

FFBC FOURTH QUARTER

LIFE GROUP CURRICULUM

October- December 2023





Fultondale FBC

2023 LIFE GROUPS - 4TH QUARTER THE FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT GALATIANS 5:22-25 10/1/2023

MAIN POINT

The fruit of the Spirit is given to every believer to demonstrate they are known by Christ and no longer captive to their flesh and its sinful desires.

INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

What is your favorite part about your personality? What is another part you are working on to change or improve?

In what ways has knowing Christ changed your personality?

We all have personality traits we like about ourselves. Generally we like the things other people appreciate about us. When we are saved, the Holy Spirit bestows upon every Christian the fruit of the Spirit. These nine traits mentioned in our passage today should shape our Christian experience and help others see that we know and have been changed by the gospel.

UNDERSTANDING

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

| HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ GALATIANS 5:22-25.

What have you studied about the fruit of the Spirit before? Has anyone memorized the list?

Look over the list of these nine traits. Which do you notice most in your own life? Which could be manifested in a stronger way?

Do all Christians possess every fruit? Why or why not? How is the fruit of the Spirit like and unlike spiritual gifts?

There are not fruits of the Spirit but fruit of the Spirit. The word fruit in Galatians 5:22, in English and in the original language, is singular. Practically, this means every Christian has all nine of these traits by virtue of being indwelt by the Holy Spirit. While all Christians have at least one spiritual gift and individual Christians have different gifts or different blending of gifts, every Christian will be marked by love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. We may not possess all in equal measure, and they may be more evident to a greater degree in another brother or sister's life, yet all renewed by the Spirit have the fruit of the Spirit.

How is love manifested by the Spirit different than love we see in popular culture?

How can you see each of the other eight traits overflowing from love?

Can you think of any verses or individuals from Scripture that help you better understand what the fruit of the Spirit looks like when put into action?

What did Paul mean when he wrote, "Against such things there is no law" (v. 23)?

Paul began this list with love because the fruit of the Spirit is rooted in love, and each individual trait we read finds its basis in love. While the law was given to restrain the works of the flesh, there is no law against the fruit of the Spirit because there is no sin in the fruit of the Spirit. As with anything in Scripture, the world has a vastly different idea of what it means to exhibit each of these traits. For that reason we need to continually fill our hearts and minds with God's truth as we learn to see from His perspective.

Read Galatians 5:19-21. Compare and contrast the works of the flesh and the works of the Spirit.

How has your relationship with Jesus caused the works of the flesh to decrease and the works of the Spirit to increase?

What does it mean to walk by the Spirit? What does this look like in our daily lives?

Walking by the Spirit means active, daily, submission to the Spirit's work in our lives and the Lordship of Jesus Christ. The Spirit allows us to deny the works of the flesh and choose

those actions which are good and pleasing to God. We cannot deny our flesh on our own; we need the Spirit's help. As we walk with the Spirit daily, what is earthly in us will be put to death as we become more conformed into the image of Christ (Col. 3:5; Rom. 8:29). Paul used graphic language to describe this process saying that through Jesus our flesh and its desires have been crucified (Gal. 5:24). Our passions are no longer informed by our flesh, but by the Spirit of God at work in our lives.

APPLICATION

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

Which fruit of the Spirit is least familiar to you? When will you devote some time to studying it in God's Word this week?

Of these nine traits, which have you particularly seen manifested in the life of another member of this group? Share to encourage one another.

How do we walk with the Spirit daily to make the fruit of the Spirit more present and evident in our lives? How does this impact our evangelistic efforts?

PRAYER

Thank God for allowing us to know Him and for how our relationship with Him has changed our lives. Pray that the fruit of the Spirit would be clearly seen in everything you do, and that the works of the flesh would be suppressed as we walk by the Spirit.

COMMENTARY

| GALATIANS 5:22-23

In contrast to the "acts of the flesh" presented in verses 19-21, those who are obedient to the Holy Spirit produce beautiful, nourishing spiritual fruit. Notice the fruit in this passage is called the fruit of the Spirit, not the fruit of self-effort. This fruit the Holy Spirit produces in the life of a faithful Christian. In other passages of Scripture, we are commanded to fulfill the individual characteristics. The answer to this seeming paradox, I believe, is that only the Holy Spirit can produce the fruit; but he will not do so unless we are striving to the best of our ability for them in faithful obedience. These fruits of the Spirit are in

harmony with and not opposed to the law. However, they are not produced by the law but rather by the Spirit working through the believer's faith.



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2023 LIFE GROUPS - 4TH QUARTER THE BEGINNING OF THE END REVELATION 1:1-8
10/8/2023

MAIN POINT

The Book of Revelation was written to give unshakable hope, encourage unwavering holiness, refute deception, and fuel mission among the nations.

INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

Why do you think so many people are fascinated with the Book of Revelation?

Why do you think other people might avoid studying it?

If you could understand just one thing about Revelation, what would you want it to be? Why?

We need to be careful not to overcomplicate this book or get sidetracked by the visionary language. Our goal whenever we study the Bible is not just to hear what it says, but to get into the shoes of the people who were first reading or hearing it. But the only thing we necessarily and ultimately need to understand the Book of Revelation is the Spirit of the living God." Let's begin this study by asking the Holy Spirit help us feel the wonder of what it means in our lives.

UNDERSTANDING

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

| HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ REVELATION 1:1-3.

In your own words, what do these verses indicate about the content and purpose of this book?

Considering this vision took place 2,000 years ago, how do you account for the words “quickly” and “the time is near”? Do you believe Jesus could return today? Why is it important that we live like “the time is near”?

What application is there for believers in verse 3? Why do you think John used these three different verbs—read, hear, and keep?

There is only one other time in the Bible where the three phrases, “revelation” (uncovering of truth), “what must quickly take place” (something that is happening or is going to happen soon), and “sent it and signified it” (made it known) appear together in the same verse—Daniel 2:28. In both places, God used a dream to uncover the reality that one day God will set up a kingdom that will never be destroyed.

| HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ REVELATION 1:4-8.

How does John describe God the Father in these verses? How does he describe Jesus? How does he describe believers?

What three things does Christ do for us (vv. 5-6)? How has your life been changed by each of these actions?

John greeted his audience with the typical greeting of “grace and peace.” However, John said the source of these qualities was “One who is, who was, and who is coming.” The three tenses identified to the first-century readers that this Person is God. In threatening times Christians can take heart that God is always with them. No matter how desperate the times appeared, John knew that God transcended time and stood ready to reassure those who follow Him. John described believers as Jesus’ “servants” or “slaves” (v. 1), and also as “priests” (v. 6). John also identified Jesus in three ways: (1) the faithful witness, a reference to Jesus’ ministry as a prophet; (2) the firstborn from the dead, a phrase referring to his death and resurrection; and (3) the ruler of the kings of the earth. With these descriptions, John encourages us to imitate Jesus’ faithfulness, have hope in eternity, and remember that God’s eternal kingdom is bigger than anything we face in this world.

How does the grand portrait of God’s greatness in verses 4-8 impact the way you live today?

If we look to Jesus in the past, present and future, what truths can we say about Him in those contexts?

What three facts about Jesus are especially significant to you in your life? Why are these facts so important?

Verse 7 could be considered the theme verse for the Book of Revelation?

What does this text tell us that we should expect to find in Revelation? How are we to live today, in light of this verse?

We see in John's introduction what David notes: "The purpose of this book is not to promote speculation about the end of the world; the purpose of this book is to call people to obey Jesus today. That's the point. Put the charts away. Look at your life. Are you following Jesus? Are you walking faithfully with Jesus?"

APPLICATION

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

How would you live differently this week if you were to truly live with the anticipation of Christ's return?

Revelation 1 should encourage us to feel Christ's affection, experience His liberation, realize our position in Him, give our adoration to Him, and live with anticipation of Him. Which of these do you need to apply to your life most right now? Why?

How can this group better challenge and encourage each other in those things?

PRAYER

Thank God for the unteachable hope John's revelation gives every one of us. Pray that God would continue to use it in our lives to encourage us to unwavering holiness, uphold truth in the church, and engage in the mission of sharing the gospel with the nations.

COMMENTARY

| REVELATION 1:1-8

1:1. Revelation, which means “unveiling,” translates the Greek word “apokalypsis.” Its use here indicates that the book of Revelation is apocalyptic literature, like Daniel in the Old Testament. “The revelation of Jesus Christ” could mean the unveiling about Jesus, the unveiling by Him, or both. “His slaves” refers to all Christians.

1:2. Standing true to God’s word and to the testimony about Jesus Christ caused John to be exiled to the island of Patmos (v. 9). Christians have been persecuted throughout church history for their fidelity to Christ. Only by failing to stand do we escape persecution.

1:1,3. “Must quickly take place” and “the time is near” have been used by critics to claim that Revelation’s prophecies have failed since they have not been fulfilled in the 1,900+ years since the book was written. However, Christ’s imminent return does not carry with it a timetable but communicates a sense of urgency that is an integral part of the New Testament message as expressed by John the Baptist, Jesus, and the apostles. Christ’s first coming marked the time when history entered its last phase before eternity. Paul expressed the urgency this entails: “Look, now is the acceptable time; now is the day of salvation” (2 Cor. 6:2).

1:3. “The reading of this prophecy” carries with it a promise of blessing. The reading in view is not just mental. The reader must also keep (i.e., “take to heart” and apply) what is written. This is the first of seven significant “blessing” statements or beatitudes in the book of Revelation (Revelation 14:13; 16:15; 19:9; 20:6; 22:7,14). Seven, the number of perfection, will recur throughout this book.

1:4. The naming of the author and audience, plus a characteristic greeting (“grace and peace”), indicate that Revelation has a similar form as other letters of the New Testament. It is not some exotic, otherworldly work that cannot readily be understood. The One who is, who was, and who is coming (v. 8) means that God not only exists now, but always has existed and always will. The seven spirits before His throne may refer to: (1) “the angels of the seven churches” (v. 20; chaps. 2-3), (2) other angels seen in the book (e.g., 8:2), or (3) the fullness of the Holy Spirit described in Isa. 11:2.

1:5-6. Jesus is the faithful witness (“martyr,” the Greek word from which we get “martyr”). “The firstborn from the dead” looks back to His resurrection, the guarantee of the future resurrection of all believers and unbelievers (20:4-5; 1 Cor. 15:20,23). Though Christ has all the authority to be universal ruler now (Matt. 28:18), He will not fully exert it until His second coming (Rev. 19:11-21). “Set us free from our sins by His blood” does not mean we are automatically saved by Christ’s death on the cross, as if all humanity is saved

regardless of their beliefs. Revelation stresses the need for repentance (9:20-21) and a faith-response to the gospel (14:6-7). The wording here may mean that believers are already a kingdom and priests in this lifetime (1 Pet. 2:9).

1:7-8. This collage of Scripture from Dan. 7:13 and Zech. 12:10 expresses the theme for Revelation. The reference to “mourn” is sometimes understood as the response of those for whom it is too late to be saved. But the context of Zech. 12:10 indicates the mourning will be true saving repentance, even for those who pierced Him (i.e., the Jews). “Alpha” and “Omega” are the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet, emphasizing that God is the beginning and the end.



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2023 LIFE GROUPS - 4TH QUARTER LETTER TO SARDIS REVELATION 3:1-6 10/15/2023

MAIN POINT

Jesus desires that we consistently fix our minds and hearts on the gospel, renewing our love and passion for Him as we do.

INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

What is one pattern or habit of your day-to-day life that you can't imagine not doing?

Why are you so faithful to that particular activity?

Growing up, were there any spiritual patterns in place in your home, such as family devotion time or bedtime prayer? If so, what do you remember most about those times?

Children are at their best when the rhythms of life are predictable and well-known. Sometimes as adults, though, our routines get us in trouble. So much of life is about routine and habit that it's easy to see how we can slip into spiritual ruts in our relationship with God. If we don't pay attention, church and church activities can become just another part of our week that gets lost in the daily grind. But Jesus expects more of His followers. He expects us and our families to live on mission for Him, and this means that how we worship should match how we feel about Him.

UNDERSTANDING

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

| HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ REVELATION 3:1-6.

In Revelation 3, we read another one of Jesus' letters to the seven churches, a church He cared about and wanted to see change for the better.

What did the works of the church at Sardis reveal about their spiritual condition?

This letter is intended by the Lord as an urgent spiritual wake-up call. If the church at Sardis did not strengthen what remained spiritually, they would die because they had not followed through on the works that honored God. The reputation these believers had was one of holiness and spiritual life, but apparently, that was just a facade. On the inside, in their hearts and attitudes, they did not shine for Christ.

What kinds of things might characterize a Christian or a church that has the reputation of being alive, but is actually dead?

Why is this such a scary possibility?

There is no praise here for the church at Sardis. In fact, Jesus' criticism is particularly frightening, because it seems that Jesus is the only One who knows the church's true condition. Others might have looked at the church at Sardis and seen life, but Jesus knows the truth—spiritually they were as good as dead. Unfortunately, this is an attitude that is way too easy for us to slip into, which is especially scary considering the consequences Jesus described in verse 3.

How might good works hide a spiritually dead church? In what way are works incomplete (v. 2)?

What, then, did Jesus tell this church to do (v. 3)?

What do you think the church should remember?

In this spiritually dead place, Jesus' commands are simple. They should remember God's blessing and repent of their spiritual deadness. In other words, they needed to recover the spiritual life and vigor they once had.

How can remembering the blessings of God serve to awaken a church that is spiritually dead?

What, then, in your own words, was the action point for this church that needed correction?

This letter was meant to be an urgent wake-up call. At some point, Jesus would be returning, and if He found the church in its current state, they would be truly dead. But if they woke up to the present reality of Jesus and remembered the great blessing of the gospel, their good works would be complete and they would be ready for Jesus to come back.

Read verses 4-6 again. What do these verses reveal about some of the Christians in Sardis?

What do you understand the soiled clothes imagery to mean?

Jesus pointed out that in the midst of a church of people who were going through the motions of their faith, whose actions didn't match their attitudes toward God, a few people stood out. These people were genuine in their relationship with God. They had not "soiled their clothes" by assuming that the appearance of true religion can substitute for the reality. Unlike the other people in the church, these Christians were not pretending.

What did these people gain by faithfully following Christ?

Christ does not ask these faithful few to leave the nominal majority, but to maintain their presence as witnesses. They may have a difficult time doing so, but Christ commends them as worthy of special praise. They will appear dressed in white one day, revealed as truly righteous. Their righteousness was not the appearance, but the reality.

APPLICATION

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

What lesson is there for you to learn from the story of Sardis?

Think about your home. What do you and your family "appear to be" to those watching from the outside? How does that compare with what you are actually living like?

Why is merely going through the motions of spiritual life or church life so easy to do? How have you seen this tendency creep into your life or your family's life? What is one step you could take toward counteracting this tendency?

How can we be a group that helps its members remain aware of who they are in God?

PRAYER

Share prayer requests with the group, specifically ones related to the truths in today's text. During your closing prayer time, ask God to help your group members assess their true attitude toward worship and renew their heartfelt obedience and love for Him.

COMMENTARY

| REVELATION 3:1-6

3:1. The risen Lord declared to the church in Sardis that he holds the seven spirits of God and the seven stars. The life-giving Spirit was badly needed by the lifeless church in Sardis. What could be more exciting in any era than for Christ to "bring his hands together" so that pastors are overflowing with the Spirit? The church in Sardis received only criticism from Jesus. The only other church similarly faulted is the seventh church, Laodicea. The complaint Christ lodges against this church is that its reputation is faulty. Others may think this congregation is lively; Christ knows (note again the I know) differently. The church is almost spiritually dead. A corpse may be beautiful, but it is still dead. In contemporary terms, the Sardis church was filled with "nominal Christians."

3:2-4. The urgent command Christ gives lies in a series of five verbs: wake up ... strengthen ... remember ... obey ... repent. Foreign armies had captured the city of Sardis twice in its history because of its failure to watch. The Christians of Sardis now have an opportunity to avoid a parallel spiritual destiny. The church's deeds appeared wonderful to those outside the church, but they were not complete in the sight of ... God Christ did not accuse them of heresy, but neither had they offended Romans or unbelieving Jews. They were not being persecuted, but they had offended God by emphasizing formality over reality. Part of the remedy was for this church to remember its glorious past, when it had been spiritually alive. When the Christians at Sardis were converted, they had received something important. While surely they had received the gospel, they had also received the Holy Spirit of life. They had forgotten about the Spirit's work. They must repent of their neglect of the Spirit and obey the command to "be filled with the Spirit" (Eph. 5:18).

Christ had threatened to judge the unloving Ephesian church by removing its lampstand if it did not repent (2:5). He had promised to judge the heretical teachers in Pergamum by fighting with his sword against them if they did not repent. Now he threatens to judge the lifeless church of Sardis by coming against them like a thief at an unexpected time. Some interpreters believe this refers to Christ's second coming, which is often said to be like a

thief (Matt. 24:43; Luke 12:39; 1 Thess. 5:2; 2 Pet. 3:10; Rev. 16:15). However, in this context the “coming” of the Lord to judge will take place only if the church does not repent. The second advent of Christ is not conditional. Thus, just as the city of Sardis had succumbed to unexpected military attack, so the church of Sardis will be visited by Christ’s judgment—if it does not change.

Is it possible for a “dead orthodox” church to change? In the case of Sardis, the answer was “yes” because a few people had remained faithful. They had not soiled their clothes by assuming that the appearance of true religion can substitute for the reality. Christ does not ask these faithful few to leave the nominal majority but to maintain their presence as a witness. They may have a difficult time doing so, but Christ commends them as worthy of special praise. They will appear dressed in white one day, revealed as truly righteous. Their righteousness was not the appearance but the reality, because they “washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb” (Rev. 7:14). Their righteousness was based on Christ’s death for them, which resulted in righteous living.

3:5-6. Verse 5 mentions he who overcomes; verse 6 refers to the one who has an ear. These elements are repeated in all seven letters, as well as the reference to what the Spirit says to the churches (see discussion at 2:7). These overcomers from all ages and all churches will be dressed in white just as the faithful few in Sardis will be clothed. The symbol of God’s divine ledger goes back as far as Exodus 32:33—“The Lord replied to Moses, ‘Whoever has sinned against me I will blot out of my book.’ ” In the present text, Christ specifies his commitment to the overcomers with a negative and positive promise. First, their names will never be blotted from the book of life. Second, their names will be acknowledged before my Father and his angels. Both of these symbolize eternal life. In ancient times, all citizens of a city might be listed in the “citizenship registry.” To be erased from such a book would mean one was not (or no longer) a citizen. All those who were citizens had the right to be announced or acknowledged before the king and his court.

Overcomers demonstrate their righteousness in this life by confessing Christ faithfully before a hostile world through the help of the Spirit of God. In their heavenly existence Christ will faithfully confess them before the very angels of God. Jesus had made an identical promise during his earthly ministry. “I tell you, whoever acknowledges me before men, the Son of Man will also acknowledge him before the angels of God” (Luke 12:8).



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2023 LIFE GROUPS - 4TH QUARTER THE THRONE ROOM OF GOD REVELATION 5:1-14
10/22/2023

MAIN POINT

Every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that Jesus is Lord of all.

INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

When you hear the word “worship,” what comes to mind?

In our society, what or whom do people worship instead of God? Why?

How is that type of “worship” different from the worship God expects from us?

The Book of Revelation is rich with imagery that is often hard for the uninitiated reader to interact. However, most of these difficult texts are about one basic concept—for Revelation 5, it is worship. Everyone worships something—that’s how we were designed. But in our sinfulness, we often choose to worship things like spouses, success, or even sports teams. The throne room of God is the ultimate expression of worship. It is in the throne room that all bow before Jesus Christ, who is Lord of all.

UNDERSTANDING

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

| HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ REVELATION 5:1-14.

Why did John cry when no one could open the scrolls? What was at stake with the scrolls?

What does it teach us about Jesus that He alone is able to open the scrolls?

Jesus alone is worthy of all praise and honor because He alone reveals the will of God. Had the scroll not been opened, God's Word, decrees, and judgment could not be made known. The scene John describes is a frightening one because no one in the company of heaven is worthy to open the scroll—not Moses, not Joshua or David, nor John the Baptist. Yet, Jesus is worthy. He is the only One who can break the scroll, and for that, He is worthy of our worship.

What titles are used to describe Jesus in this passage?

What does it mean that Jesus is both a Lion and a Lamb? What does this mean for your life?

The elder described Jesus with two metaphors derived from the Old Testament that help us see the fulfillment of the biblical story. First, the elder introduced Jesus as the Lion that is from the tribe of Judah. This reference recalls Jacob's prophetic blessing of his son, Judah (Gen. 49:9)—he was described as a "lion's whelp" from whom the scepter would not depart until the Messiah came. Second, the elder described Jesus as the Root of David. He alluded to Isaiah 11:1-9, a prophecy anticipating the Messiah's coming from the line of David. John described seeing a Lamb standing, as if slain. The use of the lamb imagery recalls the entire Old Testament sacrificial system as it predicted the coming Messianic sacrifice. The paradoxical position of standing after death suggests the lamb's power to conquer death.

According to these verses, what were the results of Jesus' death? How have these truths changed your life?

The elders worshiped with a new song. The Old Testament anticipates a new song of redemption (Ps. 33:3; 98:1; 144:9; 149:1). The redemption of lost sinners was purchased by Christ, and the new song in Revelation exalts Him. He is worthy because He was slain. By His sacrificial death, He purchased for God with His blood people who were condemned because of their rebellion against God. The blood of the Lamb cleansed them from sin. Salvation was purchased because God's justice was willingly paid by Jesus.

What is the dual role for those who are redeemed for God (vv. 9-10)?

What images and symbols describe those who worship Jesus?

Jesus' death has universal implications, for it provides salvation for people from every tribe and tongue and people and nation. The elders' song did not promise that everyone

would be saved. The Bible consistently calls people to receive salvation through repentance and faith in Jesus. This does not reverse those passages. The meaning is that people from every place eventually would place their faith in Jesus. This Jesus, the only One who is worthy of our worship, takes the scroll of God's revelation and all of heaven simultaneously sings a brand new song. This song of worship tells the whole story of the Bible: what God promised to Abraham, he has been faithful to fulfill it.

What does it mean to "reign upon the earth"?

What does it mean to serve God as a priest?

Have someone read Hebrews 12:1-3. How is our worship strengthened when we keep our eyes on Christ?

Jesus made believers to be a kingdom of priests to God, and one day they will reign upon the earth. The people of God are described corporately as a kingdom. Individually, the people of the kingdom are priests (Ex. 19:6). As kingdom citizens of the all-powerful and all-knowing One, the people reign with Him. For those suffering at the hands of an evil earthly ruler, as were the first readers, the prospect of reigning gives us hope.

APPLICATION

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

What, if anything, needs to change about your worship in light of this peak inside the throne room of God? What parts of your heart and life are not worshiping Jesus fully?

Worship is a corporate discipline as much as a personal one. How can we worship God in this group of believers?

A well-known pastor once said missions happens because worship does not. What responsibility do we have to those who do not worship the Living God?

PRAYER

Praise Jesus Christ for being worthy of all worship, honor, and praise. Worship Him in this moment and confess to Him that He alone is able to save you, and He alone is worthy of the devotion of your heart.

COMMENTARY

| REVELATION 5:1-14

5:1. The right hand of God symbolizes power and authority. The phrase with writing on the inside and on the back echoes Ezek 2:9-10, where God showed the prophet a scroll with words written “on the front and back... of lamentation, mourning, and woe.” The scroll John saw foretold woe (8:13; 9:12; 11:14), but it also disclosed God’s perfect plan (symbolized by the seven seals) of judgment and the redemption of His creation, which will culminate in the end times. Because the outer edge of the scroll was sealed, the contents could only be seen when all seven seals were removed. Thus, as the seals are opened in chapter 6, what takes place is not the content of the entire scroll, but only those judgments that precede it being fully opened.

5:2-4. The apostle John was emotionally distraught because no one in heaven or on earth or under the earth was found worthy to open the scroll and read the destiny of the world.

5:5-7. Speaking of Jesus as the Lion from the tribe of Judah echoes the messianic prophecy in Gen 49:9-10. Christ was able to open the scroll and its seven seals on the basis of an accomplished fact—His death on the cross like a slaughtered lamb (Isa 53:7; Jn 1:29). On the four living creatures, see note at 4:6-7. On the elders, see note at 4:3-4. In the apocalyptic book of Daniel, horns stand for power and authority (Dan 7:8,20,24). On the seven spirits of God, see note at 1:4. God’s sending of the seven spirits immediately after the description of the redemptive work of the Lamb (5:6) may preview “the eternal gospel” being preached climactically to the entire world in 14:6-7. The Lamb taking the scroll out of the right hand of the Father signifies a transfer of authority, allowing the Lamb to fulfill the contents of the scroll (i.e., the judgments and other events of the rest of the Apocalypse). For a parallel account, see Dan 7:13-14.

5:8. Believers’ prayers are described as filling gold bowls before the throne of God. The “gold” emphasizes their reality and exceeding value to God. The word saints (Gk *hagioi*) means “holy ones.” These are not elite and exceptional Christians. Instead, the NT uses this term for all believers in Christ (Rm 1:7).

5:9-10. The new song sung in heaven about Christ is inspired by His redemptive work, the shedding of His blood on the cross. The target group for redemption (described as every tribe... nation; cp. 7:9; 10:11; 11:9; 13:7; 14:6; 17:15, where the same terms are used in differing order) is the same group that is identified in the Great Commission: “all nations”

(Mt 28:19). The reference to Christ's shed blood and the phrase a kingdom and priests echo Rev 1:5-6 and may be partially fulfilled in heaven in 7:15. The promise that they will reign on the earth is fulfilled in 20:6.

5:11-14. On the living creatures, see note at 4:6-7. On the elders, see note at 4:3-4. This scene looks ahead to the time when "every knee will bow... and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (Php 2:10-11).



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2023 LIFE GROUPS - 4TH QUARTER WHILE WE WAIT REVELATION 10:1-11 10/29/2023

MAIN POINT

Because we have confidence that God's purposes will be fulfilled, we keep on proclaiming the gospel to the nations until the very end.

INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

What kinds of delays can we expect in life (i.e., traffic, doctor's appointments, dinner reservations)?

What is something for which you've been waiting a long time, but has been delayed?

Delays are a normal part of life. Traffic accidents or road construction delay our commutes, and delayed flights disrupt our travel plans. Inclement weather delays sporting events. Other delays are by choice: we may put our educational plans on hold, or couples may delay starting a family.

From a human perspective, the return of Christ is the most delayed promise ever. Given to us in the first century, this promise still hasn't been fulfilled. When will Christ return and the end come? Revelation 10 does not answer these questions, but it does clarify one important part of the answer: once the seventh angel sounds his trumpet, everything will move very quickly. But until that seventh trumpet blows, we are commissioned to take the gospel to the nations.

UNDERSTANDING

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

| ASK A VOLUNTEER TO READ REVELATION 10:1-4.

Describe the angel John saw in verse 1. How does the appearance and purpose of the angel compare with popular conceptions of angels?

What does the angel's appearance and size convey about the power of God? About God's enemies?

The angel was described in stunning fashion and characterized as mighty. This description made clear the power of this messenger of God. If this is God's messenger, how much more powerful and magnificent is God! It is evident from John's writing that those who stand opposed to the power of God have no hope of victory.

Why do you think John was forbidden to write down what the seven thunders spoke?

What is the implication for us that John was not allowed to reveal what he heard?

The Bible does not contain all the details about the end of time; some things we simply cannot know. However, God has revealed all that we need to know. His revelation is not exhaustive, but it is sufficient.

| ASK A VOLUNTEER TO READ REVELATION 10:5-7.

How does verse 6 answer the question of the martyrs in Revelation 6:10? How does it answer the prayer of Matthew 6:10?

When the seventh trumpet blows (Rev. 11:15-19), God's final defeat of evil will be fulfilled. The delay will not last forever. His ultimate purpose in human history will be realized.

How did the angel describe God in verse 6? How does this description speak to the trustworthiness of God's promises?

What did the angel tell John to do with the open scroll (vv. 8-9)? What does it mean for us to "take" and "eat" the Word?

God's Word would be of little or no value to us if we did not take it, read it, feed on it, and then proclaim it. Just knowing what the Word of God says is not enough—we must live our lives in accordance with it.

How is the Word of God both good news (sweet) and bad news (bitter)?

Suppose you knew for certain that the return of Christ and the end of the age would happen in the next ten years. How would that be sweet news to you? How would it be bitter?

ASK A VOLUNTEER TO READ REVELATION 10:8-11.

Who does John's prophecy reference (v. 11)?

How is John's commission in Revelation 10:10-11 similar to the Great Commission given to all of God's people in Matthew 28:16-20?

God called John to deliver a message concerning "many peoples, nations, languages, and kings," emphasizing the worldwide scope of God's concern and redemptive plan. Jesus called all His followers to "make disciples of all nations" (Matt. 28:19) and to be His witnesses to "the end of the earth" (Acts 1:8).

The judgments in the previous chapters of Revelation may be disheartening for some people. What confidence and encouragement does chapter 10 give you?

In chapters 8-9, we witnessed the outpouring of God's wrath on unbelieving humanity. In chapter 10, we find a word of encouragement for believers. God's hidden plan will be completed (10:8). We can trust Him to finish things in His time and in His way. We can be confident in His purposes, so we keep on proclaiming the gospel among "many peoples, nations, languages, and kings" (10:11).

APPLICATION

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

How can you demonstrate your faith that God's final judgment is certain even though it is delayed?

How can you demonstrate your willingness to embrace both the "sweet" and the "bitter" parts of God's Word?

Where and how has God called you to speak the gospel to those who are currently rejecting Him?

PRAYER

As you lead your group in prayer, ask God to help your group be courageous enough to share the Word with others, both the sweet and the bitter.

COMMENTARY

| REVELATION 10:1-11

10:1 The mighty angel could be: (1) the angel introduced in 5:2, (2) the angel seen in 18:1, or (3) another angel altogether. In spite of his impressive appearance and the similarity to the vision of the Son of Man (i.e., the glorified Christ) in 1:13-16, it is unlikely this is Christ. Christ is never called an angel elsewhere in the NT.

10:2 The little scroll (Gk biblaridion) may be (1) a second scroll in the Apocalypse, or (2) since it is opened, the scroll which was finally opened for viewing in 8:1. Perhaps the scroll in this verse appears small because the angel holding it is so huge (his right foot being on the sea and his left foot being on the land).

10:3-4 In 1Pe 5:8, the Devil is said to be like a roaring lion. In this case, the angel's lion-like voice may be because he is speaking for the Lion of Judah (5:5), the glorified Christ. The seven thunders may be an allusion to Psalm 29. The number seven stands for completeness in Revelation. So these thunders may look forward to the completion of God's judgment in the rest of the book. The proper perspective on the sealed writing is: "The hidden things belong to the Lord our God" (Dt 29:29).

10:5-7 The pace of divine judgment is about to quicken and be completed, with the sounding of the seventh trumpet (11:15-19), which telescopes all the way to the second coming of Christ. God's hidden plan (Gk musterion) is truth that has not been previously revealed or fulfilled, but is being revealed now (Eph 3:9). The phrase His servants the prophets echoes the same wording in Am 3:7, but it probably refers to both OT and NT (Eph 2:20; 4:11) prophets in this passage.

10:8-11 John taking the open scroll from the hand of the angel represents delegated authority, even as it did when the Lamb (Christ) took the unopened scroll from God the Father in 5:7. For John to eat the scroll recalls Ezekiel being commanded to do the same thing (Ezek 3:1-3). This turned out to be a bitter ministry for Ezekiel (Ezekiel 3:14). In John's case, while the eating was as sweet as honey, the digesting was bitter. The implication here is that the ministry of the Word of God is bittersweet because, while the intake and

preaching of Scripture (i.e., John's command to prophesy) is sweet, the calloused rejection of the hearers is bitter indeed.



Fultondale FBC

2023 LIFE GROUPS - 4TH QUARTER THE LAMB AND THE HARVESTS REVELATION 14:1-20
11/5/2023

MAIN POINT

Christians can live with anticipation, knowing that eternal rest awaits them after death and they will escape the wrath of God—all because of Jesus, the victorious Lamb.

INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

What motivates a person to seek to accomplish something that others refuse to attempt? How does a worthy motive help a person endure when training gets difficult or they begin to wonder if the effort is worth it?

How does seeing ungodly people prospering make a person wonder if following Christ is worth it?

John, while in exile on an island, is reminded that following Christ is worth it. In the last of four scenes, John sees the victorious Lamb's perfected people, hears angelic warnings of judgment and a promise of rest to the faithful, and watches the harvest of the believer and the vintage of the unbeliever. Each image reminds him—and us—of what awaits those who remain faithful to Christ.

UNDERSTANDING

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

| ASK A VOLUNTEER READ REVELATION 14:1-5.

List the descriptors used to describe the 144,000. What do these descriptors reveal about the character of this group?

What was the significance of this group being able to sing a new song? Why was it important for John to know that only this group was able to sing this new song?

How would you describe the relationship between the Lamb and the 144,000?

All the people of God that John heard as sealed in Revelation 7 are seen in their glorified condition. God has protected every one of His servants, and they will always be in the presence of the Lamb, the Son. Believers can live with confidence knowing that God can be trusted to keep His promises and that He has the power to do so.

| ASK A VOLUNTEER READ REVELATION 14:6-13.

How would you compare the messages delivered by each angel? How are their messages similar? How are their messages different?

What other contrasts are presented in this passage?

What is the significance of rest being provided for those who die in the Lord (v. 13)? How does this verse relate to Jesus' teachings about the rest found in Him (c.f. Matt. 11:25-30)?

How is salvation through faith in Christ a source of rest?

John saw three angels deliver messages to the people of the earth, proclaiming the arrival of judgment and the fall of Babylon the Great, while the Spirit promised everlasting rest to the believers who died.

| ASK A VOLUNTEER READ REVELATION 14:14-20.

Compare the two harvests described in verses 14-20. How would you characterize the mood and emotions associated with each harvest? How would you define the end product of each harvest?

How would you characterize the judgment seen in the vintage of the grapes? What other images would you use to describe the judgment portrayed in this vision?

What does this passage teach us about the importance of the Lamb?

What does this passage teach us about the importance of telling others about the gospel?

Christ will return for His followers. Just like a harvest takes place when the crop is ready, Christ will return when the time is right. The return of Christ will also usher in God's wrath on those who reject Christ. Those who reject Christ will experience the full force of God's wrath.

APPLICATION

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

How can the promise of eternal rest give you strength to remain faithful to Christ? In what area of your life do you find the promise of eternal rest most reassuring?

What are you doing to help others understand the gospel and the consequences of rejecting Christ?

How does your view of eternity impact how you live today? What needs to change in your life so that you are more fully demonstrating godliness?

PRAYER

Thank the Lord for providing salvation to all who place their faith in His Son, the Lamb. Ask the Lord to help you remain faithful to Him, encourage other believers, and boldly share the gospel with all people as you await Christ's glorious and beautiful return.

COMMENTARY

| REVELATION 14:1-20

14:1-5 The 144,000, first seen on earth in 7:4-8, are now seen on the heavenly Mount Zion with Christ, the Lamb. The beast cannot touch them, even though they do not have his mark (13:16-17), because they have the name of Christ and the Father on their foreheads. The new song cannot be the same as the one in 5:9-10 because this one can only be learned by the 144,000. In their spiritual purity, they are fitting firstfruits (either the first produce to be harvested, the best of the harvest, or both) of the Lord's final harvest (vv.

14:20). This wording implies that many others are yet to come into the gospel “harvest” (i.e., to saving faith; see vv. 6-7).

14:6-7 Some interpreters think the... gospel is not expressed in Revelation. However, the Greek word translated “gospel” (euangelion) is present, and the climactic preaching calls us to (1) fear God and (2) give Him glory, recognizing the certainty of judgment if one does otherwise.

14:8-11 The fall of Babylon and God’s wrath will be expanded in 16:17-21 and 18:1-19:3. The mention of sexual immorality recalls the same problem in the churches at Pergamum and Thyatira (2:14,20-21). While those who die in the Lord will find “rest” (14:13), there will be no rest day or night for anyone who worships the beast and has his mark.

14:12-13 Blessed marks the second beatitude in Revelation. Believers (the saints) who persevere in keeping God’s commands and faith in Jesus will be blessed with the reward of their godly works (20:12; 2Co 5:10).

14:14-20 Some believe that the One like the Son of Man in this section must be an angel because of the unlikelihood of Christ receiving the command from another angel to reap... the harvest. But the Son of Man associated with a cloud is a clear allusion to Dan 7:13, where the Messiah (Christ) is definitely in view. This section visualizes the “harvest... at the end of the age” (Mt 13:38-43), when the “good seed” and the “weeds” are separated to their eternal destinies. The wheat harvest apparently gleans those responding positively to the climactic preaching of the gospel. A recent view holds that Rev 14:14-16 is the point at which the church is raptured. This is highly unlikely. The harvest of grapes leads to the judgment pictured here as the great winepress of God’s wrath. Since the winepress imagery related to divine wrath is seen in connection with the second coming of Christ (19:15), the events of 14:17-20 must occur at that point. If taken literally, when the “grapes of wrath” are trampled in Christ’s winepress (19:15) outside the city (Jerusalem, apparently), the blood (from the climactic battle at His second coming in 19:19,21) rises to the height of horses’ bridles for some 180 miles. This is roughly the length of Israel from north to south. Some view this horrific description as symbolic of God’s righteous judgment resulting in the deaths of many of the unrepentant.



Fultondale FBC

2023 LIFE GROUPS - 4TH QUARTER OVERCOMING WORLDLINESS REVELATION 19
11/12/2023

MAIN POINT

Man-centered worldliness will ultimately be overcome by God-centered worship.

INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

Up to this point in your life, what have you had to work the hardest at waiting for? (Think: engagement, degree, promotion, children, etc.)

How did you handle, or how are you handling, the waiting process?

What role does waiting play in your relationship with God? How do you handle the waiting process with God and His ultimate plans for the world?

Ever since Jesus' ascension into heaven after His earthly ministry, death, and resurrection, we have been waiting for Him to return. His return brings with it the promise of victory over sin and death, and the new heaven and new earth where we will reside in His presence forever. Revelation 19 gives us a glimpse into that moment when He returns. This passage is a reminder that the wait is worth it, and He is worthy of our worship in the meantime.

UNDERSTANDING

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

| HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ REVELATION 19:1-10.

The great multitude stood before God's throne after realizing that victory over sin and evil has already been won. What specific things do they praise God for?

The vast multitude praise God for (1) their salvation, (2) His righteous judgments upon Babylon, the notorious prostitute (17:1), (3) the coming reign of the Lord, and (4) the joyful marriage of the Lamb. The use here of hallelujah, an expression of praise to the Lord, is for the Lord who reigns. It is used four times (1,3,4,6) and this is the only time in the entire New Testament this word is mentioned. Dr. Platt notes, "God orchestrates all of history to display His glory."

What is the difference in ways we praise God when we are facing life's challenges and how we will praise God when the challenges are no longer present?

What are some ways believers can make themselves ready for Christ's victorious return even now?

We are to be prepared for Christ's coming. Each of us should make sure that we have believed in Christ and are properly clothed with "righteous acts" (v. 8). Sometimes the pressure of constant trials and temptations and the apparent victory of the forces of evil may lead believers to despair. God has given us a message of hope: Jesus is coming to triumph over all evil. In verse 11, John's vision shifts to that of Christ's return.

| HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ REVELATION 19:11-17.

What names did John use to describe Jesus? What do these names of Jesus tell us about Him?

The rider's name was Faithful and True (v. 11). Faithful means steadfast, unflinching in character. Jesus never fails. True means consistent in character. Jesus is never false and never acts inconsistently. He comes to judge the earth precisely because He is faithful and true to God's will and His character. Verse 12 tells us that He has a name known only to Himself. Since the name stands for the person, this surely means that His person escapes complete understanding. His majesty is beyond our ability to comprehend. A third name appears in verse 13, The Word of God. The title identifies Christ as the One who accomplishes God's will. Another name is on His robe and on His thigh (v. 16). The inscription "KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS" occurs in a prominent place, symbolic

of His power. He is the ultimate Ruler. Together, these names tell us that Jesus is supremely above all and that His majesty is beyond our comprehension.

Look at each one of the descriptions of Jesus in this passage. What do they tell us about the results of His second coming?

Which description of Jesus stands out the most to you right now? Why?

If we are going to worship God like heaven worships God, then we need to see God the way heaven sees God. We should bow before the splendor of the Father and behold the supremacy of the Son.

| HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ REVELATION 19:19-21.

Bible students are not in agreement whether the battle of Armageddon is to be literal or symbolic. Regardless of the interpretation one chooses, what is one result of Jesus' ultimate triumph?

How can we apply the truth of verses 19-21 to our lives?

Christ's victory is so certain that it is as though it occurred in the past. Those who follow Christ will reign in victory with Christ the Conqueror. Those who oppose Him will be eternally punished. In His first coming, Jesus provided salvation. Part of that event was His resurrection which demonstrated to all that He is the Lord. The second event is His second coming. By that, Jesus will complete the redemption of His people, finalize the kingdom of God, and give to all persons the rewards or punishments due them according to their attitude toward Him. For those of us who are in Christ, this is the time that we wait and hope for, when our victory is won. But what do we do while we wait? Peter has a word of warning and encouragement.

APPLICATION

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

It is impossible to be bored with the Savior on the white horse, to be nonchalant in commitment or devotion to Him; to be marginal or nominal in commitment or devotion to Christ makes no sense. Let's revere Him. How would your life look different this week if you were to truly revere the risen Christ?

What reasons do you have right now to rejoice in God?

Are you ready for His coming? If He came back now what sin would He find you holding onto? Would He find you faithfully proclaiming the gospel or would He find you silent? How is God speaking to you about how you need to prepare for Christ's return?

PRAYER

Thank God that we will reign with Him forever. Ask Him to help you convey to those who do not know Jesus the urgency of responding to the gospel. Also confess to God the things that distract you from living in expectation of Him, and ask Him for the strength and conviction to live each day alert to His return.

COMMENTARY

| REVELATION 19

19:1-4. The vast multitude pictured as a choir singing the heavenly "Hallelujah Chorus" (vv. 1,3,4,6) was taken to heaven in 7:9 and are identified as the "heaven dwellers" by comparing 7:15 and 13:6. They now praise God for (1) their salvation and (2) His righteous judgments upon Babylon, the "notorious prostitute" (17:1), thus avenging the blood of His servants—the martyrs.

19:6-8. The praise of the vast multitude as a heavenly choir now turns to (1) the coming reign of the Lord and (2) the joyful marriage of the Lamb. The wife of the Lamb (Christ) is the church (Eph. 5:31-32), those redeemed from all nations (5:9-10; 7:9) by His blood (1:5-6; 5:9-10). Since these descriptions are equally true of the vast multitude (7:9; 19:1,6) and the "heaven dwellers" (12:12; 13:6), it appears that there is a shift in imagery from the group of people being portrayed as a choir to being portrayed as the wife of the Lamb.

19:9. The fourth beatitude of the Apocalypse has a twist: If a person accepts the "invitation" and goes to the marriage feast of the Lamb, his faith will make him part of the wife (the church). It is called a "feast" because it endures, beginning on the evening of the wedding and continuing for days.

19:10. Near the beginning of the Ten Commandments, God's people are prohibited from the worship of any being other than God (Ex. 20:3-6). Nevertheless, in sheer amazement, John fell prostrate to worship the angel. The angel immediately corrected him. The phrase

the testimony about Jesus is the spirit of prophecy apparently means that all biblical prophecy either directly or indirectly testifies about Jesus, the Messiah (Luke 24:27, 44-48; 1 Pet. 1:11-12).

19:11-13. John had previously seen heaven opened in 4:1. This rider on a white horse is not the same as the one in 6:2. He judges and makes war in righteousness, not in the boastful and blasphemous way that the beast does (13:5-7). This is why He is called "Faithful and True." Many crowns shows that Christ has more power to rule than Satan (12:3) or the beast (13:1). A name... that no one knows except Himself reminds readers that the Lord has not revealed everything about Himself and His plan (Deut. 29:29). A robe stained with blood looks backwards at Jesus' redemptive death (7:9) and forward to His "treading the winepress of God's wrath" (19:15; Isa. 63:1-6). In both the Gospel of John (John 1:1,14) and 1 John (1 John 1:1), John began by referring to Jesus as "the Word."

19:14. Since the armies accompanying the Lord are wearing pure white linen, as did the Lamb's wife (v. 8), this is another image for the same group elsewhere called the "vast multitude" (19:1,6; 7:9) and the "heaven dwellers" (12:12; 13:6). White horses implies that Christ allows His people to participate in the climactic victory, as they later reign with Him (20:6).

19:15-16. God's word pictured as a sharp sword looks back to the description of the Son of Man in 1:13-16. Strike the nations sounds like wording from Psalm 2, but there the striking is done with "a rod of iron" (v. 9). Shepherd... with an iron scepter is the end-time fulfillment of what was predicted of the newborn Son in Revelation 12:5.

19:17-19,21. The great armies of the earth, led by the beast and the kings of the earth, assemble to make war against the Lamb (apparently at Armagedon). But they end up being killed by the sword that comes out of the mouth of the rider on the white horse (Christ) and fed to the birds at the great supper of God.

19:20. The beast and the false prophet are captured and thrown alive into the lake of fire, apparently the first to be sentenced there (Matt. 25:41). They are not destroyed, but will suffer torment forever (Rev. 20:10).



Fultondale FBC

2023 LIFE GROUPS - 4TH QUARTER TODAY'S CHURCH REVELATION 22:1-21 11/19/2023

MAIN POINT

Jesus is being sent back for us. There is a time coming when our sentness will end. This is the hope and expectancy we hold as we continue to live out our everyday mission.

INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

Think about the best vacation you have taken recently. How did you feel when it came to an end? Were you sad? Somewhat relieved? Explain.

Now think about the Christian journey. What do you anticipate about eternity?

How do those hopes and anticipations impact your day-to-day life?

Vacations are wonderful and often restful, but they can also be exhausting because they take us out of our normal routines. Our everyday mission can have the same effect on our lives. It is invigorating when we live out our calling, but it can also be exhausting because we live in the balance between two worlds—our present reality and our future promise. Being sent isn't something that we do once or twice a year on a mission trip; it's an everyday mission. In our human nature, we might get tired and wonder when our mission will end. The answer to that question is found in the Book of Revelation. The story comes full circle. We're not there yet, but we continue until Jesus comes. This is the beauty and hope of our future.

UNDERSTANDING

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

| HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ REVELATION 22:1-6.

These verses from Revelation describe the vision of eternity that God gave John. How is heaven described in verses 3-5? What stands out to you?

Look back at Genesis 2:9,15-17. Why do you think Revelation ends with a return to a garden scene with the Tree of Life on display? Why isn't the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil mentioned? What does this tell us about what life will be like for us when Christ returns?

How is heaven actually better than Eden?

The nearer John came to the center of the city, the more like a garden it became. It was like the garden of Eden, only better. A river watered Eden (Gen. 2:10); now a river gushed from the throne, a provision coming directly from God. The Tree of Life is in the city. This tree mysteriously disappeared after being present in the first human home (Gen. 2:9; 3:22,24). Now it reappears in the final human home (Rev. 2:7; 22:2,14), wonderfully producing its fruit every month unlike any tree now known.

What do these verses reveal about our purpose in eternity? What do they reveal about our relationship with God?

With those truths in mind, how could living sent here on earth help prepare you for heaven?

What specifically from these verses motivates you to continue living sent?

With the curse of sin removed, only blessing remains. Three wonderful blessings of eternity are listed. First, God's servants will serve Him. Second, they will see His face. With the curse gone, His people will gladly enjoy His full presence. Third, His name will be on their foreheads. The name of God on people shows that they are genuine and that God guarantees to protect them (Rev. 3:12). That this reality awaits us should motivate us to live sent with a sense of urgency in everyday mission, to help us lead as many people as possible to the God of all eternity.

| HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ REVELATION 22:7-21.

From these verses, what do we learn about the mission God gave John? How are you encouraged to live sent by his example of faithfulness?

What do you learn about Jesus and His invitation to “Come” in verses 13-17?

What do you learn about those who receive the invitation?

These verses speak to the urgency of Jesus’ return. How are we to live sent in light of this passage?

Through the work of the Holy Spirit, God gave John a vision of the end times. John was faithful to record what he saw and ensure that his letter reached other people. This was an important aspect of the everyday mission God gave John. God wanted this truth communicated because Jesus is coming back; when the end comes, no one will have the chance to change his or her ways. This is the call to living sent on everyday mission. Once the events are initiated, they will conclude swiftly—we have to be ready for Christ’s return today.

Do you feel a sense of urgency to live sent on a daily basis? Why or why not?

What can you do to grow if you do not feel an urgency to live sent?

Jesus is the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End. He began creation, He observes events as they happen, and He will bring history to a just completion. Salvation is offered to anyone who will take it. It is a gift. It cannot be earned; it only may be received. This great book predicts the end of history as we know it. This truth reminds us that we are to live sent, warning unbelievers of their future without Christ. A time is coming when our sentness will end, and people will no longer have hope.

Why is this picture of eternity good news for Christians? How does this hope and future motivate you to live now?

APPLICATION

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

Have you been putting off getting serious about some aspect of your spiritual life? If so, how does today’s text challenge you?

What are some practical ways you can remind yourself of the urgency of living sent? How can we remind each other?

When you think about the finality of Jesus’ return, who does the Spirit bring to mind? How can we encourage you and pray for you as you seek an opportunity to share your faith with that person?

PRAYER

Thank God for the promise of Jesus' return, when our sentness will end. Ask God to strengthen you with His Spirit and to fill you with an urgency to live sent on everyday mission until that day comes.

COMMENTARY

| REVELATION 22:1-21

22:1-5. The river of living water looks back to Ezekiel 47, as well as to Jesus' promise about the Holy Spirit flowing as "streams of living water" (John 7:37-39) from those who believe in Him. The tree of life was in the center of the garden of Eden (Gen. 2:9; 3:3). After the fall of mankind into sin, God denied humanity access to the tree (Gen. 3:24). Ezekiel 47:12 speaks of trees that bear fruit with medicinal value. The wording here pictures the new Jerusalem as the new and permanent "Eden," where there will no longer be any curse (Gen. 3:14-19). As Adam and Eve walked with the Lord periodically in the garden, His presence will be constant. All inhabitants will have His name on their foreheads, as was the case with the 144,000 (14:1).

22:6-7. The sixth beatitude of the book (blessed) repeats the emphases on the imminence of the events in Revelation and the need for application of its prophecies seen in the first beatitude in 1:3, but here those elements are in reverse order.

22:8-9. John repeats his mistake of false worship of an angel. Apparently the reader is to understand that worship of angels (who are majestic) is an easy mistake to make, even for a mature Christian like John.

22:10-12. The Book of Daniel was "sealed until the time of the end" (Dan. 12:9) to conceal its contents. In clear contrast, and in light of the imminence of the events ("the time is near") portrayed in Revelation, John was commanded not to seal the prophetic words of this book. Until the events of the book are fulfilled, people will continue to act in keeping with their fallen spiritual nature ("unrighteous... filthy" or "righteous... holy"), but when the Lord comes, He will render to each person according to his deeds (20:12; 2 Cor. 5:10).

22:14-15,17. The final beatitude (blessed) of the Apocalypse is an elegant presentation of the gospel, using the imagery of the "new Eden" ("the tree of life") and the eternal city (enter the city by the gates). Wash their robes means faith in the shed blood of Christ. The right to the tree of life is what Adam and Eve were cut off from by their sin. The gates of

the city and access to the tree of life are made available to those who believe in Jesus, but all unbelievers, with their various sinful lifestyles, are excluded. With the repeated invitation to come and take the living water as a gift (i.e., free grace; see Eph. 2:8-9), Revelation ends with passionate evangelistic appeal. Though Jews referred to Gentiles as dogs, in this case it more likely refers to false teachers—whatever their ethnicity—as in Phil. 3:2.

22:16. Jesus is the offspring of David in the sense of being a blood descendant of King David. This also serves as a messianic title (see Matt. 1:1 and the family tree in Luke 3:23-31).

22:18-19. It is doubtful that the wording here directly refers to closing the canon of the Bible (this book). The book that is not to be tampered with is the book of Revelation, but the wording does imply that all Scripture should be guarded as sacred—never tampered with. The immediate context in Revelation is of a “new Eden” (vv. 1-5). Also, in Genesis 3, Eve added to the Word of God (Gen. 3:3) and the Serpent took away from what the Lord had said (Gen. 3:4). As a result, this “biblical bookends” effect of Rev. 22:18-19 and Gen. 3:3-4 infers that, just as Genesis is the first book in the Bible, Revelation is the last.

22:20. Jesus promised that He is coming quickly, but it has been well over 1,900 years since He uttered these words. John prayed for Jesus to come soon. God’s patience toward the unbelieving world is a cause of Jesus’ delay.

22:21. The Book of Revelation, though made up largely of apocalyptic (1:1) and prophetic (1:3) literary forms, begins (1:4) and ends (with its concluding grace) like a letter. In spite of all the works of the Devil and the judgment and wrath of God detailed in between, the Apocalypse starts with grace and ends with grace, making a full circle from grace to grace. This is a fitting symmetry for a book that foretells the ultimate victory of “the God of all grace” (1 Pet. 5:10).



Fultondale FBC

2023 LIFE GROUPS - 4TH QUARTER LIFE TOGETHER IN THE CHURCH
1 THESSALONIANS 5:12-22 11/26/2023

MAIN POINT

As Christians, we must learn how to love one another and work with one another for the encouraging and the building up of each other.

INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

Are you the kind of person who accepts the help or charity of others well, or the kind of person who finds it very difficult to accept help from others? Explain your answer.

Do you find it easier or more difficult to help others who are in dire need? Explain.

At various points in our life, we will have the opportunity to both help others and receive help from others. In both cases, the church is an excellent place to grow as a person and help the mission of God. As Christians, we must learn how to love one another and work with one another for the encouraging and the building up of each other. As we do, God gets glory and the church grows in its influence.

UNDERSTANDING

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

| HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ 1 THESSALONIANS 5:12-15.

One theme that ties together all of the exhortations in these verses is that they are all concerned with how Christians are to behave in their relationships with others, taking in to the consider the various roles or responsibilities others may have.

Why is it important for us to let the leaders of the church know that we value them? What are specific ways we can affirm and support our leaders?

How would you describe your part in meeting the needs of your spiritual leaders? Do they know how much you appreciate them?

Church members have an ongoing responsibility to respond properly to the spiritual leaders in their midst. According to Paul, we are to follow good leadership, receive admonition, and express high regard for godly leaders. When the leaders and the people are in right relationship, how much easier it is for all the members of the congregation to be at peace with each other. Here is a great prescription for a healthy church. Ultimately peace is part of the fruit that the Spirit works in our lives (Gal. 5:22).

What different types of people in the church does Paul draw attention to in this verse? What is our responsibility with each group?

What must be true about your relationships in order for you to know if the people around you fit in any of these categories?

Paul challenged the people in the church at Thessalonica to correct those who are out of step (the “unruly”); uplift those who are discouraged and fearful (the “fainthearted”); hold on to the fragile (the “weak”); and go the long haul with those who struggle (“be patient with everyone”). To know if the people around us fit into any of these categories, we have to doing life with them; we have to be in genuine, deep relationships. These types of struggles are not evident on the surface.

What is the goal of correcting those who are out of step? What does it not look like? Why is this often so hard for us to do?

The directives of verse 14 advised Christians how to care for the hurting. In verse 15, the focus changes to how to deal with those wanting to hurt someone else.

Why does it please God for us to seek the best for those who are hurtful? What does this look like? What does it not look like?

Who benefits when we please God by forgiving others? How are they benefited?

| HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ 1 THESSALONIANS 5:16-18.

One theme tying these three verses together is that each concerns the inner life of the believer within the context of their relationships with others in the church.

Do you think about rejoicing, praying and giving thanks as something an individual does more on his or her own, or as something that he or she does in relationship with others?

How does practicing these things alone impact the way we practice them with others, and vice versa? How do they help us encourage and build each other up?

| HAVE A FINAL VOLUNTEER READ 1 THESSALONIANS 5:19-22.

In reading these verses (and in reading much of the New Testament), we have to remember that the Christian faith was still developing. People were still making sense of things that we now take for granted. Things like an incomplete canon of Scripture and the activity of itinerant teachers created in the early church a setting conducive to conflict. The church struggled to know which leader to follow, which prophet was true, and which was false. Disagreements over doctrine and ethics seemed inevitable. Some theological controversies impacted the entire church and affected the understanding of the gospel itself. Other disagreements were more local in their impact, affecting a single congregation.

Do Christians struggle with any of these type of things today? Discuss various options as a group.

How might we go about “testing” as Paul commands? What is the goal of testing? How do it help encourage and build one another up?

The word “everything” is universal; it leaves nothing free from examination by spiritual standards and understanding. Paul did not explain how to carry out this testing. But certainly the fire of the Spirit (his convicting, guidance, and illumination), the instructions from the apostles and missionaries, and the written revelation of God are the lenses through which we must scrutinize everything. The clear purpose of this testing was to hold on to the good, and to avoid every kind of evil. The good has its origin in God; evil is a distortion of that good. Evil is twisting and destructive. We must not flirt with evil.

Churches that do cannot encourage and build one another up—only tear one another down.

APPLICATION

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

Which of the behaviors we've studied today represents a strength in your interaction with others? Which is an area of weakness? How can you improve the weak area(s)?

What examples of genuine love have you observed in our group or church? How does diligent service through genuine love affect a community of believers?

What do you think are the main obstacles to a deeper sense of authentic community at church?

PRAYER

Praise God for His wisdom, as He designed you to live in community. Ask Him to help your group grow closer. Pray that God would show you how to better serve others and Him.

COMMENTARY

| 1 THESSALONIANS 5:12-22

5:12. Paul turned to some practical matters of church life. The first involves the relationship between the congregation or community and its church leaders. Paul first called the congregation to give respect to those who work hard among you, who are over you in the Lord. Honor is due to church leaders, whether they are paid staff or officers who give their time and energy (elders, deacons). Spiritual leadership is difficult and weighted with responsibility. These leaders are engaged in hard work. One of their “thankless” duties is to admonish. This deals with pointing out faults or mistakes, errors in individuals or the community. Those who perform this task take on a difficult responsibility, and they are to be respected and honored.

There are implications for the leaders as well. They are to work hard. It is good work, and they are to get their energy from God. Part of the job description of the church leader is

to “stand before” or be over others in the Lord. This is not a dictatorship, but a way of lovingly and authoritatively teaching the Word of God to the people. Leaders are also to point out wrongs, sins, and failures in the lives of their people and congregation. This is not a favorite task, but it is essential to the health of believers and the church.

5:13. Not only are we to honor our leaders; we are to think of them in a special, affectionate way. We are to love them. The basis for this love is their work. Church leaders are performing a good work for Christ and His people. This deserves our highest respect and love. Paul then turned our attention toward the person sitting next to us, or across the aisle, and commanded us to live in peace with each other. This is a maintenance program for a healthy church: keep the peace. To live in peace means to go as far as possible to live in harmony with others, or “as far as it depends on you” (Rom. 12:18). Many people who would not rob a bank or tell a blatant lie will sin against this clear command. They speak or act in ways that are divisive. People who act this way hurt not only themselves and other persons, but they also hurt the church. People outside the church notice such things and stay away.

5:14. Paul next launched into some short, staccato instructions and commands for Christian living. He focused on three types of people in the Thessalonian church who presented different concerns for him. He spoke about the idle, the timid, and the weak. The idle were to be warned. There were those in the Thessalonian church who were so certain of the imminent return of Christ that they became lazy in their daily living. If Christ is coming back soon, they may have reasoned, what is the point of the daily grind? In their neglect they became careless in their responsibilities, spent too much time chatting over the back fence, and contributed little to the general welfare of the church.

The timid were to be encouraged. These were people who had become discouraged, perhaps depressed. They may have felt this way because of difficult circumstances, or because they despaired of living up to the high standards of the Christian faith. These people needed to be helped, not warned. They needed to hear, “You can do it.”

The weak were to be helped. These were the spiritually weak in Paul’s time, and they are still found in every church. Perhaps they lack knowledge or experience; it could be that they struggle with certain sins which continually defeat them; they may lack courage or find it difficult to trust God. They are weak in the faith and need to be helped along the way. We all identify with this group of people at some time or other. In our weakness and inability to conquer sin, we find that Christ helped us by the sacrifice of his life. Can we who have been so blessed do any less for others in their time of need?

Everyone should be dealt with in patience. Love is what helps us be patient with everyone. Love is patient. It does not seek its own way. Because of our selfish tendencies, we need patience from others, even as we need to be patient. Perhaps that is why God can be so patient with us. He recognizes that our mistakes, our bungling efforts, our one step forward and three steps back are valuable learning exercises in growing in grace and character.

5:15. Paul was concerned not only with relationships within the church, but relationships outside the church. He gave commands for behavior to each other and to everyone else. Getting even, exacting our own sense of “justice,” is a strong human tendency.

Jesus was different. He contradicted just about everything we naturally do. He often began His moral lessons with “you have heard” and then called for a change by following up with “but I tell you” (Matt. 5:21-30; 33-37; 38-42; 43-47). He brought a new way to live. He is the new way.

Only as we abide in Christ and entrust our grievances, hardships, and the wrongs we suffer to him can we live with this command. It is not natural, but it is possible. It marks a distinctly Christian approach to life. Paul detailed this approach by quoting Proverbs 25:21-22 in the Book of Romans when he called us to live in peace, to not take revenge. He told us, “If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink” (Rom. 12:20), then added “Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good” (Rom. 12:21). And so Paul told the Thessalonians to be kind to each other and to everyone else. This means everyone both inside and outside the church.

5:16. Paul admonished, Be joyful always. This is short and to the point. The key, however, is the word always. Paul meant this literally. Christian joy is not bound by circumstances or hindered by difficulties. In fact, joy in the New Testament is often coupled with sorrow or suffering.

The Thessalonian believers had already experienced this strange duet, like an inspiring song played in minor key (1 Thess. 1:6). When the sorrow or suffering results from being identified with Christ, the Holy Spirit creates a supernatural joy—a wellness of soul that cannot be dampened by adverse situations. The explanation may be found in 2 Corinthians 4:16–18: “For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all.”

5:17. The next staccato note follows: pray continually. This means never stop praying. Paul was a busy missionary, and he wrote about the Christian’s duty to fulfill daily

responsibilities, so this is not a command about speaking non-stop prayers. It refers, however, to the attitude of prayer, or reverence before God. The Christian's life of righteousness and his approach to relationships and responsibilities should be such that he maintains a constant attitude of being in God's presence. Such a person will pray often and about many things, including requests, praise, and thanksgiving. This command also means that we should never quit praying.

5:18. The next command requires trust in the sovereignty of Christ: give thanks in all circumstances. It recognizes God's eminence in all events. A thankful spirit does not come naturally to most of us. Certainly it pushes us beyond our natural capacities when difficult or painful situations invade our life. This command to be thankful, no matter what happens, is possible only by God's grace. When we can agree with God that he works all things out for good to those who love him and are committed to obedience (Rom. 8:28), then we can thank him.

5:19. This verse is a caution against dousing water on the fire of God's Spirit: Do not put out the Spirit fire. This can happen in any heart when the Holy Spirit is stifled, allowing thoughts or actions which are contrary to the character or practices of God. The fire of the Spirit is suppressed when he is rejected, when his convicting power, righteousness, and judgment (John 16:8-11) are ignored. We douse the Spirit's influence in our life through doubt, we drench him with anger, we drown his power with immorality.

The Holy Spirit himself cannot be put out. He is God. We can, however, stifle his work in our life. We quench the Spirit, or grieve him, when we do not reach for those attitudes and graces which are peculiarly his—love, joy, and peace (Gal. 5:22-23). The Spirit's fire is quenched when his presence is ignored or his guidance and conviction in our hearts are suppressed and rejected.

5:20. Paul declared, Do not treat prophecies with contempt. Others have translated this verse, "Despise not prophecies." This is a present tense verb, addressed to "you" (plural), and therefore intended for the entire church.

5:21-22. Paul advised the Thessalonians to Test everything. The word everything is universal; it leaves nothing free from examination by spiritual standards and understanding. Paul did not explain how to carry out this testing. But certainly the fire of the Spirit (his convicting, guidance, and illumination), the instructions from the apostles and missionaries, and the written revelation of God are the lenses through which we must scrutinize everything.

The clear purpose of this testing was to hold on to the good, and to avoid every kind of evil. The good has its origin in God; evil is a distortion of that good. Evil is twisting and destructive. We must not flirt with evil.



Fultondale FBC

2023 LIFE GROUPS - 4TH QUARTER WORN OUT ISAIAH 40:28-31 12/3/2023

MAIN POINT

When we feel worn out, we can place our hope firmly in God and trust Him to exchange our weariness for His strength.

INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

Complete this sentence: I am worn out because

In what ways do you struggle with feeling worn out? What does being worn out feel like to you?

How do you usually act or react when you're feeling worn out?

When we're just plain tired, like how you feel after a full day of yard work, most of us know what do with that. Take a good, hot bath. Have a yummy snack. Whisper a tired amen, then go to bed early. But when the spirit and mind are worn out, it's so much more difficult to know what to do.

UNDERSTANDING

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

| WATCH THE SESSION TWO VIDEO CALLED "I AM WORN OUT."

What do you do to counter your weariness?

In the video, Angela shared this truth: It is a misrepresentation of this life to believe that we will get to a place one day where we will not grow weary and not wear out. It's unavoidable. We're inclined to grow weary.

What emotions arise when you consider those truths?

| HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ PSALM 121:3-4.

Thankfully, God is not like us. He is our God who does not need sleep; He doesn't grow weary.

What does this truth teach us about God's nature?

How would you summarize these verses in your own words?

| HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ ISAIAH 40:28-31.

According to this passage, what is our role in being renewed?

What has God promised to do?

What are the benefits of placing your hope in God?

Other than God, where do you find yourself placing your hope? What is the danger in turning to those people or things for renewal?

In the video, Angela shared eight provisions for the worn-out individual:

1. The presence of God restores.
2. Sometimes we experience a divine wait before refreshment.
3. The Sabbath rest is God's gift to us.
4. Jesus did not heal everyone or go to every town.
5. Jesus required physical, mental, and emotional rest.
6. Repentance leads to refreshment.
7. If you walk in the good way, your soul will rest.
8. Godly friends refresh your soul.

Which of these provisions do you see clear evidence of in your own life?

Which of these provisions are you most in need of right now?

APPLICATION

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

What specific action could you take to come to God for refreshment this week?

What verse from today's session gives you the most hope?

What verse from today's session gives you the most hope?

What danger or warning would you give to a friend about feeling worn out?

What makes this topic so significant in our personal lives? In our relationship with God? In our churches?

PRAYER

Close your Bible study with a time of group prayer. Pray for your group members to remember how great our God is and that the Bible makes a way for us, giving grace to the weary. Pray for your group members to take God at His word and to begin to live out this week everything you've learned.

Visit lifeway.com to purchase the Bible study book for enhanced individual and group study.

COMMENTARY

| PSALM 121:3-4

121:1-2. The hills are difficult to interpret accurately. Does the phrase imply a temptation to take refuge in the hills as idolaters would do, or are the hills themselves a source of trouble, either because of the rough terrain or the potential robbers who hide in them? Either way, the author knows something better. That is why the thought of this verse leaps well beyond the hills to the universe at large; beyond the universe to its Maker. Here is living help: primary, personal, wise, immeasurable.

121:3-4. The rest of the psalm expands the promise. The word for not in verse 3 is the one used normally for requests and commands. What this means is that this verse should be taken as a prayer to be answered by the confidence of verse 4 and of all that comes after.

| ISAIAH 40:28-31

40:28 God had the power and wisdom to bring about Judah's deliverance.

40:29-31 God not only had strength, but He distributed that strength to His people. The criterion for receiving God's strength was not youth but trust. Those who trusted God would have an unlimited source of strength.



Fultondale FBC

2023 LIFE GROUPS - 4TH QUARTER GOD WORKS IN SURPRISING WAYS LUKE 1:1-38

12/10/2023

MAIN POINT

God used faithful people to achieve His purpose of redemption through Jesus.

INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

What's your favorite "unexpected" detail in the story of Jesus' birth? In another story from Scripture?

Why do you think God chooses to work in ways that surprise us? What's one unexpected way God has worked in your life lately?

The Gospel of Luke begins with an angel promising the births of John the Baptist and Jesus. As we study, we'll see a common theme develop—God's use of the unexpected to bring Jesus into the world. Scripture from Genesis to Revelation shows that God often works in unexpected ways, just as He does in our lives today.

UNDERSTANDING

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

| HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ LUKE'S PROLOGUE IN LUKE 1:1-4.

Why did Luke write this Gospel account, according to verses 1-4?

Luke said he wrote his Gospel to present "an orderly account" (1:3) of God's fulfilling His promise to provide a Deliverer through whom people can be saved from their sins. The entirety of his Gospel describes Jesus as that Deliverer, the perfect human and Savior.

Luke was a physician, a Gentile, and a companion on some of Paul's journeys. Based on these details, what might you expect to find in his Gospel?

| HAVE ANOTHER VOLUNTEER READ LUKE 1:5-25.

What characteristics of Zechariah and Elizabeth made them good candidates for a special assignment from God?

Zechariah and his wife Elizabeth lived rightly before God, obeyed the laws, and met the expectations of the Lord. Unfortunately, they were childless. Zechariah had reached an advanced age and yet continued to serve God faithfully even though God seemingly had not answered his prayer for a child.

What do you do when your prayers go unanswered? How is your relationship with God affected?

What emotions did Zechariah experience when Gabriel appeared? Put yourself in the place of the two parents. What would you think and feel as you listened to the angel?

How did the angel say John's birth and life would affect his parents and others?

The nature of John's ministry was to bring God's people back to the Lord. He would serve as the forerunner of the Messiah, through whom God's kingdom would break into human history. We'll take a closer look at this in Luke 3:1-22.

Why did Zechariah doubt the angel's word that he would have a son (v. 18)? How can you relate to his reaction? What was the angel's response?

| HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ LUKE 1:26-38.

What parallels do you see between these verses predicting Jesus' birth and the previous set of verses predicting John the Baptist's birth?

In both stories we get an introduction to the parents, angelic prophecies, signs, statements about each child's mission, and unexpected pregnancies. We also see affirmation of God's grace at work. Elizabeth acknowledged God's favor in her life (v. 25) and the angel described Mary as "highly favored" by God. This favor wasn't based on either woman's merit, but on God's grace in their lives.

In what ways do you sometimes take God's grace for granted? What do our day-to-day lives reveal about our appreciation for God's grace?

Why do you think Mary was troubled (v. 29)? What dangers did she face?

Mary was betrothed to Joseph, which made them legally husband and wife even though the marriage wasn't finalized. Discuss what possible legal and social consequences Mary and Joseph might have faced as a result of her being pregnant out of wedlock.

What did the angel's description of the child (vv. 31-33) mean to a Jew at the time of Jesus' birth? What does it mean to people today?

What attitudes are revealed by Mary's question (v. 34) and statement (v. 38)? Why did Mary refer to herself as a slave? Why do people shy away from the idea of submitting to God like a slave?

How did Mary's reaction to the angel's news compare with Zechariah's reaction in Luke 1:11-18? What are a few key differences between questioning God (as Zechariah did) and asking questions of Him (like Mary)?

Zechariah didn't believe God's ability to give him and his wife a son, and he asked for a sign to prove God's words were true. Mary voiced confusion over the logistics of how she'd have a child, but she never acknowledged skepticism or doubt. These two responses show us an important distinction between questioning God and asking questions of Him.

APPLICATION

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

The angel told Mary, "Nothing is impossible with God." Present a situation in your life when God did the impossible from a human perspective. Describe the impact of that experience.

Why does God want us to be totally obedient to Him?

What is the connection between our understanding of Jesus' identity and our willingness to accept the truth of the gospel? What keeps people from submitting to the truth about Jesus?

PRAYER

Close your group time in prayer, asking God to strengthen our faith and our courage to obey Him. Thank Him for sending Jesus and for the salvation available through Him. Pray that God will open our eyes to Jesus' identity and His work in our lives through our study of Luke.

COMMENTARY

| LUKE 1:1-38

Luke began his narrative about the events of Jesus' life and ministry with a formal preface. This was a common practice in historical works of Luke's era. A number of others had previously written about the life and works of Jesus. This may include the Gospels of Mark and Matthew since they preceded Luke's writing. "Events... fulfilled among us" speaks of how Jesus fulfilled many Old Testament prophecies. Original eyewitnesses included Mary, the mother of Jesus, about whom Luke wrote more than any other New Testament author. Luke's stated purpose in writing his Gospel was to provide historical certainty and theological clarity for Theophilus in regard to what he had been taught about Jesus.

1:5-7 Zechariah was of the line of Aaron, Israel's first high priest. Elizabeth, too, was a descendent of Aaron. Luke pointed out that they were upright in the sight of God and not just in outward appearance. Luke underscored Zechariah's and Elizabeth's dedication by declaring that this couple blamelessly followed both God's commandments and His regulations. This couple had committed themselves to faithfully follow God's will. Luke indicated that they had no children. Zechariah and Elizabeth's childlessness caused them great sorrow and perhaps even produced in them a sense of inferiority. The reference to Zechariah and Elizabeth's childlessness along with their advanced ages points to the human impossibility of the birth of a son and emphasizes the miraculous nature of God's intervention in their lives with the birth of John the Baptist.

1:11-13 Zechariah encountered an angel of the Lord in the holy place. The term translated "appeared" often denotes divine manifestation. Of course, the elderly priest was startled at the angel's sudden arrival. Zechariah also was gripped with fear. The angel, seeing Zechariah's discomfort, quickly told him not to be afraid. Then the angel revealed his reason for being there. The angel told Zechariah that his prayer had been heard and was about to be answered. Both the prayer for a child and the prayer for the Messiah would receive an answer in the same event, for their son would prepare the way for the Messiah. The angel instructed Zechariah to name that son John. John means "the LORD has been

gracious.” Probably this name underscored God’s grace as it was being extended either to Zechariah in giving him a son or, more likely, to Israel in sending the Messiah.

1:14-17 Then the angel informed Zechariah of the effect of his son’s ministry. John would be a joy and delight to his father and mother. Further, many others would rejoice because of his birth. The people of Israel longed for a prophetic voice for they had not heard one for centuries. John would be that voice. The Savior about whom John would witness would bring and still is bringing joy to people throughout the world. The angel then stated certain characteristics that would lie behind John’s effective ministry. John would be filled with the Holy Spirit even from birth.

1:18-20 Zechariah asked for some assurance regarding the truth of the angel’s message. He protested that he and his wife were too old to produce a child. This expression of unbelief strongly displeased the heavenly messenger. The angel insisted he, Gabriel, had come to the temple from the presence of God to tell Zechariah “this good news.” Gabriel announced that Zechariah would be unable to speak until the day when the imparted prophecy had been fulfilled.

1:26-27 The announcement of Jesus’ birth carried the authority of God. It came in the sixth month, a reference to the sixth month of Elizabeth’s pregnancy with John the Baptist. Both that message and this one came through God’s authorized representative—the angel Gabriel. The truth of this announcement came from the highest source. The term virgin emphasized the purity associated with a young, unmarried woman. Although engaged to a man named Joseph, Mary did not yet live with Joseph. In first-century Jewish culture, engagement (or betrothal) bound them together legally as husband and wife. The wedding and consummation of the marriage, however, followed at a later time. Luke identified Mary’s husband, Joseph, as a member of the house of David. The Jews knew from the Scriptures that the future Messiah would be a descendant of the great King David. This fact supported the identification of Jesus as King. The Child to be born, then, would be identified with the lineage through which the Messiah had been promised (see Isa. 9:6-7; 11:1-5).

1:28-31 The angel greeted Mary with the words, “Rejoice, favored woman! The Lord is with you.” Mary, a normal Galilean girl, received favored status not because she was in some way unique or sinless but because God selected her for a high honor. Gabriel delivered a shocking message to the young Mary. She would conceive and give birth to a son. The idea of conception by a woman not yet married made this a hard statement to accept.

The angel even provided the name of the Child—Jesus. The name Jesus means “Deliverer, Savior.”

1:32-33 With this verse Luke began a description of who Jesus is. His greatness indicated that He would be more than human. Normally the term “great” referred to God. The exalted title “Son of the Most High” also connected Jesus with God. As Most High, God reigns over all creation. As a descendant of King David, Jesus would occupy the great king’s throne to carry on the just and righteous reign of God on earth (see Isa. 9:7; Dan. 7:14). These titles look to Jesus as the Messiah and emphasize His divine nature. Jesus’ reign as Messiah-King will last forever. It will be a kingdom with no end. The eternal reign coincided with the Old Testament view of the Messiah. The phrase “house of Jacob” stood for Israel as a nation. Luke, however, understood God’s people to be all who by faith gave God authority over their lives. Thus Jesus came to establish Himself as King over a kingdom not limited by earthly boundaries.

1:34-35 Mary took in the angel’s comments about the Child to come. Her question about it, however, set up the further explanation offered in verse 35. She questioned how a virgin could conceive and give birth. The Holy Spirit, the third Person of the Godhead, is God present in His power. He acted to make the conception happen apart from the normal biological process. Mary’s human abilities played no part in this process. She simply made herself available to God. Luke identified the Child as the holy One. Only God makes things holy. “Holiness” indicates something or someone set aside by God to be used to accomplish His purpose.

1:36-38 The angel urged Mary to consider the case of her relative Elizabeth. He offered further evidence of God’s power to assure Mary. God enabled a childless woman to give birth and a virgin to be pregnant. Mary made herself available for God to work through her. She accepted slave status, which meant total submission and obedience. Nothing else needed to be said after Mary’s affirmation of faith. So the angel left her. This departure indicated the settlement of the matter in Mary’s heart. Things could move forward.



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2023 LIFE GROUPS - 4TH QUARTER MAKE ROOM LUKE 2:1-15 12/17/2023

MAIN POINT

Jesus came that He might redeem us and make His home in our hearts. Our personal response to God is to receive Him by grace through faith.

INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

What are some of the most meaningful Christmas traditions for your family?

Which songs do you think best reflect the true meaning of Christmas?

How would you describe the world into which Jesus came?

The Christmas story never grows old. Indeed it should be fresh to us every year. Of course, it's not just a holiday for the Christian—it's a holy day. Many people find themselves to be busy during this time of year but leave out the most important person. Without Christ, though, there is no Christmas. Sadly, it's easy even for the Christian to be so busy that we crowd Christ out of our Christmas celebrations—and the rest of the year too.

UNDERSTANDING

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

| ASK A VOLUNTEER TO READ LUKE 2:1-7.

Luke's record of Jesus' birth is both simple and magnificent. Luke's record frames Jesus' birth in historical terms while dramatically demonstrating how God chose to invade human history. God worked through the ordinary plans of government officials to bring

Mary and Joseph to Bethlehem for Jesus' birth and then used common people to spread the extraordinary message of His birth.

As with his other writings, Luke gives the historical setting of the birth of Jesus. What implications does this setting suggest about the world into which Jesus came?

What does the local setting of Jesus' birth tell us about the way He entered our world?

When did you first sense that Jesus wanted to enter and reign "your world"?

Verse 7 says there was "no room for them at the lodging place." While this is certainly a historical event, how does it also serve as a metaphor for what happens with people's rejection of Jesus today?

Jesus humbled Himself in ways beyond our understanding. This is how much He loved us—that He stepped out of heaven into a manger for us. And that was just the beginning.

| ASK A VOLUNTEER TO READ LUKE 2:8-15.

In the countryside near Bethlehem, shepherds were working in the fields. Shepherds were considered ceremonially unclean because of the duties their occupation required of them. Also, their work schedule often prevented them from being cleansed at the temple. As a result, these men were considered very low in the social order. Yet, they would be the first to hear of the Savior's birth—and be the first ones to share it.

Why do you think the first announcement of Jesus' birth was given to lowly shepherds? What does that say about Jesus? What does that say about the nature of diversity inherent within the gospel?

What might the shepherds have found most incredible about the angels' message? How do you think they must have felt in hearing it?

We like to sing about shepherds and to see them on Christmas cards, but in what tangible ways are the shepherds good examples for us to follow today?

How do these verses encourage you to place Jesus first in your life?

From no room in the inn, to a lowly manger, and then to a place in these shepherds' hearts, we see the importance of making room for Jesus. Once we have received Christ,

like the shepherds, we have the responsibility and privilege of helping others know Jesus' name!

APPLICATION

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

How did you receive the message that Jesus came to save you when you first heard it? Who did you first tell once you placed your faith in Jesus?

What does your enthusiasm to tell others about Jesus and what He's done in your life say about your relationship with Him?

How can you honor Jesus with your Christmas celebrations in a way that leads others to make room for Him in their own hearts? Who do you know that needs to hear the true message of Christmas?

In what ways can you renew your enthusiasm for the message of Jesus' birth so that it makes a difference throughout the year?

PRAYER

Spend some time thanking God for the wonderful gift of Jesus and for the joyous fact that He led you to make room for Him in your heart. Pray that others may come to know the same peace and joy that you have experienced. Ask God for the courage and clarity to make Jesus known enthusiastically and humbly, just as the shepherds did.

COMMENTARY

| LUKE 2:1-15

2:1 Augustus (meaning "Exalted," a title approved by the Roman Senate in 27 b.c.) was the Roman Caesar from 31 b.c. to a.d. 14. This decree... that the whole empire should be registered was a census for the purposes of taxation and military service.

2:2 It is thought that Quirinius served two terms as Roman governor of Syria: from 6-4 b.c., and then a.d. 6-9. Jesus was born during the period of the first registration. There was also a census registration in Quirinius's second term (Ac 5:37).

2:3-4 His own town refers not to where Joseph presently lived (Nazareth in Galilee), but to the town of his ancestral roots (Bethlehem in Judea), which was called the city of David because King David grew up there (1Sam 16:1). Joseph was descended from David (1:27). The trip from Nazareth to Bethlehem would have taken three days and covered roughly 90 miles.

2:5-6 As months before in 1:27, Mary at this time was still only engaged to Joseph because they had not yet consummated their marriage via intercourse. Nevertheless, she was pregnant and ready to give birth.

2:7 The words her firstborn Son naturally implies that Mary later had other children (Mt 13:55-56). In that day, a newborn was wrapped... snugly in cloth to keep its arms and legs straight. That baby Jesus was laid... in a feeding trough indicates that the family was forced to stay in a stable, or perhaps a cave that served as a stable, because there was no other room available in Bethlehem.

2:8 The sheep used for temple sacrifices in Jerusalem were kept in fields outside Bethlehem. The work of shepherds was more important at night because of the threats from thieves and predators.

2:9-10 Though not named in the present passage, the angel of the Lord was Gabriel (1:11-20). The glory of the Lord was a bright light (in the midst of the darkness of night), indicating God's glorious presence. It is only natural to be terrified at the sight of an angel, not to mention a sudden, overwhelming light from the sky. The angel spoke to calm the shepherds and refocus their attention on the proclamation of the gospel (good news). All the people could refer to Israel, but given Luke's emphasis on the gospel spreading to the Gentiles, it probably means "all nations."

2:11-12 Savior (Gk soter) means "deliverer, redeemer." Messiah (Gk christos, equivalent to the Hb meshiach) means "anointed one," especially focusing on being anointed as king. Lord (Gk kurios) was used of secular rulers, but it is also the standard translation of the primary name of God in Hebrew, Yahweh. The shepherds would have been shocked to hear that a divine messianic ruler had been born, but to be told He was lying in a feeding trough and born to a man and woman of humble means would have seemed preposterous.

2:13-14 The hymn sung by the choir of angels (heavenly host) is well-known today as the "Gloria in Excelsis Deo," from the first words of verse 14 in the Latin Vulgate (glory to God in the highest). To give "glory to God" does not give Him something He otherwise lacks.

Rather, it is a confession of the wondrous glory He forever possesses. The peace to be found on earth was not the Pax Romana (the “universal peace” of the Roman Empire), but peace with God through faith in Jesus Christ (Rm 5:1). The people whom God favors are those who have found God’s undeserved favor, or grace, through Christ.

2:15 What has happened refers to the birth of the Savior, who is Christ and Lord.



Fultondale FBC

2023 LIFE GROUPS - 4TH QUARTER JESUS BECAME FLESH JOHN 1:1-18 12/24/2023

MAIN POINT

When we speak about the gospel, we carry the miraculous message of God becoming human so that we might be with Him forever.

INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

What is one food that you would say you “love”? Why do you love it?

How do you think our culture would define love? How is this different than how you think Jesus defines it?

How is the Christmas story a demonstration of God’s love for you?

God’s ultimate demonstration of love for us is what we celebrate at Christmas, when God sent His Son, Jesus Christ, as a gift to the world to bring us back to a relationship with Him. Christmas sets in motion Jesus’ sacrificial work for us, which culminates at the cross. Today’s study of John 1:1-18 teaches that Jesus was both God and man, and helps us understand how important this truth is to the gospel we share with others.

UNDERSTANDING

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

| HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ JOHN 1:1-4.

Why do you think John began his Gospel by talking about how Jesus existed from eternity past?

Many people argue that Jesus was a prophet who did good works but wasn't the Son of God. How do John's words argue against that idea?

What does it mean that Jesus is "the Word"?

By describing Jesus as "the Word," John presented Jesus as God's expression of Himself to us. Through creation and then again in coming to earth, Jesus revealed what God wanted us to know about Him and about who we are in Him. Before Jesus was born in a manger, before the angel told Mary she was pregnant, before any of the Old Testament prophets spoke about a Messiah, Jesus was with God, and He was God.

Why was it important for John to point out that Jesus had a role in creation (v. 3)?

In the same way that God the Father brought physical life through Jesus in creation (see Psalm 33:9), He also brought spiritual life through Jesus. Jesus came to earth to bring salvation to mankind. John points to the Son's unity with the Father that we see throughout all of Scripture. John 1:1-4 sets the stage for the good news of the gospel: Jesus is the Son of God, and in Him is eternal life.

| HAVE ANOTHER VOLUNTEER READ JOHN 1:10-11,14-15.

Some people claim that Jesus was not actually a real historical person. If Jesus was completely human, what facts about Him must be true? (Encourage such answers as "He must have a human body, emotions," etc.).

Why is it necessary for people to understand that Jesus is fully human?

A major theme in John's Gospel is the rejection Jesus encountered, including from many Jews who didn't recognize Him as the Messiah. Even with the countless signs, fulfilled prophecies, and Jesus' own statements about Himself, they did not accept Jesus as God's Son. Even though they were a religious people, they did not understand who Jesus was because they expected something totally different.

God wasn't trying to disguise Jesus from anyone. Why, then, did Jesus seem so different from what everyone expected?

What kind of savior are the people around you looking for?

| HAVE A THIRD VOLUNTEER READ JOHN 1:12-13,16-18.

Why do you think the Jewish people had a hard time accepting that Jesus came to save the whole world and not just the Jews?

To think that God wanted to save the entire world was a crazy idea to the Jewish people. They grew up believing the Messiah would save only the Jews. No wonder so many Jews thought Jesus was preaching false words.

How has your family or cultural background shaped your spiritual journey?

If you're a Christ follower, how have you experienced the "grace after grace" John talks about in verse 16?

| HAVE A FINAL VOLUNTEER READ 1 JOHN 4:7-12.

Based on these verses, what is the biblical meaning of love?

What happens to our efforts to love each other if those efforts aren't connected to Jesus' love for us?

God did more than shout down from heaven, "I love you!" to the people on earth. He demonstrated His love by sending Jesus to die on the cross. That's the nature of love—it's more than mere emotion or sentiment. True love is intentional and action-oriented. When we begin to grasp the depth of Jesus' love for us, we will find ourselves freed to love each other in that same sacrificial and intentional kind of way.

APPLICATION

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

Why is it dangerous to think of Jesus as only God and not also fully human?

What is the danger of seeing Him as a man, but not God?

Why do you think love is such a defining mark of the Christian? Do we tend to think of love as the primary mark of the Christian life? If not, what do we think of as that mark? Why?

What are some tangible expressions of this kind of love you might practice this week: At your workplace? In your home? With your friends?

PRAYER

To close today's group time, thank God for sending His love and grace to us through His Son. End the time praising God for the sacrifice He made on our behalf. Challenge your group members to be motivated by the gospel during the Christmas season.

COMMENTARY

| JOHN 1:1-18

1:1-2. Some interpreters have translated the opening phrase of this Gospel, "Before there was a beginning, the Word had been." Indeed, the familiar repetition of Genesis 1:1 almost looks as if John wrote a Gospel of two beginnings—a creation account that parallels physical birth and spiritual rebirth. But it is important to notice that we are dealing with two beginnings, not creations. The central focus of this verse is eternity. Like His Heavenly Father, Jesus always was and therefore existed at the beginning of time.

It is interesting that John should call Jesus the Word rather than some other name to introduce his book—interesting, but not surprising since the Jews often referred to God in such terminology. The doctrine at stake here is the deity of Christ. Jesus is God, and John wanted to make that point immediately. In fact, this prologue (vv. 1-18) begins and ends with a strong statement of this doctrine.

The term Word (*logos*) would have been familiar to the Greeks as well. Their understanding centered on ultimate reason or the rationale of the universe rather than the personal God revealed to Abraham and his descendents. John claimed that the God of creation, the ultimate mind of the universe, had taken on human form; he had become incarnate.

The Bible allows no place for atheism and no room for doubt about how God has spoken—through the Word. Before there was a beginning, the Word had been coequal with God throughout all eternity. But what did the apostle mean by with God? The Greek word is *pros*, which literally means "toward," implying a face-to-face relationship. John would have neither atheism nor unitarianism. He told us later in his Gospel that the Godhead consists of a trinity, but here in verse 1 we learn plurality. So Jesus, the Word, is eternal and personal. Nothing can separate the heavenly Father from His Son. Verse 2 merely emphasizes verse 1.

1:3. Unlike the Gospel writers before him, John tells us that Jesus participated in creation and again states his case twice for emphasis. Surely this is a deliberate link with Genesis,

and it sets the stage for other New Testament Scriptures that show us Jesus' involvement in creation: "For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him" (Col. 1:16). "In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe" (Heb. 1:1-2).

Creation is a foundational doctrine of the Christian faith. Virtually every other aspect of theology rests upon our understanding of God as the origin of all life and of the role Jesus Christ, the Word, in creation. John could hardly say it more clearly: without Him nothing was made that has been made—everything from subatomic particles to galaxies. Only God who created all things can redeem them. Creation is the foundation stone of the gospel. Christ could not have been created, for He created all things. There was a "historical Jesus," but this terminology refers only to His thirty-three years on earth. His life had no beginning, and it will have no end.

1:4. Here we find the first appearance of our key word—life. The revelation of the Lamb was also the revelation of life. No fewer than thirty-six times in John, we find the word *zoe*. Jesus Christ the Creator provides physical life; Jesus Christ the Redeemer provides spiritual life; and Jesus Christ the Savior provides eternal life. In verse 4 John also introduced another key word—light. The life becomes the light of men. Notice these positive terms. What a wonderful contrast to death and darkness.

In the Word, God's person and power were revealed to humanity. Here again we see a reference to creation since, in the Genesis account, light was the first evidence of God's creative work. God is always the source of light and life. Christ the Son, the Creator, provides life and light to humanity. He alone is the life-giver and the light-bearer. John is getting ready to write new lyrics to an old melody, "With you is the fountain of life; in your light we see light" (Ps. 36:9).

1:10-11. Immediately after describing the announcement, John tells us about apathy toward the message of regeneration. The world (*kosmos*) is another of John's theme words; he used it seventy-seven times. With the device of repetition, John taught incarnation, creation, and rejection all in one verse (v. 10). Depravity and blindness thwarted God's efforts to reach out to his own creation—and still do.

In verse 11, the first appearance of the word *own* appears in the neuter gender and the second is masculine. What significance could such a distinction have for interpretation?

One possibility is that Jesus came to earth, the place He had created, and the second tells us that the people who lived there turned Him away. He was not welcomed or accepted.

1:12-13. Early in his book, John established the heart of the gospel, still two chapters away from the famous John 3:16. From the announcement of regeneration followed by apathy, the apostle introduces the acceptance of regeneration. Like most things in life, there is a right way and a wrong way to respond to God. The right way (and the only meaningful way) is to believe the gospel, receive the Savior, and accept new birth as a result. The wrong way somehow links a relationship to God with human qualities such as physical birth, self-determination, or the choice of another person. In John's theological vocabulary, believed and received are synonymous when it comes to the gospel.

1:14. This may be the most important verse in the Bible on the doctrine of the incarnation. John went back to verse 1 to pick up one of his favorite themes, the Word. God became human; God showed us His glory; God offered us grace and truth; God literally "tabernacled" among us. Remember the tabernacle in the center of the camp? It represented the place of the law, the abode of God, the source of revelation, the site of sacrifice, and the focus of worship. Now in the new covenant, Jesus provides all these. And not only was Jesus here, but He demonstrated the glory of the One and Only. Other prophets, including John the Baptist, were sent from God, but the Word came directly from the Father's presence.

Finally, we cannot pass lightly over the wonderful phrase, full of grace and truth. John used the word grace again in verses 16 and 17, then never mentioned it for the rest of his Gospel! He used truth many times, but here the combination grabs us. Jesus perfectly blended two of the most important qualities of the divine nature and displayed them in human personality.

1:15-16. The full expression of John the Baptist's comparison between himself and his Lord does not appear until chapter 3, but the phraseology of verse 15 answers the question, "When did the incarnation occur?" Historically, many conservative Bible scholars place the date at 4 B.C., but that is hardly the point of this passage. The incarnation occurred at a specific point in God's plan for the world. Paul spelled it out clearly in his letter to the churches of Galatia: "But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law, to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons" (Gal. 4:4-5). In time Jesus followed John the Baptist, but in importance He holds the preeminence. At this point in his narrative theology, John the apostle could not hold back a testimony to God's grace: We have all received one blessing after another.

1:17. The contrast between law and grace forms a major portion of Pauline theology, but we get a thumbnail sketch here from John. Moses provided a standard of righteousness that no one could meet. Then the Prophet whom Moses promised (1:25) came, and He brought a standard of righteousness centered in grace and truth. Like John the Baptist and John the apostle, Moses was a servant. But Jesus is the Son. This verse drives the dividing spike between the old and new covenants, introducing a new way of God's dealing with humankind.

1:18. This verse takes its place beside verse 14 as key passages on the incarnation, telling us that Jesus is the exclusive explanation of the Father. But did not Moses see God (see Ex. 33)? Not in this sense. Moses saw what theologians call a "theophany"—God's appearance in some temporary form. Now, John tells us, He has taken on human flesh and will live among people on earth. Some New Testament experts have translated the phrase, "God only begotten." John left no stone unturned, no argument unclarified. Jesus is the very essence of God and, according to this verse, His purpose in coming to earth was to exegete, to interpret, to explain the Heavenly Father. Numerous Bible passages remind us that Jesus came to feel what we feel, to show us what God is like, to prioritize human life—and all of that is true. But ultimately He came to die. And as John's Gospel will show, the incarnation became the gateway to the cross.



Fultondale FBC

2023 LIFE GROUPS - 4TH QUARTER FOLLOWING WITH JOY PHILIPPIANS 2:1-11 12/31/2023

MAIN POINT

We can live in love and humility even as Christ did.

INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

Share a time when you really needed an attitude adjustment.

What threatens the unity of our churches today?

In the midst of the throes and threats of a dying church, Paul invited the Philippians to live lives that emulate Christ. Paul explained that to cultivate unity within the church, you need humility, love, and self-sacrifice—all of these can be found by taking on Christ's perfect attitude. In this attitude, believers will experience unity and joy.

| WATCH THE SESSION 3 VIDEO.

UNDERSTANDING

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

| HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ PHILIPPIANS 2:1-2.

What did Paul mean when he encouraged the Philippians to think the same way as him (v. 2)?

Following Jesus isn't a solo act. We grow in Christ as we live connected to other Christ followers. In these verses, Paul gave us a four-fold motivation for unity among believers.

We see these as a series of “if” statements, which we may better understand as “since” or “because” statements. The “if” in these cases refers to certainties, not possibilities.

Why is unity so essential in the church?

Four motivations for Christian unity are encouragement in Christ, the consolation of love, the fellowship with the Spirit, and shared affection and mercy. We have the blessing of being found in Christ and knowing Him. In the midst of suffering, we find encouragement in our relationship with Him. Believers have experienced Christ’s love, and this shared experience leads us to love each other—this leads to unity. The Spirit unites us as brothers and sisters (see 1:27), partners with us in the gospel (see John 16:13-15), leads us in service and worship (see Phil. 3:3), and helps in our weaknesses (see Rom. 8:26). Disunity threatened the Philippians congregation, so Paul reminded them of the Spirit-produced fellowship they shared. Finally, Christians share a common experience of being the objects of God’s compassion. This tender care should cause us to look out for the interests of others.

Describe a time when you felt in harmony with fellow believers. What factors contributed to the unity?

| HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ PHILIPPIANS 2:3-4.

What are Paul’s commands in this passage?

Paul encouraged the Philippians to get their heads on straight and remember their identity and common mission as followers of Jesus Christ. His words likewise encourage us today. In order for the church to experience unity, we must pursue humility. More precisely, we must pursue Christ-like humility.

What are some examples of rivalry within the church today?

The humble person will avoid “rivalry and conceit.” Paul wrote earlier about the preachers who were wrongly motivated to “preach Christ out of envy and strife” or to “proclaim Christ out of rivalry” (1:15, 17). Now he told the whole church it was necessary to avoid these attitudes. Every church member should be aware of the presence of rivalry and seek to put it to death immediately.

The word “conceit” is translated as “vainglory” in some Bible versions. It’s an empty glory, a glory that doesn’t exist. People are literally conceited over nothing! Jesus Christ

demonstrates the very opposite of this. Nothing is empty about His glory. Paul told the church not just to consider their own interests, but to look out for others' interests.

Why is humility important in the body of Christ?

| HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ PHILIPPIANS 2:5-11.

Notice how Jesus did not empty Himself by losing His divinity but by taking on the form of a servant. Would someone be willing to try to explain the magnitude of Jesus' humility?

Want to know what humility and selflessness looks like? Beginning with verse 5, Paul pointed to Jesus as the perfect example of the mindset we need and the humility we should pursue. Philippians 2:5-11 highlights key doctrinal truths and provides a foundation for Christian living—all within the setting of a hymn. The song draws us to both adoration and imitation. The more we behold Jesus' glory and imitate His character, the more we'll be unified as a church. This hymn not only teaches us the pattern God gave us to follow, which is Christ; it also reminds us of the power we have through the Spirit to emulate Christ. Christ's humility is stunning. As Jesus Himself said, "The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life—a ransom for many" (Mark 10:45).

How does experiencing the work of Jesus on our behalf make us humble people?

Why is humility a necessary characteristic for those who follow Christ?

APPLICATION

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

What are some ways you can live a life of humility in your church? What attitudes or expectations are in your heart that you must put aside for the unity and humility of the body of believers?

How can we work together to make our attitude that of Christ Jesus (v. 5)?

What are some ways you can look out for the interests of others in the church this week?

PRAYER

Go before the Lord in humility. Confess and give to Him any hidden pride within your heart. Ask the Lord to help you each day to be more others-oriented. Pray for help to be a more joyful servant. Finally, thank Jesus for being the perfect example of humility and sacrifice.

COMMENTARY

| PHILIPPIANS 2:1-11

Paul built his challenge for unity on the reality of Christ within each believer. The phrase encouragement in Christ refers to encouragement that comes from Christian commitment. That Christ lived in the Philippians' hearts was indeed a great blessing for them. The term comfort from love refers to Christ's love for them. Believers are the eternal recipients of God's tender affection not because they deserve love, but because it is God's nature to love. The participation in the Spirit emphasizes the shared nature of the Christian life. The presence of the Holy Spirit makes possible the proper functioning of the body of Christ. With the expression affection and sympathy, Paul pointed to the mercies the Lord had given the believers at Philippi. The Holy Spirit provided rich fellowship among them (v. 1).

In verse 2 Paul shifted from the spiritual blessings the believers enjoyed together to their responsibility to him. The Philippian believers had a heartfelt concern for Paul. He planted the church at Philippi. They watched as he invested his life in their lives. Now he called them to continue what they started.

In contrast to his positive instructions, Paul also detailed for the Philippians what attitudes to avoid in pursuing unity. The word nothing (v. 3) emphasized Paul's conviction that rivalry or conceit should not taint any aspect of the church's life. The term rivalry implies a selfish ambition that causes disputes and divisions. The sense is that the problems facing the Philippians caused members to choose sides. Paul saw schisms in the church as contrary to the testimony of Christ and dishonoring to God's name. Also the word conceit describes what is vainglorious or groundless pride. The cornerstone of Christian faith is that humans are powerless to save themselves and must trust Christ to provide all that is necessary for salvation. Thus the believer has no basis for arrogance toward others. Furthermore, arrogance strikes at the heart of Christian unity, spoiling the testimony of the faithful.

To avoid such a destructive mind-set, Paul directed the believers to consider fellow Christians and their needs as more important than their own interests and concerns (v. 4). The church's antidote for selfishness and divisions is an abiding concern for the welfare of others. Paul called the believers to take careful note of the concerns others hold. Such willing consideration of others erases the gaps between individuals and builds a strong unity.

The apostle then gave the Philippians a vivid illustration of the perspective he intended them to have. He showed them Christ. Verses 5 through 8 paint a poignant picture of the humility Christ revealed in His incarnation and His substitutionary death. Paul urged them to exchange their selfish motives for the Savior's attitude. While Christ has all cause for glorying, being God Himself, He willingly surrendered Himself for the needs of others. The Son of God did not seek His own advantage, that is, He refused to ignore others' needs. The passage states that Jesus Christ made himself nothing. The result was that the Savior set aside His glory to minister grace and mercy to those who are most undeserving of such blessings. Assuming the form of a slave, the Lord placed Himself under the authority of His Father. The focus of the Son was to please the Father, and in doing so He sacrificed Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death—even to death on a cross.