

Growing to be Confident of God's Love

1. Consider the following cartoon. Have you ever been tempted to see God in this way?



2. Read Psalm 136. How does this Psalm suggest God's love has been shown in the world?

3. What do the following verses tell us about God's love?

Matt 7:9-12
1 John 4:9-10

John 3:16
Ephesians 2:4-7

1 John 3:1
Hebrews 12:4-6

4. How does the name *Father* help us picture God's love?

5. What do the following verses teach us about how God's love is reflected in the lives of Christians?

John 13:34

Ephesians 5:25

1 John 4:19-21

6. What role does our love have for one another in evangelism (alongside John 13:34 see also John 17:20-26)? Why might God's love strike a chord with those yet to believe?

7. Can you think of an occasion when you've found yourself becoming cynical of:

- i. God's love for you;
- ii. The love of Christians for each other?

8. How might Jesus' own experience of these two 'loves' help us temper our own cynicism?

9. Has this study dispelled any misconceptions for you about God's love?

10. Choose one of the following topics to pray aloud to the group:

- i. Thank and praise God for all the different ways he has loved us.
- ii. Seek God's forgiveness for the times we have failed to reflect his love.
- iii. Ask that the love we have for each other might be a beacon for others to know and recognize God's love.
- iv. Pray we remain confident of God's love when challenged in this belief.
- v. Ask God to reveal his love to you

Growing to be Convinced of God's Plan

1. Can you think of examples (either from real life or books or movies) where an unlikely plan has proven to be successful?
2. Read Mark 8:27-30. Why do you think people gave the answers seen in v28?
3. Messiah means 'God's anointed one'. What was the Messiah expected to do? (See Isaiah 61:1-3) How would Jesus go on to fulfill this expectation?
4. How does God's plan of salvation through a Messiah compare to what people today might expect given what they know of other religions?
5. Do we have trouble being convinced that God's plan of salvation works? What convinced the early Christians that this plan worked? (Hint: Acts 2:22-41)
6. Read Mark 8:31-33. What has Peter misunderstood about Jesus' messiahship? In what ways might we be guilty of shaping Christianity according to "merely human concerns?"

7. Read Mark 8:34 What is Jesus asking of us when he commands us to “take up our cross”?

8. What is the choice put before us in vs35-38? What do we gain by taking up our cross?

9. What might we need to remain convinced of as we deny ourselves? When do you most feel you need the encouragement to remain convinced of God’s plan?

10. Pray that:

- i. People we know might become convinced of God’s plan of salvation in Christ
- ii. that we each might remain convinced of this plan as we encounter the cost of being Christ’s disciple.

Growing in our Attentiveness to Scripture

1. Imagine you are on a quiz show, and you could choose any subject at all to be quizzed about. Which subject would you choose?

2. Read Matthew 22:23-28. What belief are the Sadducees trying to disprove? How are they attempting to disprove it?

3. How does Jesus refute this challenge (vs 29-33)? What does it display about his Bible knowledge?

4. What difference does it make to you to worship the 'God of the living'?

5. Read 22:34-40. What kind of mastery of the Bible does Jesus display here?

6. How well are you loving God and neighbor at the moment? Do you have both positive and negative stories?

7. If you had to summarize the whole Bible (ie both OT and NT together, not just the law and the prophets), what might you say?

8. What theme does Jesus pick up in vs 41-46? What does this say about Jesus' view of the OT? Where is the Bible's 'high point' to be found?

9. Is your Bible knowledge strongest on (a) the details, (b) the big summarizing themes, (c) its Christ-centredness? What can you do to strengthen your weakspot?

10. Think of the types of conversations Jesus is having in this passage. In what way is he benefitting from his Bible knowledge? What positives do others in your Bible study group gain from their Bible reading?

11. Spend some time praying that, like Jesus, Scripture might saturate our lives.

Growing in our prayerful dependence upon God

1. To what extent are you a self-sufficient person? Do you find it easy to seek help?
2. Read Matthew 26:36-38. What aspect of human weakness is experienced by Jesus in these verses? What action does this weakness lead to in v39?
3. Do your own prayers reflect the honesty displayed by Jesus here? Why or why not?
4. Read Matthew 26:40-41. What aspect of human weakness does Jesus warn his friends of in these verses? What action does Jesus recommend?
5. How wary have you been in recent months of not falling into temptation? When *should* you have been wary of it? Has this danger been brought before God in prayer?
6. What are some inadequate responses to human frailty? Which response do the disciples choose in vs 43-45?

7. Read the following sections from Matthew's Gospel. What do they teach us about human weakness, prayer, and the God we pray to?

Matthew 6:11-13

Matthew 7:7-11

Matthew 9:36-37

8. In what ways does the Bible see human weakness as a good thing? (1 Cor 1:26-29; 2 Cor 12:9-10)

9. What motivations to pray does this study leave you with?

10. Pray along the lines explored in our main passage: in response to sorrow; in light of the temptations we feel.

Growing in our Willingness to live Sacrificially

1. What dreams for your life did you have when you were 5, 15, 25, 45, 65?
2. Read Mark 10:35-37. What vision for the future have James and John been captured by? Have you ever entertained a desire for glory, power or significance?
3. What event do you think Jesus is alluding to in verse 38? What does glory look like for him?
4. What does verse 40 teach us about how a position of honour is established? (see also Luke 14:7-11).
5. Why do you think the others were indignant with James and John? (v 41)
6. Read verses 42-44. How does being great in Jesus' eyes compare with notions of greatness in the wider world? How does Jesus' approach fit with what your own culture teaches you about success?
7. According to verse 45, to what extent is Jesus willing to be a servant? How central is this example to the decisions we make in life? In what areas could this example be made more prominent?

8. Read the encounters Jesus has earlier in the chapter with the Pharisees (10:1-12) and the young man (10:17-31). According to these sections, what sacrifices are necessary if we are to follow him?

9. Given what we have seen in this study, and thinking about the remaining years that God has allotted to you, what might constitute a 'good life' from this point on?

10. Do you feel like it is too much to live sacrificially? Pray for God's help, because 'All things are possible for God!' (Mark 10:27)

Growing More Engaged in Meaningful Fellowship

1. Think about a group of people that are (or were) quite meaningful to you. What was it about this group that made it so special?

2. Read John 13:1-17. What agenda does Jesus set here for his friends?

3. Considering v1 and vs13-16, why is it important for Christian fellowships to participate in acts of practical love?

4. What do vs34-35 add to our understanding of the importance of practical love?

5. What opportunities for love already exist in a) your Growth Group, b) your Sunday Service? What new opportunities can you imagine?

6. Cast your eyes over the following chapters of John's Gospel (chs 14-17). What is the rest of this occasion taken up with?

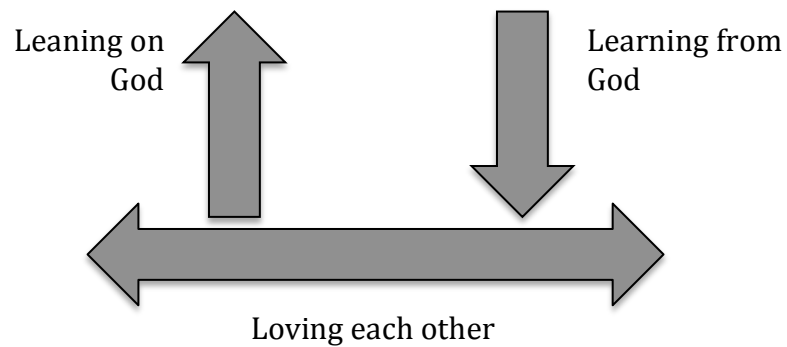
7. Do you like learning? Who is responsible for our ongoing learning according to John 14:16-17, 14:26?

8. Does Jesus' teaching about the Holy Spirit relieve us of any responsibility for the teaching of others (see 1 Cor 12:4-11, Rom 12:4-8)?

9. According to Jesus, what is the purpose of this extended teaching session (see 16:1-4, 16:33). How might this motivate us to engage our ears, minds and hearts when being taught in church?

10. How does this time of fellowship end? What extra detail about this occasion does Mark add in Mark 14:26?

11. Of the three dimensions of fellowship we observe at the Last Supper, which do you have the strongest affinity with? Which could you give more attention to? How are you planning to do this?



12. Pray for a deepening of our fellowship as we serve, learn and pray together.

Growing to be more invested in equipping others

1. Have you ever had to recruit someone for a task? Is recruiting something you're good at? Why is it important?

2. Read Matthew 10:1-4 and also Matthew 4:18-22. In what ways would Christ's recruitment of his apostles have been a disruption to their lives? Did it stop him from drawing a team together?

3. Read Matthew 10:7-8. What was the task they were recruited for? How might this commission inform our recruitment of others for ministry?

4. Read 10:9-13. How is ministry to be supported according to these verses? See also 1 Corinthians 9:7-14. Does your own personal budget reflect this principle?

5. Read on—vs 14-18. What warnings does Jesus give his recruits here? Where do we see this prophecy coming true today?

6. Are we ever in danger of allowing the difficulties of ministry to hamper our recruitment and sending of others?

7. Have another look at v18. Why is the gospel message so offensive to those in power? What is the advantage of causing trouble with our message?

8. Read vs19-20. In the midst of persecution, what assurances do these verses give us?

9. Do you know anyone who might be suitable a s candidate for some kind of ministry? Have you ever considered offering yourself for service in this way?

10. Pray that the Lord of the Harvest might send workers into his field.

Growing Gracious Hearts

1. Is there a particular type of person that you have zero patience for? What do you think has brought about this reaction in you?

2. Read Luke 7:36-39. What's your reaction to the Pharisee? How would you describe his reaction to the woman?

3. What do the woman's actions reveal about her own thoughts? Have you ever found yourself thinking like either of these two characters?

4. Read v40. What detail does Luke subtly reveal about Jesus here?

5. What does the parable of vs 41-42 tell us about God's approach to sin? DO you ever have trouble believing God chooses to act in this way? Is there anyone you wish God *wouldn't* forgive??!

6. Read vs 44-47. What explanation does Jesus offer for the woman's behavior? When was the last time you were moved by God's forgiveness of your sin? If it's been a while, what might it take to be moved once more?

7. How does Jesus interpret the Pharisee's behavior? How ought God's grace inform our interactions with those who make us feel uncomfortable? As forgiven people ourselves, are we harboring any inconsistencies in the way we view others?

8. Read Luke 15:11-32. How does the parable of the Lost Son reinforce what we've read in Luke 7:36-47?

9. Read the final two verses of our main text (Luke 7:48-50). Does grace mean sins are not taken seriously? What is the right understanding relationship between human sin and God's grace? According to these verses, how do we access this grace?

10. Pray that we might:

- a. Know God's grace in an ever-deepening way;
- b. Develop eyes and hearts to view others as potential recipients of that same grace

Growing in our Concern for the Lost

1. Is there a particular leader who has had a big impact in your life? What did they do that was so influential?

2. Read Mark 6:30-34. Is there anything significant about Jesus taking his disciples to a solitary place? In the OT, what kinds of things transpired in solitary places such as the wilderness? (hint – think of the Exodus story).

3. What does Jesus liken the crowd of people to? For some background to the sheep and shepherd metaphor, read Numbers 27:12-23. What kind of leadership did these OT leaders supply for the Israelites? (See Num 27:21). How does Jesus fill the leadership gap according to Mark 6:34?

4. Read Mark 6:35-38. Who does Jesus enlist to feed the sheep? How might this involvement of the Apostles be symbolic of their future ministry?

5. Read vs 39-44, and then read 2 Kings 4:42-44. In what way does this miracle in Mark echo Elisha’s miracle? Who was Elisha? What is significant about identifying Jesus and his Apostles with Elisha? What does this suggest about the type of leadership needed by God’s people today?

6. Look again at v 39, and then glance at the events described in the following passage (v47-51). Now read Psalm 23 (note esp v2). What is this miracle in Mark 6 teaching us about Jesus' identity?

7. What have you learnt today about the use of the Old Testament in the New?

8. Where do you see crowds of people gathered today? Do you ever think of them as sheep without a shepherd?

9. What opportunities are there for you to help the lost of our own day and age find Christ and to receive his leadership?

10. Pray that like Jesus, we will develop a deep and abiding concern for the lost, and that God will show us the best way to lead them with god's word to a place where they receive Christ's leadership as the good shepherd.

Growing in our willingness to bear testimony

1. What kind of conversations do you dread? Are conversations about your faith one of them?
2. What does the description of Jesus' trial in Mark 14:53-59 teach us about human reactions to Jesus? Can you think of any examples of false testimonies about Christ today?
3. What testimony does Jesus give in v62? For OT background see Exodus 3:13-14 and Daniel 7:13-14.
4. What words describe the response to this testimony in vs 63-65? Why is the response so strong? When have you witnessed the same reaction?
5. What are we encouraged to learn from Jesus' experience according to John 15:18-19?
6. Read Mark 14:66-72. Are you able to feel any empathy with Peter? Why do you think he failed to give testimony?
7. In light of this failure, what significance might lie in Mark 16:7?

8. What does Peter's experience teach us about:

- i. how opportunities to testify arise
- ii. What the cost of failure looks like

9. What warning and encouragement do Mark 8:38 and Luke 12:11-12 give us when faced with a situation like Peter's?

10. Can you think of any *positive* examples of giving testimony in the Bible, that is, when the testimony was welcomed and accepted?

11. What steps do *you* need to take to be a more effective witness to Christ?

12. Pray for:

- i. Opportunities to testify about Jesus
- ii. Courage to testify about Jesus
- iii. Words to testify about Jesus.