

Are You Prepared to Make a Defense?

April 30, 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: Oh Love that Will Not Let Me Go by George Matheson

(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)

VERSE 1

O Love that will not let me go,
I rest my weary soul in thee;
I give Thee back the life I owe,
That in Thine ocean depths its flow
May richer, fuller be.

VERSE 2

O Light that follows all my way,
I yield my flickering touch to thee;
My heart restores its borrowed ray,
That in Thy sunshine's blaze its day
May brighter, fairer be.

VERSE 3

O Joy that seekest me through pain,
I cannot close my heart to thee;
I trace the rainbow through the rain,
And feel the promise is not vain;
The morn shall tearless be.

VERSE 4

O Cross that liftest up my head,
I dare not ask to fly from thee;
I lay in dust life's glory dead,
And from the ground there blossoms red
Life that shall endless be.

Icebreaker

Did you have a best friend (close friend) growing up? What were some characteristics of your friend?

Text for Discussion: I Peter 3:8-9, 13-18

Turn in your Bibles and read this passage aloud together.

Aid for Discussion: Sermon Summary

An essential way we show we have found new life in Christ is through our relationships. Peter calls us to live with humble minds, tender hearts, brotherly love, sympathy, and unity of mind. This is a lofty calling but our experience is too often the opposite. We follow a Man who was crucified so that we could be reconciled to Him, yet we have a shallow view of community; we give up on it too easily. We expect relationships should be easier than they are; we grow disillusioned and give up at the very moment should persevere. We approach the world with hard hearts and thin skin when the Gospel calls us to the opposite. Why? Why don't we bless those who curse us? Why don't we pray for those who abuse us (Luke 6:28)?

Relationships are central to the Bible and essential to our lives as Christians, yet we've lost sight of the truth that each of us is a victim *and* a victimizer. If we would only decriminalize the "other", putting ourselves in their shoes, we might have sympathy for them. We could then remember the truth that good and evil resides in every heart, especially our own. With a healthier view of our own desperate need for grace, we approach the world with a tender heart and humble mind, for nothing makes us more patient and merciful with the faults of others than first seeing our own.

This doesn't mean our relationships will be without conflict. Nor will our lives be free of suffering or abuse. How then are we to handle adversity as Christians? Peter's charge to "suffer for righteousness' sake" and to "have no fear of them, nor be troubled," seems unrealistic to us, even today. So how could he say this when his fellow believers were being brutally tortured and killed for their faith? Because Peter's hope and heart were set fully on Christ, for if the center of our being cares most about how Jesus sees us, then such suffering only leads us home to Him.

Peter also desires for us to be prepared to defend our faith. To do so, we must first be wholly invested in this hope, fully aware that it is truly a matter of life and death. When our need for God has reached these depths, we can't help but explore the questions we have about our faith. It is good to wrestle with these questions, for we *must* know what we believe and why we believe it. Then when asked about our beliefs, we can respond with gentleness and respect, even in the most abrasive of circumstances.

Our righteous Savior suffered for our sins, with immeasurable sympathy so that He might bring us to God. This is our hope and our reward. To be in the presence of our loving Father is what we were made for. If that is where our hope is set, the worst that can happen to us can only open the door to the greatest thing we've ever wanted. And because Jesus has already defeated the forces of evil, we will be blessed and bless others when we respond to conflict with kindness and to adversity with a tender heart and humble mind.

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 your life in community?

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 3:8-9, 13-18. What stands out to you?
- 2) How have you experienced Christian community in the past?
 - Peter states in vs. 8 that Christian community should consist of unity of mind, sympathy, brotherly love, a tender heart and a humble mind. What characteristic/s come easily to you? Which ones are more challenging? Why?
- 3) How do you navigate conflict?
 - What does it look like to “bless those who curse you”? Have you ever experienced that?
 - Are you giving relationships priority in your life?
- 4) How do you handle adversity in your life?
 - Have you ever suffered for doing good? What did you learn from that experience?
- 5) How can we as a community group emulate the 6 characteristics in 1 Peter 3:8?

Reflection

As the Spring semester comes to a close, take some time to reflect on the past semester and look forward to the second half of the year.

- What are some highlights from this semester? What are some things you can celebrate as a group?
- What are some things that you would like to see for the second half of the year? What will need to happen to get there?

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.