

To KNOW Christ and one another more deeply,
To CARE for one another in truth and in love,
To GROW as followers of Jesus,
To SERVE those God has placed in our path.
- CG Mission Statement

Worship: Psalm 34:4-7

(Here is a psalm/song to help your group as you worship)

Practice lectio divina (sacred reading) by attentively reading Psalm 34:4-7 aloud several times. Enter into a time of worship through prayer by using a word or a phrase from the passage.

Icebreaker

Share a song that you have had in your head over the past 24 hours.

Text for Discussion: Judges 6:11-16, 25-27; 7:1-7, 16-18

Turn in your Bibles and read this passage aloud together.

Aid for Discussion: Sermon Summary

Our loving God promises that He is with us, even though we may not feel it – even though we may be skeptical or unsure if we want it. But how do we know we have the presence of God in our lives? How do we identify it?

Why the presence of God will come to us. The reason God enters our lives has nothing to do with whether we long for Him or pursue Him. Nor is it contingent on whether things are going well in our lives. To think so would dangerously deflate us (*thinking we aren't doing enough to earn God's favor*) or inflate us (*into believing we are living a more valid or valuable life than those around us*). God comes because He is merciful and gracious. In Jesus and through the Holy Spirit, God unconditionally gives us access to Himself. This is the doctrine of Grace and our Good News.

What God will do when He comes to us. There are times when nothing is going well; we cry out, hoping God will save the day. And sometimes, yes, God heals and solves whatever plagues us. But that's not always the case. In scripture, what is always true is that God is more concerned about healing the person in the circumstances than the circumstances for the person.

God knows that the gods of our heart are more threatening than all the circumstances around us. We have built our identity and security around the things of this world. But in doing this, we've made every moment of every day a threat. The things of this world are ephemeral; they won't last. So as God seeks to heal us, He asks us to rest our identity in Him. By building our lives on Jesus, our foundation is set on something eternal, which will never leave or forsake us.

What God will require of us when we encounter His presence. The joy and loving presence of God will only come alive when we approach Him in our weakness. This is why God can feel so distant sometimes. Our natural tendency is to lean into our strengths, while burying our weaknesses. But Jesus says that relying on our own strength is our greatest weakness, as it keeps us from God's presence. Failure strips away the inessentials of life. Embracing weakness is a freeing gift because it allows us to fall into the open, free, gracious arms of God.

How do we lean into our weakness? In the battles of life, when we are tempted to use shame, guilt or manipulation, we instead extend the love and grace of God. We approach others with humility and forgiveness. Because in our

weakness, we begin to taste God's presence and others begin to find it. Jesus is our resource to pursue this life, for in Christ we are guaranteed that God's loving presence will always be with us.

As Charles Spurgeon wrote, "God does not need our strength. He has more than enough power on His own. All He asks is our weakness; He has none of that Himself, and He is longing, therefore, to take our weakness and use it as the instrument in His own mighty hand. Will we not yield our weakness to Him, and receive His strength?"

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.)

What do we gain from leaning into our weakness and embracing the presence of God?

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.)

- What stood out to you in the sermon this week?
- What was Gideon doing when the angel came to him? Where was he and why? 6:11
 - Who initiated the conversation between the angel and Gideon? 6:12
 - How did the angel describe Gideon? 6:12 Did Gideon agree?
 - What does this scene teach us about the doctrine of grace and God's ever-present help?
- Which statements in the words of Gideon reveal his fear, doubt, and weakness? 6:13-16 What did God promise Gideon?
 - Identify an area of your life that is filled with fear, doubt, or weakness. What is God's promise to you?
 - How does this scene encourage you to move from fear to trust?
- When did Gideon realize who the angel was? 6:19-24 See also Exodus 33:20.
 - What did Gideon do immediately after this realization? What is the first thing you feel like doing when you recognize the presence of God in your life?
- What was Gideon's first assignment? 6:25-27 See also Exodus 20:3-5. What is God teaching Him?
 - What would be a present day parallel to Gideon's first assignment?
- What do we gain from leaning into our weakness and embracing the presence of God?
 - Why do you think God is more interested in us than in changing our circumstances? Explain how this is a beautiful and freeing gift and something we ultimately want.
- In Chapter 7 Gideon is a different man than the one seen in Chapter 6. How did God bring him the long way from a fearful doubter to a valiant warrior and sincere worshipper?
 - Apply your answer to the area where you currently serve God or would like to.
- Why does Matthew 27:46 guarantee that God's presence will never leave us?
 - How are you encouraged?

Prayer

Pray rather than tell pray requests during group prayer time. Spend some time thanking Jesus that he has pursued us with his favor and stays with us always

Experiment of the Month

(A suggestion for engagement in following the way of Jesus this week)

Spiritual Formation Experience:

Continue to meditate on and memorize Philippians 4:6-8. Journal about how the experience of meditating and memorizing helped you with your Christian mindset. Read your journal entry to the group next time you meet.

Missional Experiment:

As Gideon was led to do something that could only be accomplished by God, what is something in your life or sphere of influence that could only be accomplished by God?

(i.e. a non-believing friend trusting Jesus, healing of a personal wound, prayer answered a tough work situation, etc.)