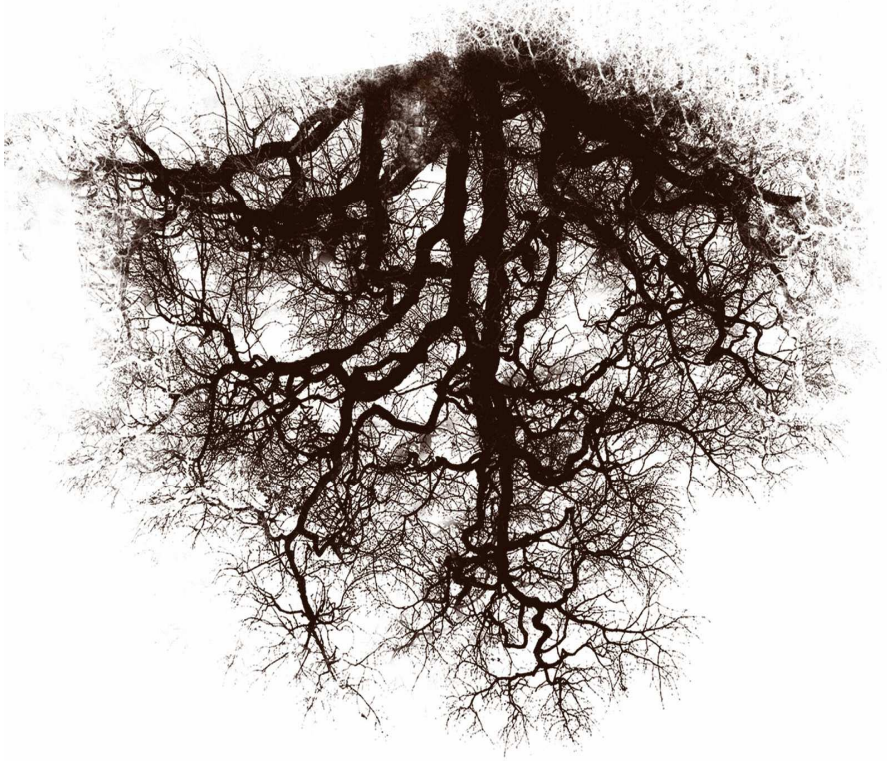




DISCIPLESHIP
according to Jesus

Discipleship



...according to
Jesus

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Introduction

An honest survey of Christians, particularly of the evangelical stream, would reveal that just about every one of us are absolutely convinced that Jesus Christ is Lord and Savior. We fully and completely believe it, and if pressed, most of us would be willing to die for that belief. However, what if that same group were surveyed, and the question was different: Do you *live* like Jesus? Do your day-to-day activities and decisions reflect His Lordship and follow His teachings? I think it's just as certain that the results would reveal a dramatic drop in affirmative answers. What's wrong with us?

Dallas Willard has long lamented the separation between Christian theory and practice.¹ Author Gary Moon says it this way: "Our way of living the Christian life is often more about intellect than experience."² Mark Scandrette makes the same point like this: "So many of us want to live the way of Jesus... yet too often our methods of spiritual formation are individualistic, information-driven, or disconnected from the details of everyday life."³ But most pointed is the critique from Michael Frost and Alan Hirsch: "It appears that a good church upbringing will do many marvelous things for you, but one of the unfortunate things it also does is convince you that Jesus is to be worshiped but not followed."⁴ Ouch! Of course, it stings because it's so true. The "normal Christian life" in our day and age seems to look very similar to... well... normal life.

What are we missing? These men, as well as a growing number of other voices, argue that we need nothing less than a return to Jesus Himself. Not the image of Jesus that immediately comes to mind, formed by years of bad paintings, flannel board cut-outs (remember those?), and caricatures that have been advanced from countless pulpits, movie screens, and popular songs. Not *that* Jesus. The *real*

¹ See Dallas Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines*, (Harper & Row, San Francisco, CA, 1988.) and *The Divine Conspiracy*, (Harper & Row, San Francisco, CA, 1998.)

² Gary Moon, *Apprenticeship with Jesus*, (Baker Books, Grand Rapids, MI, 2009.), back cover.

³ Mark Scandrette, *Practicing the Way of Jesus*, (IVP, Downer's Grove, IL, 2011.), pg. 14.

⁴ Michael Frost and Alan Hirsch, *ReJesus: A Wild Messiah for a Missional Church*, (Hendrickson, Peabody, MA, 2009.), pg. 17

Jesus—the Jewish rabbi from Nazareth that so upset the foundation of religion in His day that those who heard His teachings wanted to kill Him for just about His entire three-year ministry. And in the end, He made them so angry that they finally did! This same Jesus called to a group of twelve men: “Follow me.” (Matthew 4:19) And they did—learning His ways, hearing and practicing His teachings, and under the power of the Holy Spirit, living like Him. He calls to us in the same way: “Follow me.” If we are willing, His promise is mind-blowing: “[You] will do even greater things than these...” (John 14:12)

Of course, we all lack what it takes to truly be like Him in every way. His atoning death was absolutely necessary to heal us of our brokenness, and will be until we’re with Him. However, “by dying for us to set us free from the penalty for our sinfulness, he doesn’t nullify the call to good works and godly living. Rather, he elevates [that call] from an endless and hopeless attempt to impress God to a joyful adventure of enjoying Christ’s presence by imitating Him.”⁵

Over the next seven weeks, I want to invite you on that adventure. Together, we’ll seek to discover who Jesus really was. To what does He call us as disciples? What did He tell us following Him would be like? As we study, we’ll also seek to practice Jesus’ ways by engaging in “experiments” that lead us in the ways that He taught. If called upon, many of us would go to a martyr’s death for the God-man Jesus. But the larger question is this: Will we give Him our lives as well?

May the coming journey towards Easter be one in which we are radically transformed by His presence and Spirit—for His glory and for our greater joy.

Grace and peace,
Brian Kannel
York Alliance Church

⁵ Ibid. pg. 18.



How to Use This Book

This book is designed to be used as a companion resource to the Lenten 2012 sermon series at York Alliance Church. Each Sunday's message will provide the central teaching of the Scripture passage for that week. The three studies for each week will lead you into that teaching in even greater detail. The first study will consist simply of a detailed reading of the passage as we try to shed our preconceptions and listen to the heart of Jesus as He teaches. The other two studies will further unpack the teaching itself, often using the rest of the Bible to illuminate that truth. The best use of this study is in conjunction with both the Sunday messages and a weekly LIFE group gathering—a small community with whom you are able to discuss and apply these truths. If you are unable to attend the Sunday gathering for any reason, the sermon audio can be found at www.yorkalliance.org/resources.

There are a few distinctions from the typical study guides that have been used at York Alliance Church.

- As in previous study guides, there are three studies per week, and you are welcomed to do them at your own pace. However, a majority of the weekly studies appear as one unit, not as a main study and a “Digging Deeper” section. Move at your own pace; if you don't complete a study in a day, return to it the following day. If you only get to one or two studies in a given week, feel free to move on to the following week's studies.
- There will continue to be an Application section at the end of each study. However, a blank sermon note sheet as well as a “Facilitation/Application” sheet will also be included with each week's study. The primary intent of this page is that it be used within York Alliance LIFE groups. However, the facilitation sheet will also work effectively in accountability and mentoring relationships as well as in personal application. Often, application questions from the week's study will re-appear on this page.
- I continue to encourage you to read each Scripture passage from multiple translations, remembering that every translation is just that—a translation.

Unless otherwise noted, Scripture quotations will be from the 1984 New International Version, but I highly recommend the English Standard Version on the more literal side and the New Living Translation on the less literal and more readable side.

- In place of the weekly “Family Time” sections found in earlier study guides, a series of “Faith Experiments” paralleling the first six weeks of this study is detailed on the next several pages. The intent of these experiments is that every family and/or LIFE group will choose one experiment at the beginning of the Lenten season, and then actively engage it until Easter. As you read further details outlining the experiments in the next section, carefully and prayerfully consider the six options, choose one of the experiments... and then, while rising to the challenges and disciplines of your chosen experiment, watch how your faith is moved into action as you seek to truly follow and model Jesus.

If you have questions about how to best utilize the book or have comments on what you’re finding in it and/or on your experiences with it, they are welcomed! Email me at bkannel@yorkalliance.org.

“Father, I thank You for Your abundant grace towards us. I specifically thank You for sending Your Son Jesus to us, and through His life, death, and resurrection, for inviting us into Your Kingdom. As we study in the coming weeks, may our faith increase. As we live out these truths, may we clearly sense the empowerment of Your Holy Spirit. As we struggle to live like Jesus, may we have the deep joy that comes from the knowledge of Your love and grace. As we journey toward the cross, may we find the strength to die to ourselves—and as we journey toward the resurrection, may You graciously give us new and abundant life. (John 10:10) As we wait for Your return, may we be found as faithful followers who are willing to live boldly as citizens of your Kingdom. In Jesus’ Name, amen.”



The Experiments

Here's the thing with holiness: it doesn't just happen. The paradox is that holiness doesn't come from anything you do, and yet, it requires all of the effort that you have. You can't make yourself holy—but if you sit around and wait for holiness to arrive, it will never show up. D.A. Carson says it this way:

“People do not drift toward holiness. Apart from *grace-driven effort*, people do not gravitate toward godliness, prayer, obedience to Scripture, faith, and delight in the Lord. We drift toward compromise and call it tolerance; we drift toward disobedience and call it freedom; we drift toward superstition and call it faith. We cherish the indiscipline of lost self-control and call it relaxation; we slouch toward prayerlessness and delude ourselves into thinking we have escaped legalism; we slide toward godlessness and convince ourselves we have been liberated.”

In order to follow the way of Jesus, then, we must put forth an effort. This effort doesn't *negate* grace; as Carson states, it's *driven* by grace. But it takes effort nonetheless.

Historically, the church has observed the Lenten season through fasting. Whether it's food, drink, an activity, or a behavior, something is removed for that period of time. With this form of spiritual discipline, the church seeks to increase in Christ-likeness during the forty days of Lent.

But, instead of something being removed, what if something was *added*? Specifically, what if behaviors that mirrored the life and teachings of Jesus were intentionally added *in* during the forty days of Lent? What if, during this time, a small community of people, like your LIFE group or family unit, committed to *radical* obedience to a specific teaching of Jesus, and then paid attention to what Jesus did in each of your hearts through that step of obedience?

What follows are a series of six “faith experiments.”⁶ They are experiments in that they have a definite beginning and end, and until they are undertaken, the results can’t be predicted with certainty. They require faith because, outwardly, there would be no clear reason to attempt them. None of them is easy. Each of them requires a radical change in behavior and lifestyle for a period of time. They are not intended to be added on to normal life; they are intended to *interrupt* normal life with a practical (and maybe painful!) infusion of the Kingdom of God as Jesus taught it. They will most certainly require grace-driven effort.

The ideal situation is that you would evaluate these experiments along with your LIFE group. Participating in an experiment within the setting of community will not only make the experiment more feasible; it will make it more joyful and rewarding. In addition, the LIFE group setting provides a built-in context for debriefing, encouragement, and accountability as individuals proceed through the chosen experiment. Each LIFE group is encouraged to evaluate all six experiments and (a) determine if each member is willing to commit to one of them, and (b) to decide together which experiment would be most effective for the members of your group to commit to. While you certainly could combine elements of several of the experiments, or even add your own unique elements, I would recommend that you stick with just one of the options. Each chosen experiment will be difficult and incredibly intrusive on “normal” life, and trying to attempt more than one at a time could lead to failure and discouragement.

While the LIFE group setting is ideal for these, it’s vitally important to give each person the opportunity to either opt “in” or “out” of the experiment. Undertaking this kind of practice goes far beyond the typical commitment to a LIFE group, and each person should determine his/her willingness and be given the opportunity to either participate or not. Consider the roles and expectations that each person is being asked to change from a more “typical” LIFE group:

- We are moving from spectators to participants. While we always *can* participate in the application of the Word of God, we often choose to watch to see if others will jump in, and sometimes we are content to simply learn and discuss truth but not truly apply it. This *requires* participation.
- We are moving from passive connection to active engagement. Coming to a LIFE group gathering and being connected to one another’s lives can happen

⁶ I’m grateful to Mark Scandrette, Gary Moon, Jan Johnson, and Dallas Willard, who each have written extensively on “experiments” in living out the Kingdom of God on earth.

with relative passivity. Community, while valuable, is not an end in itself. We mustn't have the mission of community—rather, we should be communities on mission! When this is happening, passivity is not an option.

- Leaders must move from service-provider to co-pilgrim and guide. Making a meeting run and facilitating connection and vision in a group is already a difficult task. Leaders now must engage the experiment alongside the group, and yet act as a guide for a trip they've not yet taken. Leaders *must* be willing to take this journey as well.⁷

If you are personally unable to participate in an experiment with a LIFE group, whether you are currently not connected to a LIFE group or your group cannot commit to an experiment like this, you are still encouraged to try it! Family units, particularly those with teens, can undertake these themselves. It's most effective if several families band together and jointly commit to an experiment.

These experiments are in no way limited to adult participation! While they are primarily written from an adult point of view, almost every aspect of each experiment could be easily adapted to children. Inviting children into *your* practice of these experiments, whether as a LIFE group, small community, or family unit, could also be a transformational experience for them as well! As you engage these difficult experiments in radical obedience, bring your children along with you! Discuss the process (both the victories and the difficulties!), invite their participation, talk about what God is showing you along the way, and allow them to debrief their hearts with you as well.

A final caution on these experiments: They could easily be construed as some new form of legalism. However, legalism is made up of rules that are imposed on both self and others in order to either earn or maintain favor with God. These experiments consist either of self-imposed limits or self-directed behaviors, both of which do not purport to curry favor, but instead teach us to walk more fully in the freedom of the Kingdom of God.

“We are being invited to trust that the instructions of Jesus are based on true knowledge of the way life actually works. They are meant to liberate us from the patterns of thinking and acting that are sabotaging and destroying us and everyone around us. So rather begrudgingly

⁷ Principles adapted from Mark Scandrette, *Practicing the Way of Jesus*, (IVP, Downer's Grove, IL, 2011.), pg. 42-43.

asking, 'What do I have to do?' or 'How far do I have to go?' a better question is, 'How free and alive am I willing to be?'"⁸

Jesus taught that the Kingdom of God—abundant life—was available through Him. He gave His life so that we could be invited into that life. Our response, then, is to believe by faith that the freedom that He offers is truly the best possible life. These experiments are simply a pathway into that freedom.

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⁸ Ibid. pg. 47.

Experiment #1: An Experiment in Repentance

Repentance must never be seen as a one-time event that is accomplished at the outset of our relationship with Jesus, but rather, an ongoing lifestyle that should both punctuate and define our journey with Him. Biblically, repentance is simply a “turning from”—the intentional recognition of moving an area of life from valuing and embracing the kingdom of this world to living in the Kingdom of God. The discipline of repentance, then, is simply being intentional about opening our lives up to the reality that many of our values are worldly values, not Kingdom values. However, without intentionality, only the most blatant of these areas will ever be consciously recognized, and therefore, repented of.

This experiment consists of three disciplines that are practiced for the entirety of the Lenten season. It’s important to recognize that, while there is some value in these practices themselves, the far greater value is in intentionally opening our hearts to the voice of the Father as He gently reveals areas in which our lives don’t line up with His Kingdom.

- *The Discipline of Simplicity* – Part of this experiment is a recognition that most of us consume far more than we need in every area of living. For the Lenten season, refrain from buying anything that is non-essential. This would certainly include clothes, music, movies, games, technological devices, etc. However, you’re welcome to extend the discipline out to things like eating out, luxury food and drinks, desserts, entertainment or other things—as far as you choose to extend it. Each time you would typically purchase or consume, think about *why* you would have done that, and what it feels like to deprive yourself of that item or experience during this time.
- *The Discipline of Fasting* – Our lives are consumed with media input. From the morning news to evening sit-coms, browsing the internet, listening to music, reading blogs, checking email, social media outlets, and checking up on our favorite team, we are constantly barraged with “noise”. While some of it is very good, much of it is distracting at a bare minimum. During Lent, unplug all non-essential media. That which is necessary for work, school, and vital communication is allowed, but beyond that, seek to remove it. You’ll likely need to take the first week to determine the “ground rules” and agree on what is “in” and what is “out”. Do this experiment with the community with which you are journeying. Many will find this far more difficult than fasting from food! Recognize the “addiction” to noise and connectivity and, over the course of forty days, allow God to speak into the way your time is typically

used. You'll likely find that you have much more time than you knew you had—and you may find that some things need to remain turned off after this period of time is finished.

- *The Discipline of Confession* – James 5:16 says that we should “confess our sins to one another and pray for one another” (ESV). Find someone that you can be completely honest with, and ask them if they would be willing to serve as a “confessor”. It's VITAL that they understand and completely agree to maintain confidentiality! Make sure this is someone that you trust in that way! Then, once a week, have a time of confession. Come prepared with all the sin that God has revealed in you over the course of that week. They should simply ask, “What do you have to confess this week?” and then let you unpack your heart. After you are finished, your confessor should bring you and your sins before Jesus, who is the only mediator between God and man. (1 Timothy 2:5) This discipline makes us intentionally aware of the areas where God is revealing that our lives are out of sync with His will and values.

As with each of these experiments, you are encouraged to undertake this discipline with a small community. It's vital that each of you commit to undertake these disciplines, hold one another accountable, and meet weekly to discuss how things are going with the experiment. As you meet, here are a few questions that might be helpful:

- What areas have been most difficult for you this week?
- What is God revealing to you about your heart and “normal” life practice during this experiment?
- What has been the most surprising aspect of this practice for you at this point in the experiment?
- How can we support one another as we engage this process?
- How have you seen God at work through these disciplines?

Experiment #2: An Experiment in Violent Obedience

Mark Galli, in his book *Jesus, Mean and Wild*, quotes author Stephen Prothero from a 1994 interview:

“Christians traditionally, as they’ve shaped [their image] of Jesus, have been worried about getting it wrong, including the [American] Puritans. Americans today are not so worried. There isn’t the sense that this is a life-and-death matter, that you don’t mess with divinity. There’s a freedom and even a playfulness that Americans have... The flexibility our Jesus exhibits is unprecedented. There’s a Gumbylike quality to Jesus in the United States. Even turning Jesus into a friend among born-again Christians—that kind of chutzpah is something that was unknown even to Americans in the Colonial period.”⁹ (*clarifications mine*)

I would add that this reality is not simply true in the American church, but in the church of the Western world, and it is far from limited to born-again Christians, but is just as prevalent in nearly every stream of Christianity. Somehow, the grace, mercy and love of Jesus has been interpreted as a “lord” who demands nothing of us and who is endlessly patient with our wanderings, with our worldly values, and is quite willing to be added to our already large list of priorities wherever He happens to fit.

The Jesus we find in the gospels is dramatically different. He demands *all* of us, completely. He invites us with incredible grace into the life of the Kingdom, but warns us that we’ll never live that life if we’re not willing to do great violence to our old life. In Paul’s terms, we have to die. (Colossians 3:3) Death to self looks vastly different for each of us. However, this experiment is targeted toward two areas that most of us struggle in dying to—stuff and money. If you choose to undertake this experiment, it won’t be easy. But I believe it will be absolutely transformative.

- *Have2Give1*¹⁰ – Look aggressively, along with your community, at what you own. Throughout the Lenten season, determine six categories of “stuff” that you will target—one category for each week. The end result will be that you will cut your “ownership” in half within those areas over the six-week time period. This is the process: After determining categories, you’ll take inventory and, as the title of the experiment suggests, give “1” for every “2”

⁹ Stephen Prothero, quoted in Mark Galli, *Jesus, Mean and Wild*, (Baker Books, Grand Rapid, MI, 2006.), pg. 16.

¹⁰ I first heard of this experiment in Scandrette’s book. While I can’t agree with all that he says in it, he does a great job of unpacking the idea of experiments as a step in spiritual formation. Mark Scandrette, *Practicing the Way of Jesus*, (IVP, Downer’s Grove, IL, 2011.), pg. 11-14.

that you have. Clothes, kitchen items, books, movies, shoes, décor, sports equipment, furniture, technological items, bank accounts (yes, that radical!) and even cars are fair game. In the home of someone within the community, you'll need a staging area for all of the extra "stuff" that will be accumulated. Then, make wise decisions about what to do with it. Don't simply send it to the Salvation Army; contact non-profits in the area and look for effective places to give where you are able to connect with specific families and people in need. Or, around Easter, have a massive sale, with all proceeds going to one of our York Alliance Home Mission organizations or to our Benevolence Fund¹¹, or maybe fund a radical giveaway that spreads the message of the Kingdom. Larger ticket items should be stewarded well—for example, selling them on eBay or craigslist, or giving a specific item to a specific individual who needs it. The point is to recognize how much more we have than we actually need, and how to live open-handedly and generously, seeking the Kingdom instead of our security or the stuff of this world. (Matthew 6:33)

Questions for discussion among the group undertaking this experiment:

- What areas have been most difficult for you this week?
- Are there things in which you've been tempted to "cheat" with? Why do you think that is?
- Why are some categories of "stuff" more difficult than others? What does this tell you about your "normal" patterns of living and values?
- How do you feel at the end of each week?
- Is this experiment affecting the world around us as much as it should? How could it affect those around us who need Jesus more?

¹¹ For a list of organizations, you can look at www.yorkalliance.org or contact the church office at 717-848-1700.

Experiment #3: An Experiment in Lordship

We tend to quite readily affirm that Jesus is Lord, but much like the disciples, immediately following our proclamation we attempt to impose our own will on our “lord.” What would it look like for us to truly live a life in which Jesus and His teachings are central? This is the central question for spiritual formation and discipleship, and one that we often hesitate to answer honestly because the implications are so radical. However, like any truly massive undertaking, we can only make progress towards it if we will engage it one step at a time.

This experiment will require a significant bit of introspection before it moves to action, especially for the second portion. Remember that taking the time and effort (and sometimes pain!) to honestly evaluate life is what brings the maximum impact to this and the other experiments. The “goal” is not to complete the experiment with the least amount of pain possible, but rather, to be transformed increasingly into the likeness of Jesus! (2 Corinthians 3:18) Therefore, don’t try to cut corners, but honestly evaluate your life in each of these areas and seek to make real *radical* changes that will last.

- *Experiment in Truth*²² - This is a great experiment to undertake with a LIFE group or a small community that consists of those who are not solely family members. Begin by very honestly asking this question: “What is one thing that you could do over the next 40 days that could change your life forever?” Evaluate your behavior patterns, your strengths and weaknesses, and the habits that you either have or wish you did. Think about the kind of person that Jesus is forming you into. Is he bold in sharing his faith? Does she live a life of simplicity? Does he connect deeply and intentionally with friends? Does her marriage thrive in intimacy within every area? Is he involved in serving the poor? Do his children communicate openly with him? These questions are simply meant to be fodder for discussion—look at your life and intentionally consider a change that would literally be life-altering. Once you’ve determined your personal experiment, connect with a partner (or triad) of the same sex who is not a family member (if at all possible) and share with him/her your experiment and your hope behind it, as they do the same with you. Then, commit to *daily* contact with one another over the next six weeks as you engage the experiment. These experiments don’t need to be

²² The core idea for this experiment is also Scandrette’s. Mark Scandrette, *Practicing the Way of Jesus*, (IVP, Downer’s Grove, IL, 2011.), pg. 172-179.

limited to a single behavior or activity—they may include specific daily and weekly goals. For example, they could be as varied as sharing the name of Jesus with someone you know each day, serving at Logos Academy once a week, and getting eight hours of sleep each night. Debrief your successes and failures both with your partner and with your larger community.

- *Rule of Life*¹³ - Take at least a 24-hour Sabbath Retreat. Ideally, do this with your LIFE group or small community at some location that isn't your home. However, if neither of these is possible, schedule it for sometime during this six-week period in a way that works. During that time, spend 4-6 hours in silence, prayer, and contemplation, thinking about where your life is right now and where you think Jesus might be leading. Allow Him to speak into this! After that time, write down everything that you currently do that nurtures your spirit and fills you with delight. Then, write down all the activities that you need to try to avoid, that pull you away from Jesus. Write down the "have to's" in your life that exist because of your current season/situation in life and that effect your rhythms. Finally, consider the way that you *should* live your life within the areas of Relationships, Prayer, Work, and Rest, and include both what must be there and what must be avoided. Discuss this with your LIFE group, and begin to live according to it. It will likely take some time to implement, but should last far beyond Easter.

Questions for discussion among the group undertaking this experiment:

- What are some things that you've discovered about yourself in this process?
- What is easy and fun within this experiment, and which portions are difficult and painful? Why is that?
- Are there areas of your life that you assumed just "had to be that way" that you need permission to change? Like what?
- Where do you most struggle to obey Jesus in everyday life?
- How much of this experiment should continue beyond Easter?

¹³ This process was outlined by Peter Scazzero at the Emotionally Healthy Spirituality conference in Fall 2011. *Emotionally Healthy Spirituality* (Thomas Nelson, Nashville, TN, reprint 2011).

Experiment #4: An Experiment in Abiding

Most of us can quickly quote Jesus' command that we are to "abide in Him" (or "remain in Him" in the NIV). A significant percentage can even point to the passage from which that command comes: John 15. But how many of us can say that we have practiced that abiding? For most, abiding in Jesus falls victim to a frantic life that refuses to be tamed by the Savior who will not force His way into it. In the pace of everyday living, the most honest of us will admit that there are few times throughout the course of the normal day that we even consciously remember Jesus, let alone abide in Him.

This experiment engages the classic disciplines of silence and solitude as a pathway into the heart of God. If you just read those words and trembled inside, this may be an experiment you should engage! Some struggle violently with true silence and solitude, feeling loss of identity, deep loneliness, and even physical withdrawal symptoms. Others thrive in silence, but fear deep connection and community. Such individuals are encouraged to proceed to Experiment #5! Within the LIFE group setting, it is certainly possible to engage Experiments #4 and #5 together, either with each person doing the both, or with the group divided in two based on what we are most naturally drawn to (or away from). Both experiments will seem relatively easy at the beginning, but it will take a radical commitment to live them out daily for the next six weeks.

- *The Regular Discipline of Silence* – Commit to a radical rhythm of life over the next six weeks. It consists of the following:
 - Times of complete silence and solitude three times each day (morning, midday, and evening) for at least 15 minutes each. During this time, eliminate every distraction—no media, no books (not even a Bible!), no journal, no other people, and if possible, no noise. For most of us, simply carving out time like this requires a radical commitment! During each, work to stay completely focused on what it means to "abide in Jesus." What is He saying? Where has He been present in your day? What does His love mean to you right now? Where is He working around you right now? After 15 minutes of focus, you may want to take a few minutes to jot down a few notes about your experience.
 - One time each week where you spend 1-3 hours in silence and solitude. For these times, *prayer journals* are permissible, but they should only be used to keep focus. Otherwise, you should plan to spend the entire time

much like you do the 15-minute segments each day. Ideally, these times should increase from an hour to three hours over the course of six weeks. As they get longer, you may have to get more radical about carving out the time—rising early, staying up late, etc.

- *Silent Retreat* - Take a Silent Retreat—one that lasts for at least 24 hours. This is best done at a retreat center, cabin, or some other “away” location. Do everything you can do to eliminate all noise—no cell phones or other technology, no radio or music (even worship music!), no other people. Take with you only food (or you can fast during this time), a Bible, and a journal of some kind. Decide what your best rhythm would be for hearing from God, and put that into practice.¹⁴ Before you break your silence, take time to record what you felt, experienced, and heard during this time.
- *Learning to Abide* – There are at least two classic works on remaining in the presence of Jesus: *Abide in Christ*, by Andrew Murray and *The Practice of the Presence of God*, by Brother Lawrence. Buy (or borrow!) one of these books, and read it during the next six weeks. The ideal would be to decide on one of these as a community, read it at the same time, and discuss it!

Questions for discussion among the group undertaking this experiment:

- What is the most difficult part of this experiment for you?
- What are you noticing in your times of silence?
- What kinds of thoughts most easily intrude on this time? What might that say about your affections or your concerns?
- Do you feel like your life between the “silences” is different because of them? Why or why not, and in what ways?
- Are the more extended times of silence easier or more difficult? Why is that?

¹⁴ If you need assistance with this, talk with your LIFE group leader or one of the pastors at York Alliance.

Experiment #5: An Experiment in Community

It was Dietrich Bonhoeffer who said, “Let him who cannot be alone beware of community. Let him who is not in community beware of being alone.”⁴⁵ Just as there are those who have a deep aversion to solitude and silence, even more of us have some level of aversion to real, honest community. There’s something in us that wants to hold people at arm’s length, and only allow them into certain areas of our lives. That something, we learn in Genesis 3, is our own sinfulness. Interestingly, the first reaction of Adam and Eve to their sin was not hiding from God—it was hiding from each other! (Genesis 3:7)

As mentioned on the previous page, there are some among us who “cannot be alone,” and therefore, for whom community is not extremely difficult. Such individuals are encouraged to go back and consider Experiment #4! Within the LIFE group setting, it is certainly possible to engage these two experiments together, either with each person doing the both, or with the group divided in two based on what we are most naturally drawn to (or away from). Both experiments (#4 and #5) will seem relatively easy at the beginning, but it will take a radical commitment to live them out daily for the next six weeks.

- *The Radical Discipline of Community* – Commit to a radical rhythm of life over the next six weeks. It consists of the following:
 - Make daily contact with everyone in your LIFE group or community to which you have committed to pursue this experiment. While an occasional email or text connection is OK, strive for at least “voice to voice” contact, if not face to face. In addition, pray for each of these people daily—and it would be great to do it with them during your daily contact!
 - If you are a part of a LIFE group, you already have one weekly connect per week. Particularly during this six week period, make sure that this is an intentional part of your week—don’t miss it! If you are not in a LIFE group, schedule a time where your community can talk through how this experiment is going.
 - *In addition* to your LIFE group, connect two additional times each week as a group. One of these should be sharing a meal together. It doesn’t need to be fancy or expensive, and everyone can certainly provide a prepared dish or food item. However, take time to experience the regular “breaking of bread” with this community. Also, commit to *servicing*

⁴⁵ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, (Harper & Row, NY, 1954.), pg. 78.

somewhere together each week. The ideas for serving together are endless: You could pick up litter in a park, serve together with Servants¹⁶, serve at a local Rescue Mission or Food Bank, etc. If it's logistically impossible to do this as a group, at least commit to serving with one other person who is not in your family but who is a part of your LIFE group or community.

- *Remember the Mission* – One of the things that we seek to remind one another of is that the church does not have the “mission of community”, but rather, is called to be a “community on mission.” Simply put, community is a means, not an end. As you connect to one another three times each week (LIFE Group, meal together, serving together), intentionally invite someone that you know into at least one of those gatherings each week. They may not accept, but be intentional about inviting. This is clearly the purpose for which God has saved us into community. (John 13:35 and 1 Corinthians 14:24-25)
- *Extended Community* – Commit to either serving all together as a group for one full day during the Lenten season *or* to taking a weekend retreat together. If you choose the retreat, have each participant plan a portion of the weekend in order to make your time together both fun and meaningful.
- *Learning to Love* – Read *Life Together*, by Dietrich Bonhoeffer. Buy (or borrow!) the book, and read it during the next six weeks. As you read it together as a community, discuss the role that community does and should play in your lives.

Questions for discussion among the group undertaking this experiment:

- What is the most difficult part of this experiment for you?
- What are some of the joys and frustrations that come from being together so much?
- What are a few of the things that you've learned about yourself during this experiment thus far?
- Do we find that this community is an inviting place for others to connect?
- How does time spent serving together, eating together, or discussing together differ?

¹⁶ One of the Home Mission organizations that York Alliance supports that does basic Home Helps for those in need. For more information, contact the church office (848-1700) or check the website: www.yorkalliance.org under “Ministries” and “Home Mission”

Experiment #6: An Experiment in Loving the Unlovely

Jesus called His disciples to “take up their cross and follow [Him]” (Luke 14:27), and we as His disciples have often understood this command to mean that we would endure suffering as we follow after Him. Certainly that is an aspect of what He meant, as the Apostle Paul made clear (Philippians 3:10-11). However, a full reading of Jesus’ teaching reveals that the motivation behind the cross that He bore must also drive us. Just as we were His enemies and yet He loved us, we are commanded to love our enemies. (Matthew 5:44a) Just as He prayed for those who crucified Him (Luke 23:34), we are called to pray for those who persecute us. (Matthew 5:44b) And if there were space, the parallels could easily continue.

This repeated theme of Jesus is clearly taught in Luke 14:12-24. In this parable, Jesus lays out the call of the Kingdom to love those who are externally unlovely and who are unable to repay that which they receive. The cultural context in which Jesus was teaching bears being remembered; however, the poor, crippled, blind, and lame to which Jesus refers (Luke 14:13) were a daily reality to those He was teaching. A walk through town or the completion of basic chores would bring them into contact with the poorest of the poor. On the other hand, for the vast majority of us, we can live our lives very fully and completely without any significant contact with the truly poor and the truly broken. Suburban homes, shopping malls, large grocery stores, and automobile travel have all brought a level of isolation that would have been foreign to Jesus’ hearers. Therefore, if we are to embrace this aspect of Jesus’ teaching and life in the Kingdom, we will need to take intentional steps.

- *Connecting through Serving* – One of the best ways to connect with those in need is to be part of meeting those needs. Over the next six weeks, commit to at least one time weekly where you serve at a ministry that directly meets the needs of the poorest of the poor. Ideally, do this with at least one other member of your community or LIFE group. Two great options in the York area are the York Rescue Mission and Our Daily Bread. However, don’t just serve on the line—make it a point to have at least one meaningful conversation with one of those whom you are serving each week. Ask questions about their family, their history, their interests, and their passions. Most of those you talk with would *love* for you to pray God’s blessing over them—so do it!
- *Connecting through Intentional Presence* – For most of us, our neighborhoods and nearby parks are not places where you would find those Jesus

commanded us to serve. If your neighborhood is, than this will be a bit easier! Pick an area of the city where there is a significant density of people and, at least three times a week, spend at least 30 minutes walking around that area. As you do, pray over the city, and ask God to help you see people, not look past them. Each time you walk, seek to have at least one intentional conversation with someone. Again, this is best done in pairs if possible.

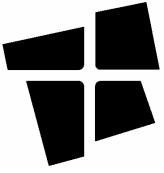
- *Feast of the Forgotten*¹⁷ – This will be the pinnacle event of the experiment. Sometime during the weeks either before or after Easter Sunday, organize an elaborate feast with your LIFE group or community. Everyone should contribute either food or money, and should be very generous in their contribution. Work together to find a location¹⁸, decorate it, and prepare the food. In the week leading up to the feast, reconnect with as many of the men, women, and children that you've met over the past six weeks as possible and invite them to come. You'll likely need to help with transportation as well, so work together as a group to arrange meeting locations, drivers, times, etc. Then, feast *together!* Intermingle your community and your guests, be prepared to ask questions and have discussion, etc. Pray through this as a community and ask God to show you exactly how He desires to use this time!

Questions for discussion among the group undertaking this experiment:

- What's the most difficult aspect of this experiment for you?
- What has impacted you most in your conversations with the people that you've met?
- What has been the most surprising thing about this experiment?
- Are there reasons why serving and connecting in these ways are not a normal part of your lifestyle? What would it look like to do that?
- Is the way that you view the people in your life changing through this experiment? Why or why not? In what ways?

¹⁷ The idea for this experiment can be found in various places, but the name is again from Scandrette. Mark Scandrette, *Practicing the Way of Jesus*, (IVP, Downer's Grove, IL, 2011.), pg. 133.

¹⁸ If you desire to use the York Alliance Fellowship Hall, contact the office for availability, reservations, and guidelines. Again, 848-1700.



***The Experiments:
Notes and Planning Page***

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Week One:
Repentance

Luke 13:1-9

We tend to see repentance as a one-time event and not an ongoing lifestyle. However, Jesus clearly calls us to a lifestyle of repentance, not a lifestyle of perfection following a one-time event. It's only in repentance that we can engage Jesus in real relationship, and true repentance will always bear fruit.

Old Eyes Made New

For the first study of each of the weeks represented in this study guide, we'll engage Scripture reading as a discipline. One of the challenges of engaging Jesus' teachings is our familiarity with them. Many of us have read the Gospel accounts. These events have been etched into our minds in various ways, and because of this, we stop listening.

Turn to Luke 13:1-9. Before you begin to read, either pray this prayer, or something similar:

Jesus, I come to your Word because I want to follow You. I believe that you are the best Way for me to live, the fount of all that is True, and the only place that I can find real Life. As I read Your Word, please send the Holy Spirit to enlighten my eyes. Allow me to engage this account as if for the first time. Show me the details that are important for me to see, give me insight into what these truths mean for my life, and then give me the grace and courage to live them out in faith, for Your glory and honor. In Jesus' Name, amen.

Now, read the passage three times, slowly. Take note of details that you see and the heart behind Jesus' words.

- Who is the audience to which Jesus is speaking?
- What other details might be important to understand this teaching?

The Need for Repentance

One of the challenges for living the Christ-life in the modern world is that there is always someone around who's worse than you. It's difficult to see ourselves as desperately in need of the grace of Jesus when we watch the 11:00 news! If you are unable to quickly locate someone who outwardly seems to be a "worse" sinner than you are, you're reading this study guide in jail... where you're now surrounded by those who likely appear worse than you!

As Jesus emerges from the wilderness following His temptation, the gospel writer Mark records Him making a kind of "thesis statement" that would define His teaching and ministry. Read Mark 1:14-15.

- What does Mark call the message of Jesus? (vs. 14)
- What are the aspects of this message according to Jesus' declaration?
- The message contains two declarations of fact and then two exhortations to action. What does Jesus ask us to do?

Do you think of the call to repent as "Good News"? We are all aware of our imperfections and sinfulness at times... but how can the call to repentance be "good news"?

Mark Galli puts it this way: "We have courage to explore the pain because we know that Jesus' harsh word of repentance is set on a foundation of grace."¹⁹

¹⁹ Mark Galli, *Jesus, Mean and Wild*, (Baker Books, Grand Rapids, MI, 2006.), pg. 39.

In Luke 13, Jesus is being questioned about what we might call a “current event.” It seems the Romans had massacred some Galilean Jews while they were in the middle of worship, and then mixed their blood with the blood of the sacrifice on the altar. The worldview of the Jews at that time was that God would often punish sin through tragedy and injustice. As He answers the questioning Jews, Jesus references another news event. What is His message to those who are questioning Him?

This is where Jesus speaks into our propensity to compare our lives to those around us and become self-righteous. According to Jesus in Matthew 5:48, to whom are we to compare our lives?

By this standard, we all come up woefully short. God is infinitely holy, and the ongoing process of repentance is designed to “sanctify” us, or to make us holy as well. With this understanding, then, how might the call to repentance actually be Good News for us all?

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Application:

- Is there an area in which God is currently calling you to repentance in? What are you doing about it?

- What stops you from truly repenting of sin and moving toward righteousness?

The Dual Role of God

The attributes of God are impossible for us to grasp, not simply in their nature, but in their infinite perfection. For instance, our concept of what "good" is already has only a bit in common with what it means to say that God is good, due to our cultural experiences and limited perspective. However, to understand that He is not just "good," but *infinitely* so, moves us far beyond our ability to comprehend. Therefore, when we, in our limited view, are faced with what seem to be opposing attributes but then seen as embodied to perfection, we have a difficult time grasping what is actually happening. However, growing in our understanding, despite its limitations, is key to receiving Jesus' invitation to a lifestyle of repentance.

Re-read just the parable that Jesus tells in Luke 13:6-9.

- Which character(s) represent God within the parable?

- Which character(s) represent us?

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If you struggled to answer which characters represent God, don't worry. You're stuck in the difficulty we looked at in the introduction! Consider:

- Read John 1:3, Colossians 1:16-17, and Romans 8:28. Who must be the owner?

- Now, read John 15:1 and Galatians 5:22-23. Who is the one who produces the fruit and is, therefore, the vinedresser?

Here's the challenge—does this represent some kind of divide within the Trinity? Can God be both owner and vinedresser? Can the same being both demand justice and plead for mercy? Read the following:

- Luke 22:39-44
- 2 Corinthians 5:21
- Philippians 2:5-8
- Hebrews 12:2

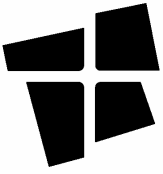
Do you think the idea of Jesus' sacrifice for our sin was the Father's idea or Jesus' idea?

It's vital for us to *not* see Jesus either as: (a) "escaping" from heaven in order to die and then plead with the Father to accept the sacrifice for sin, or (b) as the Father sending Jesus to earth against His will in order to punish Him for our sake. Rather, the incarnation (Jesus coming to earth as a man) and the atonement (Jesus dying in our place for our sin) was the plan from the very beginning of time! (See 1 Peter 1:20 and Revelation 13:8)

What does this have to do with repentance? God absolutely calls us to perfection. But He also patiently *invites* us into that perfection through His own sacrifice. Therefore, repentance is not an *obligation*, but rather, an *invitation to transformation!*

Application:

- Do you tend to see God more as the owner (demanding with high expectations) or the vinedresser (merciful and patient)? Why is it important to see that He is both?



Repentance
Luke 13:1-9

Sermon Notes:

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LIFE Group Facilitation Sheet

Welcome one another in Jesus' name!

Icebreaker: "If you could change one thing about your home or residence, what would it be?"

Worship Jesus through Scripture, music, singing, and prayer. Be creative! Invite Him to the center of your gathering.

Word: Luke 13: 1-9

- How is Jesus working in your life right now?
- Has anything specific jumped out to you, either in this passage or in the study guide this week? Are you doing an experiment, and if so, how is it going?
- Does "repentance" have a positive or negative connotation to you? Why do you think that is?
- What's an area in which you tend to compare horizontally (to the lives of those around you) instead of vertically (to God's standard)?
- Is there an area in which God is currently convicting you of sin and calling you to repentance? What are you doing about it?
- What stops you from truly repenting of sin and moving toward righteousness?
- Do you tend to see God more as the owner (demanding with high expectations) or the vinedresser (merciful and patient)? Why is it important to see that He is both?
- What's one practical thing you can do in your life to obey what Jesus is teaching in this passage? What about us as a group?

Works: Pray very specifically for those in your life with whom you come into regular contact. Pray that the transformation of your life would be a reflection of the person of Jesus to them. Determine one person over the course of Lenten season that you will specifically pray for, and ask God for opportunity to connect them to this community, to talk with them about the things that are happening in your faith, and to engage with them about where they are in their faith. Trust God to do this!

Note: Please check the website for
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Week Two:
A Violent Kingdom
Matthew 11:1-19

The Kingdom of God only comes with violence. Adding Jesus into the flow of our lives—even as top priority—is not an option that has been left open to us. The Kingdom of God has come to earth at great cost and with great violence to God Himself. Therefore, when we engage the real Jesus, our lives must not remain the same.

Old Eyes Made New

Turn to Matthew 11:1-19. Before you begin to read, either pray this prayer, or something similar:

Jesus, I come to Your Word because I want to follow You. I believe that You are the best Way for me to live, the Fount of all that is True, and the only place that I can find real Life. As I read Your Word, please send the Holy Spirit to enlighten my eyes. Allow me to engage this account as if for the first time. Show me the details that are important for me to see, give me insight into what these truths mean for my life, and then give me the grace and courage to live them out in faith, for Your glory and honor. In Jesus' Name, amen.

Now, read the passage three times, slowly. Take note of details that you see and of the heart behind Jesus' words.

- Who is the audience to which Jesus is speaking?

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- What other details might be important to understand this teaching? What other characters are involved?

At What Cost?

What does the process of being “born again” and then growing in faith toward Jesus actually consist of and look like? This question seems that it would be one easily answered by someone like me (and many of those who are reading this!) who have spent significant time in the evangelical church, both taking part in, and watching others take part in (theoretically, at least), those very activities! The reality, however, is that there is far from a consensus on the topic. For some, it’s a recitation of a prayer and an immediate list of things that should or shouldn’t be a part of living. For others, it’s a personal decision, sometimes made over a period of time or at a point in time, that changes the post-death destination. For still others, it’s leaving a “bad” community and getting into a “good” community in order to have a “cleaned-up” life.

What is the biblical answer to the question? That’s a bit trickier, and will require a brief survey. First, read the following passages:

- Exodus 3:1-6
- Joshua 5:13-15
- Job 38:1-11 (and through chapter 41 if you’d like!)
- Isaiah 6:1-7
- Acts 9:1-9

What is the general reaction of those who come into contact with God?

Now, read these passages:

- Matthew 10:34-39
- Matthew 16:24-26
- Mark 10:17-31
- Luke 14:25-33

What seem to be Jesus expectations for His disciples?

Finally, read one last passage:

- John 15:18-25

How should those who follow Jesus expect to be treated in the world?

The idea that following Jesus can be added on to a life without bringing major upheaval is simply not biblically sound. Jesus clearly called His followers to a radical obedience that would be difficult and counter-cultural and that would impact the world around them. "If our encounter with God does not require something of us, we have to ask whether it was really God we encountered."²⁰

At the same time, we must recognize that Jesus doesn't ask us as His followers to do something that He hasn't already done Himself. Read Philippians 2:5-8. Make just a partial list of the sacrifices that Jesus made for you and me:

Discipleship is intended to be a costly endeavor. But the cost was paid by Jesus Himself long before He called you and I into it.

Application:

- How would *you* describe the process of being saved, and then growing into the likeness of Jesus in your own life?

- What does following Jesus cost you?

²⁰ Alan and Debra Hirsh, *Untamed*. (Baker Books, Grand Rapids, MI, 2010.) pg. 77

You Gotta Move!

Imagine that you went to the doctor and were diagnosed with a very serious, life-threatening illness. However, there is a treatment for it, and if that treatment is followed, the illness will be completely healed. When you are initially diagnosed, the doctor is very firm with you and conveys the significant gravity of the situation—and you receive the news with a tearful, yet hopeful, response. However, you go away and do nothing, believing the doctor was needlessly dramatic. When you go back for a follow-up exam, the doctor tries to convey to you the great hope that you have if you will simply go through the treatment. He is almost joyful as he explains it! You agree with joy that this terrible illness can be cured—and again, leave and do nothing. This time, you think the doctor must be foolish since he was so joyful. Based on your actions, did you really understand the information the doctor gave you?

Now re-read the end of the passage for this week (Matthew 11:16-19).

- How does the story above parallel Jesus' description of the crowds who listened to John and then to Jesus?

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- What is Jesus' final declaration (vs. 19) regarding the actions of the crowd?

Hearing the truth but not responding to it in any way is effectively the same thing as never hearing it at all. "If you believe something is really and objectively true...then it must somehow affect your life. It must become personal. It must become *your* truth, or it is by definition not true."²¹ The apostle James effectively says the same thing. Read James 1:22-24.

- Imagine someone looking into a mirror to make sure that they looked alright before walking into an important appointment. There are several pieces of food stuck in their front teeth—but they walk away and don't do anything about them. What might you say about that person and the process of looking in the mirror?

- How does this compare to the way that you read and study the Word?

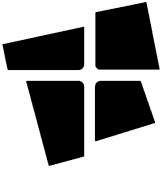
Wisdom is proved by *action*. Without that, it's just empty knowledge.

Application:

- What's something that God has shown you in His Word that you need to do something about?

- Are there times that you blame your inaction on the *messenger*, even though you've clearly heard the *message*?

²¹ Michael Frost and Alan Hirsch, *ReJesus: A Wild Messiah for a Missional Church*, (Hendrickson, Peabody, MA, 2009.), pg. 146..



A Violent Kingdom
Matthew 11:1-19

Sermon Notes:

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LIFE Group Facilitation Sheet

Welcome one another in Jesus' name!

Icebreaker: "What's your favorite part of the week? Why?"

Worship Jesus through Scripture, music, singing, and prayer. Be creative! Invite Him to the center of your gathering.

Word: Matthew 11: 1-19

- How is Jesus working in your life right now?
- Has anything specific jumped out to you, either in this passage or in the study guide this week? Are you doing an experiment, and if so, how is it going?
- How would *you* describe the process of being saved, and then growing into the likeness of Jesus in your own life?
- On a scale of 1-10, rate how difficult it is to follow Jesus, in your opinion. 1 is incredibly easily, 10 is incredibly difficult. Why did you pick that number, and do you think that understanding is biblical?
- What does following Jesus cost you?
- Are there times that you haven't done what you knew you needed to do because of the *messenger*, even though you've clearly heard the *message*?
- What's something that God has shown you in His Word that you need to do something about? What would it take to do that?
- What's one practical thing that you can do in your life to obey what Jesus is teaching in this passage? What about us as a group?

Works: Pray very specifically for those in your life with whom you come into regular contact. Pray that the transformation of your life would be a reflection of the person of Jesus to them. Determine one person over the course of Lenten season that you will specifically pray for, and ask God for opportunity to connect them to this community, to talk with them about the things that are happening in your faith, and to engage with them about where they are in their faith. Trust God to do this!

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Week Three:

True Lordship

Matthew 16:13 – 17:8

Who do we say that Jesus is? Peter proclaimed Him as Lord—and then, like us, proceeded to tell Him how a Lord should act. Jesus isn't interested in *our* version of His reign—He's only willing to be the uncontested Lord of our lives. God's Word comes as clearly to us as it did to Peter: "This is my Son—listen to Him!"

Old Eyes Made New

Turn to Matthew 16:13 – 17:8. Before you begin to read, either pray this prayer, or something similar:

Jesus, I come to Your Word because I want to follow You. I believe that You are the best Way for me to live, the Fount of all that is True, and the only place that I can find real Life. As I read Your Word, please send the Holy Spirit to enlighten my eyes. Allow me to engage this account as if for the first time. Show me the details that are important for me to see, give me insight into what these truths mean for my life, and then give me the grace and courage to live them out in faith, for Your glory and honor. In Jesus' Name, amen.

Now, read the passage three times, slowly. Take note of details that you see and the heart behind Jesus' words.

- Who is the audience to which Jesus is speaking?

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- What other details might be important to understand this teaching? What other characters are involved?

Who Do You Say I Am?

The question of who Jesus is has many layers to it. This simple question, posed to Peter, is one that each of us must answer. Beyond our verbal and intellectual answer, our *experiential* answer (how we live based on *our* understanding of Jesus) is vitally important.

C.S. Lewis famously stated that Jesus didn't allow for us to see Him as a great teacher, because He explicitly stated again and again that He was actually God. What claim did Jesus make in the following passages?

- Matthew 22:41-46
- Matthew 26:63-64
- John 4:25-26
- John 8:12-18
- John 8:54-59
- John 10:24-38

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Lewis then rightly states that anyone who made statements such as these can be accused of being a liar, dismissed as being a lunatic, or worshiped as Lord. There are no other options.²²

However, beyond the question of who Jesus says He is, we also must wrestle with what the Bible says that means! First, look at this brief survey of prophecies about Jesus:

- Genesis 3:15

²² C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, (Macmillan Publishing, 1943.) pgs. 40-41.

- Isaiah 9:6-7
- Isaiah 53
- Jeremiah 31:31

What do these passages say about the Messiah that is to come?

Finally, look at these two passages:

- Matthew 5:17-20, 38
- Luke 16:16-17

What might these verses mean as we seek to answer the question: What does it mean to say that Jesus is the Christ, Son of the living God? (Matthew 16:16)

Jesus' coming did not simply give us a new unveiling of the law of God, but neither did it abolish it. Rather, to confess that Jesus is Lord must also mean that He has kept the law perfectly on our behalf (Hebrews 4:15), that He has been made a sacrifice for us bearing our sin (1 John 2:2), that He gives us both new life and His righteousness (2 Corinthians 5:17 and 21), and that He invites us into real, abundant life! (John 10:10, 14:6) *This* Jesus changes everything!

Application:

- Is your "verbal and intellectual" answer to who Jesus is different than your "experiential" answer? Why or why not?
- What things compete with my affection for Jesus? Do you honestly have affection for Him? Why or why not?

The Word, the Law, and the Prophets

Have you ever said something, and then immediately known that you shouldn't have said it? Peter, the most vocal of Jesus' disciples, did it all of the time! I've often referred to Peter as "the guy with the foot-shaped mouth" because he so often put his metaphorical "foot in his mouth"!

The passage for this week contains two such times where Peter spoke and then wished he hadn't. The first one (Matthew 16:22) was a case of pure ignorance. Peter truly believed that, while he confessed Jesus as Lord, He was wrong about needing to die.

However, the other comment bears some investigation: Why was it such a big deal? It comes in the midst of a very mysterious event in Jesus' life, one that was recorded in three of the four gospels. Read each account:

- Matthew 17:1-13
- Mark 9:2-13
- Luke 9:28-36

Write your own summary of this event based on all three gospel accounts:

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All three gospel writers place this event immediately following the account of Peter's confession of Jesus as the Son of God, which is also a clue to understanding exactly what's happening and why. What did Peter say that evoked the rebuke from God the Father? (Matthew 17:4)

There are at least four aspects in which Peter's statement was the "wrong" thing to say. Think about the following questions, and see if you can determine them:

- "It's good that we are here." Better than where?
- "Let's make three tents..." Are the men in this passage all equals?
- G. Campbell Morgan speculates that the transfiguration of Jesus was God's original plan for man at the end of earthly life—since death came through sin, Jesus didn't need to die. He was "metamorphosing" and could have left the earth at that point.²³ What would happen then?
- Finally, and most practically, read Mark 9:6. What was the motivation for Peter speaking?

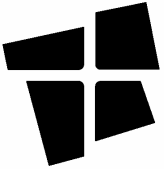
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If Jesus is truly who He says He is, we should probably listen more often than speak, particularly if we don't have anything to say! (See Ecclesiastes 5;1-2)

Application:

- Is there an area of your life where you tend to speak when you should rather be listening? What can you do to listen more effectively?

²³ G. Campbell Morgan, *The Gospel According to Luke* (Revell, New York, NY, 1931). pgs. 126-127.



True Lordship
Matthew 16:13 – 17:8

Sermon Notes:

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LIFE Group Facilitation Sheet

Welcome one another in Jesus' name!

Icebreaker: "What's your favorite thing about spring?"

Worship Jesus through Scripture, music, singing, and prayer. Be creative! Invite Him to the center of your gathering.

Word: Matthew 16:13 – 17:8

- How is Jesus working in your life right now?
- Has anything specific jumped out to you, either in this passage or in the study guide this week? Are you doing an experiment, and if so, how is it going?
- Who do you say that Jesus is?
- Is your "verbal and intellectual" answer to who Jesus is different than your "experiential" answer? Why or why not?
- In what area of your life do you confess that Jesus is Lord, but still think that He might be wrong?
- Is there an area of your life where you tend to speak when you should be listening?
- What can you do to listen more effectively?
- What else in life competes for your affection toward Jesus?
- What's one practical thing that you can do in your life to obey what Jesus is teaching in this passage? What about us as a group?

Works: Pray very specifically for those in your life with whom you come into regular contact. Pray that the transformation of your life would be a reflection of the person of Jesus to them. Determine one person over the course of Lenten season that you will specifically pray for, and ask God for opportunity to connect them to this community, to talk with them about the things that are happening in your faith, and to engage them about where they are in their faith. Trust God to do this!

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Week Four:
Abiding in the Vine

John 15:1-11

Jesus makes it clear that He is the only source of life and fruitfulness. Living in Him requires intentional pruning and the willingness to connect all of my life to His life. The clear indication as to whether or not we are abiding in Him is our fruitfulness--in Him, our lives *will* bear fruit.

Old Eyes Made New

Turn to John 15:1-11. Before you begin to read, either pray this prayer, or something similar:

Jesus, I come to Your Word because I want to follow You. I believe that You are the best Way for me to live, the Fount of all that is True, and the only place that I can find real Life. As I read Your Word, please send the Holy Spirit to enlighten my eyes. Allow me to engage this account as if for the first time. Show me the details that are important for me to see, give me insight into what these truths mean for my life, and then give me the grace and courage to live them out in faith, for Your glory and honor. In Jesus' Name, amen.

Now, read the passage three times, slowly. Take note of details that you see and the heart behind Jesus' words.

- Who is the audience to which Jesus is speaking?
- What other details might be important to understand this teaching? What other characters are involved?
- What are the key messages that this passage is seeking to convey?

- How does this truth apply to me today? How does it apply to the church?
How does it apply to the world?

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Application:

- What jumps out to you in this passage? Why?

- Of all that is being taught in this passage, what's one practical thing that you can do in your life to obey?

I AM...

One of the most profound characteristics of the Gospel of John is the “I am” statements that Jesus makes again and again. In these statements, we have a declaration of Jesus’ purpose for coming, an explanation of His work, and His promises to each of us.

Look up the following statements. Who or what did Jesus claim to be, and what promise did He make along with that claim?

<u>Verse</u>	<u>I am...</u>	<u>Promise</u>
John 6:35		
John 8:12		
John 10:9		
John 10:11		
John 11:25		
John 14:6		
John 15:5		

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Now, read back over the promises of Jesus. If He truly is who He says He is, list in your own words what the *practical implications* are for you in your life as a follower of Jesus:

Now, go back and circle any of those things that you struggle to see happen in your life. Read John 15:4. What are we called to do in order to see “fruit”?

Depending on the translation you’re using, the word may be different—it’s often translated either “abide” or “remain.” The Greek word is *meno* and it means to “remain, abide, tarry not depart, to continue to be present, to be held, to be kept, to endure.” (Thayer’s) What does it look like to *meno* in Christ for you in your daily life?

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Application:

- Where do you long to see the promises of Jesus realized in your life?

- What gets in the way of truly abiding in Christ?

Pruning for Fruitfulness

While I'm far from a viticulturalist (yes, that's one who studies and develops vines... I had to look it up too!), I do have some basic understanding of the way vines grow and produce fruit. In order for growth to occur and real fruit to be produced, vineyards must be both *weeded* and *pruned*.

The process of weeding is one that makes perfect sense to us. We are called to aggressively root out anything that is opposed to Jesus growing in our lives. The Puritans called this process "mortification," and Paul clearly calls us to this weeding process in Colossians 3:5-10. As you read this passage, what are some of the things that need to be "weeded out" of your life?

Fruitfulness, however, is not only held back by weeds. There are times that vines must be *pruned* as well. Pruning is more difficult, because it's not the bad things (that which is opposed to God) that are removed, but the *good* things that aren't the *best* things. Jesus speaks to this in John 15:2. What are some of the good things that may need to be pruned out of your life, either for a season, or for good?

Interestingly, in viticulture, vines that aren't pruned regularly with a focus on fruitfulness will grow large and thick, and all of the nutrients that are meant to produce fruit are used to simply keep the vine alive. How does this parallel the life of a Christian or the life of a church?

When proper weeding and pruning happens, and we abide in Christ (see the “I AM...” study from this week), Jesus promises that three things will come. What are they?

- John 15:5

What does that fruit look like? See Galatians 5:22-23.

- John 15:7

What are our desires when we abide in Him? See 1 John 5:14-15.

- John 15:11

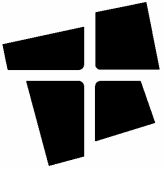
According to Jesus' own life, are joy and happiness the same thing? See Luke 22:41-44 and Hebrews 12:2.

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Application:

- In your life, what stops you from either weeding or pruning effectively?

- Are you willing for others to have input into the “pruning” process of your life? Why or why not? What value might that have?



Abiding in the Vine
John 15:1-11

Sermon Notes:

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LIFE Group Facilitation Sheet

Welcome one another in Jesus' name!

Icebreaker: "If you had a completely free afternoon, what would you like to do?"

Worship Jesus through Scripture, music, singing, and prayer. Be creative! Invite Him to the center of your gathering.

Word: John 15:1-11

- How is Jesus working in your life right now?
- Has anything specific jumped out to you, either in this passage or in the study guide this week? Are you doing an experiment, and if so, how is it going?
- Where do you long to see the "I am" promises of Jesus realized in your life?
- What gets in the way of truly abiding in Christ?
- What are some things that currently need to be "weeded" out of your life? What are some things that need to be "pruned" out?
- What stops you from "weeding out" things in your life? What stops you from being effectively pruned?
- Are you willing for others to have input into the "pruning" process of your life? Why or why not? What value might that have?
- Of all that is being taught in this passage, what's one practical thing that you can do in your life to obey? In your group?

Works: Pray very specifically for those in your life with whom you come into regular contact. Pray that the transformation of your life would be a reflection of the person of Jesus to them. Determine one person over the course of Lenten season that you will specifically pray for, and ask God for opportunity to connect them to this community, to talk with them about the things that are happening in your faith, and to engage them about where they are in their faith. Trust God to do this!

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Week Five:
Love One Another

John 15:12-17

Community is a great gift given by God for our good. It's also a discipline commanded by God for His glory. Love for one another must be sacrificial and obedient and, ultimately, it relies upon Jesus, not on us. It is by grace we've been saved—it's also by grace we've been made into a community. However, community must never be seen as the *end* but, rather, we must see our community as a *means* to accomplish the mission God has given us.

Old Eyes Made New

Turn to John 15:12-17. Before you begin to read, either pray this prayer, or something similar:

Jesus, I come to Your Word because I want to follow You. I believe that You are the best Way for me to live, the Fount of all that is True, and the only place that I can find real Life. As I read Your Word, please send the Holy Spirit to enlighten my eyes. Allow me to engage this account as if for the first time. Show me the details that are important for me to see, give me insight into what these truths mean for my life, and then give me the grace and courage to live them out in faith, for Your glory and honor. In Jesus' Name, amen.

Now, read the passage three times, slowly. Take note of details that you see and of the heart behind Jesus' words.

- Who is the audience to which Jesus is speaking?
- What other details might be important to understand this teaching? What other characters are involved?
- What are the key messages that this passage is seeking to convey?

- How does this truth apply to me today? How does it apply to the church?
How does it apply to the world?

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Application:

- What jumps out to you in this passage? Why?

- In your life journey, what's one practical thing that you can do to obey what Jesus is teaching in this passage?

Love that Proves Jesus

There are many groups of people that have clear, external indications as to who they are. Policemen dress a certain way and drive specific vehicles. Priests wear collars. Judges wear robes. Amish people are distinguished both by dress and behavior. Certainly the list could go on from there....

A few years ago, recording artist Derek Webb released a song speculating what the indicators of Christ are among Christians to the outside world. Here are a few of the lines from this challenging rebuke:

“They’ll know us by the t-shirts that we wear
they’ll know us by the way we point and stare...
they’ll know us by our picket lines and signs
they’ll know us by the pride we hide behind...
they’ll know us by the billboards that we make
just turning God’s words to cheap clichés...
they’ll know us by reasons we divide
and how we can’t seem to unify
because we’ve gotta sing songs a certain style
or we’ll walk right down that aisle
and just leave ‘em all behind...”²⁴

Sadly, while this may have some practical truth to it, Jesus made it clear that, indeed, there should be an external indicator of His presence within our community. Read John 13:34-35.

- What is supposed to display that fact that we are Jesus’ disciples?

Webb responds: “Love, love, love / is what we should be known for / love, love, love / it’s the how and it’s the why / we live and breathe and we die.”²⁵

The Bible has several very famous descriptions of what love for one another will practically look like. Read the following passages, and write down what you think the writers are trying to communicate about love:

²⁴ Derek Webb, *T-Shirts* from the album *I See Things Upside Down*, (Sony, 2004).

²⁵ Ibid.

- 1 Corinthians 13

- 1 John 4:7-21

- John 15:12-17

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As you look at this list, can you see the action of Jesus towards you? In the same way, we are called to love one another. (John 15:12)

Application:

- What are some practical ways that you *receive* the love of Jesus from others?

- In what ways do you struggle to show the love of Christ to the world around you?

A Kingdom Community

Community is quite a “buzz word” in the world today. Leaders, both in the “secular” world and within the church, have recognized the deep need that we have for belongingness to one another. However, despite that longing in our hearts, our society is increasingly fragmented. Harvard sociology professor Robert Putnam, standing on a mountain of statistics and analysis, states:

“Years ago, thousands of people belonged to bowling leagues. Today, however, they’re more likely to bowl alone: television, two-career families, suburban sprawl, generational changes in values--these and other changes in American society have meant that fewer and fewer of us find that the League of Women Voters, or the United Way, or the Shriners, or the monthly bridge club, or even a Sunday picnic with friends fits the way we have come to live. Our growing social-capital deficit threatens educational performance, safe neighborhoods, equitable tax collection, democratic responsiveness, everyday honesty, and even our health and happiness.”²⁶

However, beyond the social connection that has now and then been a part of society, there is a calling on the people of God to be an active community that embodies the love of Jesus. In these six short verses, Jesus defines for His disciples what this community is to look like.

Read the following verses from John 15, and then answer the questions:

- Vs. 12 – Where does the love we show to one another come from?
- Vs. 13 – What is the mark of true love between people?
- Vs. 14 – How is our love for Jesus shown?

²⁶ Robert Putnam, *Bowling Alone*, (Simon & Schuster, New York, NY, 2001).

- Vs. 15 – What level of connection is normative for those who are connected to Jesus?
- Vs. 16 – What is the purpose of the community into which we are called?

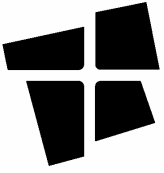
What is the practical difference between “having the mission of community” and “being a community on mission”?

- Vs. 17 – Do sacrifice, obedience, intimacy, and mission *flow out of* our community or do they *create* that community?

The question with verse 17 is a bit of a trick question! According to Jesus, the answer is “yes!” These values are inherent in the kingdom community of disciples and, therefore, flow out of it. However, they are also commanded of us because, when they are practiced, our love for one another grows!

Application:

- Which kingdom value is most evident in your community: sacrifice, obedience, intimacy, or mission? Which is most absent?
- Does the community of faith to which you are connected look different than the community that is typically seen in the world? Why or why not?



Love One Another
John 15:12-17

Sermon Notes:

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LIFE Group Facilitation Sheet

Welcome one another in Jesus' name!

Icebreaker: "If we could travel somewhere together as a LIFE group, where would you want to go?"

Worship Jesus through Scripture, music, singing, and prayer. Be creative! Invite Him to the center of your gathering.

Word: John 15:12-17

- How is Jesus working in your life right now?
- Has anything specific jumped out to you, either in this passage or in the study guide this week? Are you doing an experiment, and if so, how is it going?
- What are some practical ways that you *receive* the love of Jesus from others? That you *give* that love away?
- In what ways do you struggle to show the love of Christ to the world around you? For you, are there certain kinds of people that are more difficult to love than others?
- Do you think the love of Jesus is seen in your family? Why or why not?
- Which kingdom value is most evident in this LIFE group: sacrifice, obedience, intimacy, or mission? Which is most absent?
- Does this LIFE group look different than the typical community that would be seen in the world? Why or why not?
- What's one practical thing that you can do in your life to obey what Jesus is teaching in this passage? What about us as a group?

Works: Pray very specifically for those in your life with whom you come into regular contact. Pray that the transformation of your life would be a reflection of the person of Jesus to them. Determine one person over the course of Lenten season that you will specifically pray for, and ask God for opportunity to connect them to this community, to talk with them about the things that are happening in your faith, and to engage them about where they are in their faith. Trust God to do this!

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Week Six:
Carrying the Cross

Luke 14:26-33

Salvation is the free gift of life that costs us everything that we have. It was for the joy set before Jesus that He endured the cross—and it's for the glory of God and our greater joy that we also endure the cross. The cross of Jesus clearly tells us that the cross we bear is the love and mercy of our Father.

Old Eyes Made New

Turn to Luke 14:26-33. Before you begin to read, either pray this prayer, or something similar:

Jesus, I come to Your Word because I want to follow You. I believe that You are the best Way for me to live, the Fount of all that is True, and the only place that I can find real Life. As I read Your Word, please send the Holy Spirit to enlighten my eyes. Allow me to engage this account as if for the first time. Show me the details that are important for me to see, give me insight into what these truths mean for my life, and then give me the grace and courage to live them out in faith, for Your glory and honor. In Jesus' Name, amen.

Now, read the passage three times, slowly. Take note of details that you see and the heart behind Jesus' words.

- Who is the audience to which Jesus is speaking?

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- What other details might be important to understand this teaching? What other characters are involved?

Conditional Discipleship

Perhaps Dietrich Bonhoeffer's greatest contribution to the modern understanding of Christianity is his book The Cost of Discipleship. In it, he attacks the idea that, because grace is freely given to us by Jesus, it isn't supposed to cost us anything. He calls this idea "cheap grace":

"Cheap grace is the grace we bestow on ourselves. Cheap grace is the preaching of forgiveness without requiring repentance, baptism without church discipline, Communion without confession.... Cheap grace is grace without discipleship, grace without the cross, grace without Jesus Christ, living and incarnate."²⁷

Later in the book, he summarizes: "Discipleship is not an offer that man makes to Christ."²⁸ What, then, *is* discipleship?

In this passage, Jesus gives us clear conditions for what it means to be a disciple of His. However, in order to understand the conditions, we also have to get at the motivations behind discipleship as well. Jesus lists three conditions for discipleship in Luke 14: 26, 27, and 33. What are they?

1.

2.

3.

Obviously, these are tough conditions! Bonhoeffer, again, says it like this: "When Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die."²⁹ But what is at the heart of what He's asking of us?

How to hate my family and my own life

- Read Luke 14:31-32. What metaphor does Jesus use?

²⁷ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship* (Touchstone, New York, NY, 1995.) pgs. 44-45

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid.

- When a soldier goes off to war, he or she goes with joy and camaraderie, but obviously risks complete disconnection from family and death. Why, then, do they go? How does this relate to being a disciple?

How to bear our own cross

- Our cross must be interpreted through Jesus' cross. Therefore, we mustn't see "our cross" as personal suffering alone, which is often self-focused. Rather, a "cross" is suffered "vicariously...our suffering is sympathy with others...strength being poured out in order to help others."³⁰ What might this look like for a disciple of Jesus?

Giving it all for the sake of the Kingdom

- Read Luke 14:28-30. What metaphor does Jesus use here?
- Now, read Matthew 13:45-46. What metaphor does Jesus use here?
- If our "all" is compared to building supplies or funds for an invaluable pearl, how would you describe "renouncing all we have"?

Application:

- Which of these three conditions seems the most difficult for you? Why do you think that is?

³⁰ G. Campbell Morgan, *The Gospel According to Luke* (Revell, New York, NY, 1931). pgs. 177.

The Builder and the Warrior

Sometimes, just a slight change of perspective makes an incredible difference in what is seen. After living in our current home for a month or two, I remember the first time I approached it from the “other” direction. For various reasons, we nearly always approached from the west, but on that first time we approached it from the east, I was shocked at how different “our” house looked!

Re-read the central portion of this week’s passage—Luke 14:28-32. Many translations will add the transitional word “for” at the beginning of vs. 28 (ESV, NASB, KJV). The New Living Translation even adds the sentence: “But don’t begin until you count the cost.” However, none of that language is present in the original text. It simply begins: “Which of you...”, and Jesus gives two common scenarios that His listeners might have been faced with.

For most of us, we have always read this text as Jesus telling us that we should count the cost, as though we are a builder or a king. Is following Jesus worth it? Will we be willing to follow through to the end?

But what if our perspective changes? G. Campbell Morgan, the great British preacher and Bible expositor from the early 1900’s, makes the case that Jesus was asking His disciples to do nothing of the kind! Rather, “He was telling them that *He* had to count the cost. He is the Builder. He is the Warrior King.”³¹ (italics added)

- Re-read this passage from that perspective. How does that change the way that you see it?

- Why would Jesus tell the crowd, after laying out such difficult conditions, that *He* needed to count the cost?

³¹ G. Campbell Morgan, *The Gospel According to Luke* (Revell, New York, NY, 1931). pgs. 178.

“He said...that is why the terms are severe. That is why you cannot be My disciple save on fulfillment of these conditions. It was as though He said: I am in the world for building and battle, therefore I have to reckon upon the quality of My workmen and My soldiers.”³²

- Read Judges 7:1-23. How does this narrative parallel Jesus call to discipleship? Look at Matthew 7:13-14. Do you see the connection?

Now, read the continuation of the story in Luke 15:1-2.

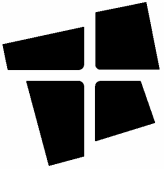
- Which group of people listened closely and which group objected to His teaching?
- Why do you think those who are blatantly sinful responded more readily to this teaching of Jesus?

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Application:

- What are things in your life that, by holding onto them, you could slow, or even stop, the transformational work of Jesus in you?
- Do you feel desperate and willing to change enough to respond to this radical teaching of Jesus? How can you keep your heart in that position?

³² Ibid.



Carrying the Cross
Luke 14:25-33

Sermon Notes:

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LIFE Group Facilitation Sheet

Welcome one another in Jesus' name!

Icebreaker: "What's the craziest thing that you ever attempted to do?"

Worship Jesus through Scripture, music, singing, and prayer. Be creative! Invite Him to the center of your gathering.

Word: Read Luke 14:25-33

- How is Jesus working in your life right now?
- Has anything specific jumped out to you, either in this passage or in the study guide this week? Are you doing an experiment, and if so, how is it going?
- Do you see discipleship as easy or difficult? Why?
- What are you tempted to have higher loyalty to and affection for than your affection and loyalty toward Jesus?
- Can you think of a time that you've suffered on behalf of someone else? What would that kind of "cross" look like in your life?
- What are things in your life that, by holding onto them, you could slow or even stop the transformational work of Jesus?
- What are some ways that we maintain an awareness of our desperate need for Jesus?
- What's one practical thing that you can do in your life to obey what Jesus is teaching in this passage? What about us as a group?

Works: Pray very specifically for those in your life with whom you come into regular contact. Pray that the transformation of your life would be a reflection of the person of Jesus to them. Determine one person over the course of Lenten season that you will specifically pray for, and ask God for opportunity to connect them to this community, to talk with them about the things that are happening in your faith, and to engage them about where they are in their faith. Only a week left! Trust God to do this!

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Week Seven:
New Abundant Life
John 10:7-18

Abundant life is available to all who will come. Jesus declares that He is the entryway to that life, the guide for that life, and the sacrifice that makes such life possible. Only in Jesus will we find real, abundant life.

Old Eyes Made New

Turn to John 10:7-18. Before you begin to read, either pray this prayer, or something similar:

Jesus, I come to Your Word because I want to follow You. I believe that You are the best Way for me to live, the Fount of all that is True, and the only place that I can find real Life. As I read Your Word, please send the Holy Spirit to enlighten my eyes. Allow me to engage this account as if for the first time. Show me the details that are important for me to see, give me insight into what these truths mean for my life, and then give me the grace and courage to live them out in faith, for Your glory and honor. In Jesus' Name, amen.

Now, read the passage three times, slowly. Take note of details that you see and the heart behind Jesus' words.

- Who is the audience to which Jesus is speaking?

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- What other details might be important to understand this teaching? What other characters are involved?

- What are the key messages that this passage is seeking to convey?

- How does this truth apply to me today? How does it apply to the church?
How does it apply to the world?

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Application:

- What jumps out to you in this passage? Why?

- In your life journey, what's one practical thing that you can do to obey what Jesus is teaching in this passage?

The Door

Back in Week Four, we looked at the “I am” declarations of Jesus, two of which are found in this week’s passage. If you didn’t complete that study, you are encouraged to go back and do it first before you complete this one or the next. You can find the study on pgs. 58-59 of this study guide.

In John 10:7-9, Jesus declares that He is the “door.” Think about that concept for a minute.

- What are doors used for? Where are they found?

This “I am” declaration of Jesus is only similar to one of the tri-fold declarations of John 14:6 (the “Way”) in that it connotes movement. Doors are meaningless unless you pass through them, and can’t do that without moving from one place to another.

Read John 10:9-10 again. What does Jesus say will happen through Him after salvation? What might that look like?

In the past century, there have been many voices bemoaning a “Christianity” without discipleship—without movement. Consider the challenges in these quotes:

- “This bond [between belief, discipleship, and missional involvement] cannot merely involve a cerebral, objective, indirect understanding of Jesus... This substitution of thinking about Jesus for existential encounter with Jesus is a constant temptation for the follower.”³³
- “One is not required to be, or to intend to be, a disciple in order to become a Christian, and one may remain a Christian without any signs of progress

³³ Michael Frost and Alan Hirsch, *ReJesus: A Wild Messiah for a Missional Church*, (Hendrickson, Peabody, MA, 2009.), pg. 50.

toward or in discipleship... Most problems in contemporary churches can be explained by the fact that members have not yet decided to follow Christ."³⁴

- "Christianity without the *living* Christ is inevitably Christianity without discipleship, and Christianity without discipleship is always Christianity without Christ."³⁵ (italics added)

The question with which we are then faced is "What does Jesus Himself say our discipleship should look like?" Consider the following:

- Matthew 28:18-20
- Luke 10:1-12
- John 13:13-17
- John 14:12-14

Based on just these few texts, how would you describe *Jesus'* view of what the life of a Christian should look like?

Action seems to be an integral part of being a disciple of Jesus. The question then is.... "Are we moving?"

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Application:

- What stands in the way of your life as a disciple who is pursuing the life to which Jesus seems to call His followers?

- Jesus claims to be the "Door" that leads to salvation, rest, and abundant life. Think about the things that stand in the way (which you listed above). What are you hoping to receive from those things?

³⁴ Dallas Willard, *Spirit of the Disciplines*, (Harper & Row, San Francisco, CA, 1988.), pgs. 258-259

³⁵ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, quoted in Michael Frost and Alan Hirsch, *ReJesus: A Wild Messiah for a Missional Church*, (Hendrickson, Peabody, MA, 2009.), pg. 51.

The Good Shepherd

Over time, much has been said about the image of Jesus as “the Shepherd” of the sheep. It’s a wonderful and compelling picture of care and sacrificial love. While it may not be the sole meaning of that metaphor,³⁶ it’s certainly a portion of what Jesus intended.

Psalm 23 has, over time, been among the most loved poetic expressions of the love and care of God for His people. Take some time to carefully read through that familiar Psalm.

- Each line makes a simple declaration of what the work of God practically does in the life of a believer. Using the phrases of this Psalm, create a list in your own words of the *effect* of God as Shepherd:

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³⁶ See G. Campbell Morgan, *The Gospel According to John* (Revell, New York, NY, circa 1931). pgs. 173 for a treatment of shepherd as king in Eastern thought and language.

- As you look over this list, can you see how Jesus embodies these actions in the life of the disciple? Circle those aspects that you have personally experienced.

Now, go back to John 10. Beginning in vs. 15, Jesus changes the tone of this metaphor for the next several verses.

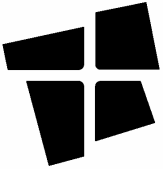
- What's the change?

- How does Jesus laying His life down relate to the roles that you've circled on the last page?

- One of the roles of a shepherd is that he acts as a guide for the sheep, leading them in the right paths. We see this in Psalm 23—and also in John 10. According to vs. 10, what's the path on which Jesus leads us?

Application:

- Are you able to trust in Jesus as the Good Shepherd? Are there reasons that you hesitate to fully trust? How should you respond to those reasons?



New Abundant Life
John 10:7-18

Sermon Notes:

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LIFE Group Facilitation Sheet

Welcome one another in Jesus' name!

Icebreaker: "What's your favorite Easter tradition?"

Worship Jesus through Scripture, music, singing, and prayer. Be creative! Invite Him to the center of your gathering.

Word: Read John 10:7-18

- How is Jesus working in your life right now?
- Has anything specific jumped out to you, either in this passage or in the study guide this week? Are you doing an experiment, and if so, how is it going?
- Would you say that your life is "abundant"? Why or why not?
- Do you view God as being concerned about your joy, or do see Him as opposed to your joy?
- As you think about the descriptions that Jesus gave of the active life of His disciples, does your life resemble those descriptions? What stands in the way?
- Where do you tend to go or what do you tend to do that you hope will bring you joy?
- Are you able to trust Jesus as the Good Shepherd? Why or why not?
- Does this community add to, have no effect on, or detract from the joy that you have in Christ? Why? Do those people in your life, who are *not* a part of this group, know that? Why or why not?
- What's one practical thing that you can do in your life to obey what Jesus is teaching in this passage? What about us as a group?

Works: Over the course of the Lenten season, you should have been praying very specifically for a specific person in your life. Take time to talk about the way that you did or didn't see God work in that relationship over the past six weeks. Where does it go from here? Ask God to give you a connection to someone who is *skeptical* about faith that you could build a relationship with in the coming months, and try to understand their point of view. Pray that God would bless their life!

Note: Please check the website for
any announcements and upcoming events!
www.yorkalliance.org

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Recommended

We are blessed to live in a time where there are literally *countless* books being published each year, and information abounds regarding who Jesus is and how we can follow Him. A major concern, however, is that we will read all *about* following Jesus, but never actually get around to doing it. To that end, feel free to disregard the following list in favor of real action!

Many of us, however, will desire to continue to read on this subject, both for instruction and for inspiration. Sadly, many of the books that are published, particularly in this area, have somewhat faulty theology and can lead down paths that place the gospel in a peripheral position at best. The following books, from the ancient to the modern, are what I believe to be solid treatments of what it means to be a disciple... according to Jesus.

The Imitation of Christ by Thomas a Kempis

Christian Perfection by Francis Fenelon

The Way of Perfection by Teresa of Avila

The Practice of the Presence of God by Brother Lawrence

A Serious Call to a Devout and Holy Life by William Law

Abide in Christ by Andrew Murray

The Cost of Discipleship by Dietrich Bonhoeffer

Spirit of the Disciplines by Dallas Willard

The Divine Conspiracy by- Dallas Willard

The Jesus Creed by- Scot McKnight

Jesus, Mean and Wild by- Mark Galli

ReJesus by- Michael Frost and Alan Hirsch

Invitation to the Jesus Life by- Jan Johnson

Untamed by- Alan Hirsch and Debra Hirsch

Radical by- David Platt

Radical Together by- David Platt

Seven: An Experimental Mutiny Against Excess by- Jen Hatmaker

Of course, this is in no way a comprehensive list, nor will I go as far as to say I endorse every detail that is written in each of these books. However, I do believe that they together represent a solid, foundational view of what it means to truly pursue Jesus as He calls us. Happy reading!



Acknowledgments

Each time I put the finishing touches on a manuscript and prepare it to go to the printer, I'm overwhelmed with gratitude for so many within the community of faith at York Alliance and beyond who encourage, support, and contribute to these works. I wish I could name you all, but it would take another book! However, let me thank just a few by name as representatives of the rest of you.

First of all, I truly do thank Jesus for the gifting, ability, and facility to be able to put thoughts together and, in reasonably quick fashion, to get them onto paper. While these projects are never easy or fast, they are much easier and faster than they should be. All that comes across good in this study guide, or in anything that I've written, belongs to Him—I'll only take responsibility for the errors! Speaking of errors, there are *far* less of them because of my fantastic editors Tim Shuey and Kimberly Cole. Thank you both for doing so much with the little time I give you before the deadlines... A huge thank you to Amy Thornton for her incredible gifting with graphics and her willingness to use it! The cover concept and design completely belongs to her, and I think it's spectacular. Thanks, Amy!

Thank you to the YAC Elders who give me permission and encouragement to write; you've continued to hold to the vision that God has given us, and I believe that we *will* see fruit. A huge thank you to the YAC Staff who give me the schedule margin and the flexibility to write. Don't worry, guys, I'll be back in the office soon! And thanks to my Tuesday morning group of York area pastors. Many of the ideas contained in this study guide had their beginnings in our discussions, and I'm thankful that we can constantly challenge one another to lead our respective church families toward Jesus.

I've found great joy during this process in the writings of two men at the beginning of two different centuries. Over the last decade, there are very few writers who have seen the intersection of the gospel and the church as clearly as Alan Hirsch, and each of us who picks up one of his books are beneficiaries. However, many of

Hirsh's ideas were alive and well almost a century ago in the preaching and teaching of G. Campbell Morgan; in rediscovering his writings, I've found a great treasury of insight.

As has been tradition, I also want to thank a variety of artists and musicians who've provided an incredible soundtrack for this journey: Josh Garrels (congrats on being awarded Album of the Year by Christianity Today! It's the first time I've agreed with the CT editors in a decade!), Sara Groves, The Lighthouse and the Whaler, Burlap to Cashmere (welcome back!), The David Crowder Band (you'll be missed—great art combined with worship music in the 21st century? Who knew?), Gungor, Young the Giant, Explosions in the Sky, and the timeless Rich Mullins. I'm sure I could have written this without all of your records, but it wouldn't have been so much fun.

Last, but certainly not least, is my incredible family. I hope the process is getting a little less painful with each book! Thank you to Tia, Ethan, Josiah, and Micah for understanding, as best you can, the constant refrain of "Daddy has to work right now...." Don't worry—it's just about time to play! To Amanda... I love you. You're a partner and a helpmate for every project, but something tells me that this one is one that will truly change us both. Thank you for your heart to become more like Jesus yourself, to push me in the same direction, to dream, and to risk. Thank you for forgiving my many failures and for constantly reminding me that Jesus is just as much in the details of life as He is in the big, impossible dream. I pray that this next chapter of life draws us even closer to one another and to our Father... wherever and however He leads.

“Faith today

is treated as something that only *should* make us different,
not that actually *does* or *can* make us different.

In reality we *vainly* struggle against the evils of this world,
wanting to die and go to heaven.

Somehow we’ve gotten the idea that the essence of
faith is entirely a mental and inward thing.”

So Dallas Willard begins his great book *The Spirit of the Disciplines*,
and so many of our lives are accurately described.

What did Jesus actually teach about being His disciple?

It’s in His death and resurrection that we have life.

But what is that life intended to look like?

During this seven week Lenten and Easter study, we will examine a series
of Jesus’ actual teachings. As we do, we’ll seek to dig under the surface
and push aside the preconceptions to get to the heart of the question:

What does it really mean to follow this radical Rabbi from Nazareth?

In addition to studies, six “faith experiments” are included and described
in detail. What would it look like if we took just one of these teachings of
Jesus and put it into practice for six weeks? Participants are challenged
to engage in not just mental and inward discipline of study, but in the
physical and outward discipline of action as well. Along with a like-minded
community of faith, you’ll be asked to choose an experiment, engage that
experiment for six weeks, discuss the process and the results with that
community—and when it’s over, .

you’ll never be the same.

“***Come follow me,***” Jesus says to us,
and He proceeds to teach us what it’s like to live in the Kingdom of
God that is already here as we wait for the coming Kingdom.

That’s discipleship... according to Jesus.