

PATH TO *ICTORY*

Growth Group Study Guide



Dear Heavenly Father,

I come before you with a humble and grateful heart. Help me to stay aware that I am solely dependent on you and your grace. You provide for both my daily needs and my eternal needs.

Help me to remain aware that I am only one part of my community. Not every issue and situation are centered on me. My life is impacted by the lives and choices of others, just as the choices I make impact other people.

As the election approaches, I seek to better understand the issues and concerns that confront our city, state, and country, and how the Gospel compels us to respond as faithful citizens in our community.

May this study guide point me towards your truth and shape me into the image of Christ.

I ask for eyes that are free from blindness, so that I might see each person as my brother and sister. Help me to see dignity in each person, especially those who feel powerless because of their situations or circumstances. Give me ears to hear the cries of the needy.

Give me a mind and heart that is open to hearing your voice so that I may be drawn closer to your Kingdom for the sake of your Glory.

I ask this in the name of your Son, Jesus Christ, and through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Amen

October 6, 2024
Session 1 | Seeing Eye to Eye

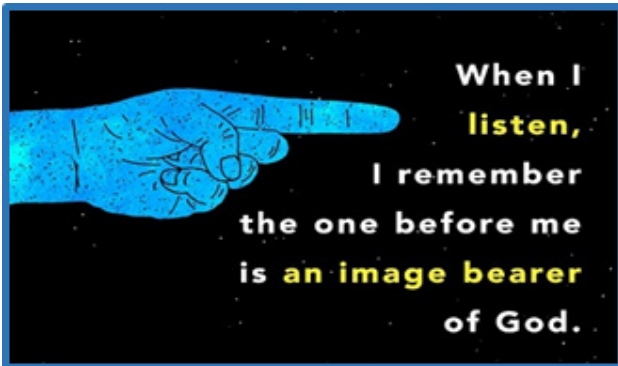


***Before you begin** this Growth Group session, pray the prayer found on the cover of your Growth Group materials. .*

Background:

This will help set the context of the session if someone from your group reads this aloud.

With the election a month away and much of the nation in heated debates over any number of contentious issues, it is important that we as Christians address the following question: Should Christians sound like everyone else when it comes to politics in America?



The Bible is the Christian's playbook. We look to it and to Jesus for guidance and direction. The Bible tells us that Jesus is "*the founder and perfecter of our faith*" Hebrews 12:2a ESV. There is no better example for Christians to aspire to than Jesus. Perhaps you are thinking, Jesus wasn't political, what can I learn about surviving the political climate from Him?

When Jesus began inviting people to follow Him and make Him Lord of their lives, many Jews believed He was the long-awaited Messiah who was going to overthrow the government and free them from Roman oppression. Not only did Jesus not overthrow Caesar, when He was questioned about paying taxes to the Roman government, Jesus instructed His questioners to "*give back to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's.*" In Romans 13:1 the Bible further instructs us concerning the government: "*Let everyone be subject to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God.*" The Bible is clear, "There is no authority except that which God has established."

Christians are to obey God, as well as the laws of the land. In every discussion, interaction, conversation, argument or disagreement—political or otherwise—we are to be law-abiders who treat others with respect. As Jackie Hill Perry explains, "If we understand everyone, friend and foe, neighbor and nuisance, as made in the likeness of God, the words we say should be tempered by that truth. Every single person we will ever converse with, both sinner and saint, bears the image of God; and for that reason, each person is worthy of honor."

Show proper respect to everyone, love the family of believers, fear God, honor the emperor.

1 Peter 2:17

Scripture: Luke 20:20-26

Before engaging in the questions, have someone in your group read the Scripture passages aloud.

Sermon Reflection:

1. What was something you want to make sure you remember that came from the sermon this week?
2. What challenged you about this sermon?
3. What do you think Jesus is trying to teach you through this sermon? How will this affect your daily life?

Questions from the Bible:

1. Do you think that the chief priest and scribes were sincere when praising Jesus in verses 20-21? If not, why not?
2. When Jesus said, "Give to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's," He was instructing us that the Christian owes loyalty to two spheres. To which do we owe the greater loyalty and why?
3. When Jesus said to give unto God what is God's, what did He mean?

4. How did those trying to trap Jesus with the question regarding taxes react when they heard His response?

5. Read Titus 3:1-2. What do you see as the common thread in the list of instructions?

6. Jesus said, “*You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden... let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.*” (Matthew 5:14,16b) What do you understand this to mean?

Questions for Application:

1. In today’s political climate, what are the practical implications of the instructions in Titus 3:1-2?

2. How do you answer the question posed in the Background: “Should Christians sound like everyone else when it comes to politics in America?” Please explain.

3. A bit of Christian levity... What part of a Christian is often last to be converted? (Answer follows) Given what we have learned about what Jesus and the Bible have to say about taxes and the government, does it matter whether we follow traffic laws? Why or why not?
 Answer: The right foot

4. “We must stay above the battle, preaching the Gospel to both parties, for God will not ask whether we were Republicans or Democrats, but rather what we did with His Son, Jesus.” (moodymedia.org) What are your thoughts about this?

5. In the Background we read, “If we understand everyone, friend and foe, neighbor and nuisance, as made in the likeness of God, the words we say should be tempered by that truth.” How does this statement guide your daily interactions with others?

6. Are you submitting to Jesus’ authority in your life or merely giving the outward impression that you are?

7. What would the world be like if there were no government?

Resources *Consider starting one of these Bible reading plans to go deeper on this topic*

5-Day Video Devotional, With and for Jesus: <https://www.bible.com/reading-plans/21964>



Hope From Israel

14-Day Devotional, Jesus.: Trusting Jesus First, Only, Now, and Always:
<https://www.bible.com/reading-plans/38083>



Trusting Jesus First

Questions for Discussion:

1. What are you reading in the Word this week?

2. How is your reading growing you in the Marks of Discipleship - prayers, presence, gifts, witness, service?

Growth Challenge:

As you engage in conversations, try to remember that the person you are speaking with is an image-bearer of God.

NOTES

October 13, 2024 Session 2 | For The Love



Before you begin this Growth Group session, pray the prayer found on the cover of your Growth Group materials.

Background:

Lord, help us as a nation to see one another as neighbors, living and working together. Help us look past our biases and fears to love our neighbors as we love ourselves. Amen

Taken from: The One Year Pray for America Bible Reading Plan: Pray for Peace reading plan. Day 4

This will help set the context of the session if someone from your group reads this aloud.

Arguments, quarrelling, division, a line drawn in the sand; if you look through history none of these are new. In fact, the apostle Paul wrote to the Corinthians to address such issues. They were choosing one messenger over the other. They were quarrelling and taking sides. (1 Corinthians 1:10-12) Paul reminded them that the message of the salvation of Christ is more important than the messenger.

We as Christians also need to be reminded that what Christ has done for us is more important than anything that anyone says or does. 2 Timothy 2: 23-24 tells us, “*Don’t have anything to do with foolish and stupid arguments, because you know they produce quarrels. And the Lord’s servant must not be quarrelsome but must be kind to everyone, able to teach, not resentful.*” 1 Corinthians 13:1-8a further instructs us to love others. Spiritual gifts, knowledge, powerful actions, and incredible generosity are important things but unless they are motivated by love, and empowered by Christ’s transforming love, they are nothing.

“He (God) wants us to demonstrate to the world that this unity in Christ is weightier than anything that might divide us.” **J. D. Greear**

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 13:1-8a

Before engaging in the questions, have someone in your group read the Scripture passage aloud.

Sermon Reflection:

1. What was something you want to make sure you remember that came from the sermon this week?
2. What challenged you about this sermon?

3. What do you think Jesus is trying to teach you through this sermon? How will this affect your daily life?

Questions from the Bible:

1. In what ways does Paul's description of love mirror God's love for humanity?
2. Make a list of the activities Paul mentions in verses 1-3 that result in nothing, apart from love.
3. Read Philippians 2:3-4. In what ways do these verses support or conflict with this week's scripture passage from 1 Corinthians 13?
4. In 1 Peter 3:8-9, we are instructed to "*not repay evil with evil or insult with insult.*" As Christians, how are we expected to respond?
5. In 1 Corinthians 16:13-14 Paul begins drawing his letter to the Corinthians to a close with this brief paragraph: "*Be on your guard; stand firm in the faith; be courageous; be strong. Do everything in love.*" Imagine it is you who has received this instruction. What, then, are you to do?
6. What is one of your favorite biblical examples of love? Why does this speak to you?

Questions for Application:

1. What is the easiest part of loving people in the way described in 1 Corinthians 13? What is the hardest part for you?
2. 1 Corinthians 13 is often read at weddings. Do you feel these instructions are properly directed towards marriage? Explain. In verses 7-8a Paul asserts that this is Christ-like love. How are you loving like Christ? What do you consider your greatest success? What do you consider your greatest struggle?
3. How does understanding love's nature inform your approach to conflict or reconciliation?
4. Where have you drawn a line in your heart where a person in your life is no longer showing you kindness? Have you determined that a cold shoulder is justified?
5. How do you respond when confronted with quarrelling or divisiveness in church?
6. Jesus' teachings focused on people, interactions, relationships, and love. Why did He not give us more instruction concerning government and how we should govern ourselves?

Resources: Consider starting one of these Bible reading plans to go deeper on this topic

Unity A Study in 1 Corinthians -16-day devotional: <https://www.bible.com/reading-plans/34454-unity-a-study-in-1-corinthians>

Fighting for Unity in a Divided World-5-day devotional: <https://www.bible.com/reading-plans/21518-fighting-for-unity-in-a-divided-world>



Unity



Fighting for Unity

Questions for Discussion:

1. What are you reading in the Word this week?

2. How is your reading growing you in the Marks of Discipleship – prayers, presence, gifts, witness, service?

Growth Challenge:

Please pray every day this week for our nation to be unified and not divided by this upcoming election. Pray for our leaders to make good choices for the nation.

NOTES

October 20, 2024 Session 3 | A Political Gospel



Before you begin this Growth Group session, pray the prayer found on the cover of your Growth Group materials.

Background:

This will help set the context of the session if someone from your group reads this aloud.

A Political Gospel? Really??

Yes. Really.

In his article [To Anyone Who Thinks Jesus Is Not “Political”](#), Bruce Ashford writes “Christ is not a last name but a title, a Greek word referring to the long-awaited Messiah, whose salvation had not only personal, but social, cultural, and political connotations.”

In this week’s scripture, Isaiah delivers a message of hope to the people of Israel, telling them, and us, of a promised Messiah saying: “*and the government will be on his shoulders*”; and “*of the greatness of his government and peace there will be no end*”; and “*He will reign on David’s throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever.*” Isaiah’s message from God makes it clear that the Messiah will come to establish an everlasting kingdom, the Kingdom of God.

Of the greatness of his government and peace
there will be no end.

Isaiah 9:7a

When Jesus saw that the temple merchants and money changers were taking advantage of the people, He overturned their tables and drove them out of the temple saying: “*It is written,*” he said to them, “*My house will be called a house of prayer, but you are making it a den of robbers.*” (Matthew 21:13) When Jesus was asked if it was right to pay taxes, He did not sidestep to avoid the trap. Instead, He said “*give back to Caesar what is Caesar’s, and to God what is God’s.*” (Luke 20:25) When sending out 72 disciples to prepare the way, His instructions included: “Heal the sick who are there and tell them, *‘The kingdom of God has come near to you.’*” (Luke 10:9) And when questioned by Pilate, Jesus responded saying: “*My kingdom is not of this world.*” (John 18:36)

Jesus said, “My kingdom is not of
this world.”

John 18:36a

The ministry of Jesus was about love, justice and mercy in all aspects of life. Make no mistake, Jesus did not avoid politics but confronted the political questions like He did those of faith and religion: head on; with love, compassion and grace.

Scripture: Isaiah 9:6-7

Before engaging in the questions, have someone in your group read the Scripture passage aloud.

Sermon Reflection:

1. What was something you want to make sure you remember that came from the sermon this week?
2. What challenged you about this sermon?
3. What do you think Jesus is trying to teach you through this sermon? How will this affect your daily life?

Questions from the Bible:

1. In Luke 10:9, Jesus instructs the 72 to tell those who accept them that, "*The kingdom of God has come near to you.*" What do you think Jesus was trying to get them, and us, to understand?
2. In Matthew 11:2-5, the disciples of John (the Baptist) asked Jesus if He was "*the one to come?*" Instead of directly answering the question, Jesus summarized the visible aspects of his ministry. What do you think John would understand from this description?
3. What does it mean, "*the government will be on his shoulders*"? (Isaiah 9:6)

4. In verses 6 and 7, how will God bring deliverance? How might these words have brought comfort to the original readers of this text?

5. From verse 7, what are the three characteristics of His government?

6. In Jesus' day kingdoms were the form of government. What then did Jesus mean when He said, "*My kingdom is not of this world.*"?

7. In 1 Samuel, chapter 8, we learn how it was that the Israelites came to have a king. As was often the case, the people demanded, saying "*We want a king over us. Then we will be like all the other nations, with a king to lead us to go out before us and fight out battles.*" (19b-20) God gave them what they asked for. Who led them before this? Why were their demands short sighted?

Questions for Application:

1. In the Background, we read, "Christ is not a last name, but a title". Was this new information to you? If it was, how has it impacted your understanding of Jesus as the Christ?

2. Do you think of the Kingdom of God as something that we can experience here, during our lifetime, or as something we will be able to experience only in Heaven? Explain.

3. In verse 6 we read, “*And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.*” Which of these names is the most significant to you? Why?
4. Thinking about Isaiah’s prophecy, and about who Jesus is and how He will rule, how does this build your confidence in Him – even if things in this world are not currently going the way you wish?
5. Merriam Webster defines politics as follows:
- a. the art or science of government
 - b. the art or science concerned with guiding or influencing governmental policy
 - c. the art or science concerned with winning and holding control over a government
- Using this as a definition of politics, how was Jesus political?
6. [Moodymedia.org](https://www.moodymedia.org) has said, “The fate of America rests more with the people of God than with who gets voted into office. Government can’t take the place of the church.” What are your thoughts on this?

Resources: Consider starting one of these Bible reading plans to go deeper on this topic

Ready to Unlock the Kingdom of God – 6-day reading plan: <https://www.bible.com/reading-plans/21593-ready-to-unlock-the-kingdom-of-god>



Ready to Unlock the Kingdom of God

The Kingdom of God – 6-day reading plan: <https://www.bible.com/reading-plans/30627-the-kingdom-of-god>



The Kingdom of God

Questions for Discussion:

1. What are you reading in the Word this week?
2. How is your reading growing you in the Marks of Discipleship - prayers, presence, gifts, witness, service?

Growth Challenge:

This week, consider your approach to politics and religion. Do you treat them as separate and unique, or do you allow your faith to guide your politics?

NOTES

October 27, 2024 Session 4 | God's Economy



Before you begin this Growth Group session, pray the prayer found on the cover of your Growth Group materials.

Background:

This will help set the context of the session if someone from your group reads this aloud.

In this week's scripture, Jesus watches as the people bring their gifts to the temple treasury, seeing offerings large and small. What impressed Jesus the most about the offerings? It wasn't the large gifts from the wealthy, instead it was the small gift from the widow, as she gave back to God all that she had.

When we think of the economy, do we think in terms of financial institutions, job markets, cost of living and the like, or do we think in terms of God's economy? In God's economy, our resources are not limited to our financial assets, but also include our time, our talents, and our capacity for love and mercy. In his book [A Disciple's Path: Deepening Your Relationship with Christ and the Church](#), James Harnish

"but she out of her poverty put in all she had to live on."

Luke 21: 4b

writes: "We give back to God what is God's so that through our gifts the love of God can become a tangible reality in our world."

Giving back to God does not mean giving only of our financial resources.

In Matthew 23:23 Jesus issues a scathing rebuttal saying: "Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You give a tenth of your spices—mint, dill and cumin. But you have neglected the more important matters of the law—justice, mercy and faithfulness. You should have practiced the latter, without neglecting the former." Yes, financial gifts are important to the life of the church, however, can you picture a church without music, without Sunday School and Bible studies, or without missions and ministries to our communities and the world? If we are serious about giving back to God, in addition to our financial giving, we must include our time, our talents, and the love God so freely shows to us.

"We give back to God what is God's so that through our gifts the love of God can become a tangible reality in our world."

James Harnish

As followers of Jesus, we joyfully share the resources that God has gifted to us so that we can share the love that God has for all His people.

Scripture: Luke 21:1-4

Before engaging in the questions, have someone in your group read the scripture passage aloud.

Sermon Reflection:

1. What was something you want to make sure you remember that came from the sermon this week?

2. What challenged you about this sermon?

3. What do you think Jesus is trying to teach you through this sermon? How will this affect your daily life?

Questions from the Bible:

1. Read Matthew 19:16-22. Why was the young, rich man sad after his encounter with Jesus?

2. In James 2:18b we read, "*Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by my deeds.*" What do you think James was telling his readers? Does his message still apply to us today?

3. Jesus said that the widow had put in "more" than all the others. It was obviously not literally more, so what was Jesus trying to teach us?

4. How were the motives of the rich different from those of the widow?

5. In Malachi 3:10b the Lord Almighty says, "*Test me in this, and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that there will not be room enough to store it.*" What is God challenging the people to test Him on? How is this an example of God's economy?

6. Why did the widow put in “all she had to live on”? Why did this matter to Jesus? How did Jesus know she had given “*all she had to live on*”?

Questions for Application:

1. Our pastors are known to offer an occasional challenge to consider whether or not our offering “represents” us to God. How did the widow’s offering represent her?
2. In the Background we read, “If we are serious about giving back to God, in addition to our financial giving, we must include our time, our talents, and the love God so freely shows to us.” Do you agree with this statement? Explain.
3. If God already has our soul, why do we sometimes find it so hard to give of our money?
4. If all creation and all power is already God’s, why does He ask us to give to His work?
5. Matthew 20:1-15, the Parable of the Workers in the Vineyard, starts out with the words. “*For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire workers for his vineyard.*” What does this parable teach us about the Kingdom of God?

6. The world has an economic system, and God has an economic system. Explain your understanding of the two:
- The world's economy is based on assumptions like:
 - God's economy is based on core biblical beliefs like:

Resources: Consider starting one of these Bible reading plans to go deeper on this topic

Tithing – What Jesus Said About Tithes – 3 day reading plan: <https://www.bible.com/reading-plans/35103-tithing-what-jesus-said-about-tithes>

The Parable of the Talents: 3 Key Lessons Most Miss – 3 day reading plan: <https://www.bible.com/reading-plans/41194-the-parable-of-the-talents-3-key-lessons-most-miss>

Be Intentional: The Gift of Time – 5 day reading plan: <https://www.bible.com/reading-plans/43058-be-intentional-the-gift-of-time>

Giving to God – 6 day reading plan: <https://www.bible.com/reading-plans/42017-giving-to-god>



Tithing



The Parable of Talents



Be Intentional



Giving to God

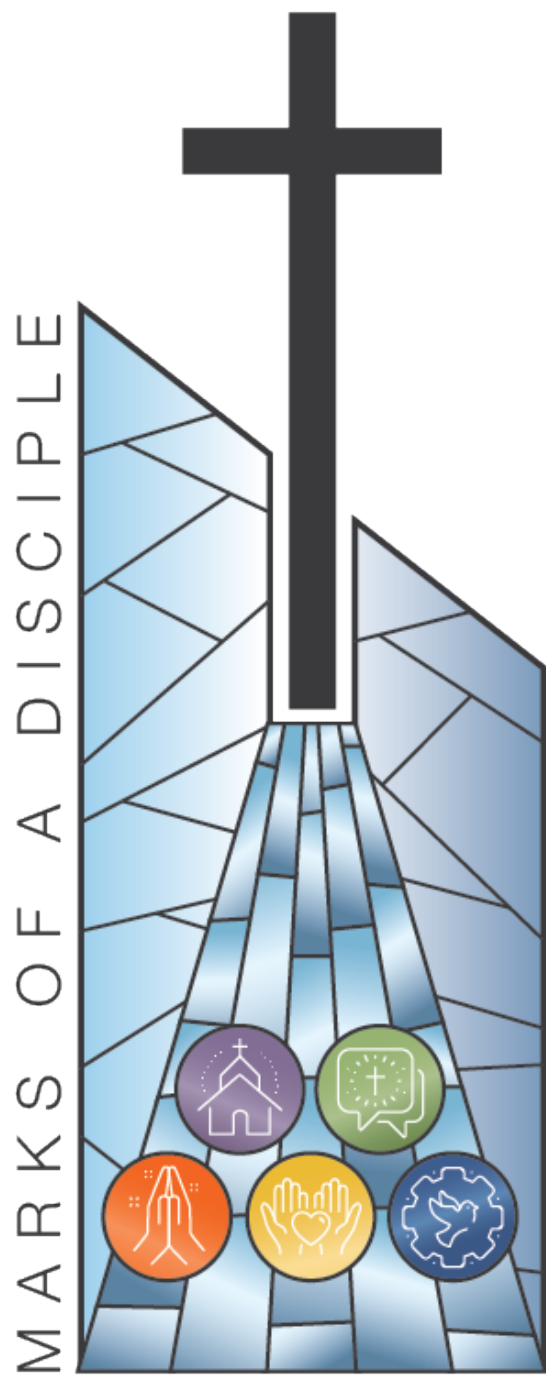
Questions for Discussion:

- What are you reading in the Word this week?
- How is your reading growing you in the Marks of Discipleship – prayers, presence, gifts, witness, service?

Growth Challenge:

As you go through this week, consider how you use your finances, your time, and your capacity for love and mercy. Do you tithe regularly? Are you, perhaps, a sacrificial giver? Or do you play it safe, protecting your resources in case of some unknown, future need?

NOTES



MARKS OF A DISCIPLE



www.MarionMethodist.org