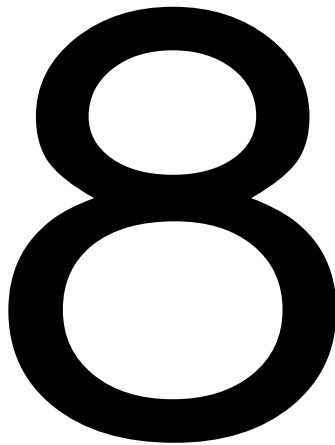


The 6 Village Values

Pilgrim Group Study



Chapter 1: COMMUNITY

By Pastor Eric Cepin

Many of us have experienced a life-changing event before: a spiritual high, an eye-opening educational moment, an ethereal rock concert, a soul-touching taste of friendship. These moments can take our breath away. They can influence major life choices for the better. However, we may unwittingly respond by spending our lives chasing after another such experience.

- 1) **Below, quickly write out a description of a person, an event, or series of experiences that changed your perspective on life, God, and the world around you.**

I have been a pastor for 17 years, during which people have often approached me with a book they want me to read or a pastor's sermon they want me to listen to. None of those people come to me and give me the author's or pastor's stats – how tall they are, how much money they make, etc. No, they just tell me about how this person opened their eyes to something, changed something in their life, taught them something. They want me to have the same experience they did. They want to tell me about that moment, and they want me to experience it with them. It's a way of connecting. They want to share the things they have learned and tasted.

The gospel writer John had a "moment" that he writes about in his Gospel. In John 15:13-15, he tells about the time when Jesus called John and the other disciples his friends:

13 No one has greater love than this—that one lays down his life for his friends. 14 You are my friends if you do what I command you. 15 I no longer call you slaves, because the slave does not understand what his master is doing. But I have called you friends, because I have revealed to you everything I heard from my Father.

- 2) **How does Jesus describe love?**

- 3) **According to Jesus, what is the difference between a friend and a servant?**

4) Putting yourself in John's shoes, why do you think this is such an important moment for him and the other disciples?

This same Apostle John wrote three letters to the church, creatively named First, Second, and Third John. In First John, the apostle wears his heart on his sleeve. In the first verses, he lays out how life-transforming it is to be God's friend. He summarizes his experience with Jesus and expresses his deep longing for us to embrace the friendship of God:

1 John 1:1-2

1 This is what we proclaim to you: what was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and our hands have touched (concerning the word of life — 2 and the life was revealed, and we have seen and testify and announce to you the eternal life that was with the Father and was revealed to us).

5) When you read these two verses, what comes to mind?

6) Why do you think John uses words like *heard, seen, touched, and looked at*?

John, in a very poetic way, is telling us that the word of life (Jesus) is eternal life itself — our link to life with God forever. Below, New Testament scholar N.T. Wright explains *his* definition of eternal life:

The reign of grace goes forward at speed towards its goal, which is the life of the age to come, the time when God will usher in the new creation in which all wrongs will be put to right. (We should note that the normal translation, 'eternal life,' where I have put 'the life of the age to come,' gives most modern readers the quite wrong impression that Paul is talking about spending 'eternity' in a world beyond space, time and matter, in 'heaven.' Paul never mentions such an idea. What he has in mind, here and elsewhere, is the bodily resurrection of God's people to share in the new earth and new heavens which will result from God's liberation of the present world from decay and corruption.

N. T. Wright, *Paul for Everyone: Romans: Part One* (London: SPCK 2004), p. 96.

7) How would *you* define eternal life?

8) Does reading John's description of his experience with Jesus and N.T. Wright's explanation of eternal life change how you feel about the future? Explain your answer.

1 John 1:3

3 What we have seen and heard we announce to you too, so that you may have fellowship with us (and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ).

The word that is translated here as "fellowship" can just as readily be translated "community." John is saying here that for you and I to have friendship, to be united in any true sense, requires us to be in friendship with Jesus first and foremost.

People often come to church looking for the moment that is going to change something within. They might come to church looking for a really cool worship experience or in hope of finding that best friend they have always been looking for.

9) **Why do you come to church? Another way to phrase this question might be: What don't you like about your church community? What really frustrates you? Write these down in the boxes below.**

Reasons for church involvement	Frustrations with church community

10) **What legitimate longings and desires do these reasons and frustrations reveal?**

In addition to indicating valid desires, each annoyance is a clue as to how far you have drifted away from fellowship/friendship with Jesus. What John is laying out here is that all the reasons that you and I get pushed into community together are going to fail and disappoint if they are not centered on Jesus. The only way you and I can have true community is when we are friends with Jesus, when that friendship creates fellowship between us, and when our friendship stays centered on Jesus.

11) What would it look like for you to grow in your friendship with Jesus?

In verse four of 1 John 1, John concludes his thought with this: *4 Thus we are writing these things so that our (your) joy may be complete.*

12) How does relationship with Jesus impact our joy while we are in relationship with one another?

1 John 1:5-9

5 Now this is the gospel message we have heard from him and announce to you: God is light, and in him there is no darkness at all. 6 If we say we have fellowship with him and yet keep on walking in the darkness, we are lying and not practicing the truth. 7 But if we walk in the light as he himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin. 8 If we say we do not bear the guilt of sin, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us. 9 But if we confess our sins, he is faithful and righteous, forgiving us our sins and cleansing us from all unrighteousness.

13) Below, write out the characteristics of both a community that walks in the light and one that walks in the darkness. (Try to go beyond what is in the text. What are some of the implications of how John talks about the darkness and the light?)

A community walking in the light	A 'community' walking in the darkness

14) Communities of light require honesty. Below, write out a confessional prayer that sheds light on the places where you have been chasing a “moment” instead the word of life.

Chapter 2: ACCESSIBILITY

By Pastor Rod Hugen

From the beginning we have believed that the Village should be a place where anyone can come and be accepted. We have fought hard against our own prejudices and lies so that we can be doorways into the kingdom of God. We resist our exclusionary ways in order to allow people to find God at their own pace and in their own way. We seek to understand the perspective of others and to love them as they are. We find that Jesus was willing to be associated with those whom society thought were outcasts as well as those who were religious and government leaders and we seek to emulate Jesus as we engage the people he places in our path. We hope to place no stumbling block between Jesus and the people we meet except for the gospel itself.

Romans 16

Now I commend to you our sister Phoebe, who is a servant of the church in Cenchrea, 2 so that you may welcome her in the Lord in a way worthy of the saints and provide her with whatever help she may need from you, for she has been a great help to many, including me.

3 Greet Prisca and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus, 4 who risked their own necks for my life. Not only I, but all the churches of the Gentiles are grateful to them. 5 Also greet the church in their house. Greet my dear friend Epenetus, who was the first convert to Christ in the province of Asia. 6 Greet Mary, who has worked very hard for you. 7 Greet Andronicus and Junia, my compatriots and my fellow prisoners. They are well known to the apostles, and they were in Christ before me. 8 Greet Ampliatus, my dear friend in the Lord. 9 Greet Urbanus, our fellow worker in Christ, and my good friend Stachys. 10 Greet Apelles, who is approved in Christ. Greet those who belong to the household of Aristobulus. 11 Greet Herodion, my compatriot. Greet those in the household of Narcissus who are in the Lord. 12 Greet Tryphena and Tryphosa, laborers in the Lord. Greet my dear friend Persis, who has worked hard in the Lord. 13 Greet Rufus, chosen in the Lord, and his mother who was also a mother to me. 14 Greet Asyncritus, Phlegon, Hermes, Patrobas, Hermas, and the brothers and sisters with them. 15 Greet Philologus and Julia, Nereus and his sister, and Olympas, and all the believers who are with them. 16 Greet one another with a holy kiss. All the churches of Christ greet you.

17 Now I urge you, brothers and sisters, to watch out for those who create dissensions and obstacles contrary to the teaching that you learned. Avoid them! 18 For these are the kind who do not serve our Lord Christ, but their own appetites. By their smooth talk and flattery they deceive the minds of the naive. 19 Your obedience is known to all and thus I rejoice over you. But I want you to be wise in what is good and innocent in what is evil. 20 The God of peace will quickly crush Satan under your feet. The grace of our Lord Jesus be with you.

21 Timothy, my fellow worker, greets you; so do Lucius, Jason, and Sosipater, my compatriots. 22 I, Tertius, who am writing this letter, greet you in the Lord. 23 Gaius, who is host to me and to the whole church, greets you. Erastus the city treasurer and our brother Quartus greet you.

25 Now to him who is able to strengthen you according to my gospel and the proclamation of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery that had been kept secret for long ages, 26 but now is disclosed, and through the prophetic scriptures has been made known to all the nations, according to the command of the eternal God, to bring about the obedience of faith— 27 to the only wise God, through Jesus Christ, be glory forever! Amen.

Romans 16 is a beautiful litany of the names of some of the members of the church in Rome and Paul sends his greetings to them. It is clear that he has an intimate relationship with them and knows much about their lives. The church is an intimate gathering of people who often have very little in common beyond being recipients of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Phoebe is likely a deacon who brings Paul's letter to Rome. Paul introduces her and commends her to the church. It is our responsibility to help our guests, friends, coworkers to be received into the church.

1) What does that look like?

2) What does it mean to be welcomed in a way 'worthy of the saints'?

3) Paul instructs the church to provide Phoebe 'with whatever help she may need'. How do we determine what is needed?

To be a 'patron' is to help meet the needs of others and to provide for their care. Paul tells the church to treat Phoebe as she has treated others, including himself.

4) What would it look like in your life if people were asked to treat you the way you have treated others?

Prisca and Aquila were a wife and husband team that were hosts and leaders of a church that met in their home. They were tent makers and Paul learned that skill from them. Part of being in community with others is sharing talents and skills with them.

5) What skills do you have that you could share with others?

They taught Apollos, who was a gifted preacher, the ways of God so they were clearly able to communicate the depth of the gospel and of Scripture to others. Accessibility means being able to share the gospel with others.

6) What does that look like in your life?

They also risked their lives for Paul. When he was attacked, they stood with him.

7) What is it like to stand with others?

Epaenetus was the first convert in the region. Imagine what it is like to be a first convert.

8) As people come into your life and into the Village community, what is it like for them (as a new believer or a non-believer)?

Andronicus and Junia were Paul's relatives.

9) What is it like to make the church and your personal life accessible to your family?

They were also in prison with Paul. God uses difficult times and suffering to bring people together.

10) What has that looked like in your life?

Paul mentions many people who are his 'beloved'.

11) Who are your beloved? What do you long for them to have and experience?

Herodian is most likely the grandson of King Herod.

12) What is it like to deal with people who have position and status and power?

13) What is it like to make the church accessible to 'scary' people?

Paul mentions several people who work hard for the sake of the gospel. Two women, Tryphaena and Tryphosa, were twins who labored in the Lord.

14) What does it mean to work hard for the Lord?

Paul talks about Rufus who was 'chosen in the Lord.'

15) What does it mean to be chosen? How do you know who is chosen?

Rufus' mom was a mother to Paul, as well. To make the church accessible we become moms and dads and brothers and sisters to those God brings into the community.

16) What does that role look like in your life?

In verses 17-18, Paul warns against those who disrupt and lead astray and who use flattery and deceit to turn people away from the gospel. We are to avoid them.

17) What does that look like?

Paul reminds us that the gospel is for all nations.

18) What are some cultural divides that make accessibility difficult?

As you read through the names Paul mentions, they are quite a diverse group. From Herod's grandson to Greek slaves. From powerful business women and men to servants. From world travelers to home makers. Married and single. Young and old. They have absolutely nothing in common but the gospel of Jesus Christ.

19) How does it make you feel to open the doors to people with whom you have nothing in common? What are some of your fears? What are some of the joys? What prejudices and biases do you need to lay aside? What is the best thing about it?

When Jesus calls his disciples he also calls a diverse group of people. He calls an anti-Rome Jewish nationalist, Simon the Zealot, to sit alongside Matthew, the tax collector who is among the most hated of the Jewish people because he works for the Roman government. He calls fishermen and businessmen to sit beside each other. He calls brothers who are known as Sons of Thunder and he calls a hothead named Simon (Peter) who will later pull out a sword and cut off the ear of a Roman soldier. He even calls the one who will betray him, Judas, to come follow him and entrusts him with the money. Jesus practices radical acceptance of people including drunkards, gluttons, tax collectors and sinners (Matthew 11:19), but he also is in the homes of the wealthy and influential (Luke 7:36-50). He tells the disciples to allow the children to come to him and to not hinder them (Matthew 19:14).

20) Who can't you accept?

Chapter 3: CREATIVITY

By Pastors Mark Crawford & Corey Gilchrist

At the Village we believe that people are made in the image of a creative God and that because this is true, we also create. Calling people to be creative in the way God has uniquely fashioned them is a huge part of our being in community. We call on people to attempt to draw, paint, photograph, sculpt, write poetry and computer programs, create music, write lyrics, cook, bake, garden, renovate buildings, and engage in other creative endeavors and then share the products of that creativity with the community. We choose to use worship songs that are created in our own community or in other nearby communities where we find relationships. We display the creativity of our community as part of our offering to God. We sponsor art shows, music concerts, and other places to proffer the things we have created to the Village community and to the broader community. We have also made the website a place to display the creativity of our community.

If we are called to be disciples of Jesus, our job is to be as close to him as possible and to imitate him. Then we will be transformed and the world will be transformed.

PART 1 STORY: We are creative beings made in the image of a creative God

You are an image bearer. Everything about us reflects a particular part of God.

1) How does your story fit into what God has said is true?

2) In what ways have you felt the absence of God in your own story? Was He still co-writing the narrative with you?

PART 2 IDENTITY: Recovering and finding our creative selves

John 1:1-5

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was fully God. 2 The Word was with God in the beginning. 3 All things were created by him, and apart from him not one thing was created that has been created. 4 In him was life, and the life was the light of mankind. 5 And the light shines on in the darkness, but the darkness has not mastered it.

Jewish people think that “the Word” is Wisdom. But it’s actually Jesus.

The Ephesians think that “the Word” is what created everything. It’s the spark of life..., but it’s actually Jesus.

The Wisdom is actually Jesus. The spark of intelligence is actually Jesus. He created everything.

All of creation and all of the created things all end up in Jesus. Jesus created everything, everything was created through Jesus, AND when that happened, Jesus is the light that can’t be crushed by the darkness.

If we are followers of Jesus, and creativity is a way to know God, then the point of creativity is to imitate the creator himself (jesus), who spoke things into existence. So the purpose of our imagination and creativity, is to constantly be pointing to Jesus, and new ways, with our imagination.

- 3) Think of the ways you are creative. Examples: parenting, helping others, establishing peace/making order from chaos.**

Creativity is key in helping each other like Jesus helps us. When we are in our marriage, where we have a roommate, our goal is to try and make everything make the way we want it to. If you want to have a good marriage, you have to think about it with a creative perspective. If you want peace, you need to have a creative perspective by saying, “What do I want my spouse to look like down the road? How can I make them look like Jesus? How can they be expressing Jesus?” Then you start by thinking creatively about the situation.

- 4) In what ways are you a creative person? In what ways do you long to become one?**

PART 3 KINGDOM: Developing and refining our creativity

There are three things in creativity:

- You have to imagine where you are headed. Have a vision or purpose.
- You have to get the skills to be able to do it. Seek from others, ask around, **read scripture**, pray.
- You have to actually do it. You have to act on creativity.

Psalm 1

*1 How blessed is the one who does not follow the advice of the wicked,
or stand in the pathway with sinners,
or sit in the assembly of scoffers!*

*2 Instead he finds pleasure in obeying the Lord's commands;
he meditates on his commands day and night.*

*3 He is like a tree planted by flowing streams;
it yields its fruit at the proper time,
and its leaves never fall off.*

He succeeds in everything he attempts.

4 Not so with the wicked!

Instead they are like wind-driven chaff.

*5 For this reason the wicked cannot withstand judgment,
nor can sinners join the assembly of the godly.*

*6 Certainly the Lord guards the way of the godly,
but the way of the wicked ends in destruction.*

When we ask God, it doesn't mean that we are going to find suddenly this thing that we are amazing at. Instead, it means that God will reveal something that we can grow in. Perhaps it's time to try new ways to create.

Matthew 7:7-8

7 "Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened for you. 8 For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened.

If you taste God's creation, you understand His character. For example, if your parents love to cook, and you never eat their food or learn any of their recipes, you don't know that part of your parents. It's the same with God: if you don't create, you miss out on a part of God. If you don't jump into the creative process, you miss out on knowing God in a deeper way.

Practice - How do you enter gracefully into encouraging each other into creativity?

- Singing/Music Playing
- Writing
- Poetry
- Movement

- 5) **What do we do when we feel like the enemy has stolen our creativity? What parts of scripture can we look to feel like God has spoken truth around our creative sides?**

Extra thought material:

What are some ways that you are creative that don't fall into the normal creative categories?

For example: organization, repairing/fixing things, cleaning, gardening, parenting, forgiving someone (just imagine them as a person redeemed by God). Creativity is about using imagination to proclaim the love of Jesus through the way we interact, through art. It is about being willing to imagine what life can look like. Creatively engaging people and proclaiming the love of Jesus *is* A CREATIVE ACT!

Chapter 4: DISCIPLINES

By Ashley Cousineau

Value Statement from Villagersonline:

We believe that the path to freedom, healing, and joy is found in the disciplines of prayer, reading God's Word, meditating, fasting, and self-denial, as well as in other spiritual disciplines. We have invited people into times of solitude and reflection and try to keep the practice of the disciplines part of our own routines. The elders regularly pray over and anoint people with oil for the purpose of bringing healing and hope. Some have invited people into their homes for a season in order to help them grow more disciplined lives in the area of resisting addictive behaviors or handling their financial affairs. Annually we covenant together to allow ourselves to be disciplined by those God has placed in spiritual authority over us.

Being disciplined is hard. In a world that values convenience, taking time to slow down and practice the disciplines is challenging. To be honest, I have found it difficult to be disciplined enough to sit down and write this chapter of the study. When I think of disciplined people, I think about professional athletes or monks. I've written off discipline, making excuses left and right, as I continue to get stuck in the many potholes of life. However, when we take the time to practice the disciplines, we can find the richness of communion with the Trinity that we otherwise miss. Jesus invites us into a life of purpose and sacrifice and that involves discipline.

There are many spiritual disciplines. Richard Foster, in his book *Celebration of Discipline*, names 12 disciplines and divides them into three main categories: inward disciplines (the disciplines we do on our own, in private); outward disciplines (the disciplines we also do on our own, but can be outwardly observed); and corporate disciplines (the disciplines we practice together as a community). I want to comment a little about each so that you can see the variety and distinct value of them all.

PART 1 THE INWARD DISCIPLINES

Meditation: This discipline involves a stillness and openness to observing the world around you. It is clearing your mind of the many scattered thoughts that float around in your head at any given moment and focusing your attention on Jesus.

Prayer: This is the most basic discipline we practice at The Village. We even have an app to assist us in praying together. Praying can be hard sometimes, but Jesus has taught us how to pray. We can pray the Lord's Prayer to help us get started.

Fasting: We fast at The Village during the season of Lent. For a time, we go without something important to us.

Study: By completing this Pilgrim Group chapter, you are already engaging in one of the disciplines - study! Jesus said, "If you continue to follow my teaching, you are really my disciples and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free." (John 8:31-32) Studying helps us to learn more about the Bible, about God, about Jesus, and everything in between.

PART 2 THE OUTWARD DISCIPLINES

Simplicity: There is a discipline in living our lives simply – not to excess. Jesus said, "So then, don't worry saying, 'What will we eat?' or 'What will we drink?' or 'What will we wear?'" (Matthew 6:31) because God will provide everything we need. For us today, this means pushing back against our culture of consumerism: eating simply, dressing simply, and not accumulating a bunch of things we

don't need.

Solitude: Solitude is creating space apart from others to commune with God. Jesus sets an example: "Then Jesus got up early in the morning when it was still very dark, departed, and went out to a deserted place, and there he spent time in prayer." (Mark 1:35) Solitude allows us to fill up on God so that we can then pour out to others around us, like Jesus did.

Submission: Submission involves trusting your authority to another person. It requires us to be deeply vulnerable. We submit to our pastors because we believe they have our best interests and the Gospel at heart. Wives and husbands submit to each other. Children submit to their parents. Paul commands the Church in Ephesians to "submit to one another out of reverence for Christ." (Ephesians 5:21)

Service: Service is helping others. Peter writes that "Just as each one has received a gift, use it to serve one another as good stewards of the varied grace of God." (1 Peter 4:10) Some common acts of service at The Village are cleaning the building, washing the dishes after dinner, and taking part in projects with our Monastic Communities.

PART 3 THE CORPORATE DISCIPLINES

Confession: In confession, we stand before the Cross and admit our sins to God. John promises that "if we confess our sins, he is faithful and righteous, forgiving us our sins and cleansing us from all unrighteousness." (1 John 1:9)

Worship: Worship is our expression of love and respect for God. We practice this as a community every Sunday at The Village. Worship can also extend into our daily routines, giving praise to God for all the good things he has created and given to us.

Guidance: At The Village, we listen to the Holy Spirit during Trinitarian Prayer to seek guidance on how to act.

Celebration: Paul commands in Philippians 4:4 to "Rejoice in the Lord always; again I say rejoice!" Celebration is something we do well as a community. We celebrate birthdays every single week! Every time we gather and celebrate in Jesus's name, we are practicing one of the disciplines.

FINAL THOUGHTS

Now, you probably thinking: "I have a hard enough time remembering to go to the grocery store! How am I going to keep up with all of these disciplines?"

First, you don't have to. Perfect discipline is not the expectation. But the motivation is joy. Over time, the disciplines bring joy—the joy of intimacy with God—and you're invited into it. Second, God honors any effort we make towards Him, no matter how small. So here are some things to try: We practice a lot of these disciplines together as a community at The Village, so come to church. Instead of hitting the snooze button in the morning, try waking up and meditating for five minutes before rushing off. Pray while you drive to work or to school. Fast from lunch just one day and take the time you would normally spend eating praying or reading scripture instead. These small shifts can really start to have an impact on our daily walk with Christ, and we will experience the richness of the gifts the Spirit has to offer us. Some days we will not necessarily "feel" like it, but disciplines are habits, just like brushing your teeth.

By shifting our daily habits to build in the practice of the disciplines, we can experience the depth and breadth of God's love for us. The disciplines force us to push back against the patterns of this world and push into God's love in ways we could never before imagine. I invite you to ask Jesus to show you

where you can find space in your day to practice the disciplines so that you may be filled with more of Him and less of you.

1) Which disciplines do you already practice?

2) In what ways have the disciplines practiced at the Village impacted your spiritual walk?

3) Which disciplines do you feel challenged to practice more in your daily life?

4) In what ways does our society push back against the disciplines?

5) Devise a plan of how you are going to shift one habit in your day to make space for practicing one of the disciplines.

Chapter 5: TRUTH

By Pastor Julie Brunson

John 1:17-18

17 For the law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came about through Jesus Christ. 18 No one has ever seen God. The only one, himself God, who is in closest fellowship with the Father, has made God known.

Jesus and his Gospel Story are inseparable from the idea of Truth.

At the Village, we talk a lot about truth and lies. The Hot Seat Model (see Appendix) is based on an understanding that *Jesus IS truth* and shows us the way to life and the Father. On the other hand, Satan is called *a liar and the father of lies*. To a culture that says, "There is no truth," Jesus says, "I am the truth."

Frequently in the Gospels the idea of understanding Truth within the context of Jesus' story brings freedom, lifts burdens, brings new life, etc. All our understanding (i.e., rules, law, identity, experience, hope, goodness, sin, judgement, salvation, culture, truth, morals, etc.) must be brought to Jesus and his teaching and his story to truly know its meaning. As a value, this means that all our other values and teachings at the Village are filtered through the value of Truth.

- 1) What are some ways that you have thought or learned about the idea of truth? Is it absolute? Can we know it? How do you pursue truth?**

TRUTH IN A STORY

John 8: 3-11

3 The experts in the law and the Pharisees brought a woman who had been caught committing adultery. They made her stand in front of them 4 and said to Jesus, "Teacher, this woman was caught in the very act of adultery. 5 In the law Moses commanded us to stone to death such women. What then do you say?" 6 (Now they were asking this in an attempt to trap him, so that they could bring charges against him.) Jesus bent down and wrote on the ground with his finger. 7 When they persisted in asking him, he stood up straight and replied, "Whoever among you is guiltless may be the first to throw a stone at her." 8 Then he bent over again and wrote on the ground.

9 Now when they heard this, they began to drift away one at a time, starting with the older ones, until Jesus was left alone with the woman standing before him. 10 Jesus stood up straight and said to her, "Woman, where are they? Did no one condemn you?" 11 She replied, "No one, Lord." And Jesus said, "I do not condemn you either. Go, and from now on do not sin any more."

2) What is the truth of this story according to the religious teachers?

3) What do you think the woman thought was true about herself, God and others (teachers, Jesus, the man involved in the adultery, etc.)?

4) What Truth did Jesus bring to this story?

THE GOSPEL: MORE THAN WE THINK

John 8:28-47, 57

28 Then Jesus said, "When you lift up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am he, and I do nothing on my own initiative, but I speak just what the Father taught me. 29 And the one who sent me is with me. He has not left me alone, because I always do those things that please him." 30 While he was saying these things, many people believed in him.

31 Then Jesus said to those Judeans who had believed him, "If you continue to follow my teaching, you are really my disciples 32 and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free." 33 "We are descendants of Abraham," they replied, "and have never been anyone's slaves! How can you say, 'You will become free'?" 34 Jesus answered them, "I tell you the solemn truth, everyone who practices sin is a slave of sin. 35 The slave does not remain in the family forever, but the son remains forever. 36 So if the son sets you free, you will be really free. 37 I know that you are Abraham's descendants. But you want to kill me, because my teaching makes no progress among you. 38 I am telling you the things I have seen while with the Father; as for you, practice the things you have heard from the Father!"

39 They answered him, "Abraham is our father!" Jesus replied, "If you are Abraham's children, you would be doing the deeds of Abraham. 40 But now you are trying to kill me, a man who has told you the truth I heard from God. Abraham did not do this! 41 You people are doing the deeds of your father."

Then they said to Jesus, "We were not born as a result of immorality! We have only one Father, God himself." 42 Jesus replied, "If God were your Father, you would love me, for I have come from God and am now here. I have not come on my own initiative, but he sent me. 43 Why don't you understand what I am saying? It is because you cannot accept my teaching. 44 You people are from your father the

devil, and you want to do what your father desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not uphold the truth, because there is no truth in him. Whenever he lies, he speaks according to his own nature, because he is a liar and the father of lies. 45 But because I am telling you the truth, you do not believe me. 46 Who among you can prove me guilty of any sin? If I am telling you the truth, why don't you believe me? 47 The one who belongs to God listens and responds to God's words. You don't listen and respond, because you don't belong to God."

57 Then the Judeans replied, "You are not yet fifty years old! Have you seen Abraham?"

5) Read Numbers 21:4–9 and John 3:14-17. What does he mean by *lift up the Son of Man*?

6) What parts of the gospel (Truth) do we find in Jesus' words (in John 8:28-47, 57)?

7) What do you think Jesus is trying to teach *the Judeans who had believed in him*?

8) What does Jesus mean by the statement *the truth will set you free*?

9) Why do you think this is difficult for the Judeans to receive?

10) What are some ways that this teaching about slavery and freedom are difficult for us?

11) What might Jesus mean by *before Abraham came into existence, I am*?

BRINGING TRUTH INTO OUR STORY

PART 1 RULES VS. TRUTH

The religious leaders understood truth as following the right rules. Keep the commandments. Don't eat this. Don't drink that. They had formed elaborate rules and systems to make sure they were "right." They wanted to engage Jesus about the knowledge that they had about *the law and the prophets*. In Matthew 5, Jesus says, "*Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets. I have not come to abolish these things but to fulfill them. (Matthew 5:17)*"

He then goes on to deepen the meaning of the law, taking it to a heart-level. It's not just about avoiding behaviors, but the ways we turn from God in the secret places of our thoughts and attitudes. "Do not murder" becomes "Do not be angry." We begin to realize that under this kind of understanding of the law, we *can't* be righteous in ourselves, which opens the path to the *grace and truth* that comes through Jesus.

12) What do you think it means for Jesus to fulfill the law?

13) Why do you think he deepens the meaning of the rules in the law?

14) What are some areas in your life where you are trying to follow the rules in order to be "right?"

15) What would it look like for you and those around you if you brought those rules under *grace and truth*?

PART 2 STATEMENTS VS. TRUTH

Often, we try to make Truth into a set of statements about the gospel or God or man. All have sinned. Jesus died and rose from the dead. On the third day he was raised from the dead. These things are true, but sometimes they can seem separate from our day-to-day lives and decisions. When Truth is found in the meaning of the Gospel and in the person of Jesus, it takes on a new life. In the gospel of John, Jesus tries to help the disciples understand that he is about to die and return to the Father. *Thomas said, "Lord, we don't know where you are going. How can we know the way?" Jesus replied, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." (John 14:5-6)*

He is saying that the path to God is not to know the right things, but to actually know Jesus. The gospel offers a relationship and a story through which we filter our knowledge and understanding of ourselves, others, the world, and God.

16) What do you think Jesus means that he is *the way, the truth, and the life*?

17) What are some times in your story where the Gospel truth has seemed like mere statements?

18) What are some times when Gospel truth felt more like a relationship with Jesus?

19) How might you use the story of Jesus as a lens to understand what's happening in your life?

20) What are some relationships or situations where this is difficult for you?

Chapter 6: AUTHENTICITY

By Russ Lewis

Authenticity is being truthful about our lives – both the good and bad parts. It means that we talk about the things which are pretty, exciting, and honorable; it also means that we talk about the things which are ugly, scary, and shameful. Authenticity doesn't mean that we simply babble about everything in our lives, all the time. It just means that we are *honest* when people ask about us, and that we are *willing* to talk about anything in our lives that might help a friend be strengthened or encouraged. (Of course, it also means that we show that we care by asking people about their lives!)

PART 1 WHY AUTHENTICITY?

- 1) **Write down a few of the reasons why you think that authenticity might be important. Then read the discussion below.**

Reason 1: Comradeship

Authenticity can encourage other people. When we aren't honest, we generally will only tell people the good things about our lives – the things that we think will gain us approval, and make us look like “good” people. But of course, none of our lives are *actually* perfect. So we start to feel alone – like we are the only broken people in the entire community. Everybody else seems to have lives that we envy: a job that sounds wonderful, a walk with God that we wish we could emulate, or a family that we wish we had.

But if we are authentic, we expose the pain as well as the gladness. We fight with our spouses; we get bored with reading the Bible and praying; we sin in the same shameful ways we've done for years.

But that is not all. “But” is truly the word, here: “that's all true, *but...*” When we speak honestly about our struggles, we also gain the chance to speak honestly about how God has met us, encouraged us, saved us, and forgiven us. When a “perfect” person says “God is good,” it doesn't mean much to us. But when a broken person says “God has healed me,” it can speak to our deepest wounds.

- 2) **When have you seen this happen in your life? Give some examples.**

Reason 2: We Believe Lies

Authenticity gives our brothers and sisters in Christ to see – and speak to – the lies that we believe. Lies always drive us away from Christ, because they cause us to believe something that isn't true about God, about people, or about the world that God created. Sometimes, they are obviously painful; they tell us that something about the world is terrible, and that God will never fix it. Sometimes, they seem happy, since they give us power – but the power is not actually something that helps us follow God better. Instead, it becomes an addiction and a habit, and we don't even consider what God thinks of it.

Lies always feel true from the inside, even if other people would clearly see that they were lies. Maybe we believe that “this is really how it is.” Maybe we know that we're doing something wrong, but we believe “I have no choice.” So long as we are not honest, these lies stay buried inside, growing stronger and deeper with each passing year.

But if we are authentic, we tell our community how we really feel, and how we really think. It gives the people we love the chance to shed God's light onto our lies. There is nothing so wonderful, freeing, and terrifying than to have someone who loves you say, “I don't think that's true” about a lie that you believe deeply.

3) When have you seen this happen in your life? Give some examples.

Reason 3: Shared Joy

Authenticity isn't just about sadness and shame! Authenticity also means sharing the good stuff. God created us for joyous relationship, and while sin has really messed things up (both with God, and with other people), there are still good things in God's world.

Sometimes, we're embarrassed about our joy. We know that our friends and family are feeling pain, and we don't want to ignore them. Maybe we feel like our happiness is a little silly, or worry that people will judge us for how we spend our lives. Maybe we feel like we don't deserve the good things that we've been given.

It's always good to be thoughtful of how others are feeling (that helps them be authentic!) - but that doesn't mean that we should hide the happiness in our own lives. When we share happiness, we help our friends believe that joy is *possible*, even if their current situation is bad.

The Bible says, “Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep (Romans 12:15).” When the entire community is authentic, we get to experience a wide variety of situations – and learn how to worship God well in each of them.

4) When have you seen this happen in your life? Give some examples.

Reason 4: It Creates More Authenticity

Authenticity invites authenticity. When we are authentic, we encourage other people to be authentic as well. Maybe our friend has something big in their life, which they have been hiding because they're afraid what others might think. When we share something scary or shameful in our own life – and they see that people love us well when we do – we encourage them to speak up about their own situation.

When we live out authenticity, we also build habits and norms within the community. If we live out authenticity as a value, we will find ourselves being authentic *by habit* – doing it without even realizing that we are doing it!

5) When have you seen this happen in your life? Give some examples.

Reason 5: It Builds Deep Relationships

Nothing builds a deep connection with another person faster than sharing your deep feelings with them, and then having them respond with kindness, compassion, and encouragement.

In our modern age, we are disconnected and isolated. Our technology gives us the ability to travel far from our hometowns (often just as we are entering the first years of adulthood), so we live far from family and our childhood friends. We “connect” with people over a screen, but rarely see anyone face-to-face. We live in a world of abundance, but are depressed – either because we envy those with more, or because we have seen the emptiness of the things we already have. We constantly divide and divorce, separating ourselves from the people who were supposed to be devoted to love us.

In this world, the norm is to shut people out. A stranger is a threat to the sad stability that we've built; a friend is someone who has the power to betray us. Nothing is more rational than to build a shield around ourselves: nobody will know our pain, and so nobody will know our weakness. We must never let anyone betray us – and so we never let anyone get close. Or if we do, we only allow them in slowly, over the course of many, many years. Is it any wonder that we feel alone?

Authenticity is the opposite. Authenticity lets people see what is really going on within us. This gives people the power to do us harm! They might reject us. They might mock us. They might offer platitudes for our pain, or they might simply not notice at all. In a church, they might even publicly shame us – casting us out of the community because we have committed some “terrible sin.”

Authenticity risks all of this, but it also gives people the chance to love us deeply. They can weep with our pain; they can dance with us in joy. They can celebrate our victories, and commiserate with our failures. They can encourage us with the encouragement that God has offered them in the past. And they can speak God's forgiveness on our sin. After all, God has already forgiven us long ago. But it is an amazing thing to hear it said *out loud* – spoken by a friend whom you deeply trust and respect.

6) When have you seen this happen in your life? Give some examples.

PART 2 BIBLICAL EXAMPLES

The Bible is full of stories where people suffer, or who are caught in sin. Let's consider how these illustrate authenticity in action.

Since we don't have time to look into all of them, roll a die to choose which of the six stories below you'll study. In Pilgrim Group (hopefully) you'll have lots of different stories that the group can discuss.

I	David and Bathsheba	long version: 2 Kings 11-12, Psalm 51 short version: 2 Kings 11:1-9, 11:14-17, 12:1-14
II	Paul on the Damascus Road	long version: Acts 7:54-8:3, 9:1-30 short version: Acts 9:1-19 other versions: Acts 22:3-21, 26:4-20; 1 Corinthians 15:5-9; Galatians 1:11-24
III	Peter's Confession and Rebuke	short version: Matthew 16:13-23 long version: Matthew 16:13-17:13 other versions: Mark 8:27-38; Luke 9:18-27
IV	Gethsemane	short version: Matthew 26:36-46 other versions: Mark 14:32-42; Luke 22:39-46; John 18:1
V	Abraham Lies (twice)	first time: Genesis 12:10-20 second time: Genesis 20
VI	Shadrach, Meshach, Abednego	Daniel 3

7) What do you think that the people in this passage were thinking and feeling when the events happened?

8) Was the person authentic to the people around them when it occurred? What were the consequences of that?

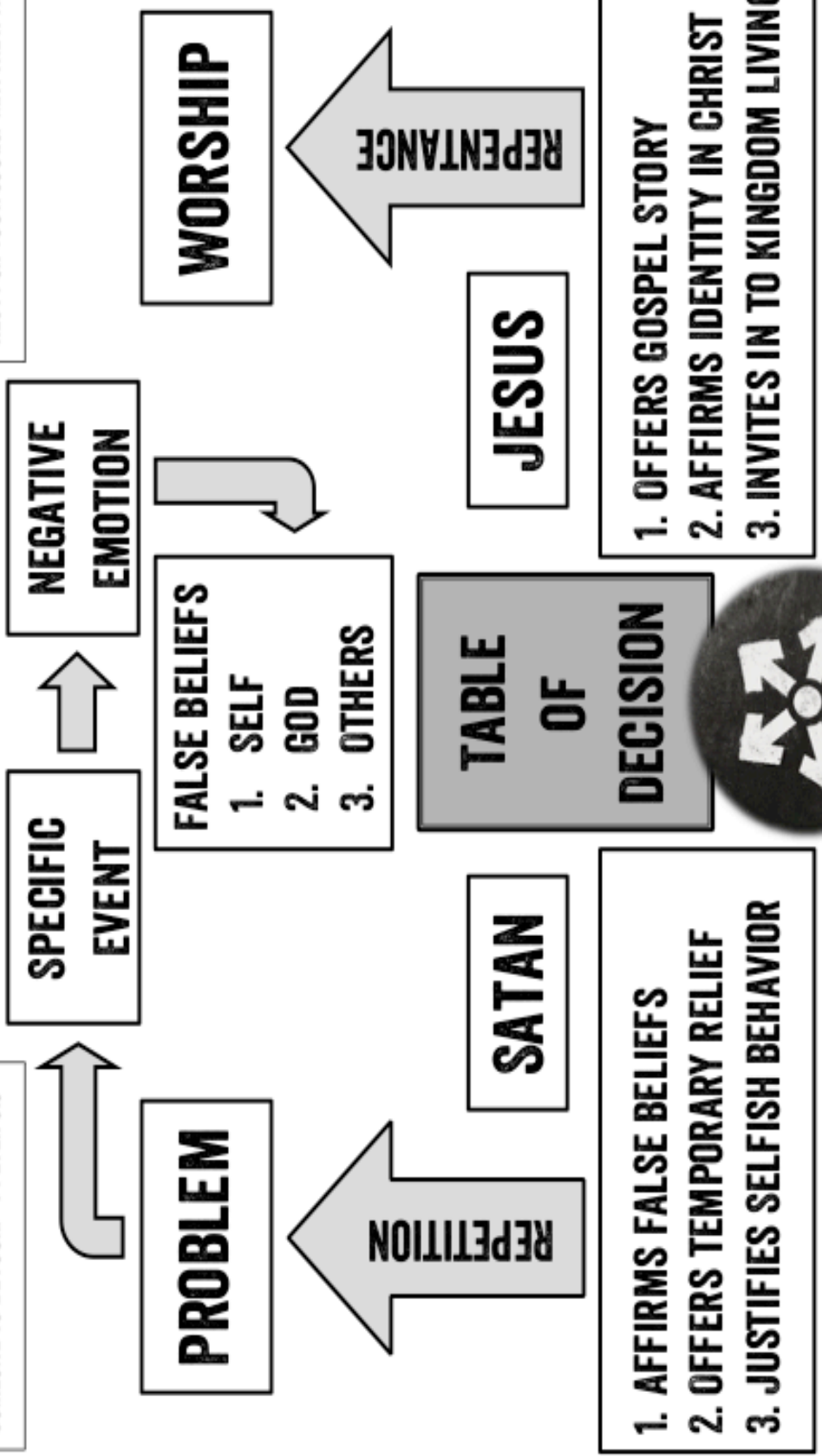
9) How were the people around them impacted when their actions were made public? How do you think they felt about that?

10) What can we learn about God, ourselves, or how God works in the world from this story?

HOT SEAT MODEL

BE ALERT AND OF SOBER MIND. YOUR ENEMY THE DEVIL PROWLS AROUND LIKE A ROARING LION LOOKING FOR SOMEONE TO DEVOUR. 1 PETER 5:8

TAKE MY YOKE UPON YOU AND LEARN FROM ME, FOR I AM GENTLE AND HUMBLE IN HEART, AND YOU WILL FIND REST FOR YOUR SOULS. MATTHEW 11:29



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Hot Seat Rules of Thumb

Things to Avoid:

- “Why” Questions
- Stories about yourself
- Explanations
- “Yes” or “No” Questions
- Advice

Things to Practice:

- Open-ended Questions
- Reflective Listening (“So it sounds like...,” “I hear you saying that...”)
- Locating emotions (“How did you feel when...”)
- Locating beliefs (“What belief did this stem from...?”)
- Locating choices (“What choice did you make...?”)

Listening to Jesus Together:

- How does His story impact this situation?
- What is your true identity in Christ?
- What would your life in the kingdom of God look like if you trusted Him here?
- How have you been finding relief?
- How is Jesus inviting you into relationship?

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 Thes 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
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

