

The Journey

	Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4	Day 5
Theme of the Day	Made for Relationship By God, the Trinity	A Relationship of Worship and Prayer	A Relationship of Following & Getting to Know Him	In Relationships of Loving Others with Christ's kind of love	In a Relationship of Sharing and Serving as Jesus' Representative
Spiritual Discipline (Receiving/Responding by the Spirit)	Receiving the Gift of Right Relationship	Responding with Worship & Prayer	Responding by Listening to God's Word	Responding by being a Friend in Christ	Responding by Bearing Witness to Jesus
Key Scripture for Chapel Talks	Mark 12 Two great commands, two relationships	Mark 4 In the boat with Jesus in stormy weather	Mark 1 Called by name to learn of him and his ways	Ephesians 4 Building up one another as brothers and sisters	John 4 Woman at the Well: "Come and See"
Spiritual Gift	Faith	Faith	Faith	Love	Hope
Personal Challenge	Looking for God and finding grace	Who can you trust? Fear and anxiety	Wanting to belong, be known: Loneliness	Wanting to Make a Difference: Aimlessness	Having a Place and Purpose: Hopelessness
Discussion	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Devotional	Jesus' Invitation Matt 11: 27 Jesus' Yoke	Our Good Father Matt. 6:25 Be not anxious	We Live by Faith Hebrews 11:8-12 The examples of Abraham & Sarah	Loving Others in Christ Col. 3:15-17 Giving others what we have received	Getting to Work with Jesus Mark 6:32 Feeding 5000
Prayer Partners	Begin?	Begin?	Continue	Continue	Continue
Signs Along the Journey	HUG Lane Ahead Trinity on Board	Enjoy the Driver Don't Hang Up	Caution: Dense Fog Follow GPS	Share the Road Travel Together	Point to Travel Lane Brake for Broken
Fireside Chat			How to Enjoy Being Brothers and Sisters in Christ		
Follow-up Bible study on the life of Jesus					Take home with you Mark 1: 1-15



A MINISTRY OF GRACE COMMUNION INTERNATIONAL



The Journey

2017 GenMin Camp Curriculum

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The Journey—(with Jesus): Camp Chapels, Devotionals and Resources

Life is a journey. But not one to walk alone. Life is meant to be a journey with Jesus. Life winds its way across all kinds of terrain. At times it's exciting, sometimes it boring. There are challenges to face and griefs to bear. There are joys to know and sorrows to share. But on that journey, the central thing going on is getting to know Jesus and the Father through him. And it takes a lifetime.

And second, it's about relationship with others: family, friends, brothers and sisters in Christ, teachers, employers, and others. For life is mainly about relationships. First with God because loves us so much that he has a grip on us and wants us to be in a growing relationship with him. And second with others—being a channel of God's love for us to others, and receiving from them reminders of God's love for us.

But how do we enjoy the gift of relationship God gives us by his grace? How can we get to know God and receive from him all he has to give? And how can we pass that love on to others? This week we'll explore how God's grace and love provides us everything we need so that we can come to know and trust him deeply and grow in our ability to pass on to others what he gives us—so that others too can know and enjoy his love, his grip on us.

We'll look at five ways we can receive from God and respond to him. We'll explore each of these ways to be in relationship, one a day. The chapel talk will introduce the main theme for the day and consider one primary Bible passage. We will provide two or three open reflection questions that can be discussed right afterwards. There will be a daily Devotional that addresses the same aspect of relationship for the day that can be done by counselors with their campers. It will focus on a different Bible passage. It can simply be read. Then there is one question provided with each Devotional to see if campers want further discussion or to ask questions.

This week is designed to get the students practicing these relationships during their time together. Suggestions will be made along the way about other ways to practice what they're learning about. One exercise will be the possibility of being in Prayer Partnerships during the week as well as thinking about serving others in simple ways. Instructions on setting up the Prayer Partnerships up will be provided. Throughout the week good Bible study will be modeled. The discussion times can foster a bit of genuine fellowship if made use of. Of course the chapel talks and morning meetings will provide opportunities for worship.

There are several places in these talks and devotionals that will get campers to consider joining a GCI church and/or youth group once they return. And also they will be prompted to think about continuing what they practiced and learned about their journey with Jesus, once they get back. A study from the Gospel of Mark will be provided for a youth leader or pastor to take the campers through after they've "come down from the mountain." We want campers to connect with a church, a community of faith and stay on the journey with Jesus and others.

Talk-Day 1—Our Journey with Jesus: *Made for Relationship*

Mark 12:28-31 Two Great Commands Matt. 11: 28-29 Take My Yoke upon you

We are yoked in relationship with Jesus on the life-long journey. God has given us by his grace a good and right relationship with him through Jesus Christ. He loves us and wants us to live and benefit from all he's done for us. So he designed us to be in relationship with him, a life long and even eternal relationship of love. He sees us and takes an interest in us and will enable us to live in a growing relationship with him. For God's own life and being is one of relationship: between the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, for all eternity.

Talk 2—Our Journey with Jesus: A Relationship of Worship and Prayer

Mark 4:36-41 In the boat with Jesus

Relating to God through Prayer (especially in difficult times) on the life-long journey

Being in a relationship with Jesus is like Jesus being with us in a boat as we sail through life. He's with us, even when we're going through stormy weather, when things don't seem to be going right. By prayer we can hand everything over to him, ourselves, our circumstances, our relationships. We can share anything and everything with him and we can receive from him his peace in prayer. Prayer is one way we can enjoy our relationship with God.

Talk 3--Our Journey with Jesus: Following and Getting to Know Him

Mark 1: 14-22 Calling of Andrew and Simon: Follow me, learn from me.

Following Jesus and learning about him and his ways from the Bible on our life-long Journey with him as he calls us by name to be with him. Jesus invites us into a relationship of following him. In that relationship we become life-long learners about him and his ways. As we live out that relationship we grow, we are transformed from the inside out. And we learn about Jesus and his ways primarily from the Bible, which was written by those appointed by Jesus to be his representatives, who knew him and his ways well.

Talk 4: Our Journey with Jesus: Loving others with God's Love

Eph. 4:14-16: No longer infants, speak truth in love, build up body of Christ.

Being in relationship with Jesus and following him involves learning who he is and receiving his love. But when we receive his love we want to pass it on to others. But that means we're also learning to love others. Being in relationship with God and others means learning how to love with God's kind of love. Staying in relationship with God will teach us how to love. And we learn how to love not alone, on our own, but with others. We'll talk about what true Christ-centered friendships are like and offer some ideas about what they are not. We'll point out that they don't have to be perfect and ideal for God to use them as channels of his blessing.

Day 5---- Our Journey with Jesus: Serving and Sharing with Others (in Hope)

John 4:1-45 The Woman at the Well—Come and see.

We are on a life-long journey with Jesus that reaches beyond our earthly life. We live in hope of him making everything right, in the end. That's his promise. Because we can trust him to love us and to keep us forever, we can freely serve others and share Jesus with them. And we can do so in very simple and ordinary ways, or in more complex and involved ways. We can be witnesses, like in a courtroom, to Jesus. We can introduce others to Jesus, like the woman at the well—so they can see and believe and trust in Jesus for themselves. We don't have to make anything happen. But God will prepare some people to receive from us, the best we have to offer—a relationship with God through Jesus. God can get us involved in his saving and reconciling work. That's why we're here. To receive from God and to pass what we receive on to others. That's the hope and joy of life.

Chapel Talk-Day 1—Our Journey with Jesus: *Made for Relationship*

Have you ever noticed how so much of life is about relationships? We live in all kinds of relationships: between parents and children, between a husband and wife, (or your own Mom or Dad and a stepmom or stepdad) between brothers and sisters, between students and teachers or bosses and employees. Sometimes our lives are affected by the relationship between persons of different cultures, nations or races, or about those who live in different places in the world or in our own cities or towns.

And how things seem to be working out and how we seem to be “doing” has so much to do with what’s going in some or all of these relationships. When relationships are going right, the whole world seems to be going right. When relationships are going wrong the whole world seems messed up.

Did you know the Bible (God’s story) is all about relationships? Did you know that Christian faith is all about relationships? And not just Christian faith, life at its core is all about relationships. What the Bible tells us is God made us to live in relationship - right relationship. That’s why we were created, and that’s what makes our life good - living in right relationships.

But there’s an even deeper reason we’re made to live in relationship. We live in relation because God is Trinity! The deepest reason is because our Creator and Redeemer God is a fellowship a communion of the Three Divine Persons in Holy relationship. From all eternity and from before creation even existed, there has been loving, knowing and glorifying going on between the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Because God is Triune, God is Loving in his very being. If there were not three Persons, if there were not relationship in God, God would not be God—God would not be. So we were created by our Triune God for relationships.

God created and designed and intended for you to live in two right relationships: First with God, and then with others. And in that order. That’s why when asked what’s most important thing in God’s mind or view, Jesus answered by saying that the greatest command for right living is to love God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength. And the second command for right living is to love your neighbor in a way that is like how you are loved by God (Mark 12:28-31). For that’s what life is about. It’s about who we’re related to and how we relate to them.

And so we’re going to talk about relationships this week. And were going to start with our most important relationship - our relationship with God - and his relationship with us. Why start there? Because that’s where everything starts. It starts with God’s relationship with us. Last year we talked a good bit about that. God has his grip on us because he loves us. That’s a good way to think about God’s relationship with us. The God of the universe has taken hold of us in Jesus Christ, his only begotten Son.

God’s relationship with us is the foundation for everything else. The foundation for every other relationship we have, whether with parents, guardians, brothers or sisters, friends, teachers, employers, other Christians and even those who don’t like us or who have something against us.

But as you know relationships involve two or more people. And because that's the case, when things are going right between both persons, the relationship is often amazing, and wonderful. But when they go bad, things can get pretty horrible. They sometimes go wrong because the problem is on both sides, but things can also go wrong when only one or the other person involved is off. And this is what happens a lot in our relationship with God. Let me explain.

Because we know God never releases his grip on you because he is perfect love and perfect rightness or righteousness and perfect truth and perfect goodness, we don't have to worry about God's side of things. God is always for us. He is always on our side. He knows what we need and what will harm us - even when we don't want to admit that what we are doing might not be the best. He is good and will always treat us out of his holy love. We're in his grip. He's got the whole world in his hands. And we see this in the life and teachings of Jesus. Jesus came to repair our broken relationship with God at his own cost and he is the one who told us and reassured us of God's good will and loving purposes for us—and for him. Jesus is the one who was crucified and resurrected to eternal life for us and for our salvation.

But here's the thing. To be in good relationship with God and with others, we need to learn to love like God loves us in Christ. We have bad habits that go way back that block us from receiving God's love and block us from sharing God's love with others. You see, we don't naturally trust God with our whole hearts, mind, souls and strength. We don't automatically treasure God and our relationship to God above all other good things because we don't understand the value of relationship. We don't fully listen to God's Word and believe that what it tells us will lead to abundant life, because we might not be convinced God is really for us - which he is. Because of this, we try to have a pleasant and easy life on our own with the idea we will turn to God only if we think we need him, or to help us get what we want.

But in his love for us, and because the way we think doesn't surprise God, he sent a way to not only make his relationship with us right, but to make our relationship with him good and right, full and free, leading to a abundant life. The way, of course is through Jesus Christ the Living Word of God and by his Holy Spirit who gave us the Written Word of God. As some great Christian teachers almost two thousand years ago said, God loves us with both his hands, and embraces us with both his arms, Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit.

The abundant or full life we are talking about happens as we grow up into God's love for us, growing into trusting and believing persons. And it will be a life-long process—because it's a life-long relationship—in fact it's an eternal relationship that will never end. So life is about receiving from God and trusting more and more in God's goodness, his holy love and his good purposes for us and for all - even for the whole creation. And that's what this camp is about: Learning more and more to love and trust and hope in God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

We want you to learn this because your relationship with God works itself out in your relationship with others. As you receive and learn about God's love for you, you learn about loving others - even those you might think are "unlovable." Believe it or not, we do not naturally and automatically love others. Sometimes this is because others don't seem lovable, they do not always treat us well. They are not honest and faithful. They are not giving, forgiving or gracious.

Well, they are not God. But probably just as often, others might feel the same about us and the problem is on our side, because, well, we aren't God either.. We can be just as mean, selfish, dishonest or greedy as others.

But sometimes it is simply because we are confused about what is loving, or how to love. There are many definitions of love floating around. Movies, songs, social media - even family and friends - give us very different examples of what a good relationship is like. Often good relationships are reduced to romantic relationships, being in love, or falling in love. Having a soul mate. Other times true love is being a hero, or better a super-hero with lots of power and influence and money to help others. Sometimes it's just being nice, not causing trouble, getting along with everyone. Sometimes love is said to mean needing to get angry or even rioting. Taking up a cause and pursuing it at any cost. Figuring out just what love is and what the most loving thing to do in a situation is not easy.

That's why we say that learning to love with God's kind of love is a life-long journey. It calls for growing in wisdom. For it's easy to be fooled and deceived or simply used and manipulated.

But God has provided for this as well. First he's given us his Living Word of God, Jesus Christ, and then he's given us His Holy Spirit and the Written Word of God. But then also God has given us people to travel along with us, those who are also on the road to learning to love God as God has loved us and to love our neighbors as we have been loved. We don't take this journey alone.

That's why God gives us his church, where we learn to help one another love God and love others by listening to, learning and receiving from God's Word, Living and Written. Some of us who are a bit older, or who have had a relationship with God longer can share what we've learned - much we've learned from hard lessons. The best thing we can do with our mistakes is to pass along the lessons we've learned to those of you who haven't yet committed those errors. It's interesting, because some believe we are telling people how to live to make their life seem restricted, or less fun. But it's just the opposite. We want to save you from some of the grief many have gone through before you. We do this because we know we are all traveling together as the children of God, regardless of age.

The life God has given you is a journey of relationships - relationships with God, with others, and with creation itself. It's a journey to grow in your relationship with God and receive from him all he has provided you and is providing you; you are in his grip. And out of that relationship you also grow in learning how to be in good and right relationships with others. And that includes helping others learn to know God and receive from God his love and live by his wisdom about life and relationships. And you do this, not alone, but as part of God's people, as part of the Body of Christ, as those who belong to his church.

That life-long journey with Jesus is what today's devotional is all about. Let's read the passage together from Matthew 11:28-30:

“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. 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. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.” (NIV)

By speaking of our being yoked with him, Jesus is talking about our relationship with him. He’s explaining a little bit of what it’s about, what it’s like. But even as he spoke to those disciples 2000 years ago, he is also speaking to you and me today. He’s helping us live in right relationship with him, helping us receive and respond to him with all our heart, soul, mind and strength. He’s setting us free to trust him fully, wholeheartedly as we listen to his word today.

In this passage, Jesus is inviting his listeners into a certain kind of relationship with him. He welcomes people to come to him to receive something from him. He tells them to be willing to learn from him. And he directs them to take and put on a yoke of some sort that he will give them. He is calling them into a very particular relationship with him of receiving from him and being directed by him. Even being tied in a certain way to him.

But he knows there is likely to be a barrier to their coming to him, or at least staying with him. There is possibly resistance to learning from him. They may think they know more than he knows or that he will deceive them, or that he doesn’t have their best interest in mind. They may not trust him and not be willing to put on his yoke—whatever that is.

So what does Jesus do? He does not just tell them what to do; he tells them why they should do what he’s inviting them to do. And the reason he gives for them to come to him, learn from him and to take on his yoke is because of who he is. He tells them who he is. He tells them about himself. This is vital, wouldn’t you agree? It’s very, very difficult to place our trust in someone we don’t know. If we’re going to trust him and do what he directs us to do, we have to know him. So he tells us about himself. That’s the only way his listeners will do what he’s asking of them. If they trust him and come to love him for who he is.

Here’s what we find out from him: he is gentle, he is humble from his very heart. He also tells us his purpose, his intention. He shares with his listeners his heart. He wants to give us rest, a rest that reaches deep down to the bottom of who we are, to our very souls, the core of our being. That’s how deep his compassion, his holy love, reaches

And notice that the way he speaks to those around him demonstrates right then and there that he is who he says he is. He is inviting. He is hospitable and welcoming. He is offering an invitation. And notice whom he invites. He knows that people are weary and burdened down by many things in life - probably mostly from bad relationships of one kind or another. So he invites those in particular who are looking for help and relief. And recall this is the eternal Son of God speaking here, the creator of all things, the Holy One of God. He invites those who know and admit, at least to him, that they need his help; they need exactly what he has to offer.

Also notice also he offers two related things: first he offers them rest, a deep rest, a rest that reaches their very souls. This would remind many of his hearers of God’s rest, of the Sabbath rest. Jesus has come to give something in particular—namely God’s rest for the soul. Second he gives us *his* yoke.

The yoke was the wooden bar that joined two animals so they could work together. But in this case, unlike animals, we aren't just putting on any old yoke, we put on *his* yoke. Jesus wants us to be yoked together with him, not to share the load of what he has done, but to be with him and share in what he is doing. He wants us to stay in harmony with him, to go where he goes, get involved in what he's doing. We are yoked together in relationship *with him*. In that way we share in *his* life. And as we take on his yoke we will also share in his rest.

We should also remember that Jesus knows a lot about being yoked in relationship with others. He has been yoked with his Heavenly Father for all eternity. As we are yoked with him, we are also yoked with the Heavenly Father, through him!

So how can we respond to him and his offer of this kind of relationship? How do we benefit from the gift that he freely offers us of a close relationship with him?

Jesus tells us that as well. We simply come to him and walk with him, learning to live in a relationship with him as if we are yoked to him. And what's really cool is that he tells us that he will even teach us how to be yoked to him as we begin to be guided by him, receive from him and walk with him, yoked together with him.

We might be afraid or concerned that this will be too hard, too heavy. But Jesus knows we might be feeling that way and assures us that since the yoke of relationship we have with him is *his*, that it will be easy and light, especially compared to all other things we could be bound to, caught by, or enslaved to.

Jesus uses the image of the yoke to tell us of the kind of relationship he desires with us and to assure us that being yoked with him is never a burden. Rather, he takes our burdens upon himself and gives us rest. The closer our relationship with him is, the more rest we will experience. Jesus is humble and gentle with us; our relationship with him will not be heavy and hard, but a joy. And that's what the Journey with Jesus is like—for all our lives.

Discussion Questions:

1. What are one or two things that you found helpful in this chapel talk? And say why.
2. Is there something from the talk you'd like to discuss further?
3. What are some of the other things we can be tempted to be yoked to, bound to, caught by? How have you found these things to be heavy and wearying? (for example, yoked to the need to be liked by everyone and the burden that this brings of having to always make sure everyone is okay with us)
4. Think about some of the challenging situations or relationships you currently have in your life. Can you imagine how to go about dealing with these situations yoked to Jesus?

Chapel Talk 2 -- Our Journey with Jesus: *A Relationship of Worship and Prayer*

Mark 4:36-41 *“And leaving the crowd behind, they took him with them in the boat, just as he was. Other boats were with him. A great windstorm arose, and the waves beat into the boat, so that the boat was already being swamped. But he was in the stern, asleep on the cushion; and they woke him up and said to him, ‘Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?’ He woke up and rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, ‘Peace! Be still!’ Then the wind ceased, and there was a dead calm. He said to them, ‘Why are you afraid? Have you still no faith?’ And they were filled with great awe and said to one another, ‘Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?’”*

Jesus came to earth so that we might have a deep and lasting relationship with God. Last chapel, we showed how Jesus used the image of a yoke to tell us about that relationship and what it would be like to be in a relationship with him. The most important thing about the yoke is who it belongs to, *whose* yoke it is. And so Jesus told us something about himself. But he also tells us we’re going to be learning from him as we are yoked into relationship with him, and that relationship will bring rest.

Throughout all the Gospels, which tell us about Jesus and his relationship with his disciples and followers, we can learn about this Jesus who wants us to be yoked in relationship with him.

Today let’s look at the story of Jesus and his disciples being yoked together in a boat, in the middle of a storm.

At the end of a long day, Jesus and the twelve disciples got into their boat and headed out to sea. The Sea of Galilee is large enough to have great storms with mighty winds that can seemingly come out of nowhere. This is exactly what happened on that day. The unexpected storm was powerful and dangerous. The winds pushed great waves of water into big heaps, maybe 6 to 8 feet high. And water was coming into the boat and threatening to eventually sink it. Like anyone would be, the disciples were scared and fearing for their lives. Jesus, on the other hand, was asleep, totally undisturbed by all the commotion.

In their panic, the disciples woke Jesus up and questioned him. Was he not concerned for them? Did he care? Jesus saw what was going on, heard their panic, and responded in a way that shocked them. Rather than joining them in their panic, he rebuked the wind by simply saying: “Peace. Be still.” And his word had immediate effect. The storm was completely stilled to a “dead calm.”

Imagine the scene. And then, perhaps just as odd as Jesus’ remaining asleep during the storm was the fact disciples were still afraid. Why? Because now the object of their fear changed. They were no longer afraid of the storm, but they were wondering about Jesus. Who was this man who could calm the sea? Who could even imagine that a man could control the wind—and do so by talking to it? They had terribly underestimated who was in the boat with them.

They didn't realize they were in a tiny boat with the one who was the creator of all things. The simple command they heard was the Word of the One who spoke everything into existence, and they were afraid. But their fear wasn't a "let's get away from this guy" kind of fear. Rather it's with a fear called awe. This is a reverence, an amazement that took their breath away. Their fear was not of evil, but of the powerful good of God. And they were in that tiny boat with someone who had amazing power.

This type of awe and holy reverence leads us to worship. This moment was one of the times in Jesus' life and ministry that the disciples realized this was not simply a man, but one who was from God and was one with God. They were in the presence of God as they stood frozen in the boat with the man Jesus.

Jesus asks them, have you no faith? He's not trying to make them feel bad, he wants to reassure them by helping them see they can have trust and confidence in him. Further, he wants them to see that when he displays God's power, it is for good. The Son of God was entrusted with the power that can control nature itself. When we see the power Jesus has, and that he uses it only for good, we know we can trust him. This trust leads to worship.

One of the purposes of this story is to help us see that our relationship with God through Jesus is not like any other relationship. It is a relationship of *worship*. That's why we address Jesus as our Lord and Savior. What those first disciples began to discover was continually filled out as they walked with him day by day. Jesus is Lord because he is over everything that exists. Everything was created by the Father and through the Son, before the Son came to earth. And everything was to belong to the Son and reach its perfection through him. And he is Lord over every aspect of life since he created it, invented it, and knows it from the inside out. He designed it and knows how it works and what it's for, its purpose. The Son of God knows every aspect of life from physics to biology to psychology, from history to engineering, to relationships, mental health, music and the all the arts. From politics to private life. He is Lord over all.

And this Jesus is not only Lord by being the creator and sustainer of all things, but he is also Savior. He is the one through whom God creates, and he is the one through whom the Father rescues, redeems, and restores. He is the one who makes right everything that is wrong, out of harmony, broken. He is the one who overcomes evil and sets us free from it. He has come to overcome evil and, in the end, to do away with it entirely. This Jesus is Savior, as well as Lord.

And finally, He is Immanuel, God with us. And that would be simply a fearful thing, except that he is totally good and uses his power to do good, including overcoming evil.

The Apostle John gives us one of the most important revelations about God in the whole Bible: "This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light and in him there is no darkness at all" (1John 1:5). We read it also from James who tells us that God is "the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change" (James 1:17). God is exactly like Jesus, all the way down. There is no dark, evil God behind the back of Jesus.

In Chapel 1 we learned we are yoked together with Jesus as Lord as God, who is creator of the universe. But his yoke is easy and burden is light and in him we find rest. But we all know life

can be hit with a storm. We don't feel rested in the midst of a storm, so where is Jesus in your storm.

This story reminds us that Jesus is with us even in the midst of storms. And sometimes it does indeed seem as if he doesn't care—because he doesn't do what we think or want him to do in that moment. There will be times like that for all of us. But he is with us and because of that, we need not fear evil, the evil that is out of our control, beyond our responsibility. Being yoked with him means giving him our full trust, our full confidence in his faithfulness.

But it also means we can come to him at any time, under any circumstances. ***And we can do that by prayer.*** He is always ready to listen. In fact he is in prayer for us. He continually intercedes for us as our Great High Priest. And he can help us pray, even when we don't know how or what to pray.

So we can bring to him all our anxieties, all our troubles. Peter tells us to cast all our cares upon him because he cares for us (1 Peter 5:7). Paul tells us to rejoice in him always, and to pray: *“Do not worry 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”* (Phil. 4:6-7).

Did you know you can talk to him about anything and everything? Even if you're sad or mad or fearful. You can come to him with all the good and with any guilt and shame. He knows all about you and wants you to come to him. You can talk things over with him. Even tell him jokes! You can especially express thanks to him for anything and everything good. After all, all good things exist because of God. And they are all gifts.

Most of all, we can especially be thankful that he has guaranteed that he will work everything together in such a way that it will contribute to good and to his good purposes. He can take bad and even evil things and make them contribute to something good. Even suffering. He's that good. That faithful. You can entrust anything and everything to him: circumstances, relationships, feelings, thoughts, family, school, friends. You're yoked with him and he'll lead and guide you through any storm of life. That's what it means to be yoked to him, to be in his boat, with him.

Did you notice that Paul says as we hand over all that is on our hearts to God, we can thank Him since Jesus already knows about all these things and is faithfully at work? You see, as we learn to entrust everything to him God gives us his own peace. We rest in his peace because God is not made anxious by our anxieties. He knows who he is and what good he is up to in making us his children. He's confident in his work in us to make us more and more able to live in him by his Spirit. As we give him our anxieties, he gives us his peace in exchange.

And His peace, Paul tells us, is deeper than all understanding. We don't have to know how God will work in our lives or why we are dealing with what we are dealing with when we trust him. We simply know he is near and he will help us find our rest in him. This peace, Paul goes on, will guard our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus Himself. It will keep us close to him no matter what obstacles we may face. We may not see the answers to our prayers that we expect, but we

will know by his Spirit that Jesus has us in his grip and God is committed to keeping us there as he works out his good purposes.

Being in the same boat with Jesus, Lord and Savior, we can bring all our hopes and fears to him. And in such a relationship with him, we can ride out any storms that may come along. He can give us his peace, peace that does not come from our circumstances, but comes from him, the One who is Lord of all.

Discussion Questions:

1. During Jesus' ministry on earth, he revealed his power and authority as Lord and King. In today's chapel, we saw that Jesus has power over nature, over his creation. What are other areas that Jesus demonstrates his authority over? (illness, demons, sins)
2. How does knowing and remembering Jesus' power and authority over the earth and his commitment as Lord to bring about his good purposes help you in your daily life?
3. What do you think Paul means when he tells the Philippians to "rejoice always"? How can we rejoice even when we are facing difficult situations, ones that make us anxious, afraid, worried or confused?

Chapel Talk 3--Our Journey with Jesus: *Following and Getting to Know Him*

This week we're exploring what it's like to live in a relationship with Jesus Christ, as Lord and Savior. Fortunately, we have stories throughout the Bible about people who were in relationship with God. Some of these people were used in powerful ways. The greatest story, of course, is that God himself came to us and revealed who he is and what being in a right relationship with him is like. Jesus brought with him "insider" knowledge of the eternal God and what it means to be in relationship with God. He would know, since the Son of God has been in an eternal relationship with the Father and the Holy Spirit. As we said before, eternally yoked to the Father in the Spirit.

Jesus is Immanuel - God with us - who tells us things we could never know unless he told us and told us in ways we could understand. And more than that, he appointed specific individuals to be his spokesmen, his interpreters—those he knew who "got it." These are the first apostles who first preached and were responsible for the writings we now call the Bible. We now trust the writings of those apostles who Jesus himself entrusted with what he told them about himself, about God the Father and Spirit. Through these apostles Jesus the Living Word of God has provided for us the gift of the Written Word of God, the Bible.

So what's it like to live in relationship with God through Jesus Christ and by the Holy Spirit and how does the Bible, the Written Word of God fit in?

A very simple passage from the life and teachings of Jesus tells us a whole lot—and provides the basis for us to live in relationship with Jesus. Let's read the passage:

Mark 1:14-22 "Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God, and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news." As Jesus passed along the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the sea — for they were fishermen. And Jesus said to them, "Follow me, and I will make you become fishers of men." And immediately they left their nets and followed him. As he went a little farther, he saw James son of Zebedee and his brother John, who were in their boat mending the nets. Immediately he called them; and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men, and followed him. They went to Capernaum; and when the sabbath came, he entered the synagogue and taught. They were astounded at his teaching, for he taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes."

Jesus himself came to proclaim or announce a message of good news. That's what we call the Gospel—Gospel means good news. It's like what a messenger would tell a small kingdom whose king had gone out to battle with an enemy of another kingdom. The good news announced would be that their King had won the war and they would not be ransacked and taken over by the

enemy king. Their own King would return and continue ruling over them. They were freed from their enemies.

So Jesus announced the good news that his kingdom has come. He was bringing the good news of the victory of God over evil. Because Jesus came and because of what he accomplished, people could now begin to live under the rule and reign of God. People could now live under the kingship of Jesus as King of kings and Lord of lords. That's God's grace.

God came to us in Jesus because of his love and his grace. We didn't do anything to make God do it. We did not deserve it. But God freely gives us his Son, Jesus, and began to establish his Kingdom with Jesus as its King. That's another way to speak of how God has a grip on us. The King has come and so now we can be citizens of his Kingdom, living under his rule and reign. Always safe under our eternal loving King.

So being in relationship with Jesus is like living in his kingdom and knowing our King loves us, has the best in mind for us, and is for us. This makes living under his rule and authority part of enjoying all the benefits of belonging to him and to his kingdom. It means taking on his ways of living, the ways of his kingdom, the ways he sets out for us.

But how do we begin? If Jesus has brought the good news of the glorious victory of God near to us so that we can live as citizens of his Kingdom and follow his ways, how do we respond? This was the same question the first disciples had. Jesus' response to them is the same response to us.

There are two basic parts to our response of Jesus' announcement of who he is and what he has done for us: repent and believe. Though these two responses sound like separate things, they are closely related.

Repenting is far more than simply being sorry for something you have done. To repent means to turn away from something and to turn towards something else. When we turn away from something that is wrong we are at the same time turning toward something that is right.

Jesus is telling his very first disciples to turn away from living under the rule and reign of any other lord or king and to turn towards him and live in relationship to him as Lord and King. This is a matter of trust, which requires belief. Let me explain:

When we turn towards Jesus as our Lord and King, we are believing or trusting in him over any other person or authority and we trust or believe in his ways over any other ways. So we repent of belonging to any other kingdom or king and believe and trust alone in Jesus and his kingdom. We live in total trust and loyalty to him as our Lord and Savior. We worship him alone. We give him alone our ultimate allegiance. We live as if we belong to Jesus, with all we are and all we have. Nothing left over. His apostle Paul put it this way:

“Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God, and that you are not your own? For you were bought with a price; therefore glorify God in your body.” (Cor. 6:19-20)

You might be asking, “But what if I can’t make that response, especially consistently and perfectly?” Jesus knows you can’t, and he can take care of it. In fact he has already provided for that. And that’s why he does two things in relationship to us, two things we see right here in his relationship with his first disciples.

First, he calls us to himself by name. Jesus comes to each person individually. He knows each one of us and he knows all about us. And in his time and in his way he calls us by name to begin to respond to him and be in a relationship with him. He invites us in; he welcomes us. He gives us his hospitality, like someone who invites you into their home, has you sit down and offers you a drink and a snack. Or like someone who says, “Make yourself at home.” Jesus takes the initiative. He makes the first move, and continues to reach out and draw us in. He does not give up.

Second, notice that Jesus not only approaches and calls each one by name; he invites them into a very particular kind of relationship with him. That is a relationship that matches being a part of his coming Kingdom and relating to him as Lord and God. He instructs these men to follow him. Following him means joining him - going where he goes, being involved in what he is doing, listening to what he says. It’s really sticking with him, no matter what. That’s a lot like being yoked to him isn’t it? It’s a lot like being in a boat with him! That’s the kind of relationship he offers to us and invites us into.

Being a Christian means becoming a follower of Jesus, being in relationship with him every day, every minute. Trusting Jesus, being one of his followers and being a citizen of his coming Kingdom means *it’s a life-long relationship*. While sometimes our relationship with Jesus will have a recognizable starting point, from our side, that relationship is for life. And it’s daily. Being a follower of Jesus is not just a Sunday only or every other day affair. It’s 24-7, as we say these days. And so it involves all we do and say, all we are and have.

And that’s because Jesus is going somewhere. He’s not standing still. So as we follow him, he’s taking us somewhere with him. Jesus does meet us where we are and accepts us as we are. We don’t have to move an inch. But as our Lord and Savior, his love is so great that he does not leave us where he finds us. He loves us too much to do that. He takes us with him to where he is going! He’s taking us to better places - on a spiritual journey that affects us at the deepest roots of who we are, the deepest and darkest places too.

Notice that Jesus tells us that as we follow him he will make us *become* something far more than we could be on our own. He tells these fishers of fish that as they follow him they’ll become fishers of men. Now that’s a big change - a huge transformation. He doesn’t tell them all that that will involve, but they know that it is a far greater and higher calling than they ever aspired to.

No one who ever meets Jesus stays the same after they meet Jesus. He’s too good and loving to simply leave things alone and not bother us. Love desires the perfection of the beloved - that’s you. But also love is patient and kind and so does not rush things. But God’s love and grace does not give up. He keeps working with us, and on us, and in us.

Notice too that as these first followers began to trust in Jesus and count on his coming Kingdom, they left things behind. They repented of their fishing careers and their broken nets that needed mending. They even left their family business, showing they could even leave perfectly good things behind to be with him and go where he was leading, so they could get to know him and get involved in what he was doing.

So repenting and believing in Jesus and in his coming kingdom involves a daily and life-long following him, being with him, staying with him.

And if we stray from him, that's not the end of the line at all. He remains a faithful Lord and comes after us so we can turn around and come back to him as he welcomes us. We saw this happen with his own disciples. At times they all had trouble following him, sticking with him, working out his plan.

And notice another thing I think you'll find interesting. The fisherman followed Jesus right into the place where the worship of the God of Israel was taking place, in the synagogue. It was in the synagogue where the word of God was read, discussed and lived out. And in that place of worship, Jesus began to teach those who were willing to listen to him and learn from him.

Jesus would read from the portion of the Bible they had in their day, the Old Testament. And he would explain to them what it meant and how it revealed who God was and how it pointed to his own coming. And the listeners who were willing to learn from him noticed something. They noticed how Jesus had an authority far, far greater than anyone they had ever known. Jesus explained scripture that came from God's prophets in such a meaningful way, they quickly recognized he knew what he was talking about!

That was because Jesus was not just explaining to them something about a word from God, but he was explaining about himself - the Living Word of God. Imagine it, the Living Word of God was explaining to them the Written Word of God. He was the one behind the Written Word of God, so yes, of course, he did know what he was talking about. It wasn't that difficult for the disciples to begin to respond to his absolutely unique authority. They trusted what they heard from him and began to live by it as they followed him. For he alone spoke with the authority of God, the God who gave life and who saves life.

A little bit later in the story, the followers of Jesus were called his disciples. Being a disciple meant that you learned from the one you were following. Being a disciple means coming under the discipline of a spiritual teacher. ***A follower of Jesus is a life-long learner*** because Jesus is a life-long teacher. His disciples recognized his absolute authority and so listened and lived by his teaching, his words, as if he was their Victorious King and Savior—because he was!

They spent time with him and got to know him. The more we follow Jesus, the more we learn about him. The more we learn about him the more we learn to trust and receive from him. We become more responsive to him and to his leading and guiding. We get to know his ways, his will and his purpose and aims. We get to know his heart and his mind. We come to desire to be a better follower of his and live under his Lordship as members of his coming Kingdom.

This is a life-long journey that changes us from the inside out. That transformation is the gift of becoming truly who God made and intended us to be. And it happens in and through our relationship with Jesus as his followers, as his disciples. He is the one who blazes the trail for us, as we walk on the journey. He is the one who frees and enables us to follow him where he takes us—our whole life long.

To help illustrate this relationship, let me share what most people learn when they first adopt a dog. Everyone wants a well-trained dog, so they start by teaching the dog to do certain things. Sit, Stay, Shake, Roll over. The owners assume that what you want to do is issue a command, then the dog understands the command and does what you want. But if that's all you're aiming for, that is not true training. These commands are simply teaching the dog a few tricks.

Training a dog is much harder than teaching it a few tricks. It involves teaching the dog to pay attention to you and to go with and follow you. You become the leader (the Alpha dog) and the pet becomes the follower. The dog doesn't so much obey your commands as learns to respond to you—sometimes without you saying a word.

For example: teaching a dog to “heel” is more than teaching a dog to walk with you. When a dog “heels” properly, it's walking next to you, a little behind and with you. And it's on a “loose leash.” You're not pulling the dog along and the dog is not taking you for a walk! How does this happen? You teach the dog to pay attention to you. When you go, the dog starts to go with you. When you go fast or when you go slow, the dog goes at your speed, adjusting to you. When you stop, the dog senses you're stopping and stops right with you. The dog continually attends to you—the relationship and communication is happening every moment of the whole walk. You're walking together. It's a joy then for you and the dog to go on a walk, a journey with each other. No pushing and pulling, no shouting or barking. It's a wonder, simply being together. A real relationship develops.

Most humans can go on a walk together without using a leash or barking commands at each other. But that happens only if you're paying close attention to each other (and not looking at your smart phone). You can see this even as birds, for instance, fly in formation together or as fish swim in their schools. But they all are paying attention to each other moment by moment.

But then the problems arise. As you are training your dog, it gets distracted by everything. Another dog, a leaf blowing in the wind, a drainage grate along the curb, a child riding a bike, a squirrel running across the pathway. At first all these things take the dog's attention entirely away from the trainer. When this occurs, you know your dog is not taking its cues from you, but from all the circumstances encountered. It takes time, but a well-trained dog learns that all it needs to do is pay attention to whomever is taking him or her for a walk. When this happens, there is harmony and all is well.

And isn't that how it is with us? We're not that much different from an easily distracted and often-spooked untrained dog. We're distracted, worried or far more interested in things around us. We forget we're on a journey with Jesus and that he is Lord and Savior. He is the one we want to pay attention to, to learn from. It's his will and ways that lead to good and abundant life. He is the one overseeing everything. He is the one who can give us his peace, his joy, his very

presence as we walk through life with him. He is the one in whom we can put our hope. And God's gift of Scripture is the training manual for Jesus followers. The written Word of God is indispensable for learning about Jesus' ways and paying attention to him—to where he's doing, what he's up to, what captures his heart and mind, as we are on our life-long journey with him. And that way, we are not just doing tricks for Jesus, but are enjoying a walk, in ever deeper relationship with him.

When you believe that God knows what he is doing and that he is true to his promises, you can believe that God is working everything together for good - for your good. When we believe this, we can believe we are on a journey as followers of Jesus living by his Word each and every day our lives.

Discussion Questions:

1. What are one or two things that you found helpful in this chapel talk? And say why.
2. Is there something from the talk you'd like to discuss further?
3. What do you already know about Jesus – His character, His concerns and purposes? What might you do to get to know him better?
4. The illustration about dog training pointed to the importance of distinguishing the dog owner's voice over the other "voices" or distractions. What other "voices" are you dealing with in your life and what are they saying? How do you distinguish Jesus' voice from the others? What is Jesus telling you in contrast to what other voices are saying?

Chapel Talk 4: Our Journey with Jesus: *Loving others with God's Love*

When Jesus is the center of how we live our lives - meaning we are loyal to him and dependent upon him - all our relationships are affected. When we allow Jesus to direct and guide us, then he is present in every one of our relationships. And it changes the way we view others. Let me explain:

With Christ at the center of our lives and our relationships, we stop thinking in terms of "Christ for us" and "Christ against them" - rather, we start to see others with Jesus Christ standing with them, and being *for* them. And just like with he is with us, he is against anything that is against them. We know that Christ came and died and rose again for them just as he did for us. He freely offers them the same forgiveness and healing he gives us. With Christ at the center, we recognize everyone we meet belongs to Jesus Christ. For he is their Creator and Redeemer. He is their God - whether they acknowledge this truth or not.

With Christ at the center, we relate to others knowing that the best thing we can give to them is Jesus Christ so that they might know him and put their trust in him and surrender their lives to him. In that way they join us in our fellowship with God through Jesus and begin receiving from him like we do. We want them to know that Jesus came to shed light on their lives and give them true life. We want them to receive from Jesus all he has to offer by trusting him and living by his Word.

Since Jesus is Lord and Savior of all, and since we are, by grace the children of God and servants of Jesus Christ, we realize that Jesus Christ is involved in every relationship we have, whether with parents, teachers, employers, friends, relatives, FB friends, or pastors. Jesus Christ is Lord and Savior of all our relationships. He rules over, watches over and has good plans and purposes for all our relationships. He works them together for good - so that together they reflect the goodness, truth and love of God.

The problem is we don't *know* automatically how to love, we have to learn.. And some of the examples and/or experiences we have of love are distorted or misleading. *Everything that goes by the name of love is not necessarily true love, nor a reflection of God's own kind of love.* When we experience false or warped things done in the name of love - especially by those close to us - it's difficult to trust. And we may even question if we even want God to be close or involved in our lives.

God understands this and wants us to understand his definition of love, so he sent us Jesus. Jesus teaches us what it means to be loved and to love others with God's good kind of love. We learn of true love first by looking at Jesus' relationship with the Father. We can find that especially in the Gospels of the New Testament. We are given quite a bit of information about that relationship from Jesus himself in the Gospels, especially in John chapter 17. You might want to read that sometime.

In his life Jesus continually demonstrates true and real love for God that leads to life and good and right relationships. He also shows us how to have good relationship with others. In those relationships with others, we find that Jesus lives out his relationship with the Father and the Spirit towards others. A careful study of his *whole* life in *detail* will show us that he alone has perfectly fulfilled the two greatest commands: the love for God and, out of that relationship, the love for neighbor. But notice the point, Jesus love for others came from his relationship of love for God.

God gives us the story of Jesus and his teachings so we can learn from those relationships. As we read about how he relates to God as his father, and we see the special relationship he had with others, our heart desires to be in that kind of relationship. And more, our heart desires to pass that kind of love on to others.

And one thing you will find is that God's kind of love (and the love Jesus demonstrated) is far more than simply being nice or kind - love is much more than simply giving others what they want or simply eliminating anything that is uncomfortable, or costly or inconvenient, or even sometimes painful. Sometimes people want what is not best or even good for them. God's kind of love has to do with offering and directing us to what is actually and always good and true and that leads to an abundant life - a life that flows from our belonging to God and living in a worship relationship with him.

We learn some things about good and true love from the writings of the Apostle Paul. We are going to read a passage from his letter to the Church in the city of Ephesus, but first let's make it clear that Paul is speaking to a group in relationship, not just to individuals who are all on their own. Unfortunately we can sometimes get the idea that we *are* all on our own with God. That God simply deals with us individually and apart from one another. But that flies in the face of a relational God who designed us to be in right relationship with him and then with others. A special and particular community of people God wants to work through are those who know him, trust him and worship him as the Body of Christ, or the church. When we're with Jesus we're brought together with all those others who are with him.

So in this passage Paul is writing to a church group, explaining to them how *together* they can lead a life that demonstrates the significance and value of their relationship with Christ and how *together* they could grow up to become mature human beings with Christ. Here's the passage in Ephesians 4:14-16:

"Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of people in their deceitful scheming. Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the head, that is, Christ. From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work."

There are many benefits to having a relationship with others in the body of Christ. When we share stories of our personal journey with Jesus, they too, can learn and benefit. When we listen to others, we too can learn. Together we grow closer to him and we don't allow ourselves to fall

for lies about him. Together, and with good teachers, we can recognize false teachings that move us away from Christ being the center, and therefore away from enjoying the peace and joy he is sharing with us in his Spirit. It's easier to do this together than to try to do this alone. God designed it to be that way.

Another benefit Paul notes is that as we grow up together and come to know Christ and his word better, we can "speak the truth in love" to one another. Now that's a very interesting way to put it, and it makes sense. If the truth is what we come to know of Jesus and his ways, then truth and love work perfectly together. We speak the truth out of our love for others. And because we love them, we speak truth.

Sadly, sometimes people - even in the church - are loving while neglecting the truth, or are truthful without being very loving. Keeping love and truth together is not easy. But that is where God wants to take his people as we all help one another move into relationship with Jesus - who loves all of us more than we could ever imagine. Paul reminds us elsewhere that we will need at times to be forgiving of one another, but not to give up on either the truth or the love in the process.

Think about your own life and relationships. Isn't what you really want, (or perhaps I should say, what you want to want), especially from people you trust, both love *and* truth? You want their patience, kindness, gentleness and hope, but you also want them to tell you the truth, be honest, and to give you help you cannot give yourself. You want truth that helps, that encourages, that builds up, and that even corrects if it helps you avoid making a costly mistake. And you want it only from those who truly care for you.

Makes sense, doesn't it. We want truth from those who are for us, who are on our side, who want us to succeed and flourish - in other words, from people who love us. Truth without love often comes across as hurtful, condemning. And love without truth comes across as dishonest and fake. A love that simply approves of everything and everyone without a thought, with no discernment, isn't worth very much, is it? To grow up, to find real life, we need God's kind of truth and love working together.

Paul was telling the Ephesians and us that's a lot of what belonging to a church and having true friends and family is all about—the truth and love of God directing us towards what is good in life here and now, and also beyond this life, in eternity. And the best we can offer others is the truth and love of Christ and the good life in relationship to him we find there.

Now notice the final point in this passage. Paul is telling us that when we are growing up in Christ together, when we are learning how to speak the truth in love with one another, that whole church is built up, strengthened, encouraged. It becomes truly knit together. We find this at camp, don't we? When we are growing together, learning how to speak the truth in love with one another, our relationships are stronger and camp is better. In just a few days we go from being individuals at camp, to being a camp family.

It is in this environment that we start to develop a desire to share God's love with others so they can also participate in a church family.

Perhaps now it makes sense why the Bible calls those who are living in relationship with Jesus, under his Word, **brothers and sisters**. We are all brothers and sisters. Now some of us are elder brothers and sisters, and others are younger ones. But that's how to think of relationships among those who are followers of Jesus.

Another word that indicates this kind of relationship is **friendship**. Members of Christ's body experience friendships that are directed by God's kind of love. And for the first time in our life, we can have relationship with a friend, Jesus Christ, who never lets us down, is never disappointed, and who loves us unconditionally. Sounds too good to be true, doesn't it.

Have you ever looked for what you think would be the perfect friend? Have you found one yet? Every time you think you have, disappointment occurs—doesn't it. Have you ever tried to be the perfect friend? It's impossible. One of the reasons you may have not found the perfect friend or have given up is because God's kind of love, centered in Jesus Christ wasn't a part of what you were looking for. ***Being involved in Christ-centered and directed friendships makes a world of difference—even if it doesn't bring perfection.***

While I say being a perfect friend is really impossible, I'm not suggesting that you don't offer the very best you have. But you know you aren't perfect, and so you sometimes feel guilty about the way you treat a friend. And you might even feel guilty because you realize you aren't treating Jesus as the perfect friend. But that's OK because perfection is not what Jesus needs from you right now. Why not? Because you are not yet perfect, and he knows it, and he loves you just the way you are! We are all becoming who God intends us to be in our relationship with him through Jesus, and by his Spirit and according to his Word. We are all becoming beings. And God's not worried about that.

Let's cover some things a good friend is not:

- Being a friend does not mean that you mean everything to someone or can save them. Only Jesus can be your friend's savior.
- Being a friend does not mean you can always solve or even help solve your friends problems. But that's when we turn to others and ultimately to God himself.
- Being a friend does not mean you totally and completely understand each other. We don't even totally or completely understand ourselves! What we want to do is turn each other towards God who does know us completely and totally.
- Being a friend does not mean you have to approve, like and be enthusiastic about everything your friend thinks, feels, believes or does. Some differences may be simply personality and preferences. You can still be friends with others with Christ at the center. Some of the difference may be that some things you or your friend thinks, feels or does are not in line with friendship with Jesus and not being guided by his Word. But your job is not to fix the other person. You can share with them your difference or listen to them when they indicate a difference to you and weigh them up, perhaps with the help of an older brother or sister in Christ who knows the Word of God well. (Remember that your parents are also elder brothers and sisters in Christ! They should probably be the first ones to consult!)
- And finally, being in a Christ-centered friendship as brothers and sisters does not mean that you have to be able to perfectly empathize with them: feel what they experience, or

know exactly what they're going through. We can go through things with them—even tough times. But only Jesus knows exactly what they're doing through. He does understand. But he will also lead us into the truth and lead them to put their faith, hope and love in him no matter what their circumstances may be. Friends remind each other of this.

The best way to be a good friend to someone is to go on a journey with them, to grow together in your relationship to God. It is to remind them of who God is, what God is like and what he has done for them. A true friend invites others into their relationship with God just like Jesus invites us into his relationship with God the Father and the Holy Spirit. Being a friend means reminding others by words and in how we act toward and around them of God's love, of God's forgiveness, of God's faithful work in their lives. We remind and encourage one another of the peace of God, the joy of God and the hope we have in God. We review and study God's Word together. We pray with and for each other.

Good friends get involved in things together that Jesus is doing now in the world by his Word and Spirit. These can be very simple and ordinary things. Good friends work together to avoid things that pull us away from Christ and his ways, and discern together what those things are. And again, we often need help from others who are more mature and informed about God's Word. Good friends are truthful and loving to each other.

One last thing to be reminded of about God's kind of love. God's kind of love does not manipulate or control others. It does not give in order to get. God's kind of love freely gives and freely receives. This is the kind of love God is giving us, right here and now! And it's the kind of love he wants us to give to others.

When we extend the kind of love to others that we are receiving from God, we love them with no strings attached. We love them whether or not they love us back. We give freely—and if something good is given back we freely receive it—not out of obligation or feeling we will now have to repay them but out of love. But here's the key: the only way to love others with no strings attached and to receive love from others with no strings attached, is to have *all* our strings attached to Jesus Christ. That is, we worship God alone. We do not worship our friendships; we worship the one who gave us our friendships.

That's what Christ-centered relationships are all about.

Discussion Questions:

1. What points in this talk about Christ-centered relationships were most helpful to you in thinking about your own relationships?
2. What do you think makes good friendships hard to develop and keep?
3. Is there something from the talk you'd like to discuss further?

Gen Min Chapel 5-- Our Journey with Jesus: *Serving and Sharing with Others*

This week we've been sharing about our life and relationship to God through Jesus. We've talked about how being yoked to Jesus unfolds in a life-long journey of following him through all our joys and struggles. And we find that the Lord and Savior of the universe has been in the boat with us all along, and he can calm any storm we might face. We talked about how our trust and confidence in his faithfulness leads us to regular prayer and worship, praise and thanksgiving, and to making him the center of our lives. We become followers as we grow up as his true adopted children. And we shared that Jesus, as Lord of all, is involved in all our relationships and has a design and purpose for them. He can work in and through us to encourage and strengthen others by helping us see others as he sees them. In all our relationships we learn to love as Christ loved us, with truth and hope.

We're on a life-long journey with Jesus, joining him in what he is doing. We don't know how long the journey will be; it's pretty obvious that none of us in this room have reached the end of the road. Jesus is still blazing the trail and asks us to join him. And he promises to see us to the end. He will never give up on us; he will never abandon us or leave us orphans. He is faithful for eternity, and he asks us to be faithful as well.

Our final destination - what Jesus calls our perfection - is not in this life or age, it is in a future we can only imagine - a future where everything is made right. It's a future we hope for. And hope is key.

Many people today live in despair, anxiety, fear, resentment, anger and frustration. They don't see a solution to their problems. They live without hope because they don't know they have been called, welcomed, redeemed, forgiven and loved. They don't know God who sent his only Son and who raised that Son from the grave. They don't know Jesus is alive forever, and that he is our hope - our only hope. They don't realize that God in Christ is lord over all of history and will bring an end to all evil—and put everything right.

And this is where we begin today's lesson.

Because we live in hope of our Lord and Savior and what he has in store for us and for the world we can sum up our response to that hope in two words: **Worship and Witness.**

First we live in a worship relationship with the Triune God through Jesus Christ. The chapel messages have been talking about what this is like: following Jesus, being his disciples, loving God with all we are and have. In our daily worship and our weekly gatherings in worship

we use words and actions to point to God, and we hear from God as we listen to his Word read and proclaimed. We respond directly to him in prayer, song, confession, praise and requests or petitions.

Notice that worship is just the name for the central way we demonstrate our personal relationship with God through Jesus. Worship is the core of our relationship with God, given to us as a free gift of grace simply because God loves us and has provided everything for us in Jesus and by his Holy Spirit. That is why we worship God alone, and that's why we love this God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength!

Our worship to God leads to the second response: Witness.

We live in a witness relationship with all others, through Jesus Christ.

The word witness may bring up a negative feeling. We've seen "witnesses for Jesus" portrayed on TV, and no one wants to be one of those witnesses. So rather than define witness by what we see on TV or in the media, let's use the New Testament meaning for the word. A witness is someone who tells others what he or she has seen or heard.

Think about a courtroom setting. A witness tells the court, the judge, jury, the lawyers, and the public what they know and what they have seen. They are sharing first-hand experience with those who were not present and therefore do not have the knowledge they need to make a decision. They are needed to present the facts for those who did not see or hear what they witnessed. Witnesses tell about what others don't and couldn't know directly at that point in time. What is even better in a courtroom is when there are multiple witnesses, all sharing the same story..

And notice that witness don't just testify about themselves. Yes, they will share their involvement with the story - often called a testimony - but usually they witness to what they saw, or heard. A witness passes on to others what the others don't yet know or understand, or haven't yet heard. And a witness helps others know more directly the truth about something. They are helping others understand something significant.

And this is exactly what we do when we witness about Jesus. We are passing on to others what they don't yet know or understand about God, his love for them, and his desire for relationship with them. And often, we can start by sharing our personal story of what it means to be in relationship with Jesus Christ and to know him as the Lord of our life.

Witnessing enables those of us who are in a Worship relationship with God to serve and love those around us by sharing what we know, as far as we know, of who God is and what he has done, is doing and will do for us. And we do so, so that others might also live in relationship with the Triune God.

A witness is a representative - or as the Bible terms it - an Ambassador.

A witness is a representative of what it means to walk in Christ. A witness points others to Jesus, who points them to the Father. In everything we do and say, we represent to others the one we worship so that they might worship with us. And of course as they do, they will assist us in our worship. They'll point us to who God is. They'll remind us and encourage us. And together, we'll be witnesses and representatives of Jesus, sharing relationship.

A witness introduces others to Jesus so others can share in the joy of living in relationship.

Henrietta Mears, a Christian education pastor in southern California, years ago summed it all up by saying we're here "To Know Jesus and Make him Known." That's the meaning and purpose of life. It's all about knowing God in worship and making him known in witness. Being such a witness or representative is a good way to sum up our relationship with others while here on earth. This is sometimes also called evangelism.

Until he returns, Jesus is continuing to gather people to himself. He's seeking worshipers of the Father by making the Father known and sending his Spirit to be with us and in us. When we're witnessing, we're not doing something *for* God as much as we are doing something *with* God. It's participating in what God is doing. In tremendous love and joy, Jesus continues to serve and minister and make God known so that others might believe, trust, love and hope in God. To share that joy with us, he invites us to participate. So when we're being witnesses, we're actually getting to work with Jesus. For he is the One True Witness of God.

Let's look at a story in the New Testament about Jesus inviting someone to participate with him in witnessing and see what we can learn from this story. We are going to read John 4 and talk about "The Woman at the Well."

John 4:1-6 - Now when Jesus learned that the Pharisees had heard that Jesus was making and baptizing more disciples than John (although Jesus himself did not baptize, but only his disciples), he left Judea and departed again for Galilee. And he had to pass through Samaria. So he came to a town of Samaria called Sychar, near the field that Jacob had given to his son Joseph. Jacob's well was there; so Jesus, wearied as he was from his journey, was sitting beside the well. It was about the sixth hour.

John 4:7-15 A woman from Samaria came to draw water. Jesus said to her, Give me a drink." (For his disciples had gone away into the city to buy food.) The Samaritan woman said to him, "How is it that you, a Jew, ask for a drink from me, a woman of Samaria?" (For Jews have no dealings with Samaritans.) Jesus answered her, "If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, 'Give me a drink,' you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water." The woman said to him, "Sir, you have nothing to draw water with, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water? Are you greater than our father Jacob? He gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did his sons and his livestock." Jesus said to her, "Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again. The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water

welling up to eternal life.” The woman said to him, “Sir, give me this water, so that I will not be thirsty or have to come here to draw water.”

John 4:16-26 Jesus said to her, “Go, call your husband, and come here.” The woman answered him, “I have no husband.” Jesus said to her, “You are right in saying, ‘I have no husband’; for you have had five husbands, and the one you now have is not your husband. What you have said is true.” The woman said to him, “Sir, I perceive that you are a prophet. Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, but you say that in Jerusalem is the place where people ought to worship.” 21 Jesus said to her, “Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father. You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship him. God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.” The woman said to him, “I know that Messiah is coming (he who is called Christ). When he comes, he will tell us all things.” Jesus said to her, “I who speak to you am he.”

John 4:27-30 Just then his disciples came back. They marveled that he was talking with a woman, but no one said, “What do you seek?” or, “Why are you talking with her?” So the woman left her water jar and went away into town and said to the people, “Come, see a man who told me all that I ever did. Can this be the Christ?” They went out of the town and were coming to him.

John 4:31-34 Meanwhile the disciples were urging him, saying, “Rabbi, eat.” But he said to them, “I have food to eat that you do not know about.” So the disciples said to one another, “Has anyone brought him something to eat?” Jesus said to them, “My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to accomplish his work...”

John 4:39-42 Many Samaritans from that town believed in him because of the woman's testimony, “He told me all that I ever did.” So when the Samaritans came to him, they asked him to stay with them, and he stayed there two days. And many more believed because of his word. They said to the woman, “It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is indeed the Savior of the world.”

Notice first that Jesus introduced himself to the woman. He took the initiative. It was a surprising initiative because Jewish persons like Jesus were not expected to interact with any Samaritans, especially a woman, and especially midday at a well. But that opened up a door to the beginning of a relationship through a conversation.

And notice how the conversation moved gently step by step. He was letting her know bit by bit who he was—since she had no idea. But he didn't just pull up in a truck and dump the whole load at once. Notice he was engaging and listened to her. In fact he begins by asking her for her help! He needs a drink of water.

His asking for water leads to a revelation that she has a kind of spiritual hunger. She responds to Jesus with questions and he follows that up by answering her questions as each one comes up. Then Jesus asks her a question—one that leads to her admitting that she has no husband. Jesus responds by affirming her honesty and reveals that he knows more of her story than she has told him. She has experienced a number of failed marriages and now seems to have given up on marriage or perhaps has let a man take advantage of her.

But she is not primarily focused on her past or present. It is clear that she is also interested in worshiping God and worshiping God rightly. Speaking to her concerns, Jesus leads her to see more of who he is and that he has unimaginably good things to give her from God: life itself. And finally he tells her outright, who he is: “I am he.” And at that point she is ready for this revelation. She takes it all in. She received everything Jesus gives her—and begins to recognize who he is, the Messiah, God’s Son come to fulfill all God’s promises. She has begun to worship God, in Spirit and in Truth as Jesus describes it. Her heart was opened by the Spirit and Jesus poured his life into her. And it began to pour out of her too! Like living water.

At this point, she becomes a very simple witness. What does she do? She testifies about Jesus’ knowledge of her life and wonders aloud to others if he is the Messiah. She’s being a witness. She tells them what she knows and invites them to come meet him themselves: “Come, see a man who told me all that I ever did.” And then she puts forth the same question she had asked herself about Jesus as he told her who he was, “Can this be the Christ?” She simply directs them to Jesus. And some apparently began right then to believe that God’s Messiah had come. But not everyone.

But notice that she does not expect all of them to believe her just because of what she tells them. She has a bad reputation among most of them. She is not the best witness as far as her character goes. But that does not stop her. She doesn’t get in an argument with them and say they really ought to believe her. She is not offended and does not storm off. She knows it’s not about her. She’s a witness not to herself but to Jesus. So what does she do? She points away from herself to him, directly to the one she’s pointing to.

And what happens? Many of them do go and see. She introduces them to Jesus and they go and meet him and begin to enter into their own relationship with him. Verse 41 “So when the Samaritans of the village came to him, they asked him to stay with them, and he stayed there two days. And many more believed because of his word. They said to the woman, ‘It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is indeed the Savior of the world.’”

This Samaritan woman - a woman of poor reputation - got to be a witness. God used her to direct others to the Savior of the world and to begin worshiping God now in Spirit and Truth. She did not have to have all the answers. She did not have to be a perfect example. She did not have to convince them herself. She did not convert them. But she experienced the honor and dignity of simply being a witness, an ambassador. What a joy. What a privilege. Her fellow villagers would now be able to drink with her the living water that Jesus freely gives. She got to be a part of what

God himself was doing in and through Jesus—bringing people into relationship so that they might receive him and the eternal life he brings to us all.

In this simple story we see both worship and witness lived out in this woman's life, as she responds to Jesus' ministry to her. Jesus reveals to her who he is and what he has to offer her through a relationship of faith and trust in him and his word and Spirit. As she begins to worship, she also is moved, in a natural sort of way, to become a joyful, free and enthusiastic witness to Jesus. This Samaritan woman is a wonderful example of the essence of living the Christian life in relationship with Jesus Christ—a relationship and journey that will be life long, yoked to her Messiah, Lord and Savior and serving as a joyful, free and living witness to him.

There are many ways to be a witness or express our witness to Jesus. There are many ways to represent Jesus to others. Most of them are very simple and not too difficult.

- Jesus talks about giving or even receiving a cup of water.
- He talks about giving to others out of what you might have, even if very little.
- Forgiveness is another way to show God's love.
- Being patient and helpful to others is another way.
- Helping those in need in a way that signals God's own help counts.
- Studying God's word together can also simply serve.
- Being a peacemaker so that differences can be worked out between people or groups is also another way.

There are also larger and more life encompassing ways to be witnesses in word and deed.

- Being simply among those who gather together for worship as a community is one.
- Being brothers and sisters in Christ, another.
- Being a child of a parent or of guardians or being parents of children are other huge ways to live out a witness to God.
- Getting an education can also be a way—as we seek knowledge and truth, usually about some aspect of the creation.
- A very simple job paid or volunteer can be a way—any good work, points to God's own good work.
- Being someone (or being someone who thanks those) who clean or take care of children or do maintenance, or deliver mail, or check groceries, or fix cars or houses or are beauticians or gardeners or farmers. Any work done well and cheerfully can point to God.
- And then there are more complex ways too, such as being a nurse, doctor, lawyer, a scientist, a legislator or engineer or an artist or musician. These often require more education and experience, but God can still use them. The amount of money made has little to do with being a witness in our lives.

The point is God can use all these avenues, all these channels to point others to him and to the goodness of his universe—a universe which is still good, even if distorted and broken. Being a witness does not require making a big difference, it simply requires a faithfulness that is based on relationship with Jesus: being yoked to him, sailing through storms with him, following and

learning from him, letting him be the center of all our relationships and discovering ways to serve others and bear witness to him. In all these ways we get to know Jesus and make him known.

Discussion Questions:

1. What are one or two things that you found helpful in this chapel talk? And say why.
2. Is there something from the talk you'd like to discuss further?
3. Is there a time in your life where Jesus worked in a wonderful way that you would like to share with others to encourage them?
4. Can you think of some act of service you can do for someone in this camp today?

Camp Devotionals

Introduction

This document contains five devotionals and related handouts to use with your group during camp. We wanted to provide these resources to give you a way to spend time looking at a passage together each day, one that connects to the chapel message and overall theme of the camp.

The hope behind these devotionals is twofold. First, they can provide further reflection on the themes of each day and the week overall. We wanted to help everyone to have more opportunity each day to ponder and enjoy looking at Jesus and growing in their relationship with Him. Secondly, they give everyone some opportunity to practice and grow in looking at Scripture together to see more deeply the good character and purposes of the triune God. For some, this may be a first opportunity to “try on” the habit of meeting God in His word on a regular basis. For others, it is hopefully a chance to enjoy fellowship with their group in God’s word.

Knowing that you most likely will have limited time, I wrote these devotionals so that you could do them without much preparation. You can read the text I have written to the group or go over the passage and what I wrote ahead of time and talk about the passage using your own words. I am assuming a devotional time of 15 minutes. I wrote them as if they were being done in the morning cabin time, before the chapels, but they can be used any time that works best in your schedule.

On the handout given to the campers and in your materials, I have included with the passage what translation I am using. You will notice that all of them are either ESV or NIV. I did take time with each passage, looking at the different translations out there, including The Message. Each time, I chose one that I thought was the close to the Greek text and I thought most helpful for the devotional.

I want to provide as much help to you as I can in being able to provide these times for those you are caring for and to find joy in doing so. If you have not led a small group devotional before, I have a few suggestions that I hope will help:

If possible, take some time before you come to camp to look over the materials yourself and ask God to give you insight and enthusiasm for what He shows you in these devotionals. I always find it helpful to me to have spent time beforehand with God and feeling some familiarity and interest in the passage at hand.

Mention to your group at the beginning of the week that you will be having a short devotional together each morning (or whenever you plan to do it) so that they see this as part of what they will be doing through the week. I think this helps them to be more prepared to listen and be invested when you have your time together.

Along with mentioning these devotionals at the beginning of the week, you can mention at the beginning of the day when you will be having this time. Again, the idea is to help everyone to make room in their minds and hearts for this time of considering Jesus in His word together.

Try to find or create a setting to have this time that reduces distractions and encourages sharing together. Take the time to create a small circle for everyone to sit in together. What I am trying to communicate to others when I do this is that I am looking forward to this time together with them and I want to help us all to attend more fully.

I think it can be helpful to begin and end your time together with a short prayer – thanking God for already being fully with us, for being a speaking God who wants to communicate with His children and asking Him to help us, by His Spirit to hear His living word to each of us in this passage. To end with a prayer can help us all remember that God has been present with us and leads us out as well – we are not alone.

I would suggest that you have the group read over the passage silently first, then you or someone else read it again out loud.

I have one discussion question or idea at the end of each devotional that you can go over if you have time.

Devotional 1: Jesus' Invitation

Overview

The theme of this week is living in, enjoying and growing in our relationship with Jesus Christ and, in Jesus, with one another. Today we want to take time, now and in the chapel, to think about this relationship that Jesus is giving us with Him.

Matthew 11:27-30 (NIV)

27 All things have been committed to me by my Father. No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him. 28 Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. 29 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. 30 For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.

When Jesus said these words, Matthew tells us that He was traveling with His disciples through the villages in Galilee to teach. And here we have some of what He was teaching. So what does Jesus teach? What does He want His listeners to know? What is His subject?

When I think of teaching, I usually think of instructing people about something else – like math or history. But here we see Jesus teaching about Himself and His relationship with His Father and, even more unusual His teaching consists of calling His would-be students to come to Him and take up His yoke! What can He mean by all this?

It seems that what Jesus is telling us is that to listen to and receive His teaching involves learning about Him and His Father and being involved in a long-term, close relationship with Him – being “yoked” together to use His image. He tells us that what He wants to give us as we walk with Him is rest. So the first thing we can know about Jesus from this passage is that Jesus is very interested in our being with Him – spending time with Him, learning what He is about in our lives, and walking with Him and knowing His rest, deep in our very souls.

Let's just take a moment to think about this. Jesus wants a real relationship with you. He doesn't just want you to know that He loves you but to be with you each day, as you go through your tasks and spend time with family or friends. He

wants you to receive His presence and rest when you are hurting or struggling and when you are happy.

Let's look further at the passage to understand more of this relationship that Jesus is inviting others into.

First of all, Jesus tells us something about His relationship with the Father. In these few words, what do we learn? First Jesus tells us that everything has been committed or handed over to Him by His Father. Jesus' relationship with His Father is such that all that the Father has, He is happy to share with His Son! The second thing He tells us is that the Father and Son know each other completely – they are in a relationship of such deep knowing that Jesus can say that no one can have this level of relationship unless Jesus Himself finds a way to bring them in. He has to show us His Father and He can do so in such a way that we can share in this relationship. What would a relationship feel like where you both fully know and are fully known by the other person and where you fully share what you have with one another?

This verse tells us quite a bit about God. And how interesting that this is what Jesus wants us to know here. Jesus has come to teach us that God, in Himself, is wonderful and deep relationship; here He speaks particularly of the Father and the Son.

How wonderful that Jesus chooses to let others in on this relationship. He is not keeping His relationship with His Father to Himself. But who might Jesus be speaking of? He tells us in the next verse. Jesus calls to all who are experiencing weariness and feeling burdened. There is no qualification given here about how one might feel weary and weighed down by their lives. He simply invites whoever knows they are troubled by their lives, whoever is aware of struggling to carry the weight of relationships or responsibilities they have or even ways they have sinned or been sinned against. These are the people Jesus chooses to reveal His Father to. Jesus calls you in the midst of your weariness and burdens.

And how does He propose to share His Father with them and us? Let's look at the words Jesus uses here. He tells us to take His yoke and learn from Him. A yoke was a wooden bar that would connect two animals together, like oxen, to enable them to pull a load. So, Jesus is offering somehow to share something with us by connecting us up to Him. He speaks of His yoke as being easy and His burden as light. Compared to the heavy burdens we come to Him with, His burden

is light. In fact, He says that by taking His yoke, we will find rest – not just a break before we take up those heavy burdens again – but a deep and abiding soul rest.

By speaking of our burdens and His yoke or burden, Jesus wants us to see a connection between the two. In order for us to take His yoke, we come to Jesus to let go of the burdens we are already trying to carry. And from looking at other Scripture, what we come to know is that we can hand Jesus' all of our burdens because He already knows all about them, has taken them Himself to redeem and heal us. Jesus is telling us "I know what is wearying you. I know your burdens, your struggles, your trials. Let me have them and stay and walk with me. Instead of being yoked to your troubles, be yoked to me."

Remember where the passage begins? Jesus tells us about His wonderful relationship with His Father. Could we say from His description that Jesus is yoked to His Father? Jesus lives in an ongoing, secure, loving relationship with His Father. He seeks to reveal His Father, share this relationship with others, with us. So, when we take His yoke and learn from Him, we enter and share in this relationship that He has with His Father.

By inviting us to take His yoke, Jesus is also inviting us to give Him all that is burdening us, that is making living in His rest hard. We can, each day, respond again to His call to us and hand over what is filling up our hands and making receiving His presence and rest difficult. We can simply tell him about our cares, worries, regrets and hurts and we can pray to Him about them. We can know that as we trust in Jesus and stay in touch with Him, He'll be with us, go through things with us, no matter what the situation. And He will lead us through our troubles and concerns – we can count on Him to do so. We can depend on Him to never leave us or forsake us. He is a faithful friend.

In taking His yoke each day, we are following along with Jesus where He is going, we are participating in the good work He is doing in our lives and even in the lives of others. When we are weighed down by our burdens, we are tempted to think that they are too big for God to do much with and so we may think there is nothing He can give us or teach us here. But Jesus tells us here that He is and remains our gentle and humble teacher who is always ready to teach us about Himself and His father and give us a rest that can only come from Him.

What burdens are you trying to carry today? Write them down on a piece of paper. In your prayer time together, hand them over to Jesus.

Devotional 2: Our Good Father

Overview

As we continue our theme of living in and growing in our relationship with Jesus, we will focus in today's chapel on our participation in Jesus' relationship with His Father through worship and prayer. In this devotional, we want to take some time to consider with Jesus the active care our heavenly Father takes in our lives.

Matthew 6:25-34 (NIV)

25 Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothes? 26 Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? 27 Can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your life?

28 And why do you worry about clothes? See the flowers of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. 29 Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. 30 If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you – you of little faith? 31 So do not worry, saying, "What shall we eat?" or "What shall we drink?" or "What shall we wear?" 32 For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. 33 But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. 34 Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.

Yesterday we considered Jesus' invitation to bring all that makes us weary and burdened to Him and to take instead His yoke. As we live yoked to Him, He gives us deep soul rest, even in the midst of much trouble or sorrow. To be yoked to Jesus is to live in a real relationship with Him, one of talking with Him in prayer and listening to His word to us.

Jesus calls to us to come to Him again every day. Why does He call us again? Because we can get anxious and burdened again, can't we? Our lives

change, our relationships change. We don't really know what is going to happen next. And we find ourselves feeling anxious and stressed again.

Jesus knows all about this. He knows we are tempted to be fearful and anxious. He knows that our lives here will involve difficulties and uncertainties. As you look at your life right now, at situations in your home, your church or community, our nation and the world, there are probably several things that can cause real anxiety.

And what I find is that when I am anxious, I have a hard time experiencing much of Jesus' rest.

In this passage from the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus speaks to people who are tempted like us to be anxious. What does Jesus do to help them in their anxieties? Does He just tell them to try really hard not to worry? Does He claim it is all in their heads and that the world really isn't as uncertain as it is?

No, Jesus knows He is speaking to people who live in a very uncertain world. The people of that time were intensely aware of their own inability to control most aspects of their own lives. Many of them had only the bare essentials of life, and all of them were dependent on the weather and the soil for the crops that were needed to sustain them.

Notice that when Jesus speaks of anxiety here, He speaks of being worried about having the basics of life – food, drink, and clothing. These fundamental necessities of life are universal and would likely be the most pressing concerns for Jesus' listeners. It would be tempting for them to live and work each day out of fear of whether they can secure what they need and want for their daily lives.

Jesus addresses their temptations to worry in a few different ways in this passage, but His central and deepest point is to remind them of the good character and work of their heavenly Father. It is important to remember that Jesus is speaking here to Jews, those who already know and seek to live in relationship with God. They know His provisions for His people over the many years since God called Abraham to leave his homeland to a place where God would show him. He reminds them here that they are not like the pagans, those who do not know God and therefore live as if there is no God who sees them, knows them, and cares for them.

The fact that they know who God is and what He has done for them and is doing does not, however, automatically keep them from being tempted to be anxious. They know about God, but they forget when they focus on those things they feel anxious about.

To help His listeners remember who God, their heavenly Father is, Jesus asks them to consider the birds and the flowers. He chooses parts of creation that are small and may escape their notice. This is especially true when He speaks of the flowers, or the grass of the field as He calls it. They are here today and gone tomorrow.

The birds do nothing to grow and harvest their own food. The grass spends no time making fabric and then sewing it into clothes to wear. Yet, they are provided for. But notice how Jesus describes God's provision. He doesn't say, "God makes sure there are things around that birds can eat." He says that God feeds the birds and clothes the grass. What is Jesus telling us about God here? That He is actively and intimately concerned for His creation. God is not negligent or absent. He has a direct interest in, and takes direct action in the lives of the creation He has made.

Notice also the name Jesus gives for God. Who is feeding the birds and clothing the grass? Your heavenly Father, Jesus says. This is what your heavenly Father is like, Jesus tells us. He knows about His creation down to the smallest members and He is active in His care.

And if your Father cares in such a personal and active way for birds and grass, you can trust His awareness of and care for you. In fact, Jesus says at another time that our heavenly Father knows the very number of hairs on our heads! Knowing that God, our Father, knows all about us frees us to seek His kingdom – to seek to live in relationship with the One who is both king and our loving, watchful Father.

Jesus is not saying that we do not need to work and find ways to care for our needs. What He is saying is that He and the Father desire that we live, and work and care for others out of a growing deep sense of His presence and faithful activity to give us a share in His life, His very rest as we learned about yesterday. How would it be different to go through your days trusting your heavenly Father sees and is caring actively for you compared to living and acting out of anxiety?

Jesus is also not saying that when we trust God, life will be easy. At the end of the passage, when telling His listeners not to worry about tomorrow Jesus says that each day has enough trouble of its own. Life here is challenging, isn't it? Every day brings its trials. Jesus is encouraging us to remember the deepest truth about our lives in the midst of whatever tempts us to worry. And that truth is – that we have a heavenly Father who is the source of our lives and He is a good Father, who is aware of and cares intimately for His creation and especially then of us, His children.

Even more than revealing to us the caring heart of His Father, Jesus came as one of us to take and redeem and heal all our anxieties. In the Letter to the Hebrews, the author tells us that Jesus, in becoming one of us, has been tempted in all the ways we are. He knows our struggles, our brokenness. He knows the hurt we have both given and received. And He knows what tempts us to be anxious. He has taken all of this on Himself to be with us in our deepest anxieties and to give us His rest. Even as we still struggle to turn from what makes us anxious to Him, we can remember and rejoice to know that He is not anxious about us. Jesus knows our heavenly Father is for us and is working even now to give us a share in His peace.

He has got you, in His grip – this one who takes such infinite care with even the birds and the flowers.

What are some ways that you have seen your heavenly Father at work in your life recently?

Devotional 3: We Live by Faith

Overview

As we continue to consider the relationship Jesus gives us with Himself, today we are focusing on looking to and listening again to Jesus so that we can live and act out of confidence and hope in His real presence and good work.

Hebrews 11:8-12 (ESV)

8 By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to a place that he was to receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going. 9 By faith he went to live in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, living in tents with Isaac and Jacob, heirs with him of the same promise. 10 For he was looking forward to the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God. 11 By faith Sarah herself received power to conceive, even when she was past the age, since she considered him faithful who had promised. 12 Therefore from one man, and him as good as dead, were born descendants as many as the stars of heaven and as many as the innumerable grains of sand by the seashore.

This passage is a part of a longer chapter in the Letter to the Hebrews, often thought of as the “faith chapter”. The author is seeking to encourage his readers and us to live by our trust in God’s real presence and active work in our lives. This is a theme we have been seeing in all of the passages we have considered so far this week, isn’t it? Jesus encourages people to come with their burdens and hand them to Him, taking His yoke out of trust that it is indeed light and easy and that they’ll find rest for their souls in Him. Jesus taught that we don’t have to live out of anxiety because we can trust in the care and activity of our good heavenly Father.

The author of this letter encourages us by reminding us of many of the people from the Old Testament who had come to know God and who obeyed Him out of their confidence in His faithfulness to His promises. They didn’t obey God to gain His favor or to get Him on their side or just because they thought they had no choice. As they came to know who He was and what He is up to, they wanted to live more and more according to His presence and work.

Notice that the phrase “by faith” is repeated here. If you were to read the whole chapter, you would see it repeated many more times. The author is speaking

of a variety of things that people did, received, or went through – and he says that all they accomplished, received or endured, they did “by faith.”

What is the author’s point? Why is it so important that we know they lived by faith? Why is the author encouraging us to live by faith as well?

The fact that each of these people lived and acted by faith is important because it tells us about the kind of relationship they had with God. And this tells us something about God and the kind of relationship He desires to have with His people, with us. The triune God wants us to know Him, to see and receive His love and His good work in our lives, to trust Him even when we don’t immediately see how He is working in a given situation.

This passage is referring to the story of Abraham. The full story of Abraham is found in Genesis, chapters 12-25. The details in our passage today focus on God’s calling Abraham to leave his homeland and go to a land God would show him with the promise that He, God, would make Abraham the father of a great nation, a nation that would bless all the peoples of the earth. Abraham trusted God to be faithful to His promise and so obeyed. He saw the goodness in God’s intentions for his life and responded accordingly. His trust in God set him free to joyfully do what God commanded him to do.

Likewise, Sarah trusted that God could be and would be faithful to His promise to them, even though she was actually too old to be able to have children. Sarah was not trusting in her own capacity to bring about God’s promises; she knew she couldn’t. God would have to bring about the fulfillment of His promise, not her, even though it was her body that God would bless and use.

Think about the difference it makes in your own life when you know well and trust the person you are obeying. If your parent or a teacher or friend asked you to do something and you knew that person was trustworthy and that he or she has your best in mind, how does that affect how you go about doing what they ask? It makes a big difference in our relationships when we have great confidence in the other person – in both their character and their purposes.

How does our trust in someone else grow? Primarily it grows by getting to know them and seeing over time their concerns and purposes and their faithfulness to their own word. If you were to look at the account in Genesis, you would find that God had several interactions with Abraham and Sarah over many years. Neither Abraham nor Sarah always responded to God in trust, but God continued

to be active and interactive in their lives. He showed Himself in various ways over those years to be faithfully involved with them. And their trust in Him grew.

Abraham and Sarah came to more deeply trust God and desire to be a part of His great purposes – purposes they were to participate in, but not actually see completely fulfilled in their lifetimes. Abraham and Sarah left their homeland trusting on God's word, but they did not receive the land as their own. Even Isaac, the promised child they had, was not born until 25 years after they first heard the promise and left their homeland.

But the author tells us Abraham was okay with not seeing it all happen in his life. He was trusting God to be faithful not just to him in his immediate life, but for the ultimate end that all God's work was going to lead to. Abraham and his son and grandson all lived on the Promised Land in tents, temporary housing, as if strangers in a foreign land. But Abraham could do this because he was "looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God". Notice he too is not counting on what human beings could accomplish, but on what God could and would do.

This is the key point of what living by faith means. The author repeats it in various ways throughout the chapter. All of the people he describes here did not live to see the complete fulfillment of God's promise to make us His people, the children of His heart, able to know and live in His great joy and life every moment. Abraham was both confident in the faithfulness of God and hopeful in the great and glorious purpose of God. He saw how much better was the place God was going to take him and us and all of creation and He came to live every day for that, even though it meant a life of waiting in many ways. He experienced some of what God had promised, but only a small proportion.

In this passage we see that when we live and obey by faith, we are trusting in God Himself, the giver of the promises, to be faithful to His wonderful work in our lives in His own time and way. We are not so much trusting in His promises, but in God Himself, the promiser of the promises.

And what are we trusting God for? Ultimately, we are counting on Him to fully bring about His good purposes for us, for all of His creation – that we live now in hope of one day entering fully and completely into the loving communion of the triune God and participate in His righteousness, in truly right relationships with God and in Him in right relationship with one another and with all of renewed creation.

What God has always been about, is giving Himself to us in such a way that we can now begin to enjoy life-giving, joyful and loving relationship with Him. But even more than that, we can have real hope, confidence, that there is to come new life that awaits us when all things will be truly remade and completely healed in Christ upon His return. And that fulfillment of God's promises will be so much more than even the best moments we have in our lives here and now.

So we trust Jesus to bring about all of what we are coming to hope for in Him. And our obedience to Jesus is our response of trust in Him. This means that we act in our current lives from a place of trusting He is present and at work, even when we don't clearly see how. Like Abraham, we are waiting for the best that is to come, even as we can and do grow in real relationship with Jesus and His Father now by His Spirit. For growing in trust, in faith, is the fruit of a life-long relationship with God according to his Word and by his Spirit.

And we live now, listening to and looking towards Jesus – growing in knowing Him so that our trust in Him can grow. When we see who Jesus is, we see the lengths God goes to, to redeem us and give us new lives. And that's what frees us to count on Him, no matter what, just like Abraham and Sarah.

What helps you to see and remember who Jesus is and what He is up to?

Devotional 4: Loving Others in Christ

Overview

As we continue to consider our relationship with Jesus, today we want to think about how our relationship Christ affects our relationships with other people, both those who know Christ and those who do not yet know Him.

Colossians 3:15-17 (ESV)

15 And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. And be thankful. 16 Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God. 17 And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

This week we have been considering who Jesus is and the kind of relationship He gives us with Himself. He has come to take our burdens, struggles, even our guilt, all that wearies us. He wants to share with us His good, loving, life-giving relationship with His Father, to give His very Spirit to live in us.

He calls us to follow Him and learn from Him as we grow more able to trust Him, receive from Him and know His peace and rest in the midst of our lives and relationships. We grow in our trust in Jesus as we turn to Him in thanksgiving and prayer and as we learn and remember who He is and what He is up to as we study His word, the Bible.

And as we turn to Christ and receive from Him, we turn away from all that blocks our receiving from Him and leads us away from enjoying our fellowship and communion with Him. We grow in resisting all that would distract us and undermine remaining in His peace, abiding with Him.

As we hand our burdens and even our sins, again and again to Him and take His yoke, we find His yoke is indeed easy and His burden is light. We live in joyful obedience to Him, trusting in His Word to give us life. We are coming to know without a doubt that He alone offers real and true life that is far, far better than what we may at times be tempted to run after now. Abundant life as Jesus tells us.

This ongoing, every day relationship of walking with Jesus is most fundamentally what the Christian life is about. God, in His word and His Spirit is

meeting us today, this moment. And our growing in this relationship with Jesus affects not only our inner lives, but the whole of our lives – all that we say and do, all of our relationships with others. This is the point that Paul is making here in this passage.

These verses are a part of a larger section of instructions given to the Christians living in the city of Colossae. The passage comes towards the end of the letter, after Paul has spent a considerable amount of time teaching and reminding the Colossians about who Jesus is and who they are in Him.

Let's consider the passage. What does Paul tell us here about living as followers of Christ?

The first thing I notice is that the two main commands Paul gives us here both start with the word "let". We are to "let our hearts be ruled" by the Jesus' peace and we are to "let His word" to us dwell richly or fully in us. What does it tell us when the command begins with "let"?

Paul is not telling us to try and get the peace of Christ somehow or to work hard on feeling peaceful. Which is good because it is very hard to try and make yourself be peaceful when you are feeling stressed or anxious, isn't it? Instead, Paul is saying that we already have Christ's peace. He spoke of the peace that Christ has given us earlier in the letter. Jesus has taken our brokenness, sin, and conflict and given us His peace, His confidence that He can and will make all things right. We have a share in His peace that He already has. It may be hidden, covered up, but it's there and we can count on it being there.

Paul is telling us to let this peace Jesus gives us rule in our hearts. In other words, instead of allowing other things – like our anxiety or resentments or feelings rule – we turn from those to receive again Christ's peace and act towards others from that peace. When we are followers of Jesus, He lives in us by His Spirit and is sharing His peace with us right now. He remains peaceful even when we aren't. But His peace is there for us to receive and enjoy as we turn to Him and realize He is peaceful in all situations.

The second command is that we let the word of Christ dwell in us richly. Again, Paul is not telling us to go out and find Christ's word, but that we are to make room for His word that He already is giving us in our lives. How do we let this word dwell fully in us? By turning away from other "words", other places or people that we may be tempted to listen to or to give us life or tell us who we are

and give us value, and turning towards Jesus to hear what He has to say. We can attend to what Jesus is saying to us and trust Him at His word and as we do, we receive more of what He is actually giving us.

Isn't it wonderful to realize that God is a speaking God? He tells us what's on His heart and mind and informs us of His ways. He gives us promises that He will keep. He wants us to hear His words, to know His loving and good presence. He has given us His written word, the Bible and His very Spirit to enable us to know and trust him. By attending to his Word we can grow in knowing and living in more and more His gracious work.

In the moment we are in, talking with someone, dealing with a difficult relationship, seeking help in a trial, we can recall what we have read in His Word or remember what we know about God's purposes or ways. We can be reassured by recalling His promises and faithfulness—to us or to others we know.

By the working of the Spirit we can receive from Him in that moment and so speak or act out of our relationship with Him in any and every situation—like those first disciples learned when they were in a storm in the boat with Jesus. Living in Christ, we can be patient when someone is being impatient with us. We can be thoughtful and helpful when others are thoughtless and unhelpful. We can forgive when others hold a grudge against us. We can ask for forgiveness when others refuse to ask it of us. We can be for others, even those who are against us. This is the kind of freedom Jesus can give us as we trust Him and His word.

As we dwell deeply in His Word, Paul tells us, we live in praise and thanksgiving in our hearts. We will worship God in joy that breaks out in all kinds of song. Notice that Paul mentions being thankful here 3 times – in all 3 verses.

Being thankful is both a result of our living in and under the peace of Christ and helps us to know His peace. When we are thankful for His wonderful word that He gives us, we are more able to hear His word. I am so thankful that Jesus is both present and active in each moment of my life. I am thankful He is reminding me of the truth of who I am in Him, He is giving me His confident peace that He is redeeming this situation, no matter how difficult it may seem at the present. He will work all things together to bring good out of it. And so we can always be thankful to God, our Redeemer.

We can act towards others, speak to them and respond to them from the peace that Jesus gives us. Paul is telling the Colossians and us that our whole lives,

our actions and relationships, come out this center, this living relationship with Jesus. This is what it means to live and act “in the name of the Lord Jesus.”

Just like when something wonderful happens to us we want to share it with others and can hardly wait to get it out, so to with our relationship with Jesus Christ. We want to give others the best we have to give. So we look for opportunities to share with others about that relationship—we teach and admonish others, to trust and live in close relationship with Jesus Christ. We help others know Christ and all His benefits and join us in living under his Word and in worship of God through Him. So they too can be full of thanksgiving and the joy of knowing God’s grace.

What are some ways that you can pass on to someone else the peace and words of Christ that you have received, perhaps even today?

Devotional 5: Getting to work with Jesus

Overview

Today we are looking at the feeding of the 5000 from Mark's gospel to consider how Jesus makes room for and invites us to participate in His work in the world.

Mark 6:32-44 (ESV)

34 When he went ashore he saw a great crowd, and he had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd. And he began to teach them many things. 35 And when it grew late, his disciples came to him and said, "This is a desolate place, and the hour is now late. 36 Send them away to go into the surrounding countryside and villages and buy themselves something to eat." 37 But he answered them, "You give them something to eat." And they said to him, "Shall we go and buy two hundred denarii worth of bread and give it to them to eat?" 38 And he said to them, "How many loaves do you have? Go and see." And when they had found out, they said, "Five, and two fish." 39 Then he commanded them all to sit down in groups on the green grass. 40 So they sat down in groups, by hundreds and by fifties. 41 And taking the five loaves and the two fish, he looked up to heaven and said a blessing and broke the loaves and gave them to the disciples to set before the people. And he divided the two fish among them all. 42 And they all ate and were satisfied. 43 And they took up twelve baskets full of broken pieces and of the fish. 44 And those who ate the loaves were five thousand men.

This week we have been talking about the wonderful living relationship that Jesus has given us with Himself and that He calls us to participate in every day. This relationship and right relationship with others is what we were created for and is most essentially what the Christian life is about.

What we are up to in following Jesus is growing in this relationship that He has given to us and gives us again each day. He is truly present and active, giving us His Spirit to live in us. He desires that we walk with Him, learn from Him, talk with Him and grow in enjoying His peace, rest, and joy that He shares with us. Jesus loves to give us Himself, to enable us more and more to live, act and speak out of His rest, trusting He is faithful and hoping in the fulfillment of His promises.

Jesus invites us not only to receive His good presence and work in our daily lives, He also invites us to participate in, get involved in, what He is doing – in His good purposes in us and in those around us. In Christ, we get to pass on the others the grace and good gifts He gives to us.

But how do we get to be involved? How can we ever be a channel of His blessing to others? How does Jesus help us to participate or get involved in His work?

This passage from Mark's gospel is a great picture of how Jesus both invites and enables us to be involved in His good work.

It may help to know what leads up to the feeding of this large crowd. Jesus had sent the disciples out two by two to go through the nearby towns preaching and healing in His name. They had just returned and reported to Jesus all that had happened. Jesus had them all get in the boat to head across the lake to a more uninhabited area for a rest.

But getting away just wasn't possible, was it? When they come to shore, they find a great crowd that had run ahead to them to be there when they landed. When Jesus sees the large crowd already waiting for Him, He is moved with deep compassion for them. They are lost and searching! So He teaches them. What does He teach? He tells them more about the good will and purposes of His Father that He has brought near in by being present with them (1:14-15).

Jesus teaches them until it is late in the day. The disciples, concerned that these people are hungry and need to find food, come to Jesus to encourage Him to dismiss the crowd.

But Jesus says something that obviously shocks them. He tells them that instead of sending them out to find food on their own, the disciples should feed them. Their immediate response to Jesus indicates their shock at the impossibility of such a request. They ask Jesus if they should spend 200 denarii on bread for these people. That is more than a half a year's salary for an average worker! Truly a small fortune!

The disciples could not imagine how they were going to obey Jesus. They are tempted to dismiss His command as being impossible for them to do. How does Jesus respond to them? Does He tell them to figure it out and get it done? Does Jesus say, "Look, if you want to be my follower you should to be ready to care for

these people and meet their needs. I won't be with you forever and you need to be figuring out how you will do my work on your own, when I'm gone"?

No, He gives them another command they can indeed readily obey— He asks them what they have and then tells them to find out. What they find is that they have very little – five loaves and two small fish. Certainly nowhere near enough to feed over 5000 people!

I wonder if the disciples were tempted not to bring to Jesus their small store of food. It must have seemed so insignificant in light of the need. What difference could these loaves and fish possibly make? Were they tempted to stall Jesus while they looked for more?

Whatever was going on in their minds, they did as He asked and brought to Jesus what they actually had, as insignificant as it must have seemed. They entrusted to Him all of what they had. What does Jesus do with what they have? He says nothing about how little it is, but takes it and offers it to His heavenly Father in prayer. Then He blesses and breaks it and hands it back to them to pass out to the waiting crowd.

The disciples hand out enough food so that everyone not only gets a piece, but is able to eat their fill. There were even leftovers to pick up!

What is Jesus teaching the disciples and us about participating with Him in His work? Jesus wanted the crowd fed and told His disciples to do what He wanted to happen. He told them to do His will. But what they didn't know at that point is how He would be involved in what they were going to do. They were going to be able to do His will only in actual, living relationship with Him.

He enabled them to obey Him by first having them give Him whatever they had, no matter how small and inadequate it seemed. He in turn offered what they had given Him to His Father. So even Jesus is not going to do the feeding by Himself. He and the Father are working together on this and Jesus wanted everyone to see that.

But Jesus is not done. He did not simply have the disciples be mere spectators, watching Jesus do amazing things, while they simply looked on, passively. Jesus handed those loaves and fish back to them, having been transformed by Jesus in his relationship to the Father.

Jesus didn't want them to be spectators, but to be participants in His ministry with the Father. And they got involved by entrusting to Jesus what they had and then receiving back from Him what they had given Him. And finally by handing on to others what they had given to Jesus and Jesus had blessed. In this way they actually did get to see and be involved in His transforming work.

And what lessons did they learn from all this? First to entrust to Jesus whatever they had to offer Him. Second, that what He asks them to do, they never do on their own, apart from Jesus own actions and involvement. In fact, third, His working is absolutely key. They could not do what He wanted them to do on their own. God works in ways that far surpass what we can do, even in our doing. And fourth, that all our doing involves relationship with the Father through the Son (and we could add in the Spirit). And that relationship involves listening, trusting and obeying. What a joy it must have been to see what Jesus could do with what they gave Him!

It is Jesus' delight to have us participate in His good work – is us and in others. It is tempting, I think, for us to wonder if what we have to offer is enough. How can the small and simple things we may have to offer in the care of others in Christ's name be enough to be effective? To really make a difference?

It's true--what we have, what we can give, is never enough on its own. But Jesus is never asking that it be enough on its own. Jesus delights in having us work with Him and in finding ways for us to be involved in His purposes. We may only be able to offer a listening ear or a prayer. We may only be able to wait quietly in Jesus as we care for another, waiting to see if He gives us a word to say. But, the good news that we learn here about Jesus is that He can always take what we give Him and use it in His gracious, redeeming work.

We can hand over to Jesus what we have today, trusting Him with it all. We can hand Him our strengths and our weaknesses, our relationships, our doubts and troubles, our questions. And as we even confess our sins to Him, we hand them over to him to receive His forgiveness. He knows us and knows what to do with where we are today. We can count on Him to bless us, and others, even if we don't see right away exactly how He will do that. We see in this story, as in all the NT stories, that Jesus is faithful and that we can know and benefit from His faithfulness as we stay in close relationship with Him.

How does this passage help you as you prepare to go home?

Devotionals: Handouts for campers

Day One: Jesus' Invitation

Matthew 11:27-30 (NIV)

27 All things have been committed to me by my Father. No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.”28 Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. 29 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. 30 For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.

What burdens are you trying to carry today? Write them down on a piece of paper. In your prayer time together, hand them over to Jesus.

Day Two: Our Good Father

Matthew 6:25-34 (NIV)

25 Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothes? 26 Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? 27 Can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your life?

28 And why do you worry about clothes? See the flowers of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. 29 Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. 30 If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you – you of little faith? 31 So do not worry, saying, “What shall we eat?” or “What shall we drink?” or “What shall we wear?” 32 For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. 33 But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. 34 Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.

What are some ways that you have seen your heavenly Father at work in your life recently?

Day Three: We Live by Faith

Hebrews 11:8-12 (ESV)

8 By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to a place that he was to receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going. 9 By faith he went to live in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, living in tents with Isaac and Jacob, heirs with him of the same promise. 10 For he was looking forward to the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God. 11 By faith Sarah herself received power to conceive, even when she was past the age, since she considered him faithful who had promised. 12 Therefore from one man, and him as good as dead, were born descendants as many as the stars of heaven and as many as the innumerable grains of sand by the seashore.

What helps you to see and remember who Jesus is and what He is up to?

Day Four: Loving Others in Christ

Colossians 3:15-17 (ESV)

15 And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. And be thankful. 16 Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God. 17 And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

What are some ways that you can pass on to someone else the peace and words of Christ that you have received, perhaps even today?

Day Five: Getting to work with Jesus

Mark 6:32-44 (ESV)

34 When he went ashore he saw a great crowd, and he had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd. And he began to teach them many things. 35 And when it grew late, his disciples came to him and said, “This is a desolate place, and the hour is now late. 36 Send them away to go into the surrounding countryside and villages and buy themselves something to eat.” 37 But he answered them, “You give them something to eat.” And they said to him. “Shall we go and buy two hundred denarii worth of bread and give it to them to eat?” 38 And he said to them, “How many loaves do you have? Go and see.” And when they had found out, they said, “Five, and two fish.” 39 Then he commanded them all to sit down in groups on the green grass. 40 So they sat down in groups, by hundreds and by fifties. 41 And taking the five loaves and the two fish, he looked up to heaven and said a blessing and broke the loaves and gave them to the disciples to set before the people. And he divided the two fish among them all. 42 And they all ate and were satisfied. 43 And they took up twelve baskets full of broken pieces and of the fish. 44 And those who ate the loaves were five thousand men.

How does this passage help you as you prepare to go home?

Prayer Partnerships

During the week of camp, we are hoping to focus on helping people to understand better and deepen their relationship with the triune God as we meet Him in Jesus Christ. Along with considering who Jesus is and the relationships He establishes with us, we will be looking at some of the ways we can participate in this relationship.

The second day's chapel will be on worship and prayer – what is it and how do we get involved? Praying can seem like a daunting task to someone who has not really done much of it. How do I go about talking with God? What should I say?

To help campers grow in their prayer life, we decided to offer this guide through the week that could be used by them. I thought the best way to give them an opportunity to practice praying regularly, you could divide your groups into prayer partnerships for the week. If you have an odd number of campers in your group, perhaps you could partner with one of them. I think it will be simpler and easier to actually do if they are just meeting with one other person.

Another way to form prayer partnerships would be to make this a whole camp activity and pair each camper with an adult helper. This would give an opportunity for forming more intergenerational relationships. This is also something that could be done with each camper when they return to their local church.

I am thinking of these times as being about 15 minutes long. To help your campers to actually do this and benefit from it, it might be good if you could decide on a time in the day when they will meet in their prayer partnerships rather than leaving it up to them to find a time in the day to meet together.

My hope is that this guide both encourages and enables those who use it in their prayer life. My own journey in learning more about who I am praying to and how to respond and participate in my relationship with Him in this way was slow and at times confusing or frustrating. I hope this provides some helpful guidance.

Prayer Partnership Guide

Think about what it would be like if you could not talk with someone you really care about? What if you could not communicate at all with that person, in person, on the phone or writing? You couldn't talk about –what you are thinking and feeling or hear from them? What kind of relationship could you have with that person? Relationships need communication to continue and grow.

Jesus shows us that God Himself is a loving relationship with real interaction between the Father, the Son and the Spirit. Jesus tells us that He says what He hears from His Father. And we see many times in the Gospels where Jesus is praying to His Father. Towards the end of the Gospel of John, He tells us that the ministry of the Holy Spirit is to pass on to us the words of Jesus.

God wants to enable us to have a relationship with Him where we can communicate with Him. Jesus encouraged His followers to pray and taught them to pray when they asked him how to pray. In Hebrews 7:25 we find out that Jesus now lives to intercede, that is, to pray for us! And God cares so much for our relationship with Him that He gives us His Spirit to live in us and to help us to pray, even when we don't have words to pray.

Prayer includes talking with God, and seeking to be quiet and listen to Him, especially after we've read or think about his Word. Because we know that God wants to hear us and that He is speaking to us by His Spirit, we can pray trusting that He is fully present and active when we pray. In prayer, we can grow to love God more and to know His love for us. When we are praying, the whole God is drawing us to Himself.

Ideas:

When you begin your prayer time, take some time to thank God. In thanksgiving, we are reminded of how good God is and are able to receive and rest in His presence with us. Thanksgiving is our primary posture before God – it helps us to open our hearts to Him. I would suggest always starting your prayer for your prayer partner this way.

There are so many things we can thank God for:

- For giving us another day, for sustaining our lives and this world
- For being the good Father who loves to listen to His children
- For giving us His Word and his Spirit to live in us and help us to know and trust Him more
- For knowing and caring already about what is on your heart
- For faithfully working (redeeming and transforming) in your life, in the lives of those you care about, and in the lives of those you struggle with for various reasons
- For His forgiveness

Take time to thank God for your prayer partner – for his/her life, that God created them and loves them. Thank God that He has them, He is always with them and that He is working out His good purposes in their lives.

Ask God to help you listen to Him, to trust Him with your life, your plans, your relationships. Ask Him to help you to hand over all those things on your minds and hearts that make it harder for you to listen to and trust in Him.

Study in Mark 1:1-15

This study in the first chapter of the Gospel of Mark is provided as a camp follow-up resource. My idea was to provide a study guide that would assist someone to study this Gospel either one on one with a younger person or in a small group setting. My thinking behind this is to help younger people become more acquainted with Scripture, here Mark's Gospel and through their study, to grow in their knowledge and trust of the triune God. I also hope, in having them work through a whole book of Scripture, that they can grow in their ability to study God's word on their own.

I know that leading a Bible study can be daunting. I tried to write this guide with enough to help with a careful reading of the text, but not so much as to be overwhelming. There are questions along the way to try and generate discussion and I certainly hope that, if used, people will feel free to go at their own pace. The primary goal is to have fellowship together in the written word of God and, through the Holy Spirit, with the living word, Jesus Christ – the One the Scriptures bear witness to.

Introduction to Bible Study

Why do Christians study the Bible? In general, when I have asked this question over the years, I find that most Christians go to the Bible to learn how to live as followers of Jesus: how to pray, how to use our money or treat other people, what is good leadership, etc.

The Bible, however, was not written to primarily answer these questions. It is written to tell us about who God is: Who is this God who has spoken to Abraham and Moses and created a people for Himself? Who is this God who meets us Himself in Jesus Christ?

Amazingly, the Bible reveals to us a God who wants to be known by His creation. And He doesn't just want us to know about Him but to be drawn into an intimate relationship with Him of knowing and being known. The God of the Bible wants us to know His heart, His mind, His character, and His purposes. The writers of the Old and New Testaments are witnesses to this God—in their writings, they point beyond their words to reveal the living God so that their readers might come to know Him better.

And when we study, we can have confidence that God by His Spirit is present and at work. The triune God Himself meets us by and in His Spirit as we study.

In Bible study, we place ourselves before the text to listen. We seek to hear from the speaking God in His written word. We want to let the author of the book we are studying point us to, lead us to, Jesus Himself. We want, therefore, to seek to hear and understand what he is telling us about God.

The purpose of Bible study is to feed our faith in God and this happens as we come to see and hear who He is. It is only out of this framework of knowing who God is that we can begin to answer the many other questions of what, how, and why.

My hope for this Bible study guide is to enable you to gaze more fully at the good and life-giving character and purposes of the triune God as he is revealed to us through these words of Mark.

Introduction to the Gospel of Mark

After Jesus rose from the dead and ascended to heaven, He sent the Holy Spirit upon His followers and they began to go out and tell others about Jesus. They spoke as eyewitnesses to Jesus – passing on what they had seen and heard from Him. It was important from the beginning of the church that the message that was preached was based in historical fact, in eyewitness (if this is a topic that interests you, a great book to read is *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses* by Richard Bauckham).

The gospels that we have in the New Testament were written when these eyewitnesses were beginning to die off. But many were still alive and could testify to the accuracy of these written accounts. Some of the gospels, like John and Matthew, were written by those who were themselves eyewitnesses. The other two, Mark and Luke, were written and compiled from the testimonies of those who were eyewitnesses. There is good early evidence available that Mark's main source for the stories in his gospel was Peter.

Scholars overwhelmingly believe that Mark was the first gospel written, probably between A.D. 65-67. It is the shortest gospel and Mark often gives more details for the stories he does include. From the evidence of the gospel

itself, it looks like Mark was primarily writing to Gentile Christians who were suffering for their faith in Jesus.

He is writing to remind them of who Jesus is and what He has accomplished for them and what He is still up to by His Spirit. He is writing to encourage and grow their faith in this Jesus in the midst of whatever they are facing in their lives. In order to more fully live by trust in Jesus' presence and work, we need to grow in our knowledge of Him. So we read these words from the same place as those first readers – seeking to feed our faith in Jesus Christ.

We can assume that Mark wrote his gospel to bear witness to this Jesus and to help us trust Him. He was deliberate in what he wrote – what he includes and what he omits, how he begins, the words he uses. So when we study, we want to come ready to listen to what he does say and to trust the Holy Spirit to enable us to come to see and know the triune God better through his words. The translation that is used in these studies is the English Standard Version.

Mark 1:1-15

The first 15 verses of Mark chapter one form a whole unit in Mark and so I have written about them together. However, there is a lot here and you might prefer to break down this into 3 study times. I tried to write this lesson with that possibility in mind and so have divided the material into 3 parts.

Before you begin each study, take a moment to pray – to thank the whole God for being present and speaking in this time and to ask for ears to hear and hearts to receive from this passage.

Read over the text of Mark 1:1-15 a couple of times and then answer the questions that follow.

1 The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. 2 As it is written in Isaiah the prophet, “Behold, I send my messenger before your face, who will prepare your way, 3 the voice of one crying in the wilderness: ‘Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.’”

4 John appeared, baptizing in the wilderness and proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. 5 And all the country of Judea and all Jerusalem were going out to him and were being baptized by him in the river

Jordan, confessing their sins. 6 Now John was clothed with camel's hair and wore a leather belt around his waist and ate locusts and wild honey. 7 And he preached, saying, "After me comes he who is mightier than I, the strap of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie. 8 I have baptized you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."

9 In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. 10 And when he came up out of the water, immediately he saw the heavens being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove. 11 And a voice came from heaven, "You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased."

12 The Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness. 13 And he was in the wilderness forty days, being tempted by Satan. And he was with the wild animals, and the angels were ministering to him.

14 Now after John was arrested, Jesus came into Galilee, proclaiming the gospel of God, 15 and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel."

1. What repeated words or ideas do you find in this passage? (for example, proclaiming and preaching)
2. Mark speaks here about both John the Baptist and Jesus. What are the similarities and differences in his descriptions of these two and their ministries? Make a list of what he says about each of them. What do you notice?
3. What questions do you have about this passage?

Digging Deeper: Where to begin? (1:1-3)

1. Looking at the first three verses, what strikes you about where Mark begins his gospel in the very first opening line? What is he telling us? Do you notice anything unusual about that first line?

Good News!

How does one go about writing a gospel about Jesus? Where should one begin? Matthew and Luke both started with genealogies and narratives about Jesus' birth. John begins further back, speaking of the Son of God's existence from before the beginning of time.

Mark begins with the words, “The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.” Without a verb, this statement appears to be a title. Mark begins by announcing that he is writing about good news, good news about this particular person Jesus, who is the Christ and the Son of God.

The word “gospel” means good news and was usually used at that time to speak of an announcement of a victory by a king and his army. Mark chooses this word to speak of his message. All that he is going to tell us about Jesus is good news about a king and a victory. Whatever the situation of those who read this, Mark wants the first thing for us to know and remember to be this – that Jesus is great good news!

Mark also wants to remind his readers right away of the central points of who this Jesus is. First of all, he is the Christ or the Messiah. He is the One promised to Israel to bring about salvation and God’s good reign over His people. He would bring His people back to God. Secondly, Mark tells us that this Jesus is not just another human who has been given a special commission by God. He is the Son of God Himself, come here to us as fully man and fully God.

Why do you think he includes all these titles with the name “Jesus”?

Mark makes sure that his readers know that this good news is all about a particular person – this particular person, Jesus. He is not sharing good news about new ideas or a new religion. In fact, you could say that the gospel isn’t just a message about Jesus, it is Jesus Himself! So as we respond to this gospel, we see that most fundamentally, we are responding to this One, this person.

Where did it all begin?

One more interesting feature of Mark’s first line is that he uses the word “beginning”. He doesn’t say “The gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God”, but “The beginning of the gospel ...” So, maybe this isn’t so much a title of the whole work, but a heading for what comes right after. Mark wants to point us to where this good news of Jesus really began.

And what is the beginning? Well, Mark quotes from the Old Testament. While he ascribes his quote to Isaiah, the quotation that Mark gives at the beginning is actually drawing from three different places in the Old Testament (Mark is not being inaccurate here by not citing all three of these places. Naming only Isaiah as his main source was an acceptable practice at the time).

Let's take a look at the Old Testament sources and then consider what Mark's point is in starting here. Mark begins his quote with, "Behold, I send my messenger before your face, who will prepare your way." There are two places that this passage alludes to, both speaking of God preparing a way.

The first passage is Exodus 23:20. Here God promises Moses that He will send an angelic messenger ahead of the 12 tribes to prepare their way into the Promised Land: "Behold, I send an angel before you to guard you on the way and to bring you to the place that I have prepared."

The second passage actually comes from the very last book of the Old Testament, words written by the last prophet of the Lord, Malachi. After his ministry, there were no prophets of the Lord for 400 years. Malachi 3:1 speaks again of the Lord promising to send a messenger to prepare a way – but this time to prepare the way before God Himself: "Behold I send my messenger, and he will prepare the way before me. And the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple; and the messenger of the covenant in whom you delight, behold he is coming, says the Lord of hosts."

Before we go on to consider what these verses add to the quotation Mark gives, let's consider the reference to Isaiah. This quote, "the voice of one crying in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the way of the Lord, make his paths straight,'" comes from Isaiah 40:3. This verse is part of a larger section, 40:1-5. These words are addressed to the Israelites who have been forced from their homeland into exile in Babylon. The message here is that the exiles would be returning from Babylon and Jerusalem would be restored.

So, what does all this add up to? Why does Mark put together this quotation this way? What is he telling us about who God is – His character and purposes? And how is it connected to his calling this "the beginning of the gospel"?

This passage reflects the idea found in the Old Testament that God prepares the way for His good purposes to be accomplished. He didn't just give Moses the task of getting the Israelites to the promised land and wish him luck. No, God is committed to His plans for His people and *He prepares* their way. In Malachi, as God speaks of His coming again to restore His people, He speaks of sending someone before Him to prepare His way. God is not last-minute or haphazard.

In Mark's allusion to Malachi here, he quotes, "*I will send my messenger*" ... to "*prepare your way.*" God is the speaker – who is He talking to? What we

have here is the Father talking to the Son. Mark wants to help His readers see and remember that God Himself has sent His Son Jesus to us and prepared the way for Him. This was always the plan between the Father and the Son.

So Mark wants us to see here that the beginning of the good news about Jesus goes back well before His birth in Bethlehem. His coming was something God was preparing the way for long ago. The Son's incarnation was not something random or a last minute change of plans.

Digging Deeper: John the Baptist (1:4-8)

1. Notice how Mark introduces John, "John appeared, baptizing in the wilderness ..." Why do you think he does this? What does he want his readers to understand about John?
2. Mark gives a fairly brief section to John here. What are all the details that he does give?

Who is this John?

As we noted, Mark is rather cryptic in his introduction of John the Baptist and brief in his description. To understand what Mark wants us to see here, we want to pay close attention to his words.

First, let's consider what Mark wants to tell us about *who* John is. There are two points we can make.

Mark does not tell us anything about John's background. Instead, right after Mark quotes the Old Testament, he writes, "John appeared, baptizing in the wilderness and proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins." By repeating "wilderness" from the previous quote, it seems clear that Mark wants us to identify John as the one that God has sent to prepare the way for His Son. This is the main point Mark wants us to get about who John is – that he is the one prophesied about, the one who would be coming before the Lord. The Israelites had been waiting a long time for God to bring about His work of salvation and restoration. And here, Mark makes clear that these prophecies were fulfilled in John.

But there is one other point Mark makes about the identity of John. Did you wonder about Mark's description of John? Why does he include these particular

details? He wants his readers, who would have been familiar with the Old Testament, to associate John with the prophet, Elijah. In 2 Kings 1:8, Elijah is described as wearing “a garment of hair, with a belt of leather about his waist.” So John, in his clothing, was identifying himself with Elijah and Mark wanted to make sure his readers knew that.

Why? What does this add to our understanding of what is going on here? Why does the one who has been sent by God to prepare the way need to be connected to Elijah? The answer is found in the next to last verse of Malachi. Remember, Malachi was the last prophet of the Lord. In his book he speaks of God preparing His own way – I quoted that earlier. In 4:5, Malachi writes, “Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and awesome day of the Lord comes.”

The last words the Israelites had received from God was that there would be a time where He would work in a decisive way in their history, in all history. There were many other prophecies in the Old Testament about a work God was going to do in their future. And here God tells them that a sign of this coming time would be Elijah being sent.

In John the Baptist, Mark is telling us, the one coming in Elijah’s name has appeared and so, the prophecy of Elijah’s return is fulfilled and the great day of the Lord has begun. After so many years of silence, God is speaking to His people again.

How does John prepare the way?

Mark tells us that John prepares the way by proclaiming “a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins” and the One who is coming that is “much greater” than he. How might these two proclamations be connected?

Remember, John is preparing the way of the Lord. He is getting everyone ready for One who is certainly, then, greater than himself! And this is part of his ministry – he announces the coming of One who is so much greater than himself that he isn’t even worthy to stoop down and untie his sandal. This comparison John makes had even more power for his original audience because, in that culture, one’s feet were considered a dirty and shameful part of one’s body.

Besides knowing that a greater One than John was coming, what else did God have John do to prepare the way? He delivered a message and indicated the

way to properly acknowledge his message. John came to preach “a baptism of repentance” and baptize those who came.

To understand the significance of this proclamation of John’s, we need to understand what repentance is. The word in Greek, *metanoia*, means a change of mind and in the Bible, this change of mind always comes about as a response to God. In the Old Testament, God speaks of Himself and His purposes for His people and they are called to respond by turning towards God in faith and turning away from whatever makes trusting Him difficult. Or the call to repentance would involve turning back to God after they had drifted away from Him.

Look at John’s message. He calls for a baptism of repentance for the *forgiveness of sins*. In other words, He is calling people to come who are hoping for forgiveness for their sins – this is something they want. So they are willing to come, turn from their sins in baptism, in order to receive this forgiveness.

And this forgiveness of sins that they come for is somehow connected to the other part of John’s ministry which is telling them about the One who is coming. How could a baptism of repentance bring about forgiveness of sins? The Jews offered sacrifices in the Jerusalem temple for sins. What John was calling them to do was new, strange, unexpected. How can one receive forgiveness for sins by being baptized in a river? At this time, baptism was not a practice that the Jews themselves partook in. They did have various rituals of purification that involved water, but there doesn’t seem to have been any direct practice of the Jews that John is drawing from here. The only similar ritual was baptism for Gentile converts to Judaism. A Jew did not need to be baptized and, as I said, forgiveness of sins was provided for by sacrifices at the temple.

Mark gives us a sense that, in this ministry of John’s, a ministry prepared by God hundreds of years before, something amazing has begun. What would compel any Jew to respond to John’s call to come and be baptized? Why would they be willing to participate in an act that was so similar to what only Gentiles had to do?

Well, how is John’s message in the wilderness received? Apparently, very well, by those in the surrounding regions – “all the country of Judea and all Jerusalem”. I think Mark wants his readers to see that God’s preparing for His Son went beyond sending John. By His Spirit, He had prepared people to hear, come and repent.

So, John calls people, in anticipation of the One coming, to participate in a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sin. But in his further description of

the One coming, it would appear that they were hoping for even more. John says that this One would baptize with the Holy Spirit, while he John, could only baptize with water.

The One that John points to has a unique relationship with the Spirit of God that enables Him to baptize others with this Spirit. What could this mean? Was there any hope in the Jewish people for some work of God's Spirit in their lives?

Yes! The coming work of God that was prophesied by many of Israel's prophets included a promise that God would one day pour out His Spirit on His people in such a way that would be about not only forgiveness of sins, but inner transformation. They would be redeemed, made new and able to obey God, live fully as His people in a way they couldn't without the Spirit. This hope, that John seems to be alluding to by proclaiming that the One coming would baptize them with the Holy Spirit, must have contributed to the people's willingness to come out to John and submit to his baptism.

Look up the following Old Testament passages on the Spirit. What do they tell you about God's plans for His people?

Jeremiah 31:31-34

Ezekiel 36:24-28

Isaiah 32:15

Isaiah 44:3

Joel 2:28

What does all this add up to? What is Mark doing in these relatively few verses, this description of the beginning of the good news about Jesus Christ?

Mark is indicating here that Jesus really is the fulfillment of the prophecies the people of Israel were still waiting on God for. This Jesus that many of Mark's readers had come to trust, that hopefully you have come to trust, is not some lone religious leader, out to start a new religion or movement. He is God Himself, the Son of God, come in human flesh and God had been preparing for His coming for a long time before the moments Mark describes.

With John the Baptist's appearance in the wilderness, the 400 years of God's silence has ended. And he doesn't just preach of some uncertain time in the future when God will act, but of One who is coming soon.

Digging Deeper: Enter Jesus (1:9-15)

Mark now moves to talk about the One whom John was preparing for – Jesus Himself.

1. Earlier I had you make a list comparing what Mark tells us about John and Jesus. Now that we have taken some time to look more closely at John, what stands out about Jesus? What does Mark tell us?

Jesus' Begins His ministry with Baptism (1:9-11)

Right after Mark reports John's words about Jesus – about His greatness and His coming to baptize with the Holy Spirit, Jesus appears on the scene. And the *first* thing Jesus comes to do is to be baptized by John along with the multitudes from Judea and Jerusalem!

Mark doesn't go into any details about the interaction with John and Jesus when Jesus comes to John to be baptized. He just reports the bare fact that Jesus "was baptized by John in the Jordan". He brings Jesus into the narrative as one more person who is coming to John to participate in the baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.

What a wild place to begin for the One who is so much greater than John! Jesus doesn't begin by baptizing John or by preaching, but by receiving baptism from John.

Mark doesn't explain why Jesus begins His ministry here in this act of being baptized. The significance of this baptism became clearer to His followers only later, as they reflected over His whole life, death, resurrection and ascension and as the Holy Spirit illuminated their minds and understanding. Only then did they come to see that Jesus taking on our our fallen human condition, our sin, in our place and on our behalf begins here at the river Jordan. Jesus is not confessing His own sin, but the sins of those He came to save, in our place and on our behalf.

Remember, Mark primarily wrote His gospel to bear witness to this Jesus, to remind the church of who Jesus is and what He is up to, to feed the faith of His followers. In starting here (and all four gospels include speaking of Jesus' baptism as the beginning of His ministry) Mark reminds us that Jesus has come as one of us, to bring us back to God, to bear in Himself our sin and alienation from God in order to redeem and save. Jesus begins His ministry by being baptized in our place

and this act points forward to the cross where He takes our sin all the way through death, judges and destroys it and comes through death to resurrection.

Here, Mark does point to the uniqueness of Jesus' baptism in comparison to every other baptism that John performed. What does he focus on?

He focuses on what happens immediately after Jesus came up out of the water. The heavens are opened, the Spirit descends on Him like a dove and He hears the voice of His heavenly Father. Only Jesus' coming up from baptism is answered by this coming down, this rending of heaven.

By now, many people had been baptized by John. Notice we know none of them in particular, none of them by name. Now comes Jesus, from Nazareth, to be baptized and there is an immediate response from the Holy Spirit and God the Father.

Why does Mark include this section? What might he want us to know? That Jesus is utterly and completely unique, that He begins His ministry as one of us, but also as the One who has the anointing of the Spirit and the approval of His heavenly Father. The whole Triune God is involved in what is going on in this moment, in this public ministry of Jesus that is about to begin.

In this moment, what does the Father tell His Son? That He is indeed His only beloved Son. That He, the Father, is well-pleased. And the promised Holy Spirit descends and settles in a dove-like fashion on Jesus. He has a unique relationship to the Father and to the promised Holy Spirit. Jesus and His Father are of one mind towards this redemptive work that is such good news for us!

Temptation in the Wilderness (1:12-13)

Again, Mark is very brief here in his description – this time of Jesus' time in the wilderness. Notice what details he does give. What does Mark want us to remember or know about the character and work of Jesus from this description?

Jesus, the Messiah and the very Son of God, begins his public ministry submitting to John's baptism. And from there? He spends 40 days in the wilderness, where He undergoes testing by Satan. This is a well-known part of the story of Jesus, and Mark is very sparse in his description compared to the accounts in Matthew and Luke.

Mark states that Jesus is driven into the wilderness by the leading of the Spirit. He is tempted by Satan, with the wild beasts and ministered to by angels. Rather than telling us any specifics about the temptations, Mark focuses on the fact that Jesus' first act after being baptized for us is to endure being tempted to not trust His Father, by the one whose name means "accuser". This tells us a great deal about God and how He works to save and heal His people.

It is the Spirit of God that leads Jesus into the wilderness. As He is baptized in our place for us, the Spirit descends on Him, and He will carry out His public ministry in the presence and power of this same Spirit. Mark wants to remind us that, as the One who will uniquely baptize "you with the Holy Spirit", He lives by the Holy Spirit as the incarnate Son, the Messiah.

Matthew includes the fact of the angels ministering to Jesus during His time in the wilderness, but Mark is alone in telling of the wild beasts that were with Him during this time. It is not immediately apparent why Mark includes this detail. As Mark was most likely written in Rome to Christians who were facing persecution, some scholars have wondered if Mark includes this detail to comfort those who were at that time facing the possibility of confronting wild animals in the arena for their faith in Christ.

The Time is At Hand (1:14-15)

With these two verses, Jesus begins His preaching ministry. It seems that all Mark has said up to this point is to lead to these words. Mark alludes to the arrest of John by Herod Antipas in a very cryptic way, "Now after John was arrested..." John has fulfilled his calling; he has prepared the way for Jesus. Now Mark turns our full attention to Jesus Himself. And after Jesus has submitted to baptism and endured tempting in the wilderness, He goes to Galilee where He preaches "the gospel of God".

What is this gospel, this good news of victory that Jesus proclaims? Here it is in a nutshell: "The time is fulfilled, the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel." There are two parts to Jesus' preaching, aren't there? First is His announcement and then follows His call to respond to this announcement.

Jesus proclaims that the time is fulfilled. Think for a moment about the astounding nature of this statement. For hundreds of years, the Israelites looked into the future, waiting for God to act as He promised. They had waited so long, it

must have become expected that God's work would always lie in the future. John's preaching, of the One to come, was also a message that pointed to the future.

And now Jesus, with these simple words, brings that waiting to an end. "The time is fulfilled". The preparation has been completed and the long awaited One is has now arrived; He is here. In the coming of Jesus Himself, the time is fulfilled.

Secondly, Jesus proclaims that God's kingdom, His good rule and reign, is "at hand". What does that mean? The prophecies had spoken of a time when God's rule of heaven would one day break in here, on this fallen, broken world – when what was distant would come near. And this is exactly what Jesus is announcing. "We have now arrived, the time has come and God's good rule has broken into time and space, here and now, and is within reach." What has brought about this momentous moment? Jesus Himself!

With this announcement, Jesus calls out to all who hear Him to respond accordingly. How does one respond to such news? By turning to live according to this new reality, believing or trusting this good news, and turning away from whatever doesn't fit with the real presence and activity of the King Himself. To hear this good news truly, is to change one's mind and course in order to receive and live according to the news of this great and long-awaited happening.

But what does the drawing near in Jesus of God's reign and rule look like on earth? And how is His kingdom connected with His baptizing with the Holy Spirit? Mark expects us to see that all the stories he goes on to relate of this Jesus, the Messiah, the Son of God, answers that question. The stories of the unfolding of His ministry, His character and purposes tells us what the inbreaking of God's kingdom in Jesus and the working of the Spirit is like. We will see in the studies that follow more of who God is and what His kingdom looks like since it is now "at hand."

In Reflection

1. As you look back over this beginning section of Mark's gospel, what strikes you the most about how God begins the work and ministry of His Son, Jesus?
2. In what ways does this passage help you trust Jesus in your own life more?

Miscellaneous Camp Resources

(for use during and following camp)

Suggested songs

“King of the World” by Natalie Grant

“Cast My Cares” by Finding Favour

“My Hope is in You” by Aaron Shust (maybe for prayer)

“Christ in Me” by Jeremy Camp

“Never Been Unloved” by Michael W. Smith

“Remind Me Who I Am” by Jason Gray

A Suggested Action Plan for After Camp

This past week we learned about being on a life-long journey with Jesus. You had some opportunities to enjoy your relationship with him this week in prayer, worship, Bible study and service. As you know, Jesus has made a way for us to stay in relationship and communication with him every day of our lives.

What was learned and enjoyed here does not have to end. But it may take some deliberate planning and being intentional to continue experiencing the joy of that relationship. And we'd like to help you with that.

That's what this action plan is about—helping you think about how you might continue some of the practices and patterns of relating to Jesus and to others that you began to enjoy here at camp. We'd like you to consider planning on ways of meeting Jesus and continuing to know him when you go back to "regular" life. He is already there and waiting for you.

Take some time now to reflect on this past week and then ask God to help you come up with one or more commitments you would like to make to grow in your relationship with Jesus once you're back home.

Here are some ideas to help you. You can use any of these ideas or come up with your own. Which of these would you like to plan on doing to continue to live in relationship with Jesus as your Lord and Savior? Check off the ones you'd like to try. If more than one, number them in the order of importance to you. You can share your plan with someone if you like.

1. Read through a gospel (Matthew, Mark, Luke, John)
2. Study the Bible in a small group or with one other person (a Gospel is a good place to start).
3. Regularly attend worship or a fellowship meeting of GCI or if not available to you another church or fellowship group that knows Jesus, studies the Bible and will help you grow in faith, hope and love for God.
4. Make a confession of faith and be baptized in a GCI church or fellowship or another if not available.
5. Become a regular participant in a GCI youth ministry (or another one if not available).
6. Regularly serve someone you know perhaps in a simple and ordinary way: a friend, neighbor, relative, elderly, brother, sister.
7. Find a way to help out in a GCI church ministry or outreach
8. Pray regularly for a friend who doesn't yet know Jesus
9. Become prayer partners with someone else, perhaps someone you got to know at camp (guys with guys, gals with gals)
10. Talk with a friend about Jesus who doesn't yet know him. Share a few stories about him from the Bible (perhaps a story you heard here a camp. Share what you came to know about Jesus and his relationship you).
11. Talk to a pastor about a problem you are facing and need help with
12. I would like to plan on _____.
13. I would like to plan on _____.
14. To help me follow through, I will share this plan with _____.

Signed: _____ Date _____.



ROAD RULE 1

Our Journey with Jesus takes place in the HUG lane.

We were created by God for a life-long relationship with him. Through Jesus Christ he has embraced us with his grace. Secure in his love and forgiveness he invites us to live in a daily relationship with him. By the Holy Spirit we receive from him all he has for us and respond to him with all our trust and thanksgiving.

SIGNS TO SHARE WITH OTHERS



ROAD RULE 2

Our Journey with Jesus is best experienced trusting him at the wheel, riding close in prayer.

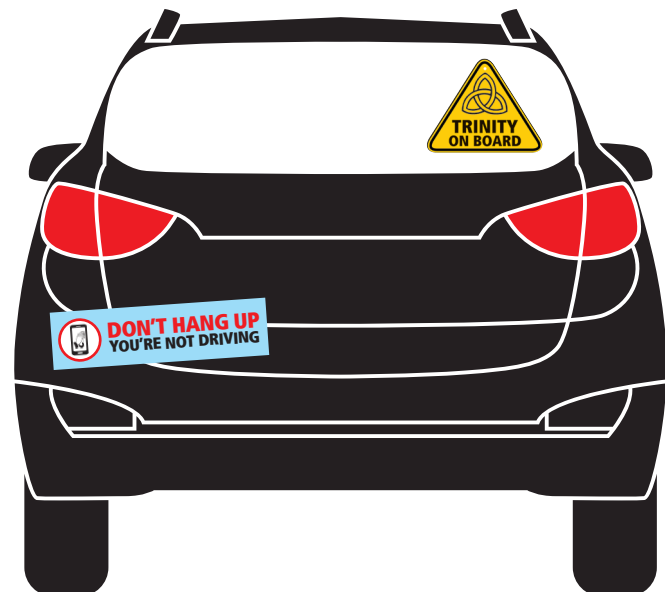
*Jesus is a most worthy driver.
We worship him, and bring all our cares and concerns to him through prayer, trusting him every mile along the way.*



SIGNS TO SHARE WITH OTHERS



**DON'T HANG UP
YOU'RE NOT DRIVING**



SIGNS ALONG THE JOURNEY

ROAD RULE 3

Our Journey with Jesus travels according to his lead, taking us further than we can take ourselves.

Jesus knows the road best. He supplies our trip with the Bible, Jesus' very own GPS system. Jesus sets the route and speed and we can trust in his lead.



SIGNS TO SHARE WITH OTHERS



SIGNS ALONG THE JOURNEY

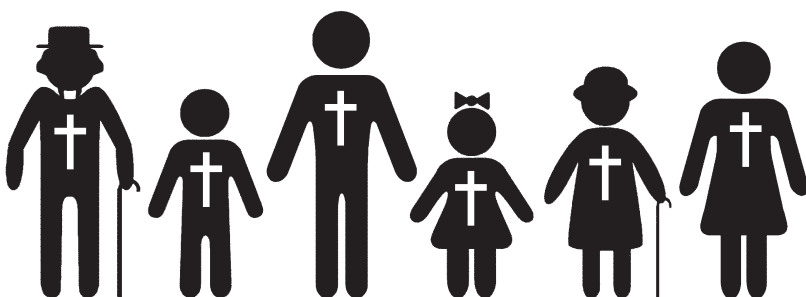
ROAD RULE 4

Our Journey with Jesus shares the road with others to love along the way.

This is a family road trip. With Jesus at the wheel, we share the journey with brothers and sisters. We don't travel alone. We make friends and share the road with young and old from every walk of life.



SIGNS TO SHARE WITH OTHERS



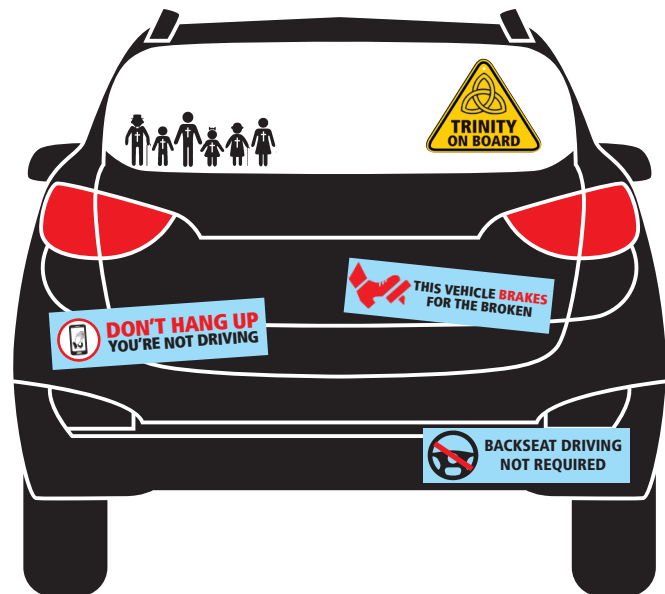
BROKEN DOWN VEHICLE POINT VEHICLES TO TRAVEL LANE

ROAD RULE 5

Our Journey with Jesus reaches out to those broken down on the side of the road.

Jesus doesn't pass anyone stuck on the side of the road. When riding with Jesus we pull over with him to help others join the journey....Whatever way we get to serve, big or small, we do so in the hope and joy of knowing we are traveling with the best mechanic of all

SIGNS TO SHARE WITH OTHERS



For a Fireside chat on Sexuality

For the leader:

As you know, this is a huge and complex topic. Our hope in the direction we have taken here, is to provide a framework and some input to help start and guide a look at some of the factors, especially for someone in adolescence.

The notes here are somewhat rough, not so much meant to be read out loud (although you are free to do so if you wish), but to help you to lead. There are some good books that you can read also to help you prepare. *Faithful: A Theology of Sexuality* by Beth Felker Jones (Zondervan, 2015) is an excellent resource and we think could be used as a follow-up after camp—maybe to have the youth group in the church work through it. Another, *Divine Sex* by Jonathan Grant (BrazosPress, 2015) is longer and covers more topics, but is well thought out and researched.

Another resource we want to let you know about is a website, www.livingout.org. While it was created to address people with same-sex attraction, it has several short, but excellent and encouraging testimonies of men and women who are living daily in the wonderful life and under the wonderful lordship of Jesus Christ.

If you are interested in more resource ideas, you can contact me (Cathy) at rillian5@gmail.com

We are praying for you and for the whole camp time—that the triune God would draw everyone deeper into His life.

Blessings,

Gary and Cathy Deddo

I. Our identity and life in Christ

Navigating through adolescence, especially in thinking about being male and female and relationships between men and women, is very challenging and complex. There are a lot of messages that we hear from our society and culture about who we are and what life should be about that can make these issues even more confusing.

Kinds of questions youth may be asking right now:

Am I of value?

Am I wanted?

Am I attractive?

Where do I belong?

Will I get married? Do I need to?

Can ask: are there other questions that they are dealing with or that others they know are dealing with?

As Christians, what we want to ask, as with all areas of our lives: What does Jesus Christ say to us? If we are looking to ourselves or others for answers to these questions, we are going to have problems. Jesus is the One who has answers to these questions. He will answer us if we will ask.

Jesus is the one who sees you, knows you and who He created you to be. He came to draw us into real, ongoing relationship with Himself. We belong to Him. We can trust that He has our good in mind, He is for us. The triune God created you, created us, for relationship—relationship with Him and, in Him, with each other. I think we all know that we long for relationships, to be known and loved and to know and care for others well, but we don't always know how to go about having these kinds of relationships. We also know they can go wrong.

It is important that we understand that while God created us for good, abundant life in Him and loving, growing relationships, we live in a fallen world. The Fall has distorted everything – so we still long for relationships, but they are broken and are sometimes sources of great anguish as well as joy.

But the good news of the gospel is that God has set out to heal, restore and reconcile all relationships. As we grow in our relationship with Him, we can trust that He is doing this good work in us. It is in our relationship with Jesus that we come to know who we belong to and who we are. (Scripture: 1 Cor. 6:19-20; 2 Cor. 5:17). When we are asked “who are you?” we might come up with a lot of different answers to identify ourselves. But as Christians, we know that God Himself gives us as a free gift, *our identity*—we are His beloved children, redeemed and growing in Him. These other labels that we may use for ourselves or that others may use of us do not tell us the deepest truth of who we are and where we are going. Only God can do that. And he has done it in His Word to us, Jesus Christ, Lord and Savior, the giver of abundant and eternal life.

Our desires, our past histories, our current struggles, don't set the agenda for our lives; they don't determine *who* we are or *what* ultimately life is about. We are created to know the abundant life in Jesus that comes with knowing God's design for us.

As you deal with these questions, we encourage you to actively pursue your relationship with Jesus. Knowing Him more by reading about him in Scripture is the best way to deal with the insecurity, anxiety, loneliness or struggles that these issues can bring. Daily prayer is also one of the best ways to get to know Him. Spending time with others who are getting to know Him is also a key part.

Another central point to remember is that we ***still on our way to becoming who we were created to be in Christ***. We are living “between the times” – we have our new identity in Christ but we don’t and can’t fully or automatically live in it. The Holy Spirit is at work in our lives, to grow our trust in Jesus and our ability to live in His grace, to hand to Him those things in our lives that keep us from receiving what He is giving us each day. In a real way, ***we are not yet ourselves*** – God is still at work in us, working out what He has accomplished for us in Jesus.

In this camp, we have been talking about ways to grow in our relationship with Jesus, to come to know better and better how good He is and to live in the peace and joy He is giving us. In this relationship, we come to see that what God intends for us, our hope in Him, is indeed so much more than anything we may be tempted to pursue. Our longings now are often too weak and distorted or wrongly directed to what really won’t satisfy. The desire to be known and to know is put in us by God and can only be satisfied by Him. He will far exceed even the best that is possible now in what Paul calls “this present evil age” (Gal. 1:4) where we are still becoming.

We want to understand the commands of Scripture in the light of the whole story of God’s good purposes for us to know full life as His people. Our obedience to Jesus comes out of our *trust* or *faith* that He is good and He is for us and confirms for us His real presence and work.

So, knowing Jesus and growing in our relationship with Him is what the Christian life is all about. He is the real and true source of our identity and our life.

There are many voices and opinions about what gender and sex are about and there is wide disagreement about what it is for, what its meaning and purpose. That is why we are informed that we will need to not conform to society’s view of things, but be transformed in our minds and hearts so that we can know and confirm in our lives what real is good, right and life giving and in accord with God’s own will and design.

When we consider being male and female and being in relationships with those of the other gender, we want to be aware of the great pressure put on us by our surrounding culture. The general and pervasive message being sent out through media and entertainment and sometimes through public education tells us that in order to be truly valuable or fulfilled, 1) you must have a romantic relationship and/or 2) you must be sexually experienced and active. But we know as Christians, that we don't have to be romantically involved or sexually experienced or active to have meaningful, fulfilled lives. We do not derive our true value or even our identities by our romantic relationships. Jesus (and Paul) were both unmarried and celibate, but filled in their lives with God and with others.

II. Being Male and Female – God's good purposes for us as gendered beings

Why did God create men and women and is that a good thing? What was God's purpose?

How do we discover its goodness and purpose?

A. First, we discover and experience the goodness of being male and female, male or female through living in a growing Christ-centered life. Talked already about letting God tell us who we are, knowing that we have our identity in Him and that who we are is who we are becoming in Christ. This includes trusting Him with the gender we have been given.

There are a lot of stereotypes in our society about what it means to be male or female. They can be a law or norm that kill us. Rather, we gradually come to know who we are, including who we are as male and female, first and foremost in our day to day relationship with Jesus—as we come to know Him better in His word and through prayer and in relationship with others in the church, not by comparing ourselves to others or to the messages of our society. Gender is a good gift to be received but also one we learn to use and become comfortable with. We grow into it as we mature as human beings. So the gift is also a task or calling.

B. As we belong to God, by His Spirit we also belong to His body, the church, as brothers and sisters in Christ.

In Christ, we are brought into a new family with all those who find their lives/identities in Christ. Dwight N. and Margaret K. Peterson (*Are You Waiting for the One?*), p. 70 “What we find in the New Testament are frequent suggestions that the family that takes precedence in the story of redemption is God's own family, which is formed not by marriage or by blood relationship but by faith and adoption... In Scripture that family is called ‘the household of faith’ or ‘the

household of God’ or simply ‘the church’ (Galatians 6:10; 1 Timothy 3:15). Membership in this family does not erase the natural loyalties by kinship or by marriage, but it profoundly relativizes those loyalties.”

So in the family of God we relate to each other as brothers and sisters in Christ, as those who are becoming in Christ—God is not finished with any of us yet. The church isn’t perfect and our relationships with each other are not automatically perfect. But together we live by and under the grace of God and as we seek to have Christ-centered relationships with one another, we trust that He enables us to grow and be channels of His blessing to one another. In that context, relating to each other as sisters and brothers in Christ, we discover the goodness of being male and female as we learn to love one another with Christ’s love.

Best way, then, to come to know goodness of being male and female, is to seek Christ-centered friendships with one another – friendships that are non-sexual and non-romanticized. There is a lot said in the New Testament on how to live out these relationships with one another in a way that leads to flourishing relationships and having a greater sense of real belonging and grace. It is in these relationships that we participate in and grow to know better the love of God for us and for His creation.

In our relationships with each other, we seek the other person’s best, which is to grow in living out of real trusting relationship with Christ.

What this includes:

- seeking to feed one another’s faith in Jesus. Helping each other grow in faith
- serving one another rather than using one another. Not teasing, being sarcastic or taking advantage of the other person’s weaknesses, but appreciating the other. Seeking to upbuild one another.
- treating others with respect and kindness. Seeking to get to know others, listening to them.
- spending time together in groups. Study the Bible and pray together for one another. Spend time with others in the church who are not your age as well, these friendships don’t have to be only with peers.

C. On dating

Talking about male-female relationship calls for spending some time dealing with the question of dating. In our romantically-obsessed society, there is pressure to date and to start dating fairly early. We can be tempted to believe that if we are dating someone, this shows that we really do have value and are attractive. Dating relationships can be considered so necessary to our lives, that people are tempted

to denigrate friendships and view them as only worthwhile as a means to getting a date. But, we can have good relationships as friends in Christ and often dating complicates things and brings in expectations that can make the relationship much more difficult and confusing. The exclusivity of dating can also inhibit fellowship.

1. When to start dating?

One question you might want to ask is what age to be to consider dating. Does it matter when you start? Some factors that are important to consider here is that most dating relationships, just by the way they are tend to become more exclusive as time goes by. This exclusivity can be unhelpful for us, especially if it limits the growth of other friendships and leads us to put undue expectations and pressures on the dating relationship. Often we are tempted in a dating relationship to seek to have the other person meet our needs, which is not God’s purpose for us in relationships—any relationships.

At some point you or the other person may realize that this is not a good situation and want to “break up.” Being people made in the image of God and for relationship, these break ups do have some effect on us. And sometimes they can be very difficult and even damaging. If you start dating early, there is the possibility of ending up with a series of dating relationships that started and then ended by the time you are old enough to consider a relationship that could lead to marriage. This is not always what happens, that is true. But we have seen it happen many times that those who started dating when they were very young found it harder to form a lasting relationship later on.

This is a good question to spend some time reflecting on and praying about before you start dating. There is no hard and fast rule on this—it is a matter of wisdom and judgment. You may want to talk with your parents, a youth leader or a pastor at church. We can assure you that you will not be missing out if you wait until you are at an age to consider marriage before you get involved in an exclusive dating relationship.

Dating relationships, when you do start them, are best started as good friendships. And it is good to have the *same* goals and purposes in a dating relationship that you would have in a friendship—that is wanting the relationship to be Christ-centered and to be a place where you grow in Christ and getting to know them in a way that feeds into that center.

2. Sex and dating

Consider ahead of time what you are going to do about sex. The Christian view is that the only safe sex is in marriage between a man and a woman. Again,

we are made to be whole human beings for good and right relationships. The Bible's stance on sex tells us about God's good and life-giving purposes for us.

This doesn't mean that God is less faithful to us and His good for us if we do have sex outside of marriage, but it is very helpful to know that God knows you, sees you, has your best in mind and can be trusted. He is not a killjoy, out to make your life miserable—far from it! As we said earlier, neither sex nor romantic relationships are necessary to know the abundant life Jesus tells us He has come to give us (John 10:10). Jesus Himself was a celibate single. Paul speaks highly of being single in his first letter to the Corinthians. There are many testimonies from men and women today who can speak of the joy they have in Christ even in their single state. It isn't easy, but then life isn't easy. Our struggle to grow in our trust in Jesus more and more and to live in His peace is the right struggle. All of life has its struggles, but the struggle to live in Jesus leads to greater and greater peace and joy.

3. Who to date

In thinking about who to date, consider the other person's relationship with Jesus. Do you see a spiritual compatibility with this person? And the same, even more crucially, for considering a potential life-long partner in marriage.

4. Concluding words

The local church and youth group can provide a good, healthy and important context for guys and gals to learn how to be friends and to resist the external pressures placed on them from the wider society. It can help grow healthy attitudes towards persons of the opposite gender. Brainstorming what kinds of activities would help the youth have such healthy relationships would be good for leaders and youth to have. For we are, essentially, whether young or older, married or single, brothers and sisters in Christ.