

Small Group Guide

"When Faith Meets Disappointment: Lessons from John the Baptist"

Based on Matthew 11:1-19

Overview

This session explores the tension between our expectations of God and the reality of how He works. Using the story of John the Baptist questioning Jesus from prison, we examine how even the most faithful people wrestle with doubt, disappointment, and unmet expectations — and what it looks like to trust God through those moments.

Key Takeaways

John the Baptist, described by Jesus as the greatest man born of woman, still questioned whether Jesus was truly the Messiah. Doubt does not disqualify us from faith.

Our preconceived ideas about what God should look like and how He should act can become barriers to truly knowing Him.

Jesus responded to John's doubt not with condemnation but with evidence and compassion, then immediately defended John's character to the crowd.

Disappointment with God often grows when our expectations exceed what He has actually promised us.

Blessed are those who do not fall away on account of Christ, even when He does not perform the way we think He should (Matthew 11:6).

Praise, thanksgiving, and prayer are the primary defenses against letting unmet expectations erode our faith.

Discussion Questions

Opening Questions

Use these to help the group ease into conversation.

Think about a time when someone you trusted did not show up for you the way you expected. How did that affect your relationship with them? How did you work through it?

Growing up, what was your impression of what a "godly" person looked like? Where did that impression come from, and how has it shaped the way you view others today?

Digging Deeper

Use these questions to explore the sermon content more thoroughly.

John the Baptist was filled with the Holy Spirit from birth, personally witnessed the Spirit descend on Jesus at his baptism, and was called the greatest man born of woman by Jesus Himself. Yet he still sent his disciples to ask whether Jesus was truly the Messiah. What does that tell us about the nature of doubt, and why should that be an encouragement to us?

John lived a life of radical separation from the world. Jesus, by contrast, ate and drank with tax collectors and sinners. Both were doing the will of God. How do you personally navigate the tension between staying set apart and engaging with the world around you?

The sermon pointed out that Jesus never went to visit John in prison and never broke him out, even though He had the power to do so. How do you respond when God has the ability to change your circumstances but chooses not to? What does faith look like in those moments?

Jesus told the crowd that John was more than a prophet, then immediately said that the least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than John. What do you think Jesus meant by that, and what does it say about the significance of what Christ accomplished on the cross?

The sermon described how our minds can take a thought and spin it into something that feels like truth. How have you seen this happen in your own life, particularly during seasons of pain, loss, or confinement? What helped you gain a clearer perspective?

Read Matthew 11:6 together. The pastor described this as a call to remain faithful even when Christ does not perform the way we expect. In what areas of your life are you most tempted to fall away or grow bitter because of unmet expectations of God?

Personal Reflection Questions

These can be discussed in pairs or processed individually before sharing with the group.

The pastor challenged the group with this question: When did you last pray and ask God what holiness would genuinely look like in your life? How would you honestly answer that question for yourself right now?

Are there people in your life you have been judging based on your own standards rather than asking God to give you His perspective on them? What would it look like to bring that to God in prayer this week?

The sermon mentioned that John's time in prison, as unwanted as it was, could have been used by God for growth and faithfulness. If you are in a season that feels like confinement right now, what might God be asking you to do with that time?

Practical Applications

Choose one or more of the following to put into practice before your group meets again.

Examine your expectations. Set aside fifteen minutes this week to write down your honest expectations of God. Then take each one to Scripture and ask

whether God has actually promised that specific thing. Bring what you discover back to the group.

Pray for perspective. Each day this week, ask God to show you one person in your life the way He sees them, rather than through the lens of your own assumptions or past experiences.

Practice thanksgiving as a discipline. Following the pattern described in 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18, intentionally give thanks in a specific situation this week that you would not naturally describe as something to be thankful for. Journal what that experience is like.

Audit your information diet. The sermon mentioned how media can amplify hurt and spin narratives. Identify one source of content this week that consistently stirs anxiety, bitterness, or judgment in you. Replace that time with Scripture or prayer.

Reach out to someone in a prison of their own. Think of someone in your life who is isolated, grieving, or going through a difficult season. Make a concrete plan to show up for them this week, not with answers, but simply with presence.

Closing Prayer Guide

Close your time together by praying through these themes as a group:

Gratitude for a God who knows us completely and is still working on our behalf

Honesty about the areas where we have been disappointed with God or with others

A request for God's perspective on the people and circumstances in our lives

Courage to remain faithful even when Christ does not act the way we expected

Openness to whatever season of growth God has placed each person in right now

Memory Verse for the Week

Matthew 11:6 — Reflect on Jesus' words about the blessing that belongs to those who do not stumble or fall away on account of Him, even when His ways do not match our expectations.