

Strangers in a Strange Land

April 23, 2017

To KNOW Christ and one another more deeply,
To CARE for one another in truth and in love,
To GROW as followers of Jesus.
- CG Mission Statement

Worship: Psalm 103

(Here is a passage to help your group as you worship. You can go through it together or in groups in meditation and/or in prayer)

Read Psalm 103 using the prayer practice of Lectio Divina. Read the passage aloud 3 times. After each reading, spend a few minutes reflecting. After the first reading, open yourself to the presence of God. On the second reading, listen for a certain word or phrase that stands out to you. On the third reading, listen to what God's invitation might be for you.

Icebreaker

Do you remember a time growing up when your parents gave you a new degree of freedom? How did you respond?

Text for Discussion: I Peter 2:11-17

Turn in your Bibles and read this passage aloud together.

Aid for Discussion: Sermon Summary

As followers of Christ, we are resident aliens in this world. For some, our hearts feel the weight of this, making it difficult to live as God calls us to. Others of us have the opposite problem: we love this world too much. We've embraced its pleasures, and any thought of our True Home has drifted from our mind. How then can we avoid both hatred of the world and improperly loving it? How do we live the good and beautiful life?

Abstain – If we fall too deeply in love with this world, we will forget our mission. As God's beloved, we are to abstain from the passions of the flesh: anything causing us to live for ourselves instead of Jesus. Even living morally and for very good things is a life of fleshly passion if we live it for ourselves. But Jesus now defines us. This frees us from anxiety, people-pleasing, and using (or abusing) others for personal gain. Our lives must therefore look different from the world, marked and defined by the love of Christ.

Honor – Martin Luther said, "The Christian is the freest of all and the slave of none, but the Christian in Jesus Christ is prepared to be bound to all and the servant of everyone." We must submit to and respect all those who have authority over us, even when they don't deserve it. This is a broad and comprehensive command, and Peter knows it means honoring sinful, broken people (just as we are). But we do this for the Lord's sake, because when we honor those over us, we honor God for it is He who gave them their authority. This doesn't mean we don't rightly oppose those in authority when appropriate. We must honor our leaders while also standing against injustice and opposing evil in every form.

Love – Love is to be our defining mark as Christians – our love for God, His people, our neighbors, as well as for every image bearer who walks the earth. This can feel impossible, and our struggle to love others is only compounded by our struggle to believe that we are loved. We are God's beloved children, and it is His deep, unwavering love which frees us to truly love and serve others. It releases us from chasing other idols that will never satisfy our deepest longings. It fills us and reminds us who we are and where we are going. When God's love defines our lives, it can be spread through us into the world. Every interaction and relationship is to be marked by God's love, showing others that we are different. For when our hearts are set free by Jesus Christ, we truly begin to live the good and beautiful life.

Guiding Question of the Week

(This question is intended as a target for the whole conversation. Do not ask for responses now. It will be repeated later in the study.)

How do you live as a sojourner in a foreign land?

Questions for Discussion

(Remember it is better to wrestle deeply with two good questions than gloss over many. Sub-bullets are intended for potential follow-up.)

- 1) Read I Peter 2:11-17. What stands out to you?
- 2) Many times, our motivations to “abstain” are negative. Where in scripture and in your own life have you seen positive motivations to abstain? (Hint: Matthew 5:8 is a good example).
 - What makes a positive motivation more effective than a negative one?
- 3) **Guiding Question: How do you live as a sojourner in a foreign land?**
 - How can we live in the world but not of the world (John 17: 14-15)?
- 4) What does it mean to you to honor everyone?
 - How can you honor an authority you don’t agree with?
- 5) Have you ever had an experience where you have really **felt** God’s love? Spend some time as a group sharing those stories as a way of encouraging one another **to love because they are loved**.

Experiment

Look for an experience of God's love this week - a specific moment when you can FEEL his love for you. Write one paragraph about it before you go to bed that night, and bring it with you to read to the group next week.

Praying for One Another

(Here are some ideas from the study to help focus your time in prayer as a group. Use by themselves or along with other prayer requests.)

- Thank God for His goodness and for His love.
- Pray that we would love the city of Los Angeles and the people of it.
- Pray that we would show the world that we are Christians by our love.