUCTION

The following is a guide to help facilitate discussion. Feel free to add or subtract or change questions to fit the conversation, and pray for the Spirit to lead in all things.

OPEN

Can you remember a time and place where you felt deeply uncomfortable, out of place? Where were you and how did it feel?

HEAD

Read John 12:25, Matthew 16:24, Luke 9:59-62 and 14:26, John 15:20, 2 Timothy 3:12, Luke 9:58, Galatians 2:20 together and share any wisdom, insights, or questions in response to the reading.

Before diving into the texts, why do you think the Christian life is a call to discomfort rather than comfort? And concerning the discomfort, do you think it's speaking to not having needs met, or having what you need but maybe not all that you want, or something else?

The Christian life is full of paradox like John 12:25, to gain life you must lose your life. Obviously this doesn't mean literal death, but what are some practical ways we let go of our love for our lives in this world?

In Matthew 16:24, the cross didn't yet have the context of Jesus crucifixion and sacrifice; rather, it was a place thieves and those who had done wrong went to die. How do you think the disciples received these words from Jesus at the time He spoke them?

The passages in Luke seem to paint the picture that family didn't matter to Jesus. What do you think Jesus was trying to communicate about family and how does one both honor their father and their mother (Deuteronomy 5:16) and live out Jesus words in Luke 14:26?

Have you ever felt persecuted as a Christian for your beliefs? If so, how do you think that persecution compares to the challenges Christians in other parts of the world face?

To be able to say along with the apostle Paul, "It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me," means a daily, constant, surrendering. What are some ways we can practice this surrendering in our day to day?

HEART

Why do you think seeking comfort in this life can be dangerous for a life of faith?

Can you be uncomfortable and at peace or joyful? Explain.

Paul said that it is in our weakness that God's power is made perfect (2 Corinthians 12:9). What does the idea of God's power and presence being with you in the discomfort, mean to you and your ability to endure?

HANDS

Take some time to learn more about Christians that face persecution on a regular basis. Look at this website (<https://www.opendoorsusa.org/christian-persecution/world-watch-list/>) and spend time praying for God's presence and courage and peace to be with them, giving them the power and

strength to continue in their faith come what may.

### LIVING WORDS for YOUR WEEK

"Five different times the Jewish leaders gave me thirty-nine lashes. Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked. Once I spent a whole night and a day adrift at sea. I have traveled on many long journeys. I have faced danger from rivers and from robbers. I have faced danger from my own people, the Jews, as well as from the Gentiles. I have faced danger in the cities, in the deserts, and on the seas. And I have faced danger from men who claim to be believers but are not. I have worked hard and long, enduring many sleepless nights. I have been hungry and thirsty and have often gone without food. I have shivered in the cold, without enough clothing to keep me warm."

2 Corinthians 11:24-27, NLT

"I once thought these things were valuable, but now I consider them worthless because of what Christ has done. Yes, everything else is worthless when compared with the infinite value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have discarded everything else, counting it all as garbage, so that I could gain Christ"

Philippians 3:7-8 NLT

# WEEK 2

## Day 8

### The Uncomfortable Cross

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Every religion and ideology has a visual symbol. Something that illustrates a significant feature or development in its history or beliefs. For the Jewish faith it is the star of David. For Buddhism it is the lotus flower. For Christianity, it is the Cross. This symbol has been used for the last 2000 years as a symbol of sacrifice, of salvation, and even a fashion symbol at times. But every time we see that symbol, we recognize that it is an uncomfortable reminder of the suffering and salvation that came through Jesus' ordeal of the Cross. In fact, the Cross is now used in the possessive as "the Cross of Christ."

Interestingly, it was not the first symbol that was used. In the catacombs outside of Rome, you will see a dove, an athlete's victory palm, or a simple representation of a fish. It actually took a while until the Cross became the visual symbol that spoke to what Jesus had done for us by coming to earth. This symbol was a reclamation of a symbol of death and punishment left from Roman times. The cross was already a symbol from remote antiquity of the axis between heaven and earth.

After Constantine saw the cross in the sky (ad 312-313) on the evening of the battle of the Milvian Bridge he adopted the symbol as his emblem and had it put on the standards of his army.

Even with all of this popularity and familiarity it has not made the meaning behind the Cross any more comfortable for those of us who claim our salvation through it. I can remember when a pastor first walked us through what a crucifixion would have been like for the one being crucified. It was not only brutal, but it was protracted. As well, watching the movie "the Passion of the Christ" was an exercise in discomfort at the physical suffering that was portrayed by the actors in that film. I found myself wanting to have an opportunity to take a break in the middle of it, to contemplate the sacrifice and to steel myself for the next chapter in the story.

The Cross will always be a deeply uncomfortable symbol, and a difficult truth for us to find salvation in. It shouldn't be easy, it should be difficult.

I leave you with this quote from Spurgeon today:

"Hide not the offense of the cross, lest you make it of none effect. The angles and corners of the gospel are its strength: to pare them off is to deprive it of power. Toning down is not the increase of strength, but the death of it" -Charles H. Spurgeon

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What has the Cross meant to you over the life of your faith?

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What do you think of when you see it?

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How can we keep the meaning of  
the Cross even though we find it so  
uncomfortable?

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## Day 9

### 1 Corinthians 1:18

18 The message of the cross is foolish to those who are headed for destruction! But we who are being saved know it is the very power of God.

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Paul, when he spoke of the Cross, was actually a very courageous preacher. Why? Because as you can see the Cross was not considered something that made much sense at all.

The question would sound something like this: How can the gospel of Christ be a form of worldly wisdom when it proclaims a crucified leader in Jesus? Isn't such a proclamation foolishness in terms of how we view the world and what counts as wisdom and knowledge? How can any of this make sense?

The truth is, that the message of the gospel, this foolishness that includes a death on a cross, doesn't really make sense unless you believe it. How does that work? How is it that you can believe something that doesn't make sense, but when you believe it suddenly makes sense?

Again, we are dealing with the paradox of faith in Jesus. When things seem like they don't make sense, is when they come into view. When we believe, all is made clear. It makes not only perfect sense, but divine sense. However, if you

cannot bring yourself to believe, to open your heart to the truth of the gospel, then you are not able to grasp the very grace that God is giving.

And the truth is, this grace that is given is not cheap. To quote Bonhoeffer again:

"Wisdom or grace without the cross is what is sold on the market like a cheapjack's wares. Cheap grace means justification of sin without the justification of the sinner, ... forgiveness without requiring repentance, baptism without church discipline ... the world goes on in the same old way ... grace without the cross, grace without Jesus Christ " (quoted in Thiselton 2000:157).

The cross, as uncomfortable as it is, adds weight, gravity, and purpose to the ministry of Jesus. It was his way of paying our bills to sin, his sacrifice made our lives possible, and our eternal lives attainable.

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What has the Cross meant to you over the years?

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How often do you think about the Cross of Christ? Just at Easter, or more often?

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Would you have been willing to go to a  
Cross for others?

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Why was it necessary for Christ to die  
on the Cross?

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## Day 10

### Mark 8:27-35

27 Jesus and his disciples left Galilee and went up to the villages near Caesarea Philippi. As they were walking along, he asked them, "Who do people say I am?" 28 "Well," they replied, "some say John the Baptist, some say Elijah, and others say you are one of the other prophets." 29 Then he asked them, "But who do you say I am?" Peter replied, "You are the Messiah. 30 But Jesus warned them not to tell anyone about him.

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This is a turning point in the life and ministry of Jesus. The reason being that this question was being asked not from the standpoint of familiarity, but rather, from the standpoint of whether or not Jesus was the Messiah that they had hoped for.

It was a conversation that was rife with political and religious pitfalls. It was more than just a simple question, it was a question that got right to the heart of two things: 1) Who Jesus was, and 2) who people thought Jesus was. These are different questions, but questions that must be answered.

For every Christian, there is a moment when these questions must hit home. They encompass not only the incarnation of Jesus, but also the crucifixion and the resurrection as well. It is not enough that we believe in one of these instances and not the other. Without believing in the Cross of Christ, the resurrection is pointless.

Without the resurrection, the Cross is incomplete. We need both of these things. And so when the question is asked by Jesus to his disciples, who do YOU say that I am, the conversation got very real, and very important.

When we are asked this question, we have an opportunity to delve into our faith a bit, and this is exactly what the disciples do. Jesus asked them the question and the first answer he got was a bit evasive, although probably true. They said: "Some say John the Baptist, and some say Elijah or another prophet." But Jesus was not comfortable with these answers, so he pushes, and then we have Peter reply, "you are the Christ."

The implications that Jesus is the Messiah, the one who saves, changed everything. While Jesus warned them not to tell anyone, the truth is that we are finally having the plot revealed to us in this story. Jesus is the one that they have been waiting for. And while he never had these words on his own lips, it was clear from their reaction that he was willing to have them believe this.

This conversation brings us to the gravity of the uncomfortable nature of the ministry of Jesus. We know that Jesus was heading for the Cross long before he got there because we know that he was the Messiah, and here it is said in so many words.

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If you were asked "who do you say that I am?" What would you say?

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How can we live as if Jesus is really our savior?

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How uncomfortable have you been talking about Jesus with someone who doesn't believe?

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What can you do to keep the Cross uncomfortable in your life?

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## Day 11

### Hebrews 13:13-16

13 So let us go out to him, outside the camp, and bear the disgrace he bore.  
14 For this world is not our permanent home; we are looking forward to a home yet to come.

15 Therefore, let us offer through Jesus a continual sacrifice of praise to God, proclaiming our allegiance to his name.  
16 And don't forget to do good and to share with those in need. These are the sacrifices that please God.

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This is perhaps not something that you have read that often. Hebrews 11 and 12 are read often, but there are times when chapter 13 gets overlooked. And it shouldn't, there are some amazing quotes in it. Like Verse 8: "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever." As well as others.

However, this text we are looking at starts with a strange comment: "let us go out to him, outside the camp, and bear the disgrace he bore..." This sounds and feels uncomfortable. And I suppose it is. It is uncomfortable in that we have to go outside the camp, outside of our walls, outside of where there is comfort, and warmth, and people that we know. We have to move beyond where it is safe in order to bear the same disgrace that he had to bear. This is what it means to give our lives to Christ. It means we follow him into uncomfortable situations. We will not be able to stay with the well-guarded confines of comfort zones, but rather we will be called to go out into the cold where it may not seem as safe. However, our comforter will be with us, and will protect us. There is also an understanding that

when we give our lives to Christ we are no longer expected to make our homes in this world. We can safely say that we are looking forward to a home that we have not yet seen, but one that has been promised to us.

Everything about these texts is uncomfortable. Going outside of the camp, that is where Jesus suffered and died (v.12). We are just strangers in this world, and we are to offer a continual sacrifice and give to those in need. When I was growing up, my parents were huge folk music fans, and my mom and dad would sing together like any good folk music duet. One of the songs that they would sing was "this world is not my home, I'm just a-passing through..." "I can remember it like it was yesterday. The song went on to talk about laying up our treasures in heaven, and about how we just don't feel at home in this world anymore.

That means that this world will always be uncomfortable for us. We will never really feel as if we belong here. We will always be foreigners in a strange land. And that is okay, as we are making sure that with this uncomfortable feeling we are really just preparing ourselves for heaven.

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What does heaven mean to you?

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Do you ever feel like you are uncomfortable here on this earth?

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Would you go outside the camp in order to be with Jesus?

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What does it mean to carry the same disgrace that he carried?

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## Day 12

### Philippians 1:21

21 For to me, living means living for Christ, and dying is even better.

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Who thinks dying is even better than living? What kind of sense does that make? This statement is deeply uncomfortable. Did Paul really want to die? Was he really okay with no longer living? Why would he say such a thing? Is there any way to be comfortable with what is being said here?

I don't actually believe that Paul went through his life hoping that he would die. But I think Paul had thought long and hard about his trajectory, about his place in the universe, and about what was important to him. He was arguably the most effective evangelist and apostle to have ever lived. But even in the midst of that, he understood that his life had been forfeit because of the grace that was given to him. Without a doubt, Paul writes these words with a sense of purpose and being fully convinced that at the end of all this labor and work, there is a deep and satisfying relationship with Jesus that was overwhelming in his life.

How do we feel about this one generous life that we have been given? Are we excited about what lies ahead for us when it is our time to go? And do we make good use of the time allotted for us here?

Paul did not rest. Even when he was in jail, as uncomfortable as someone could even be in ancient times. The whole book of Philippians shows us what it means to be uncomfortable and yet have peace, have purpose, and create momentum. I think that it all

stems from this sense of death not only not being the end, but from the belief that there is nothing that God cannot do. Therefore, wherever we are, we are fully in the grace and protection of Jesus. When we recognize this in our lives, there is nothing that we cannot see as a miracle, and there is no way the message God has burning in us cannot be made clear to the world.

How long have we lived in fear? Fear of death, fear of loss, fear of failure. But what if we lived like Paul did? In the uncomfortable? What would the world look like with people who burn with passion and are consumed with the peace granted to them by God? Passion and Peace, fire and and yet drowned by the Holy Spirit, death that gives life and a life committed to the death and resurrection of Jesus. All of this is what we have access to in the name of Jesus Christ. We are gifted and given to Jesus time and time again. And this is how we live in the paradox of feeling that death is better, but life is a gift in which to glorify God.

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How can you live in the grace and passion of Jesus everyday?

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Why should we not fear death? Is it because Jesus already solved that for us?

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How can we become more and more contagious as Christians?

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## Day 13

### Mark 10:37-45

37 They replied, "When you sit on your glorious throne, we want to sit in places of honor next to you, one on your right and the other on your left." 38 But Jesus said to them, "You don't know what you are asking! Are you able to drink from the bitter cup of suffering I am about to drink?

Are you able to be baptized with the baptism of suffering I must be baptized with?" 39 "Oh yes," they replied, "we are able!" Then Jesus told them, "You will indeed drink from my bitter cup and be baptized with my baptism of suffering. 40 But I have no right to say who will sit on my right or my left. God has prepared those places for the ones he has chosen."

41 When the ten other disciples heard what James and John had asked, they were indignant. 42 So Jesus called them together and said, "You know that the rulers in this world lord it over their people, and officials flaunt their authority over those under them. 43 But among you it will be different. Whoever wants to be a leader among you must be your servant, 44 and whoever wants to be first among you must be the slave of everyone else. 45 For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve others and to give his life as a ransom for many."

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This is perhaps one of the most paradoxical statements that Jesus made. However, when you take it a

bit slower, it makes perfect sense in the kingdom of God. Jesus was always reminding his disciples that the kingdom is not like the empires they are used to serving.

But it is so hard for us to understand this in our lives. When the kingdom takes over, things are just different, and so much better than what we are used to. Servants become leaders, and leaders don't get to lead unless they become servants. Those who relish being first in line get to wait in the back and learn patience. Those who are content to sit in the back are brought to the front to experience an amazing life that they didn't imagine they could have. Are you grateful for this paradox that we have been invited into? Of course this is going to be uncomfortable. Why wouldn't it be? It should be uncomfortable. It should make you sweat. It should make you question everything. Why would Jesus come from so far and suffer so much so that we can live lives that are simply the same as before we met the kingdom? Things should change, they should be scary, and they should be different from what we experience in the regular world. Being a Christian is supposed to be weird, unusual, and different. If it isn't, maybe we aren't doing it right! I will not belabor this point, but I do have a couple of questions:

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When did you seek to be first?

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Are you willing to be last?

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What does it mean to live with the uncomfortable Cross always in view of your life?

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Do you think Jesus was uncomfortable on the cross?

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What makes you the most uncomfortable about the Cross and the sacrifice that Jesus made?

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Day 14  
Small Group Study

INTRODUCTION

The following is a guide to help facilitate discussion. Feel free to add or subtract or change questions to fit the conversation, and pray for the Spirit to lead in all things.

OPEN

Have you ever experienced something that was known to be bad turn out to actually be good? What was it and what was that experience like?

HEAD

Read 1 Cor. 1:18; Mark 8:27-35; Hebrews 13:13-16; Phil. 1:21; and Mark 10:27-35 together and share any wisdom, insights, or questions in response to the reading.

As we consider the words of Paul to the Corinthians, how do these words illustrate the difference between God's ways and the ways of the world? Have you ever encountered this type of "foolishness"?

In Mark 8, why is the question, "Who do you say I am?" so important? Has that answer remained the same for you in your life or has it changed over time?

Hebrews 13 highlights some uncomfortable elements. What does it mean for us to "go outside the camp, and bear the disgrace he bore?"

What was Paul's attitude toward death and dying? Do you share a similar sentiment or is it vastly different? What difference has knowing Christ made in your life toward your thoughts about death?

Is the concept of "slavery" uncomfortable to you? Why do you think Jesus says that those who want to be first must be "the slave of everyone"? Does that make you want to take the lead or let others pave the way?!

HEART

What image comes to mind when you consider powerful/wealthy people? Are those images aligned with or misaligned with knowing Christ?

How have you followed Jesus into uncomfortable situations? Do you find that He leads you there often? If yes, what is that like for you? If no, why not??

When the disciples asked Jesus their uncomfortable question in Mark 10, what do you think was at the heart of their request? Do you think they really knew what they were asking for??

How has your relationship with Jesus made you uncomfortable; i.e., changed your life, affected your lifestyle, altered your priorities, refined your relationships, adjusted your politics, and so on? If your answer is "not much" maybe it's time to take a deeper dive into the life and ministry of Christ and see where the Spirit may be leading you in this season of your life.

HANDS

In what ways can you offer a "sacrifice of praise" to God this week? Is there a "sacrifice of doing good and sharing" that you can offer to God in response to all He has done for you? What might that be?

Let this group know how it can help you on this journey!

LIVING WORDS for YOUR WEEK  
“...don’t forget to do good and to share  
with those in need. These are the  
sacrifices that please God.”  
Hebrews 13:16

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NOTES



# WEEK 3

## Day 15

### Exodus 3:1-12

3 One day Moses was tending the flock of his father-in-law, Jethro, the priest of Midian. He led the flock far into the wilderness and came to Sinai, the mountain of God. 2 There the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a blazing fire from the middle of a bush. Moses stared in amazement. Though the bush was engulfed in flames, it didn't burn up. 3 "This is amazing," Moses said to himself. "Why isn't that bush burning up? I must go see it." 4 When the Lord saw Moses coming to take a closer look, God called to him from the middle of the bush, "Moses! Moses!" "Here I am!" Moses replied. 5 "Do not come any closer," the Lord warned. "Take off your sandals, for you are standing on holy ground. 6 I am the God of your father—the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." When Moses heard this, he covered his face because he was afraid to look at God. 7 Then the Lord told him, "I have certainly seen the oppression of my people in Egypt. I have heard their cries of distress because of their harsh slave drivers. Yes, I am aware of their suffering. 8 So I have come down to rescue them from the power of the Egyptians and lead them out of Egypt into their own fertile and spacious land. It is a land flowing with milk and honey—the land where the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Hivites, and Jebusites now live. 9 Look! The cry of the people of Israel has reached me, and I have seen how harshly the Egyptians abuse them. 10 Now go, for I am sending you to Pharaoh.

You must lead my people Israel out of Egypt." 11 But Moses protested to God, "Who am I to appear before Pharaoh? Who am I to lead the people of Israel out of Egypt?" 12 God answered, "I will be with you. And this is your sign that I am the one who has sent you: When you have brought the people out of Egypt, you will worship God at this very mountain."

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Why include such a long text today? Because the first time we really encounter this paradox of God's holiness is in this story. What is the paradox? It is that God is the source of life, it is that God is unique in his existence in the universe, and that God is powerful. All these things come together to be much like the sun in our solar system. It is powerful, unique, and our source of life. But if you get too close to it, it destroys you.

In this story, we see that in the presence of God, things are made holy. The ground where Moses stood became holy not because the ground had any sort of efficacy or special ingredient. It became holy because God showed up and imbued it with his presence, which is holy.

We have a tendency to think that holiness means morality, or that it means we will make better decisions than we have previously. And certainly an ability to see what is right and wrong and make decisions accordingly is important, but holiness in scripture is bigger than that. It encompasses the totality of who God is and what God can do. It is his character, both moral

and intrinsic. It is his ability to create, to set apart, and to bequeath meaning on something (like the Sabbath), and it is his overwhelming power that he wields for love.

So how are we going to be asked to be holy like God is holy?

I think that is a fair question, and one we will reach into over the next few days.

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When you think of the Holiness of God, what do you think about?

How can you understand the width and depth of God's holiness?

Do you ever feel his holy presence?

## Day 16

1 Peter 1:15-16

15 But now you must be holy in everything you do, just as God who chose you is holy. 16 For the Scriptures say, "You must be holy because I am holy."

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What in the world does it mean to be holy? How can we be holy like God is holy?

These questions have been around for a long time. And these questions, these texts make us feel uncomfortable often.

Let me set up a scenario that maybe you resonate with. You have grown up in a very legalistic household. And for us Adventists, we know what that means. We can't swim on Sabbath, we "guard the edges" so that we don't break the Sabbath. We aren't allowed to listen to that "worldly" music. We might even have burned or destroyed some cassette tapes or CD's during a week of prayer at one of our academies, only to buy them back from Columbia House a few weeks later (I might be speaking from experience...)

Then, we encounter grace, and the liberty that is involved in understanding that we have a God who is for us and not against us, that is an invitation into heaven rather than a security guard trying to keep us out. What a phenomenal understanding to finally recognize that we have a freedom in the gospel, that it is not a burden, but a diamond.

However, often when we discover this, our pendulum of behavior swings, and we find ourselves even taking advantage of the newfound liberty and freedom. When we figure out that freedom, we sometimes allow ourselves to live in a manner that is perhaps a bit suspect for someone who is wanting to reflect Jesus in their lives.

Pendulums usually center themselves after a while. The tragedy is that we have spent too much time on either extreme. We have often had a disservice done to us by the extreme legalism we had to deal with, but when we swing, we might be abusing that liberty.

What I think ends up happening is that we become pretty uncomfortable with even the idea of Holiness. Remember, this text says we are to be holy because God is holy, not because we figured out how to be holy. It is Christ in us that makes us holy, not by the actions of our hands. While we strive to be great examples of God's grace in the world, it is not by our actions that we are declared holy. Rather, it is by Christ living in us that creates in us Holy Ground.

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Have you ever had that pendulum swing?

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What were you taught about behavior when you were young?

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How can we stay away from that pendulum?

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Is there a way to keep your kids or friends off that pendulum?

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If our actions don't make us holy, then what does?

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## Day 17

### Matthew 5:43-48

43 "You have heard the law that says, 'Love your neighbor' and hate your enemy. 44 But I say, love your enemies! Pray for those who persecute you! 45 In that way, you will be acting as true children of your Father in heaven. For he gives his sunlight to both the evil and the good, and he sends rain on the just and the unjust alike. 46 If you love only those who love you, what reward is there for that? Even corrupt tax collectors do that much. 47 If you are kind only to your friends, how are you different from anyone else? Even pagans do that. 48 But you are to be perfect, even as your Father in heaven is perfect

Love.

I don't think that we can overestimate what Jesus thinks of Love and how we are to love. But how is love connected to the idea of being holy? Are these two things connected.

The short answer is "Yes."

The long answer is "Yes, of course!"

Love is the measure of our holiness. Love is the measure of our willingness to be obedient to God by following his commands. Every command leads to love. And when Jesus was pressed as to what the greatest commandment was, his answer was that we love God and love one another. (John 13:34)

So when we talk about holiness, we are not just talking about moralizing. In

fact, when we diminish holiness to just be about the moral decisions we make, we bifurcate the idea of holiness from the idea of love. And this is something that we should never do. To separate love and holiness is to allow some very dangerous things to happen. Often, Christians are accused of being less than loving. They are seen as judgmental, as easily offended, and very divisive in their understanding of the world and the people in it. In fact, we just saw a church, who has decided to plant in one of the largest cities in the world send flyers out that basically said that they were coming to save the city because it was nothing more than a demonic den of iniquity. I wonder how the people in that think about the church that is trying to be planted there?

Love is not to be diminished, and it is the outcome of holiness, the requirement of holiness, and the hope of holiness. Without love, your right actions, your moral choices, and your great intentions fall on deaf ears or are clanging cymbals.

So, if holiness requires love, does love require holiness?

That is an interesting question. I think it works like this: When we seek to love with greater impact and influence we find ourselves seeking holiness in a different way than we had before. Rather than seeking holiness for love, love begins to demand holiness to be real, authentic, and effective. So love begets holiness, and holiness is the outcome of greater and greater love.

Together, these things are a powerful one-two punch of what God wants to see expressed into the world. And we all have the ability to do it. If you are worried about being holy, begin with love and see where it takes you!

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How long have you tried to be holy?

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What would holiness look like in your life?

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How can you seek to love more, and what would that be expressed as in your life?

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## Day 18

### Matthew 9:20-26

20 Just then a woman who had suffered for twelve years with constant bleeding came up behind him. She touched the fringe of his robe, 21 for she thought, "If I can just touch his robe, I will be healed." 22 Jesus turned around, and when he saw her he said, "Daughter, be encouraged! Your faith has made you well." And the woman was healed at that moment. 23 When Jesus arrived at the official's home, he saw the noisy crowd and heard the funeral music. 24 "Get out!" he told them. "The girl isn't dead; she's only asleep." But the crowd laughed at him. 25 After the crowd was put outside, however, Jesus went in and took the girl by the hand, and she stood up! 26 The report of this miracle swept through the entire countryside.

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This is what happens when we come into contact with true holiness that is enabled by love. We all know these stories, we have read them many times. But when looked at in the context of holiness, we begin to realize that things like healing, and compassion, and mercy, are all outcomes of that love and holiness.

With Jesus, they were palpable. He was so set aside for this work and so full of the presence of love that he was able to heal and resurrect without even

thinking about it. The woman simply touched his robe and she was healed, and he understood some of this power of love to have been transferred to her. As well, when Jesus came into contact with death he was simply not having it. He was incensed that they would assume that she was dead when in his mind she was just sleeping. This is the power of love and holiness that rested in Jesus.

And love begets this holiness in Jesus, and this holiness in you as well. The power of love is more than we can even know. We have a tendency to underplay what love can do in our lives. And the truth is, we don't seek to be holy because we have confused holiness and perfection. Those are not the same thing. If they were, then we would be in a pretty difficult situation. Even after our salvation is gifted to us by God through the grace of Jesus Christ, we still struggle with being perfect. We just can't get there.

In fact, some would argue that if we were perfect, that is, without sin, then we would not need the sacrifice that Jesus made for all of us. If we were to "make it" and live perfect lives, we still may not have love, that is what God considers perfection. To think that perfection is just the absence of sin is to vastly misunderstand what sin really is, and to greatly diminish the role that love plays in our lives.

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Have you ever conflated love and perfection?

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Do you think being perfect means to simply not sin?

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What can you do to move closer to the love and power that comes from Jesus' holiness?

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## Day 19

### Isaiah 6:1-7

1 It was in the year King Uzziah died that I saw the Lord. He was sitting on a lofty throne, and the train of his robe filled the Temple. 2 Attending him were mighty seraphim, each having six wings. With two wings they covered their faces, with two they covered their feet, and with two they flew. 3 They were calling out to each other, "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of Heaven's Armies! The whole earth is filled with his glory!" 4 Their voices shook the Temple to its foundations, and the entire building was filled with smoke. 5 Then I said, "It's all over! I am doomed, for I am a sinful man. I have filthy lips, and I live among a people with filthy lips. Yet I have seen the King, the Lord of Heaven's Armies." 6 Then one of the seraphim flew to me with a burning coal he had taken from the altar with a pair of tongs. 7 He touched my lips with it and said, "See, this coal has touched your lips. Now your guilt is removed, and your sins are forgiven."

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I know I say this a lot, but I love this text. I have quoted it often, and for some reason, I didn't have it on my list for the writing this week. However, as I was trying to write something on the book of Leviticus, I found myself at a standstill; super frustrated on having to try and exegete that whole book in a day or two for this series guide.

Then I remembered this text, and I was drawn to write about it for you today. This text is such a great story of the calling of Isaiah. It shows someone who understands their place in the universe, and who is clearly concerned about being in the presence of such holiness. Not to mention that the Seraphim who were there, the angels, are crazy looking!

You see, Isaiah knew that being in the presence of such holiness dooms those who are not holy to death. We simply cannot be so close to such great holiness.

But there is something that we must understand about these texts. Isaiah knows he is not worthy, that he doesn't have the skills or the holiness to do this work. He is not prepared, doesn't know enough, isn't good enough, and yet still we see something amazing happen. When he confesses that he is not the right person for this, the angel goes and takes a burning coal. The reason for this is so that he can make his lips clean and prepared to speak for God.

There was no other training, no other requirements, and no other outcome that could have happened. When he confessed that he was unworthy, then he was made worthy, not by any effort of his own, but by the holiness of God working on his behalf.

In the same way, we are called into the work of God not because we are ready, prepared, or worthy, but because we have been made holy and we have

been asked. Our job is to follow through on the yes that we give to God in our lives. The very next verse asks the question “Who shall we send?” and Isaiah simply says, “here I am, send me!”

This availability changes everything. It means that we are willing to go where God sends us, not because we are so prepared, ready, or holy, but because God has called us to go.

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Have you ever found yourself somewhere you didn't think you would go because God called you to go and you said yes? Where and when?

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Are you available to be made holy by God and then to go and do what God asks?

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How can you know you are being called?

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## Day 20

### Leviticus 9:23-24

23 Then Moses and Aaron went into the Tabernacle, and when they came back out, they blessed the people again, and the glory of the Lord appeared to the whole community. 24 Fire blazed forth from the Lord's presence and consumed the burnt offering and the fat on the altar.

When the people saw this, they shouted with joy and fell face down on the ground.

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Here we have another instance of the holiness of God showing up and people being frightened. Have you ever thought about holiness as being something that is scary or frightening? Why would it be? How can God be so holy, yet so frightening at the same time?

Why would holiness be something that we should fear? Why would it be something that we found to be a little scary?

The word holiness means to be set apart. It means that it is something other. This is why the Sabbath was declared holy, it is something different, something other than a Monday. When we are declared holy, we are declared to be set apart, and we become something different. We look the same, but our motivations are different. We sound the same, but there is a different intention in our hearts than for other people. If we lean into this idea, then our lives are filled with so much abundance,

so much work, so much calling, that we hardly have time for anything else in our lives.

But this "set asideness," if we can call it that, means that we are gifted and called to a very particular thing that requires our love, our holiness, our attention in order to make it happen. We have been set aside, just like the Sabbath, to be something different, and something that the world needs.

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What do you think God has for you in your love and holiness?

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Why is it that you are the only person who can do it?

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Are you willing to stand in the blaze of Glory that is the presence and holiness of God in order to be ready to do what God called you to?

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Day 21  
Small Group Study

INTRODUCTION

The following is a guide to help facilitate discussion. Feel free to add or subtract or change questions to fit the conversation, and pray for the Spirit to lead in all things.

OPEN

As we explore “holiness” this week, we find out that the word “holy” means set apart. Think of the people of your past, or those that you encounter today. Is there someone you would describe as holy and if so, why? If not, what qualities or attributes do you think would define a person who is holy?

HEAD

Read Exodus 3:1-12, 1 Peter 1:15-16, Matthew 5: 43-48, Matthew 9: 20-26, Isaiah 6: 1-7, Leviticus 9:23-24 together and share any wisdom, insights, or questions in response to the reading.

God’s presence made the ground Moses was standing on holy, but why do you think Moses was instructed to remove his shoes? And the text makes it a point to say that Moses stared at the burning bush, he noticed it, took it in. Do you think there was a time in his life where he would have missed this sight, passed by it? If so, why?

It seems to go without needing to be said that God is holy, so if we are to be holy we need God. But what do you think “holiness” looks like and how do we receive holiness?

If you separate Matthew 5:48 from it’s context, you could take Jesus words

to mean that we have to be perfect (sinless?). Have you known people who take this command out of context? Were they loving? What do you think being loving has to do with being perfect (keep in mind that in the original language, “perfect” meets complete or mature)?

Have you ever felt “undone” in the presence of God? If so, what happened or what came as a result?

Is there a space for you that feels holy? Where and what is it about that space?

HEART

How can we live a life that is more sensitive to the holy that is all around us?

Why do you think that the site of true Godly holiness might cause a fear response in us?

When we feel undone and unworthy before the almighty, how should we respond?

HANDS

If love and holiness are tied together, how might you be able to seek this week to be more loving like Jesus is loving (turning the other cheek, praying for those who persecute you/your enemies, forgiving, etc...)? Who in your life needs a gesture of God’s love this week and how could you participate in helping God communicate His love for them?

LIVING WORDS for YOUR WEEK

“Each of these living beings had six wings, and their wings were covered all over with eyes, inside and out. Day after day and night after night they keep on saying, “Holy, holy, holy is the Lord

God, the Almighty– the one who always was, who is, and who is still to come.”

Whenever the living beings give glory and honor and thanks to the one sitting on the throne (the one who lives forever and ever), the twenty-four elders fall down and worship the one sitting on the throne (the one who lives forever and ever). And they lay their crowns before the throne and say, “You are worthy, O Lord our God, to receive glory and honor and power. For you created all things, and they exist because you created what you pleased.”

Revelation 4:8-11 NLT

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NOTES

# WEEK 4

## Day 22

### John 2:1-8

1 The next day there was a wedding celebration in the village of Cana in Galilee. Jesus' mother was there, 2 and Jesus and his disciples were also invited to the celebration. 3 The wine supply ran out during the festivities, so Jesus' mother told him, "They have no more wine." 4 "Dear woman, that's not our problem," Jesus replied. "My time has not yet come." 5 But his mother told the servants, "Do whatever he tells you." 6 Standing nearby were six stone water jars, used for Jewish ceremonial washing. Each could hold twenty to thirty gallons. 7 Jesus told the servants, "Fill the jars with water." When the jars had been filled, 8 he said, "Now dip some out, and take it to the master of ceremonies." So the servants followed his instructions.

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This week we are talking about uncomfortable truths that we are called to believe in. They are uncomfortable because you have to decide whether or not you believe them to have happened and whether or not they are true.

We learn these truths from a very early age, and we are expected to think of them as true and real and help us to understand who God is and what God can do. We meet these stories when we are very young and we are expected to never have our understanding of them change over the span of our lives.

This is probably not too reasonable. We grow in our understanding of everything else in our lives, but we are not supposed to grow in our understanding of these stories of scripture? Why not? Do we do damage to who we believe God is if we re-evaluate our understanding of some of these uncomfortable truths?

For instance, what do we do with the supernatural that we find in scripture? Is it okay that it is there? Did it happen? Can we question it, or at least question the writer's understanding of it? Do we lose our faith if we question some of these stories?

And what do these stories tell us about God? Do they tell us of his love, of his power, of his holiness or his character? Are we brought closer to an understanding of divine love by them, or are we repelled by trying to understand them in a modern context? How do we do this work? And are we being somehow unfaithful to even engage in it?

So let's take a look at a story that seems relatively innocuous in the grand scheme of all of these supernatural happenings. It is the story of the wedding at Cana, and it is Jesus' first miracle, apart from the incarnation.

We see Jesus at this party, and the wine runs out. His mother is pretty concerned about it. Jesus doesn't really think that it is any of his business at the time. In fact, it feels like he is almost rude to his mother in saying that his time had not yet come, and therefore, he wasn't going to do anything.

She insists, and therefore he asks the



servants to go fill up the jugs with water.  
When they dip back into them, they are  
full of the best wine that was available.

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What does this tell us about God?

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Do you think that this happened at all?

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How do you think the people in the first  
century experienced this story?

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## Day 23

### John 2:9-11

9 When the master of ceremonies tasted the water that was now wine, not knowing where it had come from (though, of course, the servants knew), he called the bridegroom over. 10 "A host always serves the best wine first," he said. "Then, when everyone has had a lot to drink, he brings out the less expensive wine.

But you have kept the best until now!" 11 This miraculous sign at Cana in Galilee was the first time Jesus revealed his glory. And his disciples believed in him.

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Continuing the story today.

As you know from this story, when Jesus does something he does it really well. He gave not only wine, but the best wine they have ever had. Which tracks, because if you are able to change water to wine, then you can certainly make it a good vintage.

Regardless of the facts about what kind of wine it was, how the bacteria then might be different than it is now, the cleanliness of water versus wine at that stage in history, we have to decide what to do with this story. Either we have to take it at face value, we have to disregard it, or we have to think a bit more to figure out how we can create a greater understanding of God and how he works in the world through stories like these.

The truth is, most of us struggle with the supernatural, although we want to believe in it. We have a hard time seeing it work in today's world, and because of this, we either think it is something that God doesn't do anymore, or perhaps he never did it and it was just the people of the day's interpretation of how God worked in their lives.

However, with this simple story and seemingly elementary miracle, we actually see the supernatural at work, we see the timing of God's signs and miracles, and we notice that people are willing to accept these things as true.

Let's take that last point first. People of the time were willing to accept that this is something that Jesus could do. What we don't see is a strong contemporary backlash against what Jesus was doing when it comes to the supernatural. People seemed to take it in stride and while there was a great deal of backlash against what Jesus said, there seemed to be a general acceptance of what Jesus was able to do. Whether it was healing, turning water to wine, or any other miracle, the acceptance of it seems to be pretty general at the time.

Remember, this is a time before we were speaking about doctrine and other theological ideas. Really, it is a simple acceptance that Jesus is who he says that he is, and therefore, has access to all that power, holiness, goodness, and grace. While all that will come later, the people of the day had to testify to what they had seen and heard. And they

seemed to witness and speak to the great deeds that Jesus had done while he was here on earth, not the least of which was the resurrection.

Regardless of what you believe, it should be noted that those disciples never wavered and never recanted that which they testified to the world. They stayed true to these stories. They stayed true to their understanding of what happened. Should we?

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Do you struggle with the supernatural things that have happened in scripture?

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Do you feel that any supernatural things have happened to you?

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If so, what? If not, do you want them to? And what would that look like in your life?

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How do you know when a miracle has happened in your life?

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## Day 24

### Exodus 7:14-18

14 Then the Lord said to Moses, "Pharaoh's heart is stubborn, and he still refuses to let the people go. 15 So go to Pharaoh in the morning as he goes down to the river. Stand on the bank of the Nile and meet him there. Be sure to take along the staff that turned into a snake. 16 Then announce to him, 'The Lord, the God of the Hebrews, has sent me to tell you, "Let my people go, so they can worship me in the wilderness." Until now, you have refused to listen to him. 17 So this is what the Lord says: "I will show you that I am the Lord." Look! I will strike the water of the Nile with this staff in my hand, and the river will turn to blood. 18 The fish in it will die, and the river will stink. The Egyptians will not be able to drink any water from the Nile.'

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Obviously, the New Testament and the story of Jesus is not the only supernatural story in scripture. The Old Testament is full of stories that seem fabulous, and perhaps even too good to be true. There are miracles, there are plagues, and there are signs of God's goodness, his sovereignty, and his power.

I think we can be sure that these were the ways that those ancient writers experienced God being with them. The Bible is a story of a confronting event between God and people he called his

own, and as such, there is a constant struggle between what they believed they were being told to do and what they were experiencing in their lives. They are an ancient people with an ancient understanding of the world. They were less theological in trying to understand God and were more experiential in their understanding. They believe that God was moving, was talking with them, and was showing them the ways to go. The prophets claimed God was speaking directly through them each and every time they spoke for God in the scriptures.

These ancient people were trying to make sense of their world, just like we are often trying to make sense of the world from what we know and what we don't know. The idea of the supernatural is really the idea that fills the gap between what we experience, what we hope to be true, and what we know is reality.

When we take a look at the plagues, they seem pretty unreal. It seems difficult to understand why God would work that way in the world at that time. However, it does fit into their worldview much more than it fits into ours. Where would the plagues take us today? Why would they be needed? And how would they present themselves?

The plagues visited pretty significant destruction and chaos into the Egyptian world at the time. They did not necessarily show a God who was interested in loving people. But, interestingly, in contrast to the Egyptian

Gods, Yahweh seems absolutely loving toward his people. And to be sure, their understanding of God at this time was very tribal and nationalistic.

When Jesus came, he did away with the “our” God language and God became perhaps what God always was; universal and for all of humanity.

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Do you see God as “your” God as opposed to others?

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How do you understand the plagues of Egypt?

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What do you think they teach you about God?

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## Day 25

### Exodus 7:19-24

19 Then the Lord said to Moses: "Tell Aaron, 'Take your staff and raise your hand over the waters of Egypt—all its rivers, canals, ponds, and all the reservoirs. Turn all the water to blood.

Everywhere in Egypt the water will turn to blood, even the water stored in wooden bowls and stone pots.'" 20 So Moses and Aaron did just as the Lord commanded them. As Pharaoh and all of his officials watched, Aaron raised his staff and struck the water of the Nile. Suddenly, the whole river turned to blood! 21 The fish in the river died, and the water became so foul that the Egyptians couldn't drink it. There was blood everywhere throughout the land of Egypt. 22 But again the magicians of Egypt used their magic, and they, too, turned water into blood. So Pharaoh's heart remained hard. He refused to listen to Moses and Aaron, just as the Lord had predicted. 23 Pharaoh returned to his palace and put the whole thing out of his mind. 24 Then all the Egyptians dug along the riverbank to find drinking water, for they couldn't drink the water from the Nile.

This is a gross plague.

I remember reading when I was younger about a certain natural phenomenon that happened at a time where the water would become red and have a salty/rusty taste. I read it knowing

that this author was doing his/her best to discredit the stories we read in scripture of anything supernatural. They explained everything away by natural phenomena, by refraction and poor positioning of the eyewitnesses. Hey had a natural explanation for every single miracle and sign that we encounter in scripture.

But it did something to the narrative. It somehow cheapened it. It made it seem as if scripture was just some massive and ancient misdirect in order for the wool to be pulled over our eyes.

Do you remember the first time you saw a magician? You were all wonder and amazement, we all were! But then, do you remember the first time you learned how some of it was done? Do you remember how it was absolutely devastating to see the tricks that were behind the "magic?"

So reading these words, it felt like someone was trying to pull the rug out from under my faith. You see, I have come to realize something: I need the supernatural. I need God to transcend just this world and worldview that I have and be much bigger than it. I want a God who has different boundaries than I do.

Now, there is a caveat to this, I also want a God who can deeply understand my world, the limitations and the borders which I live under. Without understanding this, I can't imagine that God could be of much use to me and couldn't really understand what I

go through as a temporal being in this world.

So is that it? Am I just deciding I want God to be this way? I mean, we could spend a great deal of time working through this theologically, and epistemologically trying to understand how this could be the case. But all these conversations have a tendency to bring me back to Jesus. If Jesus was okay to come to this earth, to take on our flesh and bones and even our tie, then I think that most things are available for him to do and to understand. And that gives me a great sense of security knowing that God can empathize with me on what I am going through, on my temporality, and even in my suffering.

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What have you understood about God through the plagues?

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How can you know God knows what you are going through?

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How can we lead supernatural lives?

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## Day 26

### John 14:6

6 Jesus told him, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one can come to the Father except through me.

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Here is an uncomfortable truth.

And this text has been used often to show the exclusionary nature of Christianity. Only, I am not so sure that taking this text out of context, without putting into the greater flow of what was happening in John is appropriate.

The whole of the 14th chapter of John speaks to who Jesus really is, the Son of God, and to what happens when he leaves, the Holy Spirit comes. So actually, what we are seeing here is an incredible integration of the whole idea of the trinity in these texts. Let me simplify.

Jesus says, "If you have seen me, then you have seen the Father."

They were unsatisfied, as they really didn't understand the relationship between the three members of the Godhead at this point. And why should they? It is a difficult concept to wrap our heads around. So they pushed him and asked to see the Father himself. Jesus reminds them, that if they have seen him, then the father has been made known to them.

This is an uncomfortable truth to be sure, as they did not think they had seen the father.

What Jesus was trying to get them to understand was the relationship between himself, the Holy Spirit and God the Father. They are not LIKE one, they are one. And this means that each one leans into the other one.

So, if you are thinking about Jesus, the Holy Spirit brought you to that understanding. And if you are thinking about Jesus, then everything that Jesus uncovers is the same revelation about God that you would have. There is nothing that one reveals that is not part and parcel of the others. They are one, in unity, purpose and love.

So when Jesus says that no one can come to the Father except through Him, it means that when you see one, you see the other, there is no one without the other. Jesus is not the entryway into God, Jesus is God. The Holy Spirit does not bring to Jesus, then God, but to them both because one is not one without the other. We have understood this text in a process manner, when it is really to be understood in a relational manner. It is not one, two, three. It is all at the same time, forever.

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Has this text ever made you think that some were not ever going to have access to God because they struggled with the idea of Jesus?

Does this change your mind on how people discover God?



What can you do to help others  
understand this relationship between  
the Godhead?

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## Day 27

### 1 Corinthians 3:11-15

11 For no one can lay any foundation other than the one we already have—Jesus Christ. 12 Anyone who builds on that foundation may use a variety of materials—gold, silver, jewels, wood, hay, or straw. 13 But on the judgment day, fire will reveal what kind of work each builder has done. The fire will show if a person's work has any value. 14 If the work survives, that builder will receive a reward. 15 But if the work is burned up, the builder will suffer great loss. The builder will be saved, but like someone barely escaping through a wall of flames.

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Judgment, no one likes this word.

But if they do like it, they seem to like it a little too much!

Sometimes, we as Christians don't deal with judgment too much because we are not comfortable with the judgment that is coming, and we feel like we will not fare very well. But the opposite is true.

The text above us reminds us that if we have built our foundation on something other than Jesus, then we are in trouble as the consuming fire will burn up what we thought was foundational. But the good news is that Jesus is both your lawyer and your judge. God is for you, not against you, and it isn't even you who is being judged once you accept the grace of Jesus into your life. Our

lives are not our own, it is Jesus who now lives in us.

With this knowledge, the uncomfortable truth of judgment ceases to be so uncomfortable. We begin to understand that is a natural outpouring of God's love and justification of and for us. We actually need this judgment to know we have built this life of faith on the right thing, on the sacrifice and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

So we begin to cease to worry about judgment, but begin to know that it means we are about to see a different kind of life, a different kind of world. A world made right, with love and compassion being those things that we see above all else.

So we don't have to be too uncomfortable when it comes to how we see judgment. Truly, because of Jesus, that discomfort is taken away and we are shown what it means to have God be for us and not against us

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Has Judgment ever worried you?

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What did you first think it was and how did that affect the way you saw God?

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Why do you think judgment has been such an effective way for people to scare others into the church?

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Isn't the New Testament pretty clear that judgment is for us and not against us?

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Day 28  
Small Group Bible Study

INTRODUCTION

The following is a guide to help facilitate discussion. Feel free to add or subtract or change questions to fit the conversation, and pray for the Spirit to lead in all things.

OPEN

Have you ever experienced a miracle? What was it and what was it like to experience it? Did anyone ever doubt or question your experience?

HEAD

Read John 2:1-11; Exodus 7:14-24; John 14:6; and 1 Corinthians 3:11-15 together and share any wisdom, insights, or questions in response to the reading.

Do miracles ever make you uncomfortable? As we consider Jesus' first miracle in John 2, try to imagine hearing this story for the first time. What is your initial reaction to it?

What do you think is the importance of this miracle/sign? How is Jesus' power put on display here and what purpose do you think it served?

What differences do you find when you consider the miracles of the Old Testament vs. the New Testament? Are any of them easier to believe than others? Harder to believe? Why/why not?

Moses was used by God despite how uncomfortable he was with speaking. How has God empowered or emboldened you to move beyond

discomfort, follow His lead, or adhere to His call?

What do Paul's words in 1 Corinthians 3:11-15 mean for you today? Have you ever tried (or seen someone else try) to lay a different foundation other than Jesus Christ? How did that go?

HEART

In Exodus 7 we see God's supernatural power on display. The plagues begin, but something else happens as well... Pharaoh's magicians mimic them! Have you ever experienced someone or something that mirrored the supernatural but clearly was not? Did that imitation of God's work impact your trust in Him?

Consider what Pastor Tim shared in the daily guide about John 14:6. How do those words/ideas help you in your thinking around this text? Is there any discomfort when it comes to this topic?

Does anything about the words "fire will reveal what kind of work each builder has done" cause you to question any of the work you've done or the foundation you've laid?

HANDS

How can you be more open to God's miraculous power in your daily life? If there are still things that cause discomfort for you, how can this group help you process through and/or find strength, hope, and healing on your journey?

LIVING WORDS for YOUR WEEK  
 "I tell you the truth, anyone who believes  
 in me will do the same works I have  
 done, and even greater works because I  
 am going to be with the Father."

## John 14:12

## NOTES

This image shows a blank sheet of white paper with horizontal blue or grey ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

# WEEK 5

## Day 29

John 15:13

13 There is no greater love than to lay down one's life for one's friends.

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This is the kind of text that we have come to love. We love the idea that this is the kind of love that we have from our God. However, it becomes a great deal more uncomfortable when we start thinking about how much love that takes for us to give our lives for those around us. I think that because the language is the language of death; "Lay down our lives..." that we don't think it means that we are to find that kind of uncomfortable life in more everyday situations.

We will not all have the opportunity to lay down our lives for one another in a literal sense. However, we will, on many and most occasions, actually have the opportunity to give ourselves over in sacrifice to others. This means that we are going to be making choices that put others in front of ourselves. Choices and decisions that are not easy to make, because they not only make us uncomfortable, but they become inconvenient in our lives. These decisions are a sort of "laying down our lives" for others, and they happen each and every day.

Parents understand this in a very palpable way. (Of course, so do others, I don't want to diminish the sacrifice that others live as well). As a parent, you are constantly having to put your desires on the back burner for what your kids need. When they are babies,

this is because they will not survive if you don't, and as they get older-and more expensive-we sacrifice our time, finances, our priorities and other things in order to be able to launch them into the world in a positive way. We don't do this begrudgingly, rather in joy and with an anticipation of great things in their lives.

This is a kind of uncomfortable love that we accept with no reservations. It is always more than we expect it to be, but we also know that the rewards of this discomfort is worth all of the sleepless nights, the redirection of funds, and the sacrifices.

When we give ourselves to one another in love, there will always be sacrifices, there will always be moments of discomfort. But they are not all about death, they are about the way that we submit to one another in love. These are words that we don't always like, but are important for us to understand. Love is attention, and love is also sacrifice. It is putting others before ourselves, and it is living in the requisite sacrifices that love demands.

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Is there someone you have given your life for?

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Do you regret it?

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Does it give you joy to do it?

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Do you have peace because of it?

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Have you ever been let down by one  
that you laid your life down for?

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How did you handle that?

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## Day 30

### Galatians 2:20

20 My old self has been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me. So I live in this earthly body by trusting in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

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We use this term “crucified with Christ” often in Christian circles, but what does it really mean? Why would we follow Christ to our own crucifixion? Are we really wanting to die that badly, that we will take on these words? Or is it something else? Of course, it speaks to the substitutionary role that Jesus played in our salvation, but why are we so happy to take it on as well? He died, why should we have to?

These are fair questions, I believe. And why have we taken on the language of death so often in the Christian faith. I mean, isn't the salvation that comes from Christ really all about life and not death?

I guess we are talking about the uncomfortable love that comes from being willing to lose our life for someone. And now, as the text says, we are actually willing to give our lives in submission to Christ in us. That means, we put our desires, our will, and our trajectory as second to Christ's in our life. But does that seem like too much to give? And how does that even happen in our lives? Are we not supposed to have our own plans, our own will, and our own hopes and future?

I sometimes cringe when we talk like this, because it does mean that we put all of it into God's hands, rather than take responsibility for our own lives.

I would like to offer another solution. I think we work in partnership with Christ in our lives. Obviously, we don't know every left or right turn to take every single moment of each day. So we have to have our brains involved in the decision making process of our lives. However, is there an overarching theme that we live that supersedes these little decisions? I mean, when we partner with someone, and with someone that we love and loves us, that relationship becomes the overarching theme and end of every decision. In a marriage, we have to consider the marriage before every decision.

Scripture tells us to “seek first the kingdom” and all its righteousness. (Matthew 6:33) So how do we do this within our partnership with God? I think it is actually simple as we continue to live our lives with God. We begin to consider what God would want, what accelerates the kingdom building in our lives, and what shows Christ to others most profoundly. When this becomes the instinct that we live, we begin to change the way we make decisions. We begin to submit in a very different way.

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How do you seek first the kingdom of God to understand God's love for us?

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Do you like the word “submit”? Why or why not?

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How do you experience Christ in your heart?

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What do you think about the language of partnership with God?

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## Day 31

### 1 John 3:16

16 We know what real love is  
because Jesus gave up his life for us.  
So we also ought to give up our lives  
for our brothers and sisters

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What are other types of real love?  
What does love look like in a church  
community? How can we experience  
real and true love together as brothers  
and sisters in Christ? What does a  
Christian community look and feel like  
that reflects and expresses the love of  
Christ so that we can all experience this  
uncomfortable love of God to us?

Whew, that's a lot of questions. Sorry  
about that. But I was just thinking about  
what it really looks like in church. It is so  
easy for us to say that we are involved  
in church and never be uncomfortable  
with the way God is asking us to love  
one another. We can come each week,  
grab a great cup of coffee, and just sort  
of float through the community without  
really putting roots down. Roots are  
uncomfortable. They lock you into a  
place, they even displace some things  
in your life as they grow deeper and  
deeper into the place they are planted.

We have been taking out ivy from our  
backyard for the last year. No, that is not  
an exaggeration, it is a solid truth. Ivy  
takes time to extract from the ground.  
The reason is that the root structure  
of ivy is pretty profound. You think you  
get it out, and then it sends its shoots

up again and again. It just continues to  
grow until you get every root out, and  
they have to be completely removed or  
they will continue to grow where they  
are.

We are a little like that, when we place  
ourselves in a place where we can grow  
deep roots, then they do just that. And  
if it is good soil, then our roots grow  
strong, and they won't break easily. They  
are placed so deeply into the ground  
that even if they break a bit, they are still  
able to grow and produce fruit.

So we begin to understand that there  
are a lot of people that we might give up  
our lives for, people for whom we might  
be willing to sacrifice more and more  
for. In this respect, we are becoming  
an ecclesia, a community that has its  
liturgy, or its work, being the sacrifice  
that gives to one another.

When this happens, we understand  
what Jesus was talking about when he  
mentioned giving up our lives for one  
another. We are brothers and sisters,  
bonded together by the Cross of Jesus  
Christ who makes us whole and united.

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Where is your community?

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Have you laid down deep roots?

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How can we help one another today?

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What does it mean to be part of a community that allows you to grow deeper and deeper.

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Day 32  
Hosea 1:2

2 When the Lord first began speaking to Israel through Hosea, he said to him, "Go and marry a prostitute, so that some of her children will be conceived in prostitution. This will illustrate how Israel has acted like a prostitute by turning against the Lord and worshiping other gods."

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Wow.

Wow.

The very beginning of this book and this text is shocking. "Go and marry a prostitute, so that some of her children will be conceived in prostitution." That is just terribly difficult. I hope that God never calls me to that situation.

But wow, how much is there to unpack here?

Go and marry a prostitute. What a crazy demand and order. What was God trying to do here? Was he trying to make a fool of Hosea? Was it a test of his faith? Would you have passed this?

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What does it mean to have children conceived in prostitution? Does it mean that not all of Hosea's children would be his. It doesn't seem that God was expecting the prostitute to stop plying her craft. Rather, it seems that God was expecting that she would continue to work in prostitution and even to bear children from those "relationships".

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This is a weird object lesson. Do you remember those short object lessons they used to do at church when you were growing up? They would take an object and say something like "The love of God is like this avocado..." And then make a spiritual point out of it. This is sort of like that, but opposite.

What is strange is that Hosea is expected to be a father to these children, just like God is a father to us, even when we have been unfaithful. This is a particular kind of love that we need to learn to be comfortable with. Why?

Because when we become comfortable with God loving those who have cheated on him, then we realize that God will be merciful to us, and we can still have him as our father.

When have you been unfaithful to God?

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Did He accept you back?

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Why did he do that? Did he have to?

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What can you do to help someone else know that God will love them, even if it is an uncomfortable situation?

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## Day 33

### Hebrews 12:5-11

5 And have you forgotten the encouraging words God spoke to you as his children? He said, "My child, don't make light of the Lord's discipline, and don't give up when he corrects you." 6 For the Lord disciplines those he loves, and he punishes each one he accepts as his child. 7 As you endure this divine discipline, remember that God is treating you as his own children. Who ever heard of a child who is never disciplined by its father? 8 If God doesn't discipline you as he does all of his children, it means that you are illegitimate and are not really his children at all. 9 Since we respected our earthly fathers who disciplined us, shouldn't we submit even more to the discipline of the Father of our spirits, and live forever? 10 For our earthly fathers disciplined us for a few years, doing the best they knew how. But God's discipline is always good for us, so that we might share in his holiness. 11 No discipline is enjoyable while it is happening—it's painful! But afterward there will be a peaceful harvest of right living for those who are trained in this way.

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Discipline is not a word that anyone really likes. This text deals with discipline as a positive showing of love from the father. He begins by preaching a little sermon on Proverbs 3:11-12. These ancient proverbs still speak to us. God is bound to his children as just that,

a father to his children. We are children of God, and we have all the benefits as well as all the relational realities of having a heavenly father.

In other words, there are times when children need correcting and discipline. We know that discipline is uncomfortable, but true love demands this kind of action. Without it, are we really loved at all? If we are not disciplined by our parents, then are we just ignored and ultimately abandoned. The hard work, the uncomfortable work of love, is often not snuggles, but correction.

No one likes this. And that is okay.

But love does not mean that we are always well-liked.

So how does God discipline us? A few ways that maybe we haven't thought of.

1. The sermon each week. Yes, that can be a corrective. I don't know how many times people have come to me after a sermon and said "I didn't like what you had to say today, but it was for me!" It is amazing to me that this happens as often as it does, but that is the way the Sacred Echo works in our lives.
2. The scriptures. Our daily study of scripture can remind us of the way that God would have us go. There is nothing that is as constant in our spiritual lives than scripture, if we choose to go to them. This is why we build these series guides, so we will all become comfortable living this life of discipline from God through Scriptures.

3. Accountable Relationships. Every Christian should have people who keep them on the right path. People who can speak truth into their lives without judgment, but with love.
4. Family. Sometimes it is hard to hear the words of correction from those who know and love us the most. But sometimes those are the words from the people that we need to hear them from.

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How do you like to be disciplined? And will you listen to God when it happens?

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How does God speak correction into your life?

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Does it come from love or judgment?

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How do you take it when it comes?

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How can you help nudge people that you have an accountable relationship with in the right direction?

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## Day 34

### Jonah 1:7-17

7 Then the crew cast lots to see which of them had offended the gods and caused the terrible storm. When they did this, the lots identified Jonah as the culprit. 8 “Why has this awful storm come down on us?” they demanded. “Who are you? What is your line of work? What country are you from? What is your nationality?” 9 Jonah answered, “I am a Hebrew, and I worship the Lord, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the land.” 10 The sailors were terrified when they heard this, for he had already told them he was running away from the Lord. “Oh, why did you do it?” they groaned. 11 And since the storm was getting worse all the time, they asked him, “What should we do to you to stop this storm?” 12 “Throw me into the sea,” Jonah said, “and it will become calm again. I know that this terrible storm is all my fault.” 13

Instead, the sailors rowed even harder to get the ship to the land. But the stormy sea was too violent for them, and they couldn't make it. 14 Then they cried out to the Lord, Jonah's God. “O Lord,” they pleaded, “don't make us die for this man's sin.

And don't hold us responsible for his death. O Lord, you have sent this storm upon him for your own good reasons.” 15 Then the sailors picked

Jonah up and threw him into the raging sea, and the storm stopped at once! 16 The sailors were awestruck by the Lord's great power, and they offered him a sacrifice and vowed

to serve him. 17 Now the Lord had arranged for a great fish to swallow Jonah. And Jonah was inside the fish for three days and three nights.

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This was a long text, so I won't belabor the point. But sometimes, the uncomfortable love of God comes to you when you are running away. And accessing that love means that you have to become obedient to what God wants for you.

There will be sometime in your life when you become a Jonah. It's okay, God will stay with you, and you probably won't have to spend too much time in the belly of a whale. But you will be led on a very strange journey to receive the uncomfortable love of God.

May God continue to bless you, even when you run away!

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Pastor Tim, and the Crosswalk  
Series Guide Team

Day 35  
Small Group Bible Study

INTRODUCTION

The following is a guide to help facilitate discussion. Feel free to add or subtract or change questions to fit the conversation, and pray for the Spirit to lead in all things.

OPEN

Can you remember a time as a kid when you're mom or dad did something for you in public that in retrospect, they did out of love for you, but at the time was horribly embarrassing?

HEAD

Read John 15:13, Galatians 2:20, I John 3:16, Hosea 1:2, Hebrews 12: 5-11, Jonah 1:7-17 together and share any wisdom, insights, or questions in response to the reading.

There is a lot of talk by Jesus about losing one's life or laying one's life down for another. Since many of us won't do this literally, what does it mean or look like for us to lay our lives down figuratively for one another?

Jesus said that no one has greater love than when they lay their life down for their friends. But according to Romans 5:8, Jesus laid His life down for all, including His enemies. What does His example mean to you and how do we seek to love more like Him?

God called Hosea to marry a prostitute, someone who was and would be unfaithful to him, as a way of teaching us about God's love for us. What are the parallels you can see between Hosea's call and God's love for

His people? How hard is it to love those who betray us? What does it mean to you that "if we are faithless, he remains faithful, for he cannot disown himself"?

The word discipline comes from the root disciple, and is meant to help teach us in the way we should go. Was there a discipline you received as a child that you remember the lesson learned to this day? How about a discipline you received from God and what you learned from that experience?

Has God's love ever found you in the midst of disobedience? If so, how does his love change us when we are confronted with it's full force?

HEART

Too many so-called Christians are more known for what they're against than what they are for, as a result, Christianity in the West is often labeled as judgmental, hypocritical, too political, and anti-lots of things. How do we, as followers of Christ, go about changing those perceptions? Can we make a dent in how others view followers of Christ or is it too late?

What is a better motivator toward loving others; focusing on what it looks like to love others, or focusing on how loved we are and the person who loves us? Explain.

Real love and real intimacy can be difficult, risky, unsettling at times as we let people know more of our real selves, but it can also be incredibly rewarding and life-changing. How can you and I help each other feel more safe to put our roots down into community and be known? What are ways we put our

roots down as we feel more open to doing so?

HANDS

What is one thing that you can do this week to get more connected to your church community, or if you're already deeply connected and committed, what is something you can do to help someone else begin to put roots down?

LIVING WORDS for YOUR WEEK

"So now I am giving you a new commandment: Love each other. Just as I have loved you, you should love each other. Your love for one another will prove to the world that you are my disciples."

John 13:34-35 NLT

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