

# Simple Things

Pilgrim Group Study

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## Introduction to Pilgrim Groups

The spiritual disciplines create a path from our physical world into the new world of the Kingdom of God; a world which is breaking in around us. On this path, we learn to think about and respond rightly to God. We open space in our lives to become aware of God interacting with us. We begin to see His beauty unfolding in and around us, and His work accomplished through us. This is the pilgrimage we are presently undertaking.

This Village journey has several objectives: first, to further develop community within the Village. Pilgrim Groups are a specific discipleship structure of the Village, and we ask that people who participate in them be active participants in the community, attending worship services at the Village and so forth during their time in the Pilgrim Group. Within this context, the Pilgrim Group is designed for the practice of some of the disciplines of the faith together (these may vary depending on the topic & structure of the particular study & group); to discuss our sexuality in healthy ways; to confess sin, pray for each other, and experience healing; to develop leaders; to grow in knowledge and application of the Bible; and finally, to further the discussion of our vocation in the Kingdom of God.

### **The Discussion...**

In response to another person's sharing, group members should refrain from giving advice or telling their own stories as a way of instruction. This is a time to ~~persuade~~ one another by asking open-ended questions and practicing active listening. Try to use clarifying statements like, "What do you mean by \_\_\_\_\_?" or, "Tell me more about \_\_\_\_\_. Instead of offering answers to people's problems, consider praying together with the laying on of hands as a default solution.

### **The Confession...**

Confession is about our struggle to live "in the world but not of the world." This may include acknowledging overt sins, but it may just as well be telling other people about our worldly patterns of thought that need to be transformed (Romans 12:1-2). Any way of thought or action that is not based on God's goodness and the life to which He calls us is fair game for confession. This should be followed by people praying for the confessee, as in James 5:16 and 1 John 1:9. God wants to renew our minds, and He does this when we ask in prayer. Sometimes areas of sin in our life seem subtle, or we hold them in denial, so conversation in your pilgrim group may also include helping guide someone toward seeing their own hidden sin and the impact it has. We need to be open to the voices of people in our community as they gently point out areas that need to be healed.

### **Discussing Sexuality...**

As we consider our stories and tell each other about the experiences which have shaped us, our sexuality may be an evident force. God has designed us as sexual beings. Sexuality, however, which He created for good, has been twisted and abused in the dark world around us. We are each in the process of growing into wholeness in this area of our lives. Some of us struggle with addictions to pornography, some have long histories of sexual abuse, some have lived sexually impure lives, and most of us struggle to reconcile the worldly messages about sexuality with our own bodies, desires, and experiences.

As we seek to better understand God's view of sexuality and to become more comfortable with our sexual selves in Christ, it is important for us to create a safe space for each other where we can head toward the freedom from shame which God offers. Please honor sensitive conversations with appropriate confidentiality as well as gentle, active listening.

## Chapter One

by Eric Cepin

### 1 John 5:11-12

And this is the testimony: God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. Whoever has the Son has the life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life.

Three difficulties that you and I face all the time, in our culture and in our life, are: chaos, loneliness, and fear. These waves of disruption emanated from the tide of evil that washed out from the Garden at the time of the fall, and none of us can escape them. Now, if you say, “No, I don’t experience those,” then you’re caught, instead, in denial. This Pilgrim Group study, called Simple Things, is meant to address the stuff of life we all face by focusing on some basic verses that are core to following Jesus. We’ll begin with 1 John 5:11-12.

The author of this verse was a disciple of Jesus named John. Now, John was ostentatious enough to identify himself in his gospel (his story about Jesus) as “the disciple Jesus loved.” This disciple that Jesus loved wrote three letters and a gospel, all named after him and found in the New Testament. In this verse, John basically summarizes all of his writings: *“This is the testimony: God has given us eternal life and this life is in his son. Whoever has the son has life and whoever does not have the son does not have life.”* Beyond summarizing his own work, this statement reiterates one of the major themes of the New Testament: life can only come through Jesus Christ. John calls his statement “the” testimony. A testimony, or an official record of a thing, is a proclamation. And the proclamation that John makes here is that eternal life is in Jesus. That kind of testimony requires some serious background knowledge on John’s part.

Going back a few chapters to 1 John 1:1, John says, *“That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched – this we proclaim concerning the Word of life.”* This introduction resounds as an echo of Advent, where the shepherds go from an encounter with a sky full of angels to the town of Bethlehem where they proclaim to everyone they meet the amazing things that they have just seen and heard. It resounds as an echo of the earliest church, where John and Peter in Acts 3 are threatened by the Jewish rulers who want them to stop teaching about Jesus’ healing and Jesus’ name. They respond that they’re not going to stop talking about what they’ve seen and heard. To this, John adds an idea: “that which our hands have touched.” He’s saying, “We saw the Word. We heard the Word. We actually wrestled with the Word.” This is *relationship*.

And then he continues on with, *“The life appeared; we have seen it and testify to it, and we proclaim to you the eternal life which was with the Father and has appeared to us. We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ. We write this to make our joy complete”* (1 John 1:2-4). John wants to tell you that there are two reasons he is testifying about this God-given eternal life. One of these is reasons is so that you can have fellowship with *John*. And when John says fellowship, he doesn’t mean hanging out; what he’s talking about is communion. He’s talking about eating God’s body and the drinking His blood together – the things that connect us to life. The reason? *“Because I want my joy to be made complete.”* Like my friend Gareth who makes amazing sweet rolls and then shares them, John’s joy is made

complete when you taste the thing that he tastes and enjoy the thing that he enjoys. So when John says, “This is the testimony, that God has given us eternal life,” what he’s saying is, “I want you to be with me in this eternal life. The way I have touched it, seen it, and heard it, I want you to touch it, see it, and hear it. I want to see it on your face. I want to hear the stories of your experience with Jesus.”

In the *gospel* of John, Jesus says, “*I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me*” (John 14:6). When He says this, Jesus is alluding to a statement which traditionally referred to the Torah, the section of the Old Testament which includes the Law and the Prophets. When Jesus replaces the Torah with Himself, He proclaims, “The Law and the Prophets are not the way, the truth and the life – I am. The Law and the Prophets just point to me. I’m the way. I’m the truth. I’m the life.” Similarly, at the end of his gospel, the reason John gives for telling the whole story is that he wants you to believe that Jesus is the Messiah – the One who leads to the Father and to life. But there are some problems with belief, right? You can’t just “believe” something in your head. How do you take hold of John’s proclamation as your own?

Well, John lays it out for us. In 1 John 5:1, he says, “*Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God*” and further on, in 1 John 5:5, “*Who is it that overcomes the world? Only the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God.*” For an ancient person, to say that Jesus is the Son of God was the same as saying that Jesus is God. So the first thing that you have to believe is that Jesus is the Christ and is born of God. You have to be able to just say it.

But to say something doesn’t really mean anything, right? You have to have some kind of action that supports your words. John continues, “*And everyone who loves the Father, loves his child as well. This is how we know that we love the children of God: by loving God and carrying out his commands. In fact, this is love for God: to keep his commands. And his commands are not burdensome....*” The other day in the midst of a conversation, my son asked me, “How do you know that I love you?” and I said, “When you obey!” Right? Our belief is evidenced by our obedience, our choices to love God, and our choices to love other people. So we have our statement, and we have a willingness to act on it. But you know, taking action without motivation doesn’t usually go very well. That brings us back to verse 5. The reason that you would speak, believe, and act is the hope that you will overcome the world.

In the Star Wars franchise movie Rogue One, there is a scene with a blind monk who repeats the mantra, “The Force is with me and I am one with the Force” whenever he’s nervous. Now, there’s this scene at the end of the movie, where the monk and a few of the rebels are pinned down, and they need to get from one place to the next to flip this switch. So the blind monk stands up as the laser bolts are flying around, and he holds his little staff and begins to walk into the battle field, saying, “I am one with the force and the force is with me. I am one with the force and the force is with me,” and he just walks straight through the battlefield, unharmed. It’s a pretty compelling scene. And as I think about 1 John 5:11-12, these two verses are very similar to the mantra of this monk. As you and I face chaos, loneliness, and fear, we’ve been given belief, obedience, love, and the hope of overcoming. We stand up, grab our little staff, and repeat John’s proclamation that has now become ours: “This is the testimony: God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. He who has the Son has life. He who does not have the Son of God does not have life. And this is the testimony....”

When you begin to embrace eternal life – when you make the proclamation that Jesus is the Son of God, and you start to love His people and to love Him, and you embrace the hope that He will overcome – you will be confronted by chaos. And you cannot face this chaos with virtue alone. After all, there are lots of virtuous people in the world who don't know Jesus. You do not need Jesus to have virtue. You do not need Jesus to do good things. You do, however, need Jesus in order to have an unselfish reason to do good. You need a moral construct to ground you. And the thing that's different about Christianity is that through it, the God of the universe says, "I am the anchor. I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life. I will give you a boundary. I will mark out a path." Now, I don't know how many of you follow history or like to read about World War II. But when the war ended and the Nazis were on trial, most of the western world was saying, "How could you do these things?" The people would say, "Well, we were just operating according to the rules of our country." If you go into the courtroom at Nuremberg, you will see on one side of the room a depiction of Adam and Eve and the Serpent, and on the other, the Ten Commandments. The appeal is to a higher law, to something beyond our virtually constructed truths and decisions. Christianity reveals that the gift of eternal life which will anchor you in the world's chaotic storm of evil is Jesus: the way, the truth, and the life. The thing you face chaos with is truth.

Now, the second thing that we face is loneliness. Oddly, what eternal life offers us in the face of loneliness is justice. Let me explain. Justice is the highest virtue, because without justice, friendship is impossible. Without justice, we are all lonely. Think about it: all of our relationships are built on wrongs. You can love me, care for me, and be so nice to me for years. But one day, you could do something wrong and never be able to fix it. Ever. I might hate you for it. Because we cry out for justice; it's in our pores. It's the thing that makes life right.

2,000 years ago, Jesus climbed up a hill and was offered up by His Father as a sacrifice. And justice was meted out so that when I am super nice to you for a couple of years and then do something stupid and hurt you, that debt of justice is paid. You and I can actually be friends, because now, in eternal life, we can experience justice. Jesus has stepped into the middle of our marriages, our friendships, our stupidity, and our arrogance. He provides justice for us. This allows us to eat the bread, drink the wine, and be in fellowship together. And actually taste goodness. So the way that we stand in the face of loneliness is through justice. That's what eternal life offers.

Finally, there is love. When eternal life speaks out against fear, it offers belonging. When you belong somewhere, and to someone, you are loved in spite of yourself. Grace is bestowed in belonging. This is the reason that at the Village Church we have a belonging service every year: ours is a doctrine of belonging. You belong here and you should be reminded of that, but it's not that you belong in this particular little community. It's that you belong to the table. You belong to Jesus. There's nothing you can do, nothing that can be done to you, that will separate you from the love of God. Nothing. So as you encounter chaos, loneliness, and fear, I encourage you to imagine yourself as the monk. Stand up, hold your staff, know that you're blind, and begin to recite: "And this is the testimony: that God has given us eternal life." Keep repeating that mantra. Because no matter how hard you work to avoid all kinds of adversity or chaos, loneliness or fear, these realities will come knocking on your door. They will greet you each day, seeping into your pores. And the only way that you and I can stand against them is to stand with Jesus. To stand in life. Take this verse as your mantra this year, and remember, "That this is the testimony: that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son, and whoever has the Son has life, and whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life."

I John 5:11-12

- 1) How does your testimony line up with John's?
  - 2) How does fellowship with the saints, past and present, affect you?
  - 3) You've been given belief, obedience, love, and hope. Reflect on what that means in the midst of chaos, loneliness, and fear.
  - 4) What is it like for you to realize that life goes on eternally?
  - 5) Life is found in Jesus. What does that mean to you?

## Chapter Two

by Mark Crawford

### John 16:24

Until now you have not asked for anything in my name.  
Ask and you will receive, and your joy will be complete.

So here it is: the purpose of prayer is joy. If you don't remember anything else, remember that. The purpose of prayer is joy. Three questions emerge from this verse. The first question is, "What does it mean to ask in Jesus's name?" Pop quiz: "What's in a name? That which we call a rose by any other name would smell as sweet." *Romeo and Juliet*. So I don't know Shakespeare very well. I actually had to look up and make sure that quote was from *Romeo and Juliet*. But it's true, right? So the idea is, a rose is a pretty name for a flower, but if it were called a blob it would still be a pretty flower. It would still smell good. The name "rose" holds significance only because it belongs to a beautiful thing.

A name holds significance because it *belongs* to someone. It carries who the person is and what defines them. I guarantee you that you could bring up the name of Jesus almost anywhere in the world, and someone would have an opinion. And depending on where you are in the world, they might have to share that opinion with you through a jail cell. Because the name of Jesus is significant. To ask in Jesus's name implies relationship with Jesus. It implies a knowledge of Jesus and who He is and what He longs for and stands for. Hebrews 4:14-16 says, "*Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has ascended into heaven, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weakness, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are – yet he did not sin. Let us then approach God's throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.*" In Law and Order or whatever crime show you pick, you know that if the criminal has a really good lawyer they might not get convicted. In our case, however, Jesus knows we sinned, and God, the righteous judge, knows that we sinned. The reason we don't get what we deserve is because Jesus stands there with us and says, "I know him. I know her. I died for them." So what Jesus says in this verse is a crazy statement for any first century Jew. You would never ask God for something in someone's name. The way to God is the Torah. It's through the Temple and through sacrifices. The priest makes a sacrifice for you. He stands before God and makes you right with God. And that's why this verse starts with "Until now." Jesus is declaring that *He* is the way. It was through Jesus that they were going to talk to God. To speak in Jesus's name is to declare that you have a relationship with Jesus, and therefore, you have a relationship with God. So, "*Until now you have not asked for anything in my name. Ask and you will receive and your joy will be complete.*"

The second question we have to think about is, "What does it mean when we ask and do not receive?" When I was a freshman in college, I went to a small Christian school in Michigan called Spring Arbor University. I took a class called "Gospels and Acts," and the teacher was a friend of my parents. A big part of the class was a paper that everyone had to write called an exegesis, which is basically an explanation, or interpretation, of a biblical text. Essentially, it's what I'm doing now but with more Greek. The teacher had this list of verses that he called "hard verses" that we had to pick from. And they're verses that basically seem like they contradict other places in the Bible, or they are hard to understand, or our experience tells us something

different. I'm 95% sure that this verse was on that list. Because Jesus says, "Ask and you *will* receive." Why, then, do we not get what we ask for? Why, when we pray for things we long for, does God apparently do nothing? The short answer is, "I don't know." I do know that this verse is often abused. We're told lies about the amount of faith we have or lies about the right way to ask God. These lies sit in the idea of God as a wish-granter, as a genie. But also, this verse is just hard because God doesn't really answer the "Why?" question. When Job demands to know why hard things happened to him, God's response is basically, "Who are you to ask me these things? I am God."

I think we can get close to an answer though. So the first answer is that sometimes we ask for things that we are not prepared for. If, in a couple of years, my daughter came to me and said, "Dad, I want the keys. I need to drive to the store," I would say, "No, because you're only two years old." The Bible is full of people who had to wait. David waited years in exile to be king. Abraham waited for a son, and then tried to speed up the process. And Simeon (if you know the story of Advent) was told by God that he would live to see the Messiah, and he did. He had to wait to see the Savior. The second answer is that we often ask for things out of our sin. We ask for things we don't need or for things that would actually drive us away from God. James 4:1-3 says, "*What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don't they come from your desires that battle within you? You desire but you do not have, so you kill. You covet but you cannot get what you want, so you quarrel and fight. You do not have because you do not ask God. When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures.*" Jeremiah 2:13 says, "*My people have committed two sins: They have forsaken me, the spring of living water, and have dug their own cisterns, broken cisterns that cannot hold water.*" Taking these two pictures, we get an idea of the impact of our sin on prayer. We dig our own wells, hoping to quench our thirst. And we get mad at God when we come away thirsty. We pray for things that cannot possibly satisfy the chaos, the loneliness, and the fear. We pray things like, "If only my wife was...", "If only my husband would...", "If I just had the right job...the right relationship...a better car...a better house...". The result of these kinds of prayers is dissatisfaction, broken relationships, and more thirsty crying out in disappointment that God did not do what we wanted. What's difficult is that often our prayers are for good things, but we ask out of a need to fill the emptiness. And then we mask our emptiness by saying, "In Jesus's name I pray." We become like a child asking Dad if they can eat an entire bag of marshmallows because Mom said they could, but in actuality Mom didn't say they could. There's a difference between childlike belief in a parent's ability to perform miracles and a childlike manipulation to get the things we want. We need to ask for miracles. But we also need to surrender ourselves to the line in the Lord's prayer: "*Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.*"

The third answer to this question is that sometimes God has plans that we cannot see or understand. The disciples experienced this all the time with Jesus, especially in the last days before His death and resurrection. Throughout chapter 16, Jesus's last instructions to His disciples are scattered about, including really confusing phrases like, "In a little while you will see me no more, and then after a little while, you will see me." What does that mean?!? The disciples still thought they were going to revolt. They thought they were going to raise up arms, kick the Romans out, and fight for independence. That's why Peter has a sword when soldiers come to arrest Jesus in the garden. It's why James and John ask Jesus, "When you come into your glory, can we sit at your right hand and your left?" They think He's going to set up His kingdom on earth. Right away. That they're all going to rise up and beat the Romans. Time and again, the disciples showed that they had no idea what was going to happen. And that's the way it is with us. We read the Bible, we spend time in prayer, we act in the way that we think God

has called us to, and still things don't work out the way we think they should. But we have to continue forward and strive towards relationship with Jesus.

Our last question for this verse is, "What is joy?" *Until now, you have not asked for anything in my name. Ask and you will receive and your joy will be complete.* What is joy? Rod Hugen, one of the pastors of our church, once said, "Joy is not happiness. A lot of times we mistake that. Happiness is an emotion that comes and goes. There's something rich inside of us. Those of us who have walked with Him for a long time begin to experience this deep-down joy. The pleasure of God's company. That's what joy is: the pleasure of God's company. It is a deep reflection inside the character and nature of Jesus that brings peace to us. That joy, that deep-down inside stuff means that we can walk through horrible things. And we can walk through them, not with happy smiles on our faces, but weeping and full of joy. We can sorrow and be full of joy. We can be in anguish and full of joy. We can go through pain and be full of joy because of who Jesus is in us. He invites into that most intimate of intimate relationships. And when we have that most intimate relationship, there is a deep undergirding, a deep foundational joy that's in us." This is joy: the pleasure of God's company. The purpose of prayer is joy. If I were to rewrite this verse, I would write, "Out of relationship with Jesus comes relationship with God." And this is what Jesus is saying: that because of His sacrifices, we can experience the goodness of what He experiences. The relationship that humans had in the Garden with God comes again to us through the name of Jesus. The chaos, the loneliness, and the fear of our broken world have been healed through what Jesus did on the cross. So now, through relationship with Jesus, we can experience the pleasure of God's company. We all have two deep longings: to be known and to be loved. And when we seek to have these longings met through the pleasure of God's company, we can find peace in the midst of chaos, belonging in the midst of loneliness, and love that overcomes fear.

We have now arrived at, "So what?" So, if the purpose of prayer is joy, and joy is the pleasure of God's company, so what? What now? What do we do? We should be spurred to action by this verse. This verse should drive us to take a prayer-inventory of sorts. You need to be asking questions like: How do I pray? Is there joy when I pray? What stands in the way of me spending time in prayer? And maybe read through or sit down to write your 20 prayers for the year. And share them with someone close to you. Because we sometimes think of prayer as a purely personal time with God, when there's actually a deep richness in inviting the community of God to encourage and support us in prayer. And if you're stuck on where to start when you pray, try starting with a prayer partner (someone to keep you accountable), try setting a timer for a short time – five or ten minutes – and find somewhere to sit quietly, which I know is hard sometimes. I think often we don't enter in because we're afraid of the silence, or of letting go of the busyness of life. Another thing to try is, if you don't know what to say, find a Psalm and read it out loud. Or find a book of prayers and read them out loud. My last thought is this: we have to take seriously the declaration of "In Jesus's name we pray." It's become a cast-off tagline, when really it's the most deeply significant part of our prayer. It's a beautiful thing to declare that we enter into the pleasure of God's company through the sacrifice of His son.

## **John 16:24**

- 1) Respond to the statement that the purpose of prayer is joy.
  
  
  
  
  
  
- 2) Jesus vouches for you and stands with you before God. How does that impact your prayer life?
  
  
  
  
  
  
- 3) Why don't you get what you ask for?
  
  
  
  
  
  
- 4) How do you deal with God's answer to Job?
  
  
  
  
  
  
- 5) Jesus teaches us to pray, "Your will be done." How does that change how you pray?
  
  
  
  
  
  
- 6) Write down 20 brief prayers. Write 'Your will be done' after each one. How do you feel about submitting these to God?

## Chapter Three

by Rod Hugen

### 1 John 1:9

If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just  
and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.

The next verse that we're going to address is 1 John 1:9. We're talking about confession here; specifically, the confession of sin. There's another way to confess: it's when we confess that Jesus is Lord. You've heard Romans 10:9 perhaps: "If you confess... that Jesus is Lord." That confession is simply to announce the truth about something. But considering this verse, we want to concentrate on the confession of our sins.

In chapter one, Eric talked about the fact that we live our lives in chaos, loneliness, and fear. And these are all results of sin. The reason for sin is that we are separated from God. We want to be our own gods. We don't like God. We don't like the fact that there is a ruler over us. We want to do things our way. We're going 40 different directions, doing 40 different things all at once. We're lonely, even sometimes in what we think would be the most intimate of places. Lonely with our spouses. Lonely in our families. We are afraid. We live lives of fear. That's the world in which we live. And the reason for that is sin.

Sin is simply missing the mark that God calls us to. God says, "Be this way. Do these things. Honor this. Love this." And we don't. We miss the mark. Sometimes it seems we don't miss it by much, but any miss is a miss. One of my favorite definitions of sin is, "That which is not the way it's supposed to be." I like that, because it makes us come face to face with the fact that there *is* a way that it's supposed to be. God's ways are real. They bless us and draw us to Him. We often think the Ten Commandments are restrictive, but they're actually freeing! They give us freedom to do all sorts of things. Freedom to not die. To not murder. To not steal. Freedom to worship and honor God. Whenever we separate ourselves from that freedom, we sin.

The concept of sin is hard for us, because we are masters at justifying ourselves. "I got angry, but *really* wasn't my fault." "I know I lied, but it was really to protect these other people." Right? We justify everything. When we're speeding, it's because something really important is happening and we have to get there fast. When that other jerk is speeding, he's just an idiot! Right? That's how we are. We give ourselves a break. We don't give anybody else one.

We can recognize our sin if we're serious about asking. We can ask in community. Here, gathered around. "Where do you see me sinning?" You may not recognize the impact of your sin, but I guarantee that people around you feel it and know it. You can recognize your sinfulness if you ask your spouse, your kids, any of your intimate relationships, "Where do I sin against you?" They'll tell you. Also, you can ask the elders of this church, "Where am I sinning?"

The second we start talking about sin, we go straight to shame, right? Shame or anger. Anger because, "I'm not that way." Or shame because, "Yeah, I am that way." And I want to just mention that there are two different kinds of shame. In our culture, shame is seen as a bad thing. We think people should never be shamed. Shaming is horrible. But there is a godly shame. And it is the most precious gift you can receive. The shame that, when your sin is presented to you,

you recognize it. You think, "I wish I wasn't like that." And that kind of godly shame can lead us to repentance. It leads us to say, "This is wrong and I don't want it to be wrong anymore. I want to make things right. God, help me." That's the beautiful part of godly shame.

Now there's another kind of shame and that's satanic shame. Shame that Satan throws at us constantly: "You'll never get it right." "You'll never amount to anything." "You're a liar, and you're always going to be a liar." Satanic shame is hopeless. Godly shame is hopeful. Satanic shame says, "You can't change." Godly shame says, "God can change you." We get so hooked on satanic shame and Satan's accusation of us. We don't like to be shamed. And then we have this beautiful invitation to confess our sins. The word "to confess" comes from a Greek root that means "to agree with God." Confession is all about agreeing with God. When you begin to understand the depth of your sin, then you acknowledge it. Out loud, you say, "Yes, God, you're right. What I did was wrong."

Confession is when we have been saying, "I hate that person but they deserve to be hated, because after all, they're just hateful people, and I have rights. It's okay for me to do that." But God says, "Love your neighbor as yourself. Love your enemy. Do good to those who spitefully use you." So confession is saying, "I agree with You, God. I'm sorry. You're right. What I'm doing is wrong. I need to stop."

To confess our sin is to agree with God, and our confession is always first and foremost to God. Psalm 32:1-5 says, "*Blessed is the one whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the one whose sin the Lord does not count against them and in whose spirit is no deceit. When I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long. For day and night your hand was heavy upon me; my strength was sapped as in the heat of summer. Then I acknowledged my sin to you and did not cover my iniquity. I said, 'I will confess my transgressions to the Lord. ' And you forgave the guilt of my sin.*" Beautiful. You confess and acknowledge. God forgives. So first of all, our confession is to God.

But we're also invited by Scripture to confess to each other. James 5:16 says, "*Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective.*" John Calvin was one of the theologians and scholars that I read when I was young, and he says we should "lay our infirmities on one another's breasts, to receive among ourselves mutual counsel, mutual compassion, and mutual consolation. Then, as we are aware of our brother's infirmities, let us pray to God for these." There's this beautiful thing about confessing to each other, because it means that we can be in this together. I despise the fact that there's often more confession and more acceptance of confession in bars than there is in churches. That's crazy to me. If there has ever been a place that's created for the very purpose of being able to confess our sins to each other, this is the place. And if it's not, something's gone dreadfully wrong. We hesitate to confess our sins. We just hate to do it.

So why do we hesitate? Our thoughts run along the lines of: "What will people think?" "What will happen if they know the real me?" When I look back on my failures to confess, every single time, there has been some element of, "If people really know, they will despise me." We hesitate, because we don't want people to know. We want people to have a false image of us. In fact, we'd much rather *look* good than *be* good. Right? Being good is hard. Looking good, you've got to keep some balls up in the air, but you can become an expert at lying and cheating and hiding your sin. We hesitate because we are fearful of consequences. And there are real consequences to confession. You can get in trouble with the government if you confess. You can get in trouble

with your spouse if you confess. You can lose your job if you confess. Fear of consequences is a real thing. And we're always afraid of the consequences, because we simply do not trust the goodness of God. We're sure that we have to protect ourselves because God won't.

Another reason we hesitate is that we're afraid of change. We get comfortable in our lifestyle. If things are working; why mess with it? We think, "This is comfortable. I'm okay just the way I am. It's going to work out." And in some ways, that seems right. But God has always invited us into *not* the status quo, into *not* the same old thing. He invites us into adventure. He invites into walking with Him. He invites us into a world of change. For those of you who cannot stand change and want everything to stay the same, I'm sorry to disappoint you: God's not going to leave you where you're at. Ever. He's calling you to new places. Another reason that might sound kind of good is, "I don't want to do any more damage. I've already hurt somebody and if I say what I have to say, it could be worse. It could hurt them more." Again, it's a complete and total distrust of the goodness of God. Don't get me wrong; there can be consequences. Real consequences. Painful consequences. And even in those consequences, when you trust God, you will find His goodness in ways that you cannot imagine.

So what are some things that happen when we confess? Well, when we confess our sin to God, forgiveness is granted. It's a done deal. And it's not just the forgiveness. Confessed sin disappears. God erases it. He separates you from it and it from you. Scripture tells us that our sin is cast into the bottom of the sea. It's as far away from us as the east is from the west. I'm not quite sure how that works. How far is the east from the west? Well, pretty far, apparently. It's not like from the Middle East to the western United States or something. No, this is from one direction to the other. This is as far as it gets. Sin disappears. It's gone. Imagine if you lived this. What would happen if you actually believed it was true that God had completely forgotten all the sin you have confessed? He no longer holds it against you. It's done. How would you live differently if that were true? What kind of joy would that bring to you? What kind of freedom would that release you to? We don't really have a frame of reference for this, because we don't forget sins. Sometimes we get to the point where we say, "I'm going to bury the hatchet." And then we remember *where* we buried that hatchet; just in case we want to dig it up again sometime and use it. One of the great things I often love to talk about in regard to marriage, including my own, is the way in which we forgive our spouse for something, and then two years later, when they do it again we say, "See? You did it again, one more time." To their response of, "Wait. I thought that was forgiven," All we can say is, "Oh yeah, it's forgiven...Not. Because I'm still remembering it. And I'm gonna keep remembering it." I have sinned against Kathy in this way. I bring up stuff. It's a denial of the goodness and the grace of God. God forgets our sin. He chooses to treat it as though it never happened. Walk in the joy and the freedom of that.

Another beautiful thing that happens when we confess sin is that Satan is disarmed. His best weapon is taken out of his hands. I love that. His tool is to say, "See? See what you did? If people find out... You'd better do it in secret... You'd better hide." And we listen to him! We drive over the speed limit only when we think we won't get caught. We commit crimes in the middle of the night, under the cover of darkness. Because that's how Satan operates. We don't just walk in and do bad things in front of people; we're not stupid. We don't want to get caught, we don't want to suffer. Satan hides everything in darkness. God reveals everything in light. All of your sins are going to be found out, do you know that? Isn't that depressing? All of your sins are known. God in heaven sees everything. The good news is, He loves you and He forgives you when you ask.

Further, when we confess, true community is built. A community built on truth, not on image. Real community happens. It's been my longing here at the Village from the very beginning that we could create community. Deep, intimate, real community. Where confession of sin could happen. Because then we're dealing with each other honestly. And we have to deal with the pain and suffering and struggle that comes with that. But we also find the richness of the goodness of God in it.

When we confess, our capacity to resist temptation increases. I have found this to be true for myself. I struggle with kind of a gambler's personality. I like to gamble. My wife and I went to Vegas once, and I took \$20 and put it in a slot machine, and on the second to the last quarter, I won \$750. I gave \$650 of this to my wife; then I took the other \$100 and said, "I'm going to turn this into even more money." And I did. And I started realizing that I was trusting the money I was winning more than I trusted the goodness of God in my life. Sometimes I would, in those early days, stop by a casino and risk my \$20 to see if I could win more. Or I'd buy lottery tickets with the hope that it was the way God would take care of me. Since that season, I've stopped buying lottery tickets. And I've driven past casinos numerous times. And I've turned down a trip to Vegas or two. Because it's not a good place for me. Being able to talk to you about that is a freeing thing. I no longer feel like God's not going to take care of me. And when that doubt comes to my head, this confession has allowed me, more and more, increasingly, to resist my gambling inclinations.

What happens when we confess? God is honored. God is honored that we trust Him. God says, "Way to go." I sometimes imagine God has a gigantic refrigerator, and up there is your picture, right? And He says, "Look at my kid, look what he did." When we confess our sins, God forgives us. He makes it as though our sin never was. He forgives us and He purifies us. He cleans us up. He begins to polish us. He starts to take away more and more of that which keeps us from Him. God's faithfulness to us is fulfilled, and God's justice is fulfilled. Interesting, isn't it, that God's justice is fulfilled? When we confess, God's justice is made right. Because that shifts the burden of our sin from us and it puts it on Jesus, the One who died for it. Confess your sins to God. We do that when we trust that He has forgiven us and will forgive us. Confess your sins to each other. Confess your sins to each other when you're really afraid to. When you're terrified to. For those of you who hear such a confession, know that you're holding something precious in your hands. When you hear someone say, "I've done this wrong," weep with them. Care for them. Pursue them. Often we do the same sin over and over and over again. Walk with them. When someone gives you the gift of confession, treat it as the gift that it is. Honor it. Honor it by confessing back to them and proclaiming the truth. We don't know the pain and suffering and struggle that others are going through, so when we hear their confession, and their acknowledgment of their sin, we can say, "Ah. You're forgiven. You've acknowledged it before God and before me. You're forgiven. And let me tell you what I struggle with." Because mutuality matters. Because otherwise we create this atmosphere where, "These people are the sinners, and these people are the saints," which puts a rift between us. Years ago I read a study where they interviewed all these people who didn't go to church but kind of thought they'd like to go to church. When asked why, the number one reason people didn't go to church was, "Because I'm bad, and good people go there." Baloney. There aren't good people here. The people who are good here are good because of the work of Jesus Christ and for no other reason. Confess your sins to God and to each other.

## **1 John 1:9**

- 1) How do you go about confessing that Jesus is Lord?
  
  
  
  
- 2) Self-justification distances us from God and others. Why is it so difficult for us to acknowledge our sin?
  
  
  
  
- 3) Reflect on what it means to agree with God regarding your condition. What do you find encouraging about that? What discourages you?
  
  
  
  
- 4) Our confession is first of all to God. Why is that?
  
  
  
  
- 5) Which is easier, confessing to God or confessing to each other? Why?
  
  
  
  
- 6) What are the benefits of confession to you?

## Chapter Four

by Eric Cepin

### 2 Corinthians 5:17-21

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come:

The old has gone, the new is here!

All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ

and gave us the ministry of reconciliation:

that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ,

not counting people's sins against them.

And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation.

We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God.

God made him who had no sin to be sin for us,

so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

The book of 2 Corinthians is a letter written by the Apostle Paul, and, in this letter, Paul is struggling to prove to the people of Corinth that he has some kind of worth. Because everybody there keeps beating him up. And people say he's unimpressive and kind of ugly. And they tell him, "You don't really have anything good to say compared to these Super Apostles who are much better speakers." And so in most of Corinthians, in particular 2 Corinthians, he's trying to say, "I'm important guys. Here's why I matter".

Paul's big argument for why he matters is in these powerful few verses that we are going to look at this week; they are core to who the Village is. He says in 2 Corinthians 5:17, "*Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!*" Paul says, "If anyone is in Christ...." Now, being in Christ is like having a standard in battle – a flag that represents your unit. When you say you're in Christ, you're saying Christ is the banner that you wave over yourself. He's the identity. He's the place where you belong. He's what gives you meaning.

And this verse declares that the new creation is here. At this point in time, Paul has never read Revelation 21, because it hasn't been written yet. But he certainly has Isaiah 65 in the back of his mind. If you've ever read Isaiah 65, you know that Revelation 21 is just a beautiful expansion. Both talk about the new creation. Revelation 21 describes this world that God is going to make, where there isn't any weeping, where neither the old nor the young need to fear death, where God's joy pours out over us. And if you are a new creation, you happen to be a member of the creation-to-come. So Paul is saying that if you're in Christ, then right now in this moment you are a citizen of a country and a place and a way of being that has yet to be fully made. You're a new creation.

Living as a new creation while remaining broken in a broken world has been described with the idea that “the old has gone and is going, and the new has come and is coming.” It is a state of being *and* it is a process, which fits into the context of this passage. You and I stand as new creations in process together in community in Christ. Now, why and how would we end up being members of the new creation? Well, it comes from the Resurrection. Jesus is the hope of the Resurrection. So if you are in Christ, then you are in the Resurrection, and you are a new creation. You stand as a representative to the rest of us and to the world of the new that is to come: the new world, the new heavens, and the new earth.

Paul goes on and writes, “*All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation.*” Reconciliation is to be made right. If two things are reconciled, it means they are made right. Everything’s okay. Everything’s peachy. If you and I are new creations, if we are these representatives, then we belong to a ministry. It’s like we are part of a governmental department in the new creation. You and I are part of the governmental department called the Ministry of Reconciliation. To make things right.

Now, governmental ministries have directives and tasks. Ministries have things that they are supposed to do. And in the gospel of John, verse 13:34, Jesus tells His disciples He’s going to give them a new command; this command is the directive of the ministry of reconciliation. And the command is that we should love one another as Jesus loved us. The directive of the ministry of reconciliation is that we are to be a people of love who model the way we interact after the way that Jesus interacted with us.

We have a directive, we have an identity, we have a department within the kingdom we belong to, and verse 19 starts to show us the task of the ministry of reconciliation: “*That God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ. Not counting people’s sins against them. And He has committed to us the message of reconciliation.*” There’s something interesting in this line. It says that in Christ, our sins are not counted against us. Well that sounds like forgiveness to me. The task of the ministry of reconciliation is forgiveness – not counting our debts against one another.

How does that work? If our hope is the Resurrection, if that’s where the new creation comes from, then our actual mode of operation, the way we love one another, is by bearing the cross. So when you go to the door of this metaphorical Ministry of Reconciliation, do you know what symbol you see on the door? The cross. Because forgiveness is modeled to us by Jesus. The uncomfortable thing about forgiveness is that you cannot forgive anybody unless you accuse them of something. There’s no reason to forgive them if you don’t accuse them. And Jesus has accused us. He’s said we are sinners. We missed the mark. We turned our back. So God has accused us, and then God has forgiven us by changing who bears the consequences. This is also uncomfortable, because Jesus says in the gospel of Luke that to follow Him you have to take up your cross daily. The mode of operation for you and I, as ministers of reconciliation, is to daily bear a cross of forgiveness.

Now the way that you and I understand who Jesus is, the way we model being a new creation, is to actually practice forgiving one another. Forgiving one another is difficult. It’s hard because when somebody does something to you, it hurts. And every time you see that person, if you have

not forgiven them, it hurts worse. And guess what comes out of you when you don't forgive people? Bitterness, blame, and depression. And do you know what happens to a community when there's no forgiveness? It fractures. People begin to avoid each other or completely reject each other. People begin to say, "Well do you know what they're like? Do you know who they are?" In the Hebrew, there are a lot of words for forgiveness. But one of them is "NASAH," which means "to remove somebody's burden" – to literally pick it up and remove it from them. It is to accuse somebody of how they have wounded you, and then take that accusation away, and say, "I no longer hold it against you. It's no longer on you."

The tough part of forgiveness is acknowledging that there's hurt. We actually have to feel the pain. When you and I choose to pick up the offense, to carry Jesus's cross, it is difficult. Every time somebody wrongs you, you want justice. You do want them to pay. It's normal to be wronged and think, "That person needs to pay for wronging me." Maybe they just made an offhand comment, and you think, "I should make this cutting comment to them, and then they'll feel horrible about what they said." Even just simple things like that. We want people to pay. And forgiveness is to actually say, "I lift this offense, because justice has been served on Jesus." I feel the wound and the pain of taking that away and not getting justice, and I identify with Jesus and His pain of betrayal. And His pain of suffering for me.

Paul goes on to talk more about this job that you and I have. He says, "*We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making His appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf, be reconciled to God. God made Him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God.*" So it goes beyond this ministry of reconciliation. You actually have a title. It's the title of Ambassador. Ambassadors are people who live in foreign countries and have the authority to represent their home country. And Paul's saying that when you and I actually offer forgiveness and proclaim Jesus in the context of that forgiveness, we are making an appeal with Jesus. We're speaking the words of Jesus. When we do that in community, when we do that gathered together, what we're doing is making a proclamation of the power of God against evil, against bitterness, against depression. We're making a claim with authority. We're making a statement under the banner of Christ's love, because in Him we are becoming the righteousness of God.

## **2 Corinthians 5:17-21**

- 1) What does it mean to be a new creation in Christ?
  
  
  
  
  
  
- 2) Reconciliation is to make things right. How does that play out in your life?  
Where are you making things right?
  
  
  
  
  
  
- 3) We are called to love. Jesus' love brings about reconciliation. He reconciles us when we are unlovable. What does it look like to love the unlovable?
  
  
  
  
  
  
- 4) To forgive we must accuse. How do you deal with the discomfort of making accusations?
  
  
  
  
  
  
- 5) Bitterness and depression are burdens related to not forgiving. One of the words for forgiveness is 'lifting a burden.' What burden is God calling you to lift?
  
  
  
  
  
  
- 6) Forgiveness is our calling as ambassadors of reconciliation. How are you announcing and proclaiming the gospel of Jesus?

## Chapter 5

by Eric Cepin

### Proverbs 3:5-6

Trust in the Lord with all your heart  
and lean not on your own understanding;  
in all your ways acknowledge him,  
and he will make your paths straight.

In life, there are basically four things that create stress and anxiety. The first is our environment. When I say environment, I'm talking about the spaces you inhabit – your work space, the way your house is set up. But I would also include what we would call in sociology the psycho-social structures – how all the relational dynamics come together in those spaces. For example, we all know that when you walk into a workplace, there's a code. That code may produce anxiety and frustration, depending on felt expectations and how everybody works together.

Another thing that causes stress and anxiety is relationships. We are constantly in intimate relationships; we are forced together in them. We have husbands and wives, we have little kids and adults interacting. We are parents trying to keep little babies from screaming all night and parents trying to learn how to deal with teenagers. We are teenagers trying to learn how to deal with parents, schoolmates, boyfriends and girlfriends. The list goes on and on. These relationships cause frustration and concern.

The third thing that you and I face as human beings is our health, both mental and physical. I heard of a study recently where they took a scale used in the 1970's to measure anxiety in mental health wards. When the same anxiety test was given to current high schoolers, most of their scores turned out to be higher. Teenagers today experience more anxiety than people who were under psychiatric care in the 1970's. I don't need to see that study to know it's true. In social science, you can track how we've moved out of rural life into city life, so we're pressed closer together. Anytime people are pressed closer together and separated from family, anxiety will increase. And then you add the internet. That produces more anxiety, because we have more information and we're artificially connected. So there's our mental health. And, as we all know, there's our physical health. We feel frustration and confusion as our bodies change with age, when we experience illness, unexpected health problems, or some surprising event which lands us in the hospital. These things create anxiety, stress, frustration, and confusion.

One final stressor is money. If you have it, then you start feeling guilty and don't know what to do with it. It doesn't seem to do what you want it to do for you. If you don't have it, then you're constantly thinking, "How am I going to pay my rent? How am I going to eat?" Money is this thing that keeps life together while producing more anxiety, frustration, and stress.

Each of us narrates our lives in the negative in these four areas. Even when we try really hard to narrate our life in a positive manner, we tend to default to the negative. Because the reality is that life really doesn't work. There's something uniquely broken with our environment. With our relationships. With our health. With our money. It's all broken. And if you're reading this, my guess is that you believe Jesus has some kind of answer.

In this section, we're looking at Proverbs 3:5-6. Proverbs is in the Old Testament and was probably written mostly by Solomon. Proverbs chapter 3 as a whole talks about wisdom. From the two verses we're looking at, I want you to hold on to three words which provide a diagnostic tool you can use for yourself and others in the community. The first is *trust*. The second is *lean*. And the third is *acknowledge*. "*Trust in the Lord with all your heart and do not lean on your own understanding but in all your ways acknowledge Him. And He will make your paths straight.*" The key is that last part, "*He will make your paths straight.*" When you face difficulties with environment, relationships, money and health, the singular thing that produces frustration and anxiety is that your path is not straight. You have a crooked path. Imagine what a crooked path might be like: it's dark, you're outside in unfamiliar surroundings, and you don't know where you're going. You don't even know if there's a cliff that you could fall off of. Anxiety is all about being on a crooked path.

The three words from this verse point toward what a straight path might look like. "*Trust in the Lord with all your heart.*" We often think of trust as taking uncalculated risks and believing that everything will turn out well. But this whole chapter is about wisdom. To trust God here is to say, "I've come to the place where I already believe that God is trustworthy." This is similar to the idea of being in Christ discussed in chapter four. Being in Christ is holding up a standard and saying, "This is the military position that I belong to. I am in Christ. I am under this banner. This holds my identity." When you take on God's identity, you're saying, "It's not what's valuable to me anymore, it's what's valuable to God." So when you're saying, "I'm going to trust you with all of my heart" – in the Hebrew, "all of your heart" means all of *you* – thus, "all of me belongs to all of you," what you're saying is this: "You are trustworthy enough for me to hand over everything. I am now going to identify as You, not as me." That's what it means to trust God with all your heart. Every time you talking about trust, you're talking about identity. Am I going to be in Christ, or am I going to be in myself? So that's your first diagnostic.

The second part says, "*Do not lean on your own understanding.*" My friend Adrienne recently mentioned to me, "In Spanish, we say '*the chair*,' not '*my chair*'. We say '*the car*,' not '*my car*'." But as Americans using English we say, "That's *my car*. You can borrow *my car*." When we come to problems in our environment, relationships, health, and money, we always start by thinking, "I need to figure this out." Do you see the problem in this? Sometimes when we hear, "*do not lean on your own understanding*," we think, "Yeah, but sometimes God's understanding seems a little off, right? He does weird things that don't make any sense." But God's understanding of things is not weird or out of the norm. *Your* thinking is weird and abnormal. That's why you shouldn't lean on it. So the second thing we need to think about as we face these four stressors and things that produce anxiety in our life, is: "Whose understanding am I leaning on?" How do you narrate things? Are you narrating them as things you should fix? Or are you narrating them as, "What is God doing?" Because one of the keys to having a straight path is being part of a story with Jesus where you're constantly asking, "What is Jesus doing and how can I join Him?"

So we've got trust, we've got lean, and now, in all your ways, you need to acknowledge God. This is where a lot of times we run amok and begin to live out lives of anxiety. Because we're not in conversation with Jesus. We don't realize that it is in *all* of our ways. When we sit down to eat, many of us thank God for the food. Do you know why we thank God for the food? Food is what we need in order to live. We're saying, "Jesus, the only way we can truly live is if we have You to eat, if You're the one we consume." Thanking God for our food is a simple reflection of

our relationship with Jesus. But a lot of times we do that and then there's no other acknowledgement. There's no conversation with God until we get to a moment of extreme crisis in our environment, relationships, health, or money, and then we begin to say, "Aaah, God! Help me!"

My son loves to talk to me. He would attest to this: there's nothing he doesn't want to tell me about. There's an ongoing conversation, a dialogue, going on between us. I am not a good example of God for him, because at some point I'm like, "I'm not listening. I have tuned out." But the reality is that you and I tend to avoid having this dialogue with God, because it's a little uncomfortable. We're not really used to talking to God. Before I married my wife, I got to live in her grandparents' house for two years while I went to ASU. While I was living there, her grandfather passed away. There were a couple of months after that where her Grandma and I were living in the house together. In the mornings when I got up, I would approach the living room and stop, because early in the morning, her grandma would be weeping. She would be talking to God and telling Him all about her life, how much she missed her husband – she was 85 years old – and she wanted to be done. She talked out loud, and when she talked, I could tell she'd been talking to God for a long time. You know how you can overhear a conversation between two people and know they've been friends for a really long time? She had been in a process in her life of acknowledging God and dialoging.

When we talk about "all our ways," it's the simplest ways. It's when you're out in the garden and you talk to God about the beautiful beans. It's constantly being in a narrative conversation with God. It's being willing to talk out loud. When I talk to men and women who are struggling with pornography, one thing I say is, "You know what, the best thing to do is invite Jesus to go look at pornography with you." And people look at me like, "What?" Because that seems strange. But I guarantee you that if you begin a dialogue with Jesus and say, "Hey Jesus, I'm gonna do this, why don't you come with me?" then Jesus will talk to you. He doesn't want to be pushed out of this brutal struggle. He wants to be in it, and He wants to talk to you about what's going on in you and what's going on in those people you're watching. So it's okay to invite Him into that conversation. It will transform the way that you deal with your sexuality, because you are acknowledging God in all of your ways. In *all* of your ways. In your broken ways, and in your good ways.

So if we want our paths straight, here are the diagnostic questions. Ask yourself, "Am I willing to give over everything I have am to God – am I willing to trust?" "Am I willing to lean on God's understanding?" and, "Am I willing to enter into the dialogue?" Because if any one of these are askew, your path's not going to be straight. Jesus' expansion on Proverbs 3:5-6 is in John 8:12. He says, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life." The word "light" here means "animation." So when a person lives in darkness they are not animated, but when someone lives with the light, they come alive. You get a straight path by having it lit, so you know where you're going. To get there, you have to follow Jesus. The word translated as "follow" in John 8:12 has five uses, and I think Jesus has all of them in mind when He says this.

The first idea in following Jesus is "to risk". The idea here would be used to describe a soldier following a captain into battle. The captain is at the bottom of a hill, and he proclaims, "We're going to take this hill." When the captain runs up the hill, everybody follows. Jesus is saying this right after religious leaders have brought a woman caught in adultery to Him. They want to know what He'll say needs to be done. Jesus leads us into the ministry of reconciliation here by taking

the risk of standing between the perpetrator and the victim. To the perpetrator, He says, “You can’t do this; be holy.” To the victim, He says, “Where are your accusers? I don’t condemn you.” It’s the call of the gospel. The cross. The resurrection. “Go and sin no more. Be holy.” The thing that Jesus asks us to do in this call to follow Him, to be on His mission and hold His flag and trust Him, is actually to stand between the perpetrator and the victim and call both to holiness. He’s asking you to take a risk.

The second meaning of “follow” has to do with how a slave follows a master. A loyal slave or servant can know his master so well that he goes ahead and prepares the details, so that the master can easily step into what he needs to do. Tim Keller says that a church cannot control what the Holy Spirit does, but a church can be ready for the Holy Spirit to fall on it. We can be in a place of holiness. We can follow by knowing our Master so well that we’re ready for Him to act. We’ve prepared the ground for the Spirit of God to move, because we’re committed to His mission.

The third implication of the word “follow” is vulnerability, because it means “to heed wise counsel.” Jesus invites you into a community of God. When a community of God surrounds Jesus, transformation happens. Your ability to follow wise counsel means that you actually have to not believe you’re the one who’s right. Which is difficult! It’s very hard to take wise counsel. But Jesus says, “If you’re going to follow me, then you’re going to have to let other people in the community speak into your life. You’re going to have to let other people help you apply Scripture to your life.”

The next idea conveyed by the word “follow” is obedience. Jesus says in the gospel of John, “If you love me, you will obey me.” This word is sometimes used for adhering to the laws of the state. Part of following Jesus is being obedient: trusting, leaning, and acknowledging. It’s following the Ten Commandments and Jesus’ summary of them: Love God. Love people.

And the last meaning of the word “follow” is “focus.” To understand a line of argument is to follow the train of thought. We are called to grasp hold of the teachings of Jesus and understand what He really means. What Jesus has to say isn’t all simplicity. There is a complexity to His teachings. And discipline is required for you to follow where He’s going. You have to apply your mind. When Jesus calls us to follow, He’s asking us to do so with our hearts, souls, and minds.

As you address your frustrations and the anxieties of others around you, I want you to use this diagnostic tool. Begin by asking these questions: “Are we trusting God with all our hearts?” “Are we taking hold of the identity of Christ?” “Why is it that having Christ as our identity is so difficult for us?” “How are we narrating life?” When people begin their narration by a concern and a compassion for other people, you know that they’re a follower of Jesus. And last you can ask, “What is our conversation with God like? How do we talk to God?” One of the best ways to help yourself and other people engage with Jesus is to say, “You know what, let’s just pray. We don’t need to come up with the answers. Let’s talk to God and tell Him what’s going on and what we want Him to do. Let’s begin to dialogue and listen to see what He says. Let’s begin to listen together.” We can have this conversation about being a follower of Jesus together and help each other move toward trusting, leaning, and acknowledging God and walking on straight paths.

## **Proverbs 3:5-6**

- 1) Where in life are you experiencing anxiety now?
  
  
  
  
  
  
- 2) On a scale of one to ten rank your level of trust in God. Why is that? What do you need to do to live into the identity of Christ?
  
  
  
  
  
  
- 3) What do you think God is doing in the area where you feel most anxious?
  
  
  
  
  
  
- 4) What does talking to God look like in your life? Is it crisis only? Scheduled into your routine? An ongoing chat?
  
  
  
  
  
  
- 5) Following means to live at risk, being loyal to the mission, listening to wise counsel, obeying the leader, and focusing on Jesus. Where are you following well? Where do you struggle to follow?

## Chapter 6

by Mark Crawford

### Hebrews 10:24-25

And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another – and all the more as you see the Day approaching.

What is a friend? We come to the Village and spend time together. We learn some of the most intimate details of each other's lives. And still there is sometimes a sense that the people we go to church with are in a special category other than "friend." We divide up our lives into pockets and think of the people in the church as something other than friends. And it's not that we shouldn't have friends outside the community, because that would be contrary to the gospel. But it's important to think about what friendship looks like within the context of the community of Christ and in particular, what it means to be and have friends at the Village. A friend in the community of Christ thinks about, and prays for, persists toward, and gives heart to those who are also in Christ.

One of the primary activities in which we participate in the community of Christ is the defining of words. It's important that we do this because there are a lot of words in the Bible that don't make sense to us. There are words that we don't use any more, words that are particular to ancient Hebrew culture. There are words that mean something different now than they did one hundred years ago, let alone two or three thousand years ago. We also enter into this activity because the words we use and what they mean are supremely important. To be in community together means striving to understand each other as much as we possibly can. The defining of words is also important, because our culture and language are constantly changing.

Probably the most important reason we participate in a defining of words is that doing so was part of the ministry of Jesus. In Matthew 5 during Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, Jesus takes the command, "you shall not murder" and defines it not just as the physical act of killing someone, but as simply being angry with someone. Then a little later, Jesus takes the command, "you shall not commit adultery" and again defines it not just as the physical act of committing adultery, but also as lust after someone. I want to point out that the reason Jesus is defining these words is because He is defining sin. At the time He was speaking, the people of God had forgotten the heart. They had reduced relationship with God to making sacrifices for physical acts of sin, but God defines sin as the evil that is in our hearts. In Matthew 15, Jesus says, "Do you not see that whatever goes into the mouth passes into the stomach and is expelled? But what comes out of the mouth proceeds from the heart, and this defiles a person. For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, slander. These are what defile a person. But to eat with unwashed hands does not defile anyone."

There are two more words that Jesus defines in His ministry that specifically address this problem of the heart. The first is “love.” John 3:16 says, “For God so loved the world, that he gave his one and only son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.” In the words of the great theologian (and early 90’s hip-hop singer) Kevin Michael McKeehan, “Love is a verb.”

Our culture defines love as something like either affection or lust. It is a feeling that we fall into or out of. But in the gospels and later in the letters, we are given the ultimate picture of love: the decision by God to come into His created world in order to die as a sacrifice for our sin and be raised up as a triumph over death. 1 John 3:16 says, “This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters.” Love is not a feeling or something that just happens to us. It is this gift that God has given us. When you say, “I love you” to someone, you should know that you are actually saying, “I am willing to lay down myself and who I am to serve you, just as Jesus did for me.”

The second word that Jesus defines in His ministry is “joy.” As mentioned previously in the chapter about John 16:24, joy is not happiness. Joy is what flows out of prayer. Joy is the pleasure of God’s company. This is what Jesus came to restore with His ministry, death, and resurrection: our ability to enter into relationship with God and to experience the joy of that relationship.

So here’s what we have defined so far: Sin is the evil that is in all of our hearts. Love is the example that Jesus set in dying for our sin. Joy is the relationship we have with God as a result of that loving action. These combine to create the classic picture of the gospel (which, to keep up the theme of defining things, means “good news”).

I’m talking about all of this to get to the word that we are defining today, which is “friendship.” So let’s go to our verse for this chapter of the study, Hebrews 10:24-25 – “And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.”

We begin with the gospel in this conversation, because we have to know what our baseline is. Verse 24 begins with, “And let us.” These verses in chapter 10 are directives for those who are in the community of Christ. The writer says just before this in verse 19, “Since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, LET US...”

We are all here because we believe in Jesus Christ, or are at some level searching for the truth about Him. Here’s what Dietrich Bonhoeffer, in his book *Life Together*, had to say about this, “A Christian comes to others only through Jesus Christ. Among men there is strife. Without Christ there is discord between God and man and between man and man. Christ became the Mediator and made peace with God and among men. Without Christ we should not know God, we could not call upon Him, nor come to Him. But without Christ we also would not know our brother, nor could we come to him. The way is blocked by our own ego. Christ opened up the way to God and to our brother. Now Christians can live with one another in peace; they can love and serve one another; they can become one. But they can continue to do so only by way of Jesus

Christ.” We are friends because of Christ and nothing else. It is only through Him that we can know each other.

And this leads us into, “Consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds.” This is a popular Village verse that you may have heard before. The picture implied is obviously someone riding a horse with spurs, but the word also translates as “irritate.” We are called to irritate and to pester one another on toward love and good deeds. I love this idea, but as much as it comes up, we still have a really hard time living it out. We miss the very important, “consider one another.”

In that quote from Bonhoeffer, he says, “The way is blocked by our own ego.” We often consider how we may spur *ourselves* on toward love and good deeds and then project that onto those around us. We fail to actually look at those around us and think about *them*. We are called to love all people, including those whose views and lifestyles differ from our own. How much more, then, should we strive to know and love the people who are in our own community?

This is our second building block. Friends within the community of Christ think about one another. But to consider one another does not just mean to think about one another. It means we must pray for one another.

A couple years ago, we did a whole year on Village values, and Ron Layman introduced community. In that talk, he said that we should just put yellow tape across the front doors of the church, because walking into a church is like walking in on a crime scene, except that everyone is guilty. We are all broken, sinful creatures, who have been saved by a loving God who invites us into relationship. To consider one another means entering into prayer with God for each other. It means sitting with God and being open to having our hearts changed towards the people we don’t like and the people we don’t understand. And I guarantee that if you pray for someone everyday, your heart will be changed towards them. Its funny, we often think prayer is about changing the other person, when much more often the result is that our own hearts are changed.

Pray for one another. Pray everyday. One of Martin Luther’s most famous quotes is, “I have so much to do that I shall spend the first three hours in prayer.” Jesus got away to pray. Prayer is relationship with God. It’s lifting up the community. It’s life-giving and joy-producing. We don’t pause our life to pray, we’re not missing out when we pray – it is a recognition of our own weakness and God’s very great strength. Pray for one another, especially for those who it is hardest for you to love.

Verse 25 begins, “...not giving up meeting together as some are in the habit of doing.” Before I came to the Village, there was a time when I was working at another church. At that church, there was a guy I played in the band with. During that time, he was a great friend to me. We hung out together. We played a lot of music together. He was with me through some very difficult events. After I came to the Village, I began to notice him on Facebook. He said some stuff I don’t agree with, but I brushed it off. One day I saw something he had posted on Facebook, and I thought, “Man that guy’s a jerk.” I immediately thought, “Where did that come from? I went to this guy’s wedding. I like him. We were close friends.”

There is something interesting that happens when we are forced to interact with each other face to face. It becomes harder to dehumanize them. It’s harder to not be confronted with the reality

that we are all broken and in need of Christ's sacrifice. So do not give up meeting together, because this is our third building block: Friends within the community of Christ persist towards each other.

"To persist" is to continue firmly or obstinately in an opinion or a course of action in spite of difficulty, opposition, or failure. To persist in the community of Christ is to spur or irritate one another on towards love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, in spite of difficulty, opposition, or failure. What things do you think make it ok to give up meeting together? What things do you allow to dictate whether or not you will persist? I know that one of the things that makes me think it's alright to stop reaching out to someone is, "Well *they* hurt me; *they* should be the one to come talk to me." This only creates bitterness. And my bitterness does nothing to the other person. It only amplifies my own hurt, my own stubbornness. And the enemy gains a foothold in telling me lies about why the other person hasn't called me, and why I'm right to feel the way I do. Persist towards good deeds. Persist toward loving action. Persist towards each other.

Let's define our last word. The word "encourage" comes from the Latin word for *heart*, which is "cor." It's the same word that gives us the Spanish "corazon," which, of course, means "heart." To encourage someone literally means to "give heart." But our hearts are sinful. So we cannot give our own hearts. We *give heart* through the loving action of Jesus Christ, and by sharing the joy of a relationship with God. We *give heart* to each other by pursuing each other. By offering relationship, by eating together, by working together, by having fun together. We *give heart* to each other by reaching out when times are hard and by celebrating even the small events together.

In Larry Crabb's book titled Encouragement, he says, "Encouragement is the kind of expression that helps someone want to be a better Christian, even when life is rough. By the grace of God, I can have that effect on your life and you can have it on mine. We must apply our mental energies to the job of understanding precisely how we can perform this important work for each other."

So this week think about your community. Think about the people who it's hard for you to love. Think about them in light of their identity as children of God and brothers and sisters in Christ. Then spend time praying for them. Pray for their job, their family, and their struggles in life. And pray for yourself. Pray that God would show you how to love them, how to reach out to them, how to push past the things that divide us. Then persist towards them. Invite them out for coffee, call them and ask to pray with them, be willing to admit hurt, and to ask for forgiveness. And finally, give heart to each other. Encourage one another. Eat together, pray together, work together, and figure out how to have fun together. In Ecclesiastes it says, "So I commend the enjoyment of life, because there is nothing better for a person under the sun than to eat and drink and be glad. Then joy will accompany them in their toil all the days of the life God has given them under the sun."

## **Hebrews 10:24-25**

- 1) What is a friend?
- 2) Reflect on the fact that saying I love you means you are willing to lay down your life for the person to whom you are saying it.
- 3) Joy is the pleasure of God's company. How do you experience joy?
- 4) What is your reaction to the idea that we can only know each other in Christ?
- 5) What does it mean to 'consider' someone?
- 6) What keeps you from meeting together with others?
- 7) How are you irritating others to good works?
- 8) Are you encouraged? Are you encouraging others?

## Chapter 7

by Rod Hugen

### Philippians 4:13

I can do everything through him who gives me strength.

I love this passage because it's so *wrong*. Right? It can't possibly be true. Really, I can't do much. But those words are true. They are incredibly true, but they're in a context. Let's consider the context of where these words come from in Philippians 4:2-20, because then the words make sense:

*I entreat Euodia and I entreat Syntyche to agree in the Lord. Yes, I ask you also, true companion, help these women who have labored side by side with me in the gospel together with Clement and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the book of life. Rejoice in the Lord always; again, I will say, rejoice. Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand; do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me – practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you. I rejoiced in the Lord greatly that now at length you have revived your concern for me. You were indeed concerned for me, but you had no opportunity. Not that I am speaking of being in need, for I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content. I know how to be brought low, I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need. I can do all things through him who strengthens me. Yet it was kind of you to share in my trouble. And you Philippians yourselves know that in the beginning of the gospel, when I left Macedonia, no church entered into partnership with me in giving and receiving, except you only. Even in Thessalonica you sent me help for my needs once and again. Not that I seek the gift, but I seek the fruit that increases to your credit. I have received full payment, and more. I am well supplied, having received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent, a fragrant offering, a sacrifice acceptable and pleasing to God. And my God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus. To our God and Father be glory forever and ever. Amen.*

Quite a few years ago, my wife's grandmother was in the hospital dying, and I went to visit her the morning of the day that she died. As I walked in, I looked all around and I sat down and I prayed for her. She was unconscious, and there were all these tubes running in and out of her, and there was all sorts of electrical wiring, and there was machinery buzzing and making noises, and there were all these blinking lights, and medical personnel walking by from time to time checking things. And as I'm sitting there, I'm thinking, "Wow. If you unplug these machines, Grandma's dead. She's on total life support." And in that moment, the Holy Spirit whispered to me, "And so are you. So are you." If God takes oxygen away from us for a few moments, we're dead. If He decides that gravity is no longer in play, we're dead. If He moves us closer to the sun, in a deteriorating orbit of that sun, we're dead. We're on total life support.

We're in this bubble that floats through the universe where He gives us life. All that we have is from Him.

We believe that we have power and that we can do amazing things. We *can*, in that our abilities are gifts from God. But in our sin, we start to think that we have certain rights that we earn because we're smart or good or kind or important. We have this sense of entitlement. I have demands on how my life should be. Is that true for you? My life has to be a certain way. Do you have demands on what God needs to do? What does God owe you? What does he need to do in order for you to be happy with your life? Maybe you have a whole list of things that you feel entitled to.

In this passage, Paul says he's content in his circumstances. There were people he looked to who supplied his needs. But he is content in whatever circumstances he finds himself. We also look to others to supply our needs. Who do you look to to supply your needs? And then we get to the hard question: Who lets you down? Who abandoned you when you needed them the most? Paul talks about abandonment. It's a big issue. Those who we need the most don't come through for us. Sometimes they couldn't possibly come through for us even if they wanted to.

In 2 Corinthians 11:21-29, Paul describes some of the harder circumstances he's faced and found contentment in. This daunting list is written from prison. When most of us make our list of the things we need in order to be content, they don't usually include imprisonment, beatings, being robbed, or being shipwrecked. We tend to think that if we could just get the next big thing in our lives settled, it would be enough. But it never is. Paul's contentment, however, isn't found in getting more stuff or getting his act together or getting deeper and better relationships. Paul's contentment is found in Christ. In Christ, he is set free from stuff and from circumstances. The circumstances don't matter, because Jesus is enough. Paul has this incredible confidence in the goodness of God. He knows that, irrespective of what happens to him, he is held in the hand of Jesus. He is held in God's hands.

In another place, Paul says that the question of life and death doesn't matter him, because, "*to live is Christ, and to die is gain.*" So first of all, the fear of death is taken away. Jesus comes to free us from our terror about dying. He wants to give us His freedom in whatever circumstances we find ourselves. With whatever stuff or lack of stuff we have. One of my favorite promises of Jesus is and always will be, "*In this world you will have trouble.*" That's such a beautiful promise. And it's absolutely true. Paul's in prison. He's been beaten, robbed, everything's gone wrong in his life. But he has the knowledge of the goodness of God. And somehow the presence of God in those circumstances becomes enough. And then the freedom comes to just live with abandon. Paul says, "*I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.*" Because I'm no longer bound to things. Because I'm no longer bound to this earth. Because I'm no longer bound to have to have life be a certain way. Because I don't have those boundaries any longer. I am free to live. I'm free to enjoy the money that I have. To enjoy the home that I'm given. To enjoy the people in my life. To just live. To live with joy. To rejoice. "*I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.*"

Paul reminds us that our capabilities are in Christ. We are equipped by Christ to do good works that God prepared for us to do. Ephesians 2:8-10 reminds us, "*For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.*" Isn't that fabulous? God's prepared

good things for you to do. When you walk with Him, He's giving you good things to do. And you get to take pleasure in them. "I can do all things," Paul says. There aren't limitations on what Christ can accomplish using His people. What burdens do you have that you think preclude you from doing what Christ has called you to do? The nice thing is, God do whatever He wants through you. He's amazing. He can prepare all things, anything, whatever thing, He can prepare it for you to do and you can do it. "I can do all things"

It's not that you can do all things in your own power. Paul says you can do all things through Christ. In Galatians 2:20, he writes, "*I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.*" You have to submit your life to Christ. When you give your life over to Christ, He can accomplish anything through His power and through what He's already done. One of our biggest problems is that we want to be strong. We want to be looked up to and respected and admired. But Christ's strength is made evident in our weakness. In 2 Corinthians 12:9-10 Paul writes, "*But he said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, because my power is made perfect in weakness.' Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses so that the power of Christ may rest upon me. For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong.*" Don't be afraid of your weakness. Celebrate it. Enjoy it. It's where people see Jesus in you. "Paul can go through all this rejection, all this pain, all this suffering, all this struggle, and all this hurt, not because he has his act together, but because in his weakness Jesus strengthens him. And we, along with Paul, can do all things when Christ strengthens us.

## Philippians 4:13

- 1) In what parts of your life do people look to you to know what to do or how to think?
  - 2) How do you feel weak in the various aspects of your life?  
(marriage/singleness, parenting, work, health, etc.)
  - 3) Write your own definition of what it means to be content:
  - 4) Talk about a time that Jesus used your weakness for His glory.

## (Appendix 1) The Trinity

The doctrine of the Trinity is a paradox: a pair of statements which are so diametrically opposed that, within human reasoning, we imagine that they cannot possibly both be true. Yet we believe in the Trinity because we believe that both statements are the inescapable conclusions of Scripture.

First, we believe that God is One. There is only one God. There are no lesser Gods, or rival Gods, or alternative Gods. Second, we believe that there are three persons who are all equally God: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Christian theology holds that there is something very important which separates these three from each other; we cannot simply lump them together and assume that they are different flavors of the same God. Yet, in another sense, they are entirely linked and unified; it would be just as large a mistake to claim that there are three Gods.

Many good theologians have attempted to resolve this paradox. However, these summaries usually either minimize the three-ness of God (often depicting Him as a single being with three expressions) or minimize the oneness of God (often depicting Him as three beings utterly united in purpose). I suspect that the Trinity is something which is impossible for human minds to grasp entirely; we will forever need to hold onto the two “incompatible” truths at the same time.

The doctrine of the Trinity reminds us that we do not understand God in any complete or essential sense. There is something about Him which is impenetrable to human minds. God said, “My thoughts are not your thoughts,” and I believe this is quite literally true. There is no intellectual box which we can build which will contain all of the truth about God. Keep an eye out; you will find that there is much about God which we can describe, but cannot entirely understand.

### **Trinitarian Community**

God has lived in community for all eternity; there was never any time (nor will there be in the future) when any of the three Persons did not exist. Since all three are Persons, God has always experienced relationship within the Trinity. Since all three are all-loving, the relationship has always been one of perfect love.

In that perfect love, there is a natural order. The Father sits at the top of the order; He is deserving of all honor, power, and authority, and the others love to give it to Him. Under this authority sits the Son, who submits willingly and delightedly to the authority of the Father. (The Spirit is also involved in all of this relationship, but I'm not clear exactly how the Spirit fits in.)

We humans are often shocked when we hear this. If there is a natural order – if there is a system of honor and power – then can there truly be love and relationship? Surely the Trinity is an unequal partnership – the Father gets the best, and the Son has to settle for less.

Yet this is emphatically not the case. The authority structure is natural to the relationship, and is expressed in a purely loving way. The Father's authority is never destructive or domineering, and yet is pervasive; the Son's submission is neither subservient nor denigrating, and yet is complete. When we look at the relationship of Father and Son, we see the ideal of what human authority can be: full of love flowing in both directions, without undermining the natural, beautiful structure and order of the relationship.

The key is love-filled, mutual delight. It is not simply that the Son chooses to submit to authority because it is His role, or because He must; instead, He delights in giving glory and honor to the Father because He loves the Father so completely. In fact, the Father promises to do the same: in the culmination of all things, when sin is wiped out and all is set right, the Father will glorify the Son above all things.

## **(Appendix 2) Trinitarian Prayer**

Trinitarian prayer comes from a desire to establish a relationship with the three Persons of the Trinity. We recognize God as Father, Son, and Spirit.

As a kid, one of the beauties of a proper relationship with our father is that we are always amazed at what he can do and we are always excited and willing to ask him for anything, knowing that he is good and loving and will do what is best for us. We recognize that in our sin flawed world we don't have good father role models, but also recognize that God is the perfect father. With that in mind, we begin our Trinitarian Prayer time by telling God how amazing he is and we describe to him our experience of his attributes. We tell him about our knowledge of his strength, or majesty, or beauty, or love, or any of the other qualities that we see in him. We choose to fully trust him. We also ask him for anything we desire. We are willing to risk him answering 'no' or 'later' because we know that the perfect Dad knows best what we should have. He may say no to ice cream before dinner, but he may take pleasure in giving us our heart's desire. We are confident that whatever we ask in his name he will give us and that he loves us completely and will not give us that which would harm us.

The second part of our Trinitarian Prayer come out of a recognition that Jesus is the perfect older brother to us. He has already been though whatever we might be going through. He has suffered death itself on our behalf and sits at the right hand of the Father. He knows what to do in every situation we face since he was tempted as we are tempted and he suffered in ways that we cannot imagine as he suffered the consequences of our sin. He loves us as brothers and sisters and we can ask him to help us with anything. He is always available to us when we are confused or frightened or when we simply don't know what to do. He will show us in his word and through his Spirit everything that we should do or say. He never mistreats us or treats us evilly since he is good and righteous and loving toward all he has made. We can depend on him whenever we are unsure and we know that he will correct us when we do that which is harmful or sinful. We have confidence in him and can trust whatever he tells us to do so we simply tell him what an amazing older brother he is and bring all of our cares and concerns before him.

The third part of our Trinitarian Prayer is a recognition that the Spirit is our encourager. The Spirit always speaks truth to us and urges us to do that which is righteous and good. The Spirit can be trusted and when we listen to the Spirit we hear that which the Father and Jesus would have us do. We realize that the primary way the Spirit speaks to us is through the Bible so we open our Bibles and listen for what he might be saying to us. We also recognize that the Spirit prompts us to do what we are called to do through the still, small voice that urges us into the ways God would have us go. With that in mind, we sit silently and expectantly waiting to hear from the Spirit. We ask the Spirit to guide us into all truth and we make note of that which we read in God's word and that which we 'hear'. We listen knowing that the Spirit will never lead us astray and will always encourage us and give us hope.

We finish our time of Trinitarian Prayer sharing with our community what we heard from God. We share the Scriptures that came to our minds and we offer what we believe we heard to the scrutiny of others who walk with Jesus. We recognize that God is also a God who speaks through his people and we willingly submit what we believe is true to other believers and especially to the elders who are called to be responsible for our spiritual care. We recognize that sometimes we do not hear clearly and that we need others to speak truth to us. We listen carefully to those God has placed in our lives recognizing that in humility and submission to others we can most often hear the truth of what God is saying to us.

Problem with Specific Event

Worship

(Appendix 3) Table of Decision

Repentance

False Belief

1. Self
2. God
3. Others

Satan

Jesus

Table

Of  
Decision

1. Offers Gospel Story
2. Affirms Identity in Christ
3. Invites into Kingdom Living

1. Affirms False Beliefs
2. Offers Temporary Relief
3. Justifies Selfish Behavior

## (Appendix 4) Your Identity In The Kingdom

### **MY RELATIONSHIP**

I am reconciled to God - 2 Cor 5:18  
I'm a child of God - He is my Father - 1 Jn 3:1,2  
I am a saint - Eph 1:1; 1 Cor 1:2; Phil 1:1  
I am Christ's friend - Jn 15:15  
I am a fellow citizen in God's kingdom - Eph 2:19  
I am born of God - 1 Jn 4:7  
I have been brought near to Christ - Eph 2:13  
I have been adopted by God - Rom 8:15  
I'm to be righteous and holy like God - Eph 4:24  
I have direct access to God - Eph 2:18

### **MY INHERITANCE**

I am a citizen of heaven - Phil 3:20  
I am an heir of God - Rom 8:17  
I've been rescued from Satan's domain - Col 1:13  
I am a joint heir with Christ - Rom 8:17; Gal 4:7  
I am hidden with Christ in God - Col 3:3  
I am blessed with every spiritual blessing - Eph 1:3  
I am chosen of God - holy, beloved - Col 3:12  
I am a child of promise - Rom 9:8; Gal 3:14  
I am a child of light, not darkness - 1 Thess 5:5  
I've been given great promises - 2 Pet 1:4  
I am a partaker of Christ - Heb 3:14  
I'm one of God's living stones - 1 Pet 2:5

### **MY TRANSFORMATION**

I'm a member of a royal priesthood - 1 Pet 2:9  
I'm redeemed and forgiven - Eph 1:6-8  
I'm to be a stranger to this world - 1 Pet 2:11  
I've been justified - made righteous - Rom 5:1  
I'm an enemy of the devil - 1 Pet 5:8  
I have eternal life - Jn 5:24  
I died w/Christ to the power of sin - Rom 6:1-6

### **MY CALLING**

I am free from condemnation - Rom 8:1  
I am to be salt on the earth - Mt 5:13  
I have received the Spirit of God -1 Cor 2:12  
I am to be light in the world - Mt 5:14  
I have been given the mind of Christ - 1 Cor 2:16  
I'm chosen and appointed to bear fruit - Jn 15:16  
I have been crucified with Christ - Gal 2:20  
I am called to do the works of Christ - Jn 14:12  
I am a new creation - 2 Cor 5:17

### **MY CALLING CONTINUED**

I am to do what Christ commanded His disciples - Mt 28:20  
I have been made alive with Christ - Eph 2:5  
I have been given spiritual authority - Lk 10:19  
I am God's workmanship - Eph 2:10  
Signs should accompany my work - Mk 16:17-20  
I have received fullness in Christ - Col 2:10  
I am a minister of a new covenant - 2 Cor 3:6  
I am a minister of reconciliation - 2 Cor 5:18,19

### **MY POSITION**

I am to be an expression of life in Christ - Col 3:4  
I am connected to the true vine - Jn 15:1,5  
I am a partaker of a heavenly calling - Heb 3:1  
I'm a willing slave of righteousness - Rom 6:18,22  
I am a temple of God - 1 Cor 3:16; 6:19  
I am one spirit with the Lord - 1 Cor 6:17  
I am a member of Christ's body - 1 Cor 12:27

## **(Appendix 5) Table of Decision Rules to Live By**

### **Things to practice:**

- Open-ended questions
- Reflective listening
  - “It sounds like...”
  - “I hear you saying...”
- Questions about emotions
  - “How did you feel when \_\_\_\_\_ ?”
- Questions about underlying beliefs
  - “What belief is this rooted in?”
- Listening to Jesus together
  - How does His story impact this situation?
  - “What is your true identity in Christ?”
  - “What would it look like to trust Him here?”
  - “How have you been finding relief?”
  - “How is Jesus inviting you into relationship?”

### **Things to avoid:**

- Yes/No questions
- ‘Why’ questions
  - “Why did you do that?”
  - “Why did you feel that way?”
- Stories about yourself
  - “This reminds me of the time when I...”
- Advice
  - “You should...”