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Session 10 -- The Cross II: Redemption

Core Idea:

In His death on the cross, Jesus redeems and sets free broken humanity from slavery to sin and death.

Memory Verse:

Ephesians 1:7

In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace . . .

In the last session, we looked at how Jesus makes us “at-one” with God by being our representative. He took on humanity and though He faced the same temptations that are common to us all, He remained obedient. He then took our place on the cross as a substitute, dying the death we deserved.

Is that all there is to say about the cross and the atonement? By no means! As I said in the last session, this truth is a beautiful and multifaceted diamond. It deserves our attention as we look at it from each angle, admiring its beauty from every side. So let us continue our admiration by moving from *representation* to *redemption*.

Redemption is another one of those “Church words” that not everyone is familiar with. To redeem something is to purchase it back. In the ancient world, slavery was a common practice. Armies defeated in battle could find their captured soldiers pressed into slavery. Sometimes families with enormous debt might pass one of their members into slavery to work off the debt. When the individual or the family saved up enough money they could *redeem* or purchase their loved one’s freedom.

Humanity’s Slavery

This may be hard for modern Americans to understand, since we live in the “land of the free, and home of the brave.” However, all human beings are born into slavery. Our chains may not be physical, but they are there nonetheless. Even as we go about exerting and celebrating our freedom to do as we please, we are in fact wrapping our chains more tightly around ourselves.

As you wrestle with that thought, let me draw your attention back to the Garden of Eden in Genesis chapter 3. We looked at this chapter in Session 3 when we covered The Fall. If you need to go back and read Genesis 3 to remember what happened, I encourage you to do so.

The Garden of Eden is where we first encounter the Kingdom of God. Remember what we said about the Kingdom in Session 5: a kingdom needs a ruler, a reign, and a realm? In the Garden we have God as King ruling over creation in and through His servant-kings Adam and Eve. He gave them dominion (kingdom language) over creation to tend and care for it. In fact, the man and the woman were to extend this God’s kingdom as they filled the earth and subdued it.

However, the serpent (Satan) comes along in Genesis 3. He tempts the man and the woman with freedom from God's Kingdom rule.

Genesis 3:4-5

But the serpent said to the woman, "You will not surely die. For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."

The temptation was freedom, "You will be like God," but the result was slavery. Since that moment, humanity has been enslaved to sin, death, and the devil. However, King Jesus sets us free from each.

Slavery in Egypt

After Genesis, the next book of the Bible is Exodus. This book tells the story of God's people, Israel, the descendants of Abraham, in Egypt. As the people of Israel grew in numbers while living in Egypt some 400 years, there arose a king over the land that hated the people of Israel. This Pharaoh, king of Egypt, enslaved the people of Israel. Even worse, he sought to enact population control and genocide by having all the newborn boys of the Israelites killed at birth.

Thus, God raised up a man named Moses through whom God would fight for His people. God waged war on Pharaoh and the land of Egypt through a series of plagues, yet after each plague, the king of Egypt refused to give up his claim on God's people. He stubbornly resisted through nine fearsome disasters, which brings us to one of the seminal events in the Bible: the Passover.

In Exodus chapter 12, we read the instructions God gives through Moses to His people about the Passover. Take a moment and read through Exodus 12:1-42.

What was the purpose of the Passover Lamb? What were the people to do with its blood?

In the Passover event, God redeems His people from slavery to Pharaoh and the Egyptians. He wages war on their behalf until Pharaoh gives up his claim to the Israelites and lets them leave. The blood of the Passover Lamb marked the homes of the people of Israel, signifying them as God's people. Thus, they were spared the destruction of the final plague.

It is important to note that the people did not go from serving Pharaoh to complete anarchy. They were not redeemed from slavery to freedom in the American way of thinking. Rather, they went from belonging to Pharaoh to belonging to God. God became their king.

Exodus 19:1-8 Emphasis added

On the third new moon after the people of Israel had gone out of the land of Egypt, on that day they came into the wilderness of Sinai. They set out from Rephidim and came into the wilderness of Sinai, and they encamped in the wilderness. There Israel encamped before the mountain, while Moses went up to God. The Lord called to him out of the mountain, saying, "Thus you shall say to the house of Jacob, and tell the people of Israel: 'You yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself. *Now therefore, if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my*

treasured possession among all peoples, for all the earth is mine; and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.' These are the words that you shall speak to the people of Israel." So Moses came and called the elders of the people and set before them all these words that the Lord had commanded him. All the people answered together and said, "All that the Lord has spoken we will do." And Moses reported the words of the people to the Lord.

Where Pharaoh was a cruel king bringing hard labor and death, God is a loving King who brings life and peace. The annual celebration of the Passover meal was to remind the people of Israel that they were redeemed (purchased) by God through His victory over Egypt. He is their King, and they are His people.

Why was an annual reminder of the Passover necessary?

Jesus the Passover Lamb

When we study the Bible, especially the Old Testament, we find certain people, places, and events serve to foreshadow the person and work of King Jesus. These are referred to as *antitypes* that point ahead to Jesus, who is the *type*. The Passover Lamb is one such antitype that speaks to the work of Jesus in bringing redemption through His sacrifice on the cross.

However, I do not want you to take my word for it. Listen to what the Bible says about Jesus and the Passover Lamb starting with the testimony of John the Baptist.

John 1:29-31 Emphasis added

The next day he saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, "*Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!* This is he of whom I said, 'After me comes a man who ranks before me, because he was before me.' I myself did not know him, but for this purpose I came baptizing with water, that he might be revealed to Israel."

1 Corinthians 5:6-8 Emphasis added

Your boasting is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump? Cleanse out the old leaven that you may be a new lump, as you really are unleavened. *For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed.* Let us therefore celebrate the festival, not with the old leaven, the leaven of malice and evil, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.

1 Peter 1:17-21 Emphasis Added

And if you call on him as Father who judges impartially according to each one's deeds, conduct yourselves with fear throughout the time of your exile, knowing that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, *but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot.* He was foreknown before the foundation of the world but was made manifest in the last times for the sake of you who through him are believers in God, who raised him from the dead and gave him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God.

How does the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross compare and contrast with that of the Passover Lamb in Exodus 12?

If this is not enough to convince you of the connection between Jesus and the Passover Lamb, then consider that it was during the celebration of the Passover that Jesus was crucified. This was not a coincidence. Rather, it was the purposeful design of God to highlight the meaning and purpose of the death of Jesus.

During the eating of the Passover meal with His disciples, King Jesus instituted what has become known as the Lord's Supper.

Mark 14:22-25

And as they were eating, he took bread, and after blessing it broke it and gave it to them, and said, "Take; this is my body." And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, and they all drank of it. And he said to them, "This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many. Truly, I say to you, I will not drink again of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God."

As the Israelites ate the Passover Lamb and spread its blood on the doorframes of their houses, so the disciples of Jesus were symbolically partaking of the body and blood of Jesus. (This connects with the theme of union with Jesus we looked at in the previous session.) As the blood of the Passover Lamb marked God's people in Egypt, sparing them from the tenth plague, so the blood of Jesus marks His people today.

Why do you think it is important to regularly partake of the Lord's Supper as a reminder of what Jesus has done for us?

Freedom in Christ

Now let us tie this session together. The events surrounding the original Passover meal in Exodus led to Israel's freedom from slavery to Pharaoh. Similarly, the sacrifice of Jesus, our Passover Lamb, brings us freedom from our slavery to sin, death, and the devil.

Romans 8:1-8

There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death. For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit. For to set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God's law; indeed, it cannot. Those who are in the flesh cannot please God.

Read this passage multiple times and slowly. Summarize in your own words what the author is saying here.

Hebrews 2:14-15

Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery.

How does fear of death trap us into sinful behaviors? How are we able to live differently when we are set free from fear of death?

King Jesus, the one prophesied about in Genesis 3:15 is the one who crushed the head of the serpent (Satan) through His perfect life and sacrificial death. Because of Him, you and I are redeemed and set free from the curse of sin and the consequences of human rebellion against God.

Action Points

Take a moment to total up all of your financial debt that you owe--credit card debt, car payments, mortgage, etc. At your current job, how long would it take you to pay off the total? What would it mean to you and your family if someone redeemed you from that debt and erased it all? Meditate on the connection between your financial debt and your sin.

Remember King Jesus' sacrifice by partaking of the Lord's Supper either individually or with your disciple-partner. Take bread together and meditate on Jesus' sacrifice on the cross. Drink the cup together and meditate on the new relationship with have with God because of that sacrifice.

Disciple-Partner Discussion Questions

Reread the Core Statement and the Memory Verse of this chapter. How would you summarize each of them in your own words?

What was the purpose of the Passover Lamb? What were the people to do with its blood?

Why was an annual reminder of the Passover necessary?

How does the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross compare and contrast with that of the Passover Lamb in Exodus 12?

Why do you think it is important to regularly partake of the Lord's Supper as a reminder of what Jesus has done for us?

Summarize Romans 8:1-8 in your own words. What is the author saying here?

How does fear of death trap us into sinful behaviors? How are we able to live differently when we are set free from fear of death?

How should we respond to the freedom purchased by the blood of Jesus?

What did you learn from doing the Action Points?

Extra Resources

Recovering Redemption: A Gospel-Saturated Perspective on How to Change by Matt Chandler and Michael Snetzer

The Book of Exodus: Explorations in Christian Theology by Ed Gallagher

An Old Testament Theology by Bruce K. Waltke

Session 11 -- The Cross III: Reconciliation

Core Idea:

In Jesus, the rift between God and humanity is repaired and reconciled.

Memory Verse:

2 Corinthians 5:18-19

All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation.

In the past couple of sessions, we looked at how Jesus serves as our representative and our redeemer. He identifies with our human condition in order to defeat sin and substitute His life for ours. In doing so, He sets us free from the power of sin, death, and the devil. However, salvation in Christ is not simply being “saved from” something, we are also being “saved to” something. Pay attention to the words of the Apostle Paul:

Colossians 1:13-14

He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

Just as the people of Israel were not set free from slavery to Pharaoh to live in anarchy, so we are not just saved from the consequences of our rebellion to continue living in that rebellion. Instead, we are brought back to our proper relationship with God, our King and Creator. We call this aspect of salvation *reconciliation*.

The Wall Between Us

First, in order to understand how Jesus reconciles our relationship with God, it is important to understand how sin broke our relationship with God. Unfortunately, there is a lot of confusion about this idea due to a fundamental misunderstanding about God. The misunderstanding can be stated like this “God is too holy to tolerate the presence of sin, so Jesus has to take our sin away so God can accept our presence.”

That sounds like it makes sense, right? God is holy. Sin is bad. God does not like sin, so surely He does not want sinful people in His presence, right?

Have you encountered teaching similar to this before? What does this teaching say about who God is and who we are?

However, throughout the Bible we see God approaching, speaking with, and reaching out to sinful people. In Genesis 3, God came looking for Adam and Eve. God approached Abraham to make a covenant with him. He spoke to Moses through a burning bush and sent him to deliver God's people from Pharaoh. Ultimately, we see in Jesus that God does indeed approach sinful men and women, showing compassion and mercy to them.

How is this view of God different from the one expressed above?

So why, then, does Jesus have to die in order to take away our sin and reconcile us with God? Might I suggest that the problem does not lie with God, but with us instead. Instead of a holy God having a problem being around sinful people, the problem is sinful people being in the presence of a holy God.

Have you ever known someone who just excelled at something? Maybe they were an athlete, and they were always the fastest and the best one on the team. Or maybe they were a musician who could pick up and play any instrument as easily as breathing. Or maybe they were just a genuinely good person who everyone seemed to like? Have you noticed that just thinking about people like that makes you aware of your own shortcomings? We feel shame because we fall short in comparison.

How have you experienced shame when comparing yourself to someone else? What was the situation? How did you feel at the time?

Now take that feeling and multiply it by infinity. That is what it would feel like to stand before God bearing the weight of all of our sin and rebellion against Him. This is why we as humans try to keep God at arm's-length. Consider the experience of Isaiah, a prophet of God, when he was allowed to have a vision of God.

Isaiah 6:1-5 Emphasis added

In the year that King Uzziah died I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up; and the train of his robe filled the temple. Above him stood the seraphim. Each had six wings: with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. And one called to another and said: "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory!" And the foundations of the thresholds shook at the voice of him who called, and the house was filled with smoke. And I said: "*Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts!*"

Isaiah laid eyes on the Lord God and was instantly aware of just how sinful and rebellious he and his people were. Yet Isaiah was not destroyed. Rather, look what happened next:

Isaiah 6:6-7

Then one of the seraphim flew to me, having in his hand a burning coal that he had taken with tongs from the altar. And he touched my mouth and said: "Behold, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away, and your sin atoned for."

In response to Isaiah's anguish at being a sinful man in the presence of a holy God, an angel took coal from the altar on which the sacrifices for sins were made. Touching his lips with the coal, Isaiah's guilt is removed and sin atoned for. He is reconciled to God.

Made Right with God

In the legal system, when someone commits an offense, they are tried, and if found guilty, he or she is then sentenced to a punishment in accordance with the offense committed, perhaps a fine, probation, or jail time. When the fine is paid or the time is served, we say that the person has "paid their debt to society." They are then released to join the rest of law-abiding society. We call this system "justice."

In the original languages of the Bible, *justice* is closely related to the word *righteousness*. A righteous person is one who followed the commands of God and does what He said. Thus, a righteous person was a law-abiding citizen among God's people. An unrighteous person was one who rebelled against God's laws, and was thus subject to the penalties of the justice system. Make sense?

Now in reality, we are all unrighteous men and women guilty of rebellion against God as King. How can our debt of sin be paid in God's justice system so that we can go from being unrighteous rebels to being righteous citizens of God's Kingdom?

Romans 3:21-26 Emphasis added

But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it— the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction: *for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift*, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God's righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins. It was to show his righteousness at the present time, so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.

Jesus takes upon Himself our sin as well as our guilt and shame. Everything that made us not right with God (unrighteous), Jesus has removed. Not only does He remove our sin, but He makes us right with God (righteous). In Christian theology, we call this *justification*.

Because of this, the wall of separation between us and God is removed. The sin that keeps us in shame and causes us to keep God at arm's-length is removed. We are made right with God both legally and relationally.

Psalms 103:8-14

The Lord is merciful and gracious,
slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.
He will not always chide,
nor will he keep his anger forever.
He does not deal with us according to our sins,
nor repay us according to our iniquities.

For as high as the heavens are above the earth,
so great is his steadfast love toward those who fear him;
as far as the east is from the west,
so far does he remove our transgressions from us.
As a father shows compassion to his children,
so the Lord shows compassion to those who fear him.
For he knows our frame;
he remembers that we are dust.

Romans 5:1-11

Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God. Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.

For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. For one will scarcely die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die—but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God. For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life. More than that, we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.

In your own words, summarize what Psalm 103:8-14 and Romans 5:1-11 are saying.

The Ministry of Reconciliation

Not only does this reconciliation affect our future, but it has implications for our life in the Kingdom of God today! Remember, the goal of a disciple of Jesus is to become more like Jesus. Jesus is one who reconciles, so His disciples ought to be people who practice reconciliation.

2 Corinthians 5:18-21

All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

So important is the practice of reconciliation that Jesus, in His Sermon on the Mount, instructed His followers to take care of it *before* practicing their acts of worship.

Matthew 5:21-26 Emphasis added

“You have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not murder; and whoever murders will be liable to judgment.’ But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment; whoever insults his brother will be liable to the council; and whoever

says, 'You fool!' will be liable to the hell of fire. *So if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift.* Come to terms quickly with your accuser while you are going with him to court, lest your accuser hand you over to the judge, and the judge to the guard, and you be put in prison. Truly, I say to you, you will never get out until you have paid the last penny.

Later in the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus is asked how many times a person ought to forgive someone who has sinned against him. Jesus' answer is that we ought to forgive as often we are sinned against. Why? Because we have been forgiven by God for all of our rebellion and betrayal.

Read the story Jesus shares in Matthew 18:23-35. Who are you in this story? Why?

What challenges or fears do you have about forgiving or reconciling with those who have wronged you?

Let me be clear that forgiving someone does not mean we give them a blank check to hurt us again. We will come back to this idea of reconciling broken relationships in future sessions. For now, let us practice forgiveness and reconciliation in those areas we can do so without compromising our safety.

Action Points

Write down a list of any broken relationships in your life--those who have wronged you and those whom you have wronged. Begin praying to God for wisdom and opportunities to reconcile these relationships.

After *talking with your disciple-partner or other godly counsel for wisdom, seek to actively reconcile those relationships that you can. If there are issues of safety or other reasons why it is not wise to pursue reconciliation at this time, continue praying and listening to God for wisdom.*

Disciple-Partner Discussion Questions

Reread the Core Statement and the Memory Verse of this chapter. How would you summarize each of them in your own words?

Have you encountered the teaching that God cannot tolerate the presence of sinners before? What does this teaching say about who God is and who we are?

How does our view of God change when we realize the problem is with us pushing God away?

How would you summarize what Psalm 103:8-14 and Romans 5:1-11 are saying in your own words?

Why is it important that we learn to practice forgiveness and reconciliation?

Read the story Jesus shares in Matthew 18:23-35. Who are you in this story? Why?

What challenges or fears do you have about forgiving or reconciling with those who have wronged you?

What did you learn from doing the Action Points?

Extra Resources

Justification by N. T. Wright

Exclusion and Embrace by Miroslav Wolf

Atonement and the Death of Christ by William Lane Craig

Session 12 -- The Cross IV: Resurrection

Core Idea:

The resurrected Jesus brings new life both now and in the future.

Memory Verse:

2 Corinthians 5:17

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.

It is no understatement to say that the death of Jesus on the cross is the fulcrum of history. It is the pivotal, transformative event that changed everything. Jesus died in our place and for our sins, redeeming us from death and reconciling us to God. However, and pay careful attention here, it was all for nothing if Jesus was not resurrected.

1 Corinthians 15:17-19

And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins. Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied.

In his opening to his letter to the Christians in Rome, the Apostle Paul writes that the resurrection is the proof of who Jesus claimed to be.

Romans 1:1-4 Emphasis added

Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God, which he promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy Scriptures, concerning his Son, who was descended from David according to the flesh and *was declared to be the Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead*, Jesus Christ our Lord . . .

If Jesus died and stayed dead, then He would have been no different from any number of would-be Jewish Messiahs, wanna-be kings, or has-been philosophers. Many great men and women lived, taught, and died. Some are even said to have done miracles and amazing works. However, they all succumbed to the ultimate enemy of human life . . . death.

Evidence of the Resurrection of Jesus

With so much riding on the historical truth of the resurrection of King Jesus, we need to take a moment to address some of the claims people have made against the resurrection. Space does not allow us to cover everything in depth, and so I encourage you to check out the Extra Resources section at the end of this chapter to go deeper.

There are three main claims the skeptics make against the truth of the resurrection. **First, some try to argue that Jesus did not really die on the cross.** Jesus, they claim, merely passed out and was mistakenly put into a tomb. After a few days, Jesus recovered enough to leave the

tomb on His own and make His way to the disciples who then claimed that Jesus rose from the dead.

There are a number of problems with this argument. For one, the Roman soldiers tasked with executing Jesus were professionals. They knew how to execute people with torturous efficiency. It is unlikely that Jesus or anyone else would have survived what was done to Him. Even if He were to somehow survive the execution, Matthew 27:57-66 tells us that a large stone was rolled over the entrance of this tomb and soldiers were tasked with guarding the tomb. After being beaten and tortured to near death, how would He recover enough to roll the stone away from the tomb and overpower multiple guards? Finally, even if He were to survive the cross, move the stone, and knock out the guards, when He finally showed up beaten and bloody to His followers, do you think His appearance would have inspired the kind of worship that proclaimed Him Lord and Savior and Conqueror of Death itself? I doubt it.

Other skeptics of the resurrection **try to argue that Jesus' followers stole His body**. Under this theory, the followers of Jesus attacked and overpowered the soldiers guarding the tomb of Jesus and stole His body. They proceeded to get away with this act without any reprisals from the authorities even as they proceeded to public proclaim the resurrection of Jesus. Talk about the perfect crime!

Still others **try to argue that the followers of Jesus simply lied about the resurrection**. Of course, were the followers of Jesus to go around making claims about the resurrection knowing full well that His body was still in the tomb, all the Jewish authorities would have to do is bring out His body. That they never did so points to the absurdity of this claim.

Personally, I find the most compelling evidence for the truth of the resurrection to be the changed lives on the part of Jesus' disciples. At the arrest of Jesus, the closest followers of Jesus showed themselves to be cowardly and afraid. They all ran away, and Peter even denied knowing Jesus. However, after an encounter with the risen Christ, they became bold and public proclaimers of their faith in Jesus. Not one of those who witnessed the resurrection recanted their testimony even through imprisonment, torture, and execution.

What questions do you have about the resurrection of Jesus?

Read the following accounts of the resurrection:

Matthew 28:1-20

Mark 16:1-20

Luke 24:1-53

John 20:1-21:25

Acts 1:1-12

What happens after the resurrection of Jesus? Who does He speak with? What does He do?

New Life in the Future

As a pastor serving in the local church, I have officiated my share of funerals. I have led services for young and old alike. Some had died suddenly, leaving their families in shock and dismay. Others passed after a lengthy battle with disease, and their families had plenty of time to come to terms with what was happening. Regardless of the circumstances, death is hard and each person tends to grieve in his or her own way. And yet, in my experience, there is a noticeable difference in how followers of King Jesus grieve.

One of the best known Bible verses in the United States is John 3:16. Here we find the promise that comforts the hearts of many followers of Jesus when they say goodbye to a loved one.

John 3:16

For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.

Eternal life--the promise of life after death--is comforting because it means that death is not the ultimate farewell. Our lives are not just blips on the cosmic timeline, soon to be forgotten in the ash heap of history. No! There is more, so much more than this life.

When you think about the promise of eternal life, what do you think it will look like?

But what does life after death look like? Here we see a lot of confusion in popular culture about how Christians view the afterlife. Often people imagine "heaven" in the clouds where we float around with angel wings and halos in some kind of disembodied existence. However, this is not the picture the Bible paints. Consider how the Apostle Paul describes life after death in 1 Corinthians 15.

1 Corinthians 15:42-49 Emphasis added

So is it with the resurrection of the dead. What is sown is perishable; what is raised is imperishable. It is sown in dishonor; it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness; it is raised in power. It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body. Thus it is written, "The first man Adam became a living being"; the last Adam became a life-giving spirit. But it is not the spiritual that is first but the natural, and then the spiritual. The first man was from the earth, a man of dust; the second man is from heaven. *As was the man of dust, so also are those who are of the dust, and as is the man of heaven, so also are those who are of heaven. Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the man of heaven.*

What is Paul saying here? Just as Jesus, the man from heaven, was resurrected with a body, so shall we be resurrected with a body. If you read through the accounts of the resurrection of

Jesus, perhaps you noticed that He ate and interacted physically with the disciples. Paul continues on in verses 50-57.

1 Corinthians 15:50-57

I tell you this, brothers: flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. Behold! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed. For this perishable body must put on the imperishable, and this mortal body must put on immortality. When the perishable puts on the imperishable, and the mortal puts on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written:

“Death is swallowed up in victory.”

“O death, where is your victory?”

O death, where is your sting?”

The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Later in the last book of the Bible, the Apostle John gives us a beautiful picture of heaven.

Revelation 21:1-8

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.”

And he who was seated on the throne said, “Behold, I am making all things new.” Also he said, “Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true.” And he said to me, “It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. To the thirsty I will give from the spring of the water of life without payment. The one who conquers will have this heritage, and I will be his God and he will be my son. But as for the cowardly, the faithless, the detestable, as for murderers, the sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars, their portion will be in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur, which is the second death.”

There are no disembodied spirits playing harps in the clouds here. Instead, heaven and earth merge as God sets up His throne on earth in the holy city, the new Jerusalem. This is the fullness of the Kingdom of God. However, those who remain in rebellion and refuse the redemption and reconciliation offered by Jesus will miss out on this glorious future.

Reflect on these passages from 1 Corinthians 15 and Revelation 21. How does the Bible’s picture of resurrection life differ from the popular culture’s picture?

What about the resurrection life do you long for the most?

New Life Now

It is important to point out that the hope of the Kingdom of God in the life of the followers of King Jesus is not just for life *after* death. We have new life *right now* as we enter into union with Jesus (we discussed this in Session 9). Jesus says as much in His conversation with Nicodemus in the Gospel of John chapter 3.

John 3:3-8

Jesus answered him, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.” Nicodemus said to him, “How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother’s womb and be born?” Jesus answered, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not marvel that I said to you, ‘You must be born again.’ The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.”

As we come to Jesus, we are born again through the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives. We begin to live out the new reality of the Kingdom of God. Like a basketball player learning to play within the system of her new team or a guitarist learning to play with a new band, we begin to put aside our old lives of rebellion and start to walk in the new life of the Kingdom.

Ephesians 4:17-24 Emphasis added

Now this I say and testify in the Lord, that you must no longer walk as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their minds. They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, due to their hardness of heart. They have become callous and have given themselves up to sensuality, greedy to practice every kind of impurity. But that is not the way you learned Christ!— assuming that you have heard about him and were taught in him, as the truth is in Jesus, to *put off your old self*, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and to *put on the new self*, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.

Read Colossians 3:1-17. According to this passage, what belongs to our old way of living apart from Christ? What belongs to the new life we have in Christ?

Which elements of the old self are you still struggling to put off? Which elements of the new self are you still struggling to put on?

It is important to remember that living into this new life we have through King Jesus is the journey of a lifetime. This is why discipleship is such a lengthy process. It cannot be rushed. There will be ups and downs. Sometimes you will take two steps forward and one step back. However, year to year, you will see progress towards being more like Jesus.

Action Points

Do some research for yourself on the truth of the resurrection. The Case for Christ by Lee Strobel is a good resource but there are others. Which arguments for the resurrection of Jesus do you find most persuasive?

If you have done so, consider watching the movie The Passion of the Christ. The depiction of the crucifixion in that movie is one of the most dramatic and true to life that I have ever seen. Reflect on the reality of the death of Jesus and the miracle of His resurrection.

Disciple-Partner Discussion Questions

Reread the Core Statement and the Memory Verse of this chapter. How would you summarize each of them in your own words?

What questions do you have about the resurrection of Jesus?

After reading the accounts of the resurrection of Jesus, what did you notice? What did the resurrected Jesus say or do after His resurrection?

If you had been one of the witnesses to Jesus' resurrection, what would you have said or done?

When you think about the promise of eternal life, what do you think it will look like?

Reflect on these passages from 1 Corinthians 15 and Revelation 21. How does the Bible's picture of resurrection life differ from the popular culture's picture?

What about the resurrection life do you long for the most?

Read Colossians 3:1-17. According to this passage, what belongs to our old way of living apart from Christ? What belongs to the new life we have in Christ?

Which elements of the old self are you still struggling to put off? Which elements of the new self are you still struggling to put on?

What did you learn from doing the Action Points?

Extra Resources

The Case for Christ by Lee Strobel

Evidence That Demands a Verdict by Josh McDowell and Sean McDowell

The Case for the Resurrection of Jesus by Gary R. Habermas and Michael R. Licona

Session 13 -- New Life I: By Grace

Core Idea:

Salvation for broken humanity comes from the overflowing love of a generous God and King.

Memory Verse:

Ephesians 2:8-9

For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.

The song, *Amazing Grace*, is definitely one of if not the most popular Christian hymn of the modern era. Written by John Newton, a former slave-ship captain turned Christian minister, in the later 1700s, *Amazing Grace* continues to move hearts with its brutal honesty and sweet melody, whether played in a church or at a graveside funeral service.

*Amazing grace, how sweet the sound
That saved a wretch like me
I once was lost, but now I am found
Was blind, but now I see*

Grace is another one of those church words that are loaded with meaning. The short definition of grace is **God's undeserved favor** especially in saving and reconciling sinful humanity. To truly unpack what grace and all that it means would take the work of a lifetime and this short chapter will scarcely do it justice; however, we have to start somewhere.

Amazing Grace

For humans, when someone has wronged us through an act of betrayal, we are often content to cut them out of our lives until they come groveling and pleading for our forgiveness. Even then, we are still not eager to restore or reconcile the relationship. After all, they hurt us! They don't deserve our friendship. They deserve to pay for what they have done!

Yet in King Jesus, we do not see this same attitude. Even though we have betrayed and rebelled against Him many thousands of times over. This is what we mean when we say that grace is undeserved. In fact, some go further to call it *ill-deserved*. What we deserve is God's wrath, anger, and judgment. What we get is mercy, forgiveness, and reconciliation through the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross.

The Gospels are filled with examples of Jesus' compassionate grace towards people, but I especially like this story found in Luke 19 about a man named Zacchaeus.

Luke 19:1-10 Emphasis added

He entered Jericho and was passing through. And behold, there was a man named Zacchaeus. He was a chief tax collector and was rich. And he was seeking to see who Jesus

was, but on account of the crowd he could not, because he was small in stature. So he ran on ahead and climbed up into a sycamore tree to see him, for he was about to pass that way. And when Jesus came to the place, he looked up and said to him, "Zacchaeus, hurry and come down, for I must stay at your house today." So he hurried and came down and received him joyfully. And when they saw it, they all grumbled, "He has gone in to be the guest of a man who is a sinner." And Zacchaeus stood and said to the Lord, "Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor. And if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I restore it fourfold." And Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house, since he also is a son of Abraham. *For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.*"

Grace means that rather than waiting for us to come to Him, God moves first! He initiates the process of reconciliation by reaching out to us. He came seeking us while we were hiding from Him, ignoring Him, or trying to deliberately push Him away, just as He did with Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden.

Read the three stories Jesus tells in Luke 15. In your own words, how are each of these stories an example of God's grace? How does God react when someone repents of their rebellion and returns to Him?

How is your story similar to that of the Prodigal Son?

Scot McKnight, in his book, *A Fellowship of Differents*, has a beautiful description of grace. "God created us, and that means too that God's love expanded to us. God is love and God can do no other. God looks at all of us and says, Yes. Do you hear God's grand Yes to you? . . . It's also the best news ever that God looks at you and says, *Yes, I want you in My company.* God's Yes echoes throughout the cosmic expanse and promises, *I will do what it takes to make that happen.*"

Just as He said Yes to Zacchaeus, so King Jesus says Yes to you and me. In fact, the extent to which He says Yes could even be described as scandalous.

Scandalous Grace

God's love, mercy, compassion, and grace is broader and more encompassing than you could possibly imagine. Think about the worst person you could imagine. No, even worse than that one. The most vile, wretched, evil scum of the earth person you could think of, even he can receive the grace of God.

"But," you protest, "_____ doesn't deserve God's grace!" You are absolutely right! None of us do. That's the point. We often like to play this game where there is a line between "good" people who deserve God's love and "bad" people who do not, and most of us will include ourselves on the good side. But the harsh truth is that the world is not divided between good and bad people. It is divided between bad people and Jesus.

John 8:3-11

The scribes and the Pharisees brought a woman who had been caught in adultery, and placing her in the midst they said to him, "Teacher, this woman has been caught in the act of adultery. Now in the Law, Moses commanded us to stone such women. So what do you say?" This they said to test him, that they might have some charge to bring against him. Jesus bent down and wrote with his finger on the ground. And as they continued to ask him, he stood up and said to them, "Let him who is without sin among you be the first to throw a stone at her." And once more he bent down and wrote on the ground. But when they heard it, they went away one by one, beginning with the older ones, and Jesus was left alone with the woman standing before him. Jesus stood up and said to her, "Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?" She said, "No one, Lord." And Jesus said, "Neither do I condemn you; go, and from now on sin no more."

How does this story illustrate the scandalous expanse of God's grace?

Put yourself in the place of the woman. How would you respond to Jesus' words, "Neither do I condemn you; go, and from now on sin no more"?

No matter what you have done,
not because you go to church,
not because you read your Bible,
not because folks think you are spiritual, and

no matter what sins you have committed,
no matter how vicious or mean or vile they were,
no matter how calloused your heart and soul have become,
God loves you.

Not because you are good,
not because you do good things,
not because you are famous or have served others,
but because you are you.

To you, God has said Yes,
God is saying Yes,
and God will eternally say Yes.
God is for the You that is You.

Abundant Grace

At this point, someone will ask, "If God loves me no matter what I do, why should I bother with this whole discipleship thing? Why not just do whatever I want, whenever I want, because God will still love me, right?" This is not a new thought, the Apostle Paul addresses it in his letter to the Church at Rome.

Romans 6:1-4 Emphasis added

What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it? Do you not know that all of us who have been

baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.

The idea that we could experience the saving grace of King Jesus and continue on living the same lives of rebellion and sin is what Dietrich Bonhoeffer called *cheap grace*. “Cheap grace is the preaching of forgiveness without requiring repentance, baptism without church discipline, Communion without confession, absolution without personal confession. Cheap grace is grace without discipleship, grace without the cross, grace without Jesus Christ, living and incarnate.”

Cheap grace is when we try to take all the benefits of accepting Jesus as Savior without any of the responsibilities that come from acknowledging Him as King. You cannot divorce the two. Jesus is Savior because He is the King. He is the King because He is the Savior.

How have you witnessed or experienced cheap grace before?

As Dallas Willard once wrote, “Grace is opposed to earning, not to effort.” God does not ask us to jump through hoops to *earn* His love and forgiveness. However, the experience of His love, compassion, and forgiveness ought to move us to live vastly different lives. “Grace invades our world to transform us until we are fully outfitted for eternal life. Grace is God’s loving, new creation power at work in us.”

Obviously, this transformation takes time. That is why it is important to remember that God’s grace is for all of life. He does not save us through grace and then expects immediate perfection. This is why, when talking about our lives as followers of King Jesus, I like the phrase **grace-covered obedience**. We seek to live in obedience to our King out of our love for and gratitude to Him. However, we still carry habits and behaviors of our past that we have not yet fully surrendered to Him. In His grace, He patiently bears with our stumbling and bumbling. Even more than that, coaches and guides and teaches us how to live out this new life. His grace covers our shortcomings and helps us grow to be the men and women we are called to be.

Do you accept that God still loves you even when you fail to live according to His ways? Why or why not?

How would you describe the difference between grace-covered obedience and fear-based obedience? Which of the two do you find more motivating?

Action Points

Perform an anonymous random act of kindness for a stranger. For example, you could buy someone's meal at a restaurant.

Look up the story of John Newton and the song, Amazing Grace. Reflect on the meaning of the lyrics and how they speak to your life.

Disciple-Partner Discussion Questions

Reread the Core Statement and the Memory Verse of this chapter. How would you summarize each of them in your own words?

Read the three stories Jesus tells in Luke 15. In your own words, how are each of these stories an example of God's grace? How does God react when someone repents of their rebellion and returns to Him?

Why is it important that Jesus came to *seek* the lost?

How is your story similar to that of the Prodigal Son?

How does the story of the woman caught in adultery illustrate the scandalous expanse of God's grace?

Have you ever felt condemned by other people and judged like the woman in this story?

Put yourself in the place of the woman. How would you respond to Jesus' words, "Neither do I condemn you; go, and from now on sin no more"?

How have you witnessed or experienced cheap grace before?

Do you accept that God still loves you even when you fail to live according to His ways? Why or why not?

How would you describe the difference between grace-covered obedience and fear-based obedience? Which of the two do you find more motivating?

What did you learn from doing the Action Points?

Extra Resources

What's So Amazing About Grace? by Philip Yancey

Mere Christianity by C. S. Lewis

A Fellowship of Differents by Scot McKnight

Session 14 -- New Life II: Through Faith

Core Idea:

In His wisdom, God has given humanity a choice to reject Him or accept Him by faith.

Memory Verse:

Hebrews 11:1

Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.

In the memory verse for Session 13, Ephesians 2:8-9, we saw that God's salvation comes to us by grace through faith. Grace, we saw, is God's unmerited favor towards human beings, *even though we have rebelled against Him*. In other words, God still loves and pursues a relationship with us. He initiates the act of reconciliation, even though He was the one betrayed.

Grace is God's part. Faith is ours. Faith is how we receive God's grace. Because God's grace comes first (it is already there waiting for us), there is nothing we can do to *earn* God's love or mercy or anything else. All we can do is receive what has been offered to us. However, God does not force Himself on anyone. We have the choice. We can continue our rebellion, or we can accept His grace through faith.

Here is the definition of faith that I have used for years:

Faith is believing that Jesus *is who He says He is*, and trusting that He *will do what He says He will do*.

Reflect on this definition of faith. Do you agree or disagree with it? Why?

Who does Jesus say that He is? What does He promise to do? How does believing this make a difference in how you live day to day?

What Faith Is Not

Let's clear the air for a moment and address some of the false notions about faith. First, faith is not **blind**. Sometimes when people talk about faith, they use phrases like "blind faith," "a leap of faith," or "a shot in the dark." The implication is that faith is something you believe in without proof or even in spite of contrary evidence. "Even though all the evidence tells me that if I jump off the roof of my house, I will fall and get hurt, *I believe I can fly*." That is not faith; it is foolishness.

Having faith does not mean ignoring evidence. It does not mean turning off your brain when you enter the church building. Rather, there is very good evidence to believe that Jesus is who He says He is. Dallas Willard says that faith “is confidence grounded in reality, not a wild, desperate ‘leap.’”

1 Peter 3:13-17 Emphasis added

Now who is there to harm you if you are zealous for what is good? But even if you should suffer for righteousness' sake, you will be blessed. Have no fear of them, nor be troubled, but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, *always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you*; yet do it with gentleness and respect, having a good conscience, so that, when you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame. For it is better to suffer for doing good, if that should be God's will, than for doing evil.

Why is it important that disciples of King Jesus be ready to give a reason for their hope in Jesus?

Another misconception about faith is that it is **opposed to action**. Honestly, I do not want to bore you with the ins and outs of a centuries old debate within the Church. Let me just say, there are those who believe that asking the followers of Jesus to do *anything* smacks of trying to earn God's grace. Thus, there is no reason to expect followers of King Jesus to even try to obey King Jesus. On the contrary:

Ephesians 2:8-10

For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.

You see? Salvation is not the result of works, but rather, works are the result of salvation.

James 2:14-19 Emphasis added

What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him? If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, and one of you says to them, “Go in peace, be warmed and filled,” without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that? *So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.*

But someone will say, “You have faith and I have works.” Show me your faith apart from your works, and I will show you my faith by my works. You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe—and shudder!

It is important to remember the order: God's grace -- our faith -- our actions.

What happens when we get these three out of order?

What Faith Is

The core elements of faith are **belief** and **trust**. As we discussed above, our belief in Jesus is not a blind leap of faith without evidence. There are numerous good reasons to believe that Jesus is who He said He is--the Christ, the Son of the Living God. However, we have the free will to ignore that evidence and believe something else.

Hebrews 11:6

And without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him.

John 3:16

For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.

Romans 10:9-13

. . . because, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved. For the Scripture says, "Everyone who believes in him will not be put to shame." For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all, bestowing his riches on all who call on him. For "everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."

From these three verses, what are followers of Jesus called to believe about who He is?

In the passage from James 2 we looked at earlier, James makes the statement that even the demons *believe* in God. *Mere belief* does not equal saving faith. Following Jesus is more than just mentally agreeing to a set of facts. No, our belief in who Jesus is must be paired with our *trust* in Him. Not only do we believe that Jesus is King, but we also trust that He is a good king worth following.

Describe in your own words the differences between belief and trust. Why are both important for saving faith?

At the risk of belaboring the point, if we truly believe that Jesus is who He says He is, and if we truly trust that He will do what He says He will do, then our lives will reflect that faith. We will live differently because of our faith in King Jesus. Unlike the demons, we will cease our rebellion and submit to Him as King.

Read through Hebrews 11 and note all the things men and women did because of their faith in God.

Back to the Beginning

For a moment, think back to our discussion of Genesis 3 and The Fall. The serpent deceived the woman by spinning lies instead of truth. When she *believed* the lies, she began to lose *trust* in the goodness of God. Thus, instead of *submitting* to God as King, she and her husband rebelled against God and disobeyed His command.

Do you see how faith in Jesus is the reverse of what happened in Genesis 3? Instead of believing the lies, we believe the truth. Instead of doubting the goodness of God, we trust Him with our lives. Instead of rebelling and doing things our way, we submit and follow His ways.

When we do this, we stop pushing God away and instead draw near to Him. Because of His grace, we find He is right there ready to embrace us with open arms. The shame and the stain of our sinful rebellion has been dealt with on the cross of Jesus Christ, and so we are reconciled to God and given a new life both now and in future at the resurrection. This is what it means to be saved by grace through faith in Jesus.

Action Points

In light of 1 Peter 3:13-17, make a list of the reasons you have for faith in Jesus. These can be personal reasons like how you have seen Him move in your life. They can also be reasons based on apologetics.

Create a list of doubts or questions that may be obstacles to belief (for yourself or for others). Pray for wisdom and begin to look up how others have wrestled with and found answers for those questions.

Disciple-Partner Discussion Questions

Reread the Core Statement and the Memory Verse of this chapter. How would you summarize each of them in your own words?

Reflect on this definition of faith. Do you agree or disagree with it? Why?

Who does Jesus say that He is? What does He promise to do? How does believing this make a difference in how you live day to day?

Why is it important that disciples of King Jesus be ready to give a reason for their hope in Jesus?

Read the story found in Mark 9:14-29. How does Jesus handle the man's imperfect faith?

In your own words, how would you describe the relationship between grace, faith, and action.

Read Hebrews 11:6; John 3:16, and Romans 10:9-13. From these three verses, what are followers of Jesus called to believe about who He is?

Read Hebrews 11. What did the men and women mentioned there do because of their faith?

How is our faith in Jesus a reversal of what happened in Genesis 3?

What did you learn from doing the Action Points?

Extra Resources

Renovation of the Heart by Dallas Willard

Faith Crisis: What Faith Isn't and Why It Doesn't Always Do What You Want by Ron Dunn

What is Faith? By R. C. Sproul

Session 15 -- Faith Killers I: Suffering and Hardship

Core Idea:

Suffering and hardship can impact a Disciple's desire to follow Jesus.

Memory Verse:

James 1:2-4

Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.

In Matthew chapter 13, Jesus delivers a series of parables about the Kingdom of God including my favorite, The Parable of the Soils. Through this parable, Jesus describes why some people respond to His teaching about the Kingdom while others reject it. Instead of me paraphrasing it for you, go ahead and look up the passage yourself: Matthew 13:1-23.

What are the four kinds of soil that Jesus describes in this parable? What does each soil represent?

What is the difference between the Good Soil and the other kinds of soil? Which kind of soil are you?

According to Jesus, there are some who will never respond to the Kingdom. That is a sad reality of our world. Some choose to remain in rebellion and opposition to God. However, others receive the good news that Jesus brings and they respond to it. They receive God's grace (Session 13) and respond in faith (Session 14). However, instead of growing into mature, fruit-bearing followers of King Jesus, something happens that disrupts the process. The fledgling faith of the person withers and dies or at the very least is drastically shunted by two very dangerous faith killers: trials and temptations. We will start with trials and save temptations for the next session.

A Painful Reality

As much as we would love for life to be all unicorns and rainbows, it is not. Bad stuff happens. People get hurt, sometimes innocent people. Jobs are lost. Cancer is found. Loved ones pass away. It all hurts. Sometimes the hurt lingers for a long time. We cry to God for answers, and we get back silence. Maybe someday, years down the road, we get a chance to see how God uses

a painful moment from our past to work good in our lives or in the lives of others. Yet so often we are not able to see any good in our pain.

That is a depressing thought, I know. However, we must learn to deal with reality as it is, not as how we dream it to be. Also, we do people a disservice when we refuse to acknowledge their pain and hurt. Well meaning people try to comfort others with the words, "God has a plan." Great words, and I believe them, but at the graveside of a child, those words do no good. Rather, they often add anger on top of grief and confusion. Then they feel shame, because as a culture, painful emotions make us uncomfortable.

For a long time, I thought it was inappropriate to be angry with God. I thought that being disappointed or feeling hurt because He refused to answer my prayer and give me what I want was sinful and rebellious. So I tried to bury those feelings and ignore them. But guess what I learned? Buried feelings do not go away! They do not disappear just because I want them to. They linger, and they cause distance between us and God. Instead of putting down deep roots as our relationship with and faith in God grows, our roots remain shallow because unaddressed painful emotions create a barrier between us and God.

It took me a long time, but I finally came to understand that God can take our painful emotions. God can take our anger, our hurt, and our disappointment. He can handle our screams and our tears . . . because He loves us. As a good Father, He lets us beat on His chest and even scream in His face. All the while, He wraps His arms around us to comfort us with His presence (but not always with answers).

Consider King David who wrote so many of the poems that make up the book of Psalms. In Psalm 22, he accuses God of forsaking him.

Psalm 22:1-2

My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?
Why are you so far from saving me, from the words of my groaning?
O my God, I cry by day, but you do not answer,
and by night, but I find no rest.

Read the rest of Psalm 22. Though David begins with an expression of his pain, how does he end the Psalm? What changes in David through the course of the Psalm?

All of us have gone through seasons of hardship. Think about one such season in your life. What were you feeling at the time? How have you worked through those emotions?

Where is God?

One question that every disciple of King Jesus must wrestle with is this one, "Where is God when I am hurting?" We must learn to wrestle with it because the world is asking this question. Remember that the Enemy specializes in lies with the intent to drive a wedge between God and

humanity. What bigger tool than to use our hurt and our pain to make us doubt the goodness of God?

In the Gospel of John, Chapter 11, we see a family in crisis. Two sisters witnessed their brother take ill and die. They were all friends of Jesus, and though word reached Jesus about the illness, He did not make it in time to prevent the man's death. When He arrives, both sisters hit Jesus with the statement, "If you had been here, our brother would not have died." Take a moment and read the story for yourself in John 11:1-57.

Why do you think Jesus waited two days before heading to see Lazarus?

If you were Mary or Martha, what would you be thinking about or feeling in that moment?

This particular story ends with a miracle. Lazarus is raised from the grave and restored to his sisters. "And they lived happily ever after." Yet not every story ends with a happy ending, at least, not with a happy ending of a miracle resurrection. So what does this story have to do with our pain and hurts? Notice what happened when Mary comes to Jesus.

John 11:32-35 Emphasis added

Now when Mary came to where Jesus was and saw him, she fell at his feet, saying to him, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died." When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who had come with her also weeping, *he was deeply moved in his spirit and greatly troubled*. And he said, "Where have you laid him?" They said to him, "Lord, come and see." *Jesus wept*.

You see, there is a bigger question than "Where is God when I am hurting?" Because God is everywhere. The bigger question is "What is God doing when I am hurting?" And because we know that Jesus shows us what God is like, it is safe to say that God weeps over our hurts just as Jesus wept over the pain of Mary and Martha when they grieved their brother. God is not some stoic, uncaring, unconcerned force somewhere in the cosmos. He is our loving Father. Even when bad things happen, and even when He, for whatever reason, does not prevent them, He knows our pain.

"But how can God know my pain?" He knows because He has experienced pain. Jesus, the second Person of the Holy Trinity, God in the flesh, experienced the fullness of humanity. He knew the grief of losing friends and loved ones. He knew hunger and thirst and fatigue. He knew betrayal. He also knew the most excruciating form of torture when He endured the cross. Though He was innocent of any wrongdoing, He suffered a criminal's death in our place and for our sin. God knows our pain.

How does your view of God change how you view hardship and suffering?

Double-Fisted Faith

In the Old Testament, the Book of Daniel is a fascinating story of faithfulness to God in spite of hardship. Daniel and his friends, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, were taken from their home as young men when the king of Babylon invaded and conquered it. They were forced to serve the king of Babylon and at times their faith got them into trouble because they would not worship according to the customs of the Babylonians.

Daniel 3 tells about the double-fisted faith of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego:

Daniel 3:13-18

Then Nebuchadnezzar in furious rage commanded that Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego be brought. So they brought these men before the king. Nebuchadnezzar answered and said to them, "Is it true, O Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, that you do not serve my gods or worship the golden image that I have set up? Now if you are ready when you hear the sound of the horn, pipe, lyre, trigon, harp, bagpipe, and every kind of music, to fall down and worship the image that I have made, well and good. But if you do not worship, you shall immediately be cast into a burning fiery furnace. And who is the god who will deliver you out of my hands?"

Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego answered and said to the king, "O Nebuchadnezzar, we have no need to answer you in this matter. If this be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of your hand, O king. But if not, be it known to you, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the golden image that you have set up."

"Imagine these three brave men standing before the most powerful man on earth with bold defiance. With one clenched fist they say, 'God can rescue us and we believe He will.' . . . Then the second clenched fist comes up and they say with equal confidence, 'Even if He doesn't save us, we will not serve your gods.'" See? Double-fisted faith holds on to God with both hands. We trust He is good and able to save, but we also trust that He is good and able to see us through even if He doesn't save us.

"When we have this kind of faith, we are saying to God, 'Whether you choose to act or not, I will cling to you and hold on with both hands.' This is the kind of faith God deserves, and the kind His Holy Spirit empowers us to have no matter what our circumstances."

Meditate on this idea of "double-fisted" faith. Do you struggle with this idea? Why or why not?

When have you had to cling tightly to God and His promises, not knowing the outcome of the situation?

Action Points

Reflect on some of the difficult moments in your life. How did those moments impact your relationship with God? Did they cause you to lean on Him more? Or did they lead you to pull away from Him?

Consider what you wish others would have done or said while you were going through a rough time. How can you be a person of compassion for others who are struggling?

Disciple-Partner Discussion Questions

Reread the Core Statement and the Memory Verse of this chapter. How would you summarize each of them in your own words?

What are the four kinds of soil that Jesus describes in the parable in Matthew 13:1-23? What does each soil represent?

What is the difference between the Good Soil and the other kinds of soil? What kind of soil are you?

Read Psalm 22. Though David begins with an expression of his pain, how does he end the Psalm? What changes in David through the course of the Psalm?

All of us have gone through seasons of hardship. Think about one such season in your life. What were you feeling at the time? How have you worked through those emotions?

Why do you think Jesus waited two days before heading to see Lazarus?

If you were Mary or Martha, what would you be thinking about or feeling in that moment?

How does your view of God change how you view hardship and suffering?

Meditate on the idea of “double-fisted” faith. Do you struggle with this idea? Why or why not?

When have you had to cling tightly to God and His promises, not knowing the outcome of the situation?

What did you learn from doing the Action Points?

Extra Resources

The Problem of Pain by C. S. Lewis

A Grief Observed by C. S. Lewis

Where is God When it Hurts? by Philip Yancey

Session 16 -- Faith Killers II: Idols and Strongholds

Core Idea:

Various temptations and issues in life try to stand in the way of a Disciple's desire to follow Jesus.

Memory Verse:

1 John 2:15-16

Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world—the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride of life—is not from the Father but is from the world.

Growing up, I was never a big fan of horror movies. They just weren't my thing -- ghosts, zombies, monsters, or demons. However, during high school, I recall reading a couple of fiction books by author Frank Peretti about angels and demons. At the time, Peretti was wildly popular in American Evangelical Christian circles. His book, *This Present Darkness* and *Piercing the Darkness*, imagine the world we live in as a battleground between armies of angels and demons with humans as sometimes unwitting pawns in this cosmic fight of good and evil.

Peretti is not the only one to try and imagine what the spiritual battles between angels and demons look like. How often have you seen cartoons that show a character making a decision with an angel on one shoulder and a demon on the other? I am sure you can think of plenty of other examples as well.

Recall the parable that Jesus gave in Matthew 13:1-23. (Stop and read it again if you've forgotten.) In this parable, Jesus acknowledges the reality of Satan, the evil one, who has influence over some people, such that he interferes with their hearing and receiving the gospel. However, that is not the only way that the enemy derails faith in Christ. Last session we looked at how trials and hardships can be a faith killer. This time, we will look at how temptations and idols can affect our faith.

Who is the Enemy?

As we begin, let's clear up some terminology. Often, when speaking about the forces opposed to God, I use the shorthand phrase "the Enemy." Who is this enemy? Is it Satan? Well, yes . . . and no. Let me explain.

First, we have seen in Genesis 3 that there is a serpent, Satan, aka the Devil, aka the Evil One. Satan is opposed to God and His people and seeks to wage war against them through deception. Along with Satan are various demonic spiritual beings that exert various degrees of influence on people. However, neither Satan nor the demons that have joined in his rebellion against God are equal to God. They are not infinite, nor are they all-powerful.

Read Mark 5:1-13. How does this army of demons react to the presence of Jesus?

The Bible is clear that Satan is joined in his rebellion against God not only by the demons, but also by humans who have rebelled against God (i.e. everyone). Sinful humans create *sinful systems* that reinforce and perpetuate sinful behavior. At times the Bible refers to these systems collectively as *the world*.

1 John 5:19 Emphasis added

We know that we are from God, and **the whole world** lies in the power of the evil one.

Think about the various world systems: politics, economics, education, and entertainment. How do these world systems reinforce and perpetuate sinful behavior?

Satan and the world systems built by men and women in rebellion against God stand as enemies of the Kingdom of God, but disciples of Jesus have switched teams. Though we used to be on the side of the enemies of God, we are now part of God's people, even adopted as God's children.

Colossians 1:13-14

He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

Yet, even though we have joined up with Team Jesus, there remains an enemy we must do battle with on a daily basis. The Bible calls this our *flesh*.

Romans 8:5-8

For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit. For to set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God's law; indeed, it cannot. Those who are in the flesh cannot please God.

The flesh is that part of us that still likes to play for the enemy's team. It is the habits we have formed over years of following the ways of this sinful world. It is the little devil over the shoulder depicted in cartoons, only this is not necessarily one of Satan's demons. It comes from within us, from those areas of our soul not completely surrendered to Jesus.

Romans 8:13-14

For if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God.

Because of the hold these areas have in our lives, they are also called *strongholds*, little fortresses where the enemy (Satan, demons, the world systems, and our flesh) have strong defenses and refuse to give up without a fight.

What are some significant spiritual strongholds in your life that you are aware of?

Spiritual Warfare -- Battling the enemy in front of us

As we talk about spiritual warfare, we are not talking about holy water, speaking Latin, and exorcising demons. Rather, I want us to focus on the enemy in front of us, our flesh and our sinful habits that are still unsundered to King Jesus. We are called to put to death the flesh. The word for this is mortification. It sounds grisly, I know. The goal here is to root out those strongholds until we are completely surrendered in every area of our lives to Jesus.

Biblical Truth

Satan is a liar. King Jesus called him "the father of lies." One of the key strategies of Satan and the world systems is to twist the truth up in knots in order to deceive. The best weapon to fight against lies is the truth.

2 Corinthians 10:4-5

For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds. We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ . . .

This is why it is important for disciples of Jesus to engage with scripture on a regular basis. We will discuss later what this means in more detail, but for now it is important to know that the Bible is our standard for weighing truth from lies. The Apostle Paul calls it the sword, our offensive weapon in rooting out the strongholds of sin in our lives.

Read Ephesians 6:10-18. In addition to the Word of God as the sword, what other pieces of armor does Paul describe? What do these various pieces of armor do?

Radical Honesty

In our fight against the sinfulness of our own hearts, we not only need biblical truth, but we also need a commitment to radical honesty. The Apostle Peter calls Satan a lion on the prowl seeking people to devour. Think about how lions hunt. They like to go for the prey that is off by itself, away from the herd. Secrets keep us isolated from one another and cut off from our community. Secrets are the breeding ground for Satan's lies and deception. Consider what Jesus says:

John 3:19-21 Emphasis added

And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil. *For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his works should be exposed. But whoever does what is true comes to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that his works have been carried out in God.*

When we confess our sins to others, we bring ourselves into the light. We are no longer fighting the enemy alone in the darkness.

Grace-filled Community

Do keep in mind that this call for radical honesty is not a call for us to blast everything on social media for the world to see. Unfortunately, not everyone can be trusted with our struggles.

However, we all need a safe, grace-filled community (two or three people) with which we can be honest about our struggles and our past.

A grace-filled community is one that shows each other the grace and love of King Jesus. The members speak truth to each other with love in order to build one another up rather than shame each other or tear each other down. A grace-filled community practices the kind of love found in 1 Corinthians 13:4-7.

Read 1 Corinthians 13:4-7. Do you have a grace-filled community in your life? How can you be a grace-filled person for others?

Full Surrender

Perhaps the hardest part of this kind of spiritual warfare is deciding to be all in for Jesus in the first place. This is honestly the work of a lifetime. The closer we get to Jesus, the more we find hidden strongholds and false idols we were not aware of before. As we find areas of our lives that do not line up with King Jesus' way of life, we surrender them as well.

Colossians 3:5-10

Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. On account of these the wrath of God is coming. In these you too once walked, when you were living in them. But now you must put them all away: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and obscene talk from your mouth. Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator.

In all of this remember that God's grace covers you. You are loved because He loves you. The heart work we do as we root out strongholds is in response to His love, not the cause of it.

Action Points

What are some spiritual strongholds in your life that you are already aware of? Work with your disciple-partner to find scripture that applies to those areas.

Do you have a grace-filled community with whom you can be honest? Who is part of that community? What qualities should you look for in men and women who make up this community?

Disciple-Partner Discussion Questions

Reread the Core Statement and the Memory Verse of this chapter. How would you summarize each of them in your own words?

Read Mark 5:1-13. How does this army of demons react to the presence of Jesus? What does this teach us about the power of Jesus?

Think about the various world systems: politics, economics, education, and entertainment. How do these world systems reinforce and perpetuate sinful behavior?

In your own words, how does the Bible combat the lies of the enemy? Do you believe the Bible is true?

Read Ephesians 6:10-18. In addition to the Word of God as the sword, what other pieces of armor does Paul describe? What do these various pieces of armor do?

In your own words, how does practicing radical honesty break the power of sin? Have you ever experienced this in your life?

Read 1 Corinthians 13:4-7. Do you have a grace-filled community in your life? How can you be a grace-filled person for others?

What did you learn from doing the Action Points?

Extra Resources

Spiritual Warfare by Brian Borgman and Rob Ventura

Overcoming Sin and Temptation by John Owen

Winning the War in Your Mind by Craig Groeschel

Session 17 -- Identity in Christ I: Adopted

Core Idea:

In Christ, Disciples are given a new identity. They are adopted by God to be sons and daughters.

Memory Verse:

Romans 8:15

For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, “Abba! Father!”

Back in Session 2, I asked you to consider some of the stories that shaped your childhood. Let’s go back to those stories as we consider how this new life and new relationship with King Jesus not only restores us, but it *restories* us as well. That is, Jesus gives us a new story and a new identity in His Kingdom.

As we grow from childhood to adolescence to adulthood, we develop our sense of identity, our story. “Who am I? What am I doing? Where am I going?” These are powerful questions. Some of us sit down to answer these questions deliberately and consciously. Others process these questions subconsciously, that is, they may not be able to articulate the question, but they feel the angst of trying to answer it nonetheless.

Where do we go for answers to the question, “Who am I?” Many of us find part of that answer in our family of origin, for good or for bad. Our family dynamics play a major role in shaping our identity. For example, the oldest child is often formed into a leadership role by being tasked with responsibilities to help her younger siblings. The youngest child, being the baby of the family, is often given more latitude and less responsibility. Then there is the middle child who often feels lost in the chaos.

It is in our early childhood family experience that we develop our sense of our self-worth. We not only ask, “Who am I?” But also, “Am I loved? Am I lovable?” Sadly, the answer too many receive from their childhood is “No, I am not worthy of love.” When this thought becomes part of our story, the effects are devastating. We either give in to despair, or we go about chasing love wherever we can find it.

Part of the good news of the gospel is that through Jesus, we are *adopted* by God as His sons and daughters. Through our adoption, we gain a new Father, a new family, and an inheritance.

Romans 8:14-17

For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, “Abba! Father!” The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him.

New Father

No human father or mother is perfect. We understand that. As a father myself, I am keenly aware of many of my shortcomings. (I am also aware that there are shortcomings I am not aware of yet.) So whether your parents were as close to perfection as humanly possible or whether they were among the worst of the worst, they still fall short of the perfect love we find in our heavenly Father.

When human parents fail their children, that failure usually comes out in one of two ways: abuse (inflicting harm) or neglect (withholding good). Both of these can be physical, mental, or emotional. No matter what form it takes, both abuse and neglect communicate to the child, "You are not loved." This message is powerful because of the vulnerability of the child and the relationship of the one teaching this lesson, the parents.

However, God the Father is clear. You are loved. You are loved with a deep and abiding love.

John 3:16

For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.

1 John 4:7-12

Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love. In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God abides in us and his love is perfected in us.

Romans 8:31-39

What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things? Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? As it is written, "For your sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered."

No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

What is the proof of God's love towards you?

What are the limits of God's love?

It is important to remember that the Bible uses the image of God as Father and not *Grandfather*. In some cultures, grandparents are viewed as doting and permissive, often spoiling their grandchildren. Though God's mercy, grace, and love are far more than we deserve, like any decent father, He seeks to grow us into maturity. This means that He does not spoil us with our *wants*, but rather provides us with our *needs*.

God loves you just as you are. However, He loves you too much to leave you there.

In your own words, what is the difference between the idea of God as Father vs. God as Grandfather?

Ephesians 4:11-16 Emphasis added

And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, *to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ*, so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes. Rather, speaking the truth in love, *we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ*, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.

From Ephesians 4:11-16, what does maturity look like?

Hebrews 12:1-11

Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.

Consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself, so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted. In your struggle against sin you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood. And have you forgotten the exhortation that addresses you as sons?

“My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord,
nor be weary when reproved by him.
For the Lord disciplines the one he loves,
and chastises every son whom he receives.”

It is for discipline that you have to endure. God is treating you as sons. For what son is there whom his father does not discipline? If you are left without discipline, in which all have participated, then you are illegitimate children and not sons. Besides this, we have had earthly fathers who disciplined us and we respected them. Shall we not much more be subject to the Father of spirits and live? For they disciplined us for a short time as it seemed best to them, but he disciplines us for our good, that we may share his holiness. For the moment all discipline

seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.

The author of Hebrews calls upon his or her readers to endure the hardships they are facing from a world hostile to King Jesus. The author compares the Christian life to running a race like a marathon. Picture a coach putting her players through drills, pushing them to the limits of exhaustion in order to build stamina and endurance. Picture a father teaching his children life lessons even though the kids would rather be playing games. This is the love of your heavenly Father.

How has God helped you to grow more like Jesus?

New Family

If through Jesus, we have been adopted as sons and daughters of God, then it stands to reason that we are also adopted into a family of brothers and sisters. This is what the Apostle Paul says in Galatians.

Galatians 3:23-29 Emphasis added

Now before faith came, we were held captive under the law, imprisoned until the coming faith would be revealed. So then, the law was our guardian until Christ came, in order that we might be justified by faith. But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian, *for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith.* For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. *There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.* And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise.

One thing this means is that in the local church there should not be the classic divisions that the world likes to obsess over. There ought to be no room in the local church for any forms of racism. Nor should there be favoritism of the wealthy over the poor. I say *should* and *ought* because sadly this is not always the case. As we are discipled into the character of king Jesus, we learn to view these issues from His perspective rather than the world's.

Meditate on what it means to be adopted into the family of God. How else does this change the way we live?

An Inheritance

Earlier we looked at Romans 8:14-17. There Paul not only claims that we are children of God, but also that as children, we are heirs of God. This means that we share in the family fortune! God not only loves you and adopts you, but He extends to you all the privileges that come with being His children including eternal life with Him!

1 Peter 1:3-5

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.

How does knowing that in Christ you are adopted by the King of the Universe change how you view yourself?

Action Points

Take some time to reflect on your parents. Write out two lists: their successes as parents and their struggles as parents. How do their successes point you toward God as Father? How is God a better Father?

Is there anything about your parents that you need to forgive or ask forgiveness for? Write a letter to your parents. Discuss with your disciple-partner whether or not to send the letter.

Disciple-Partner Discussion Questions

Reread the Core Statement and the Memory Verse of this chapter. How would you summarize each of them in your own words?

What is the proof of God's love towards you?

What are the limits of God's love?

In your own words, what is the difference between the idea of God as Father vs. God as Grandfather?

From Ephesians 4:11-16, what does maturity look like?

How do you react to the statement, "God loves you just as you are. However, He loves you too much to leave you there." Do you agree or disagree with this statement? Why?

How has God helped you to grow more like Jesus?

Meditate on what it means to be adopted into the family of God. How else does this change the way we live?

What did you learn from doing the Action Points?

Extra Resources

Who Am I? Identity in Christ by Jerry Bridges

Identity Theft: Reclaiming the Truth of Our identity in Christ by Melissa Kruger, et al.

Who Do You Think You Are? by Mark Driscoll

Session 18 -- Identity in Christ II: Made Holy

Core Idea:

In Christ, Disciples are set apart and different from the world in order to influence the world for Jesus.

Memory Verse:

1 Peter 2:9

But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.

Have you ever been part of a team? Maybe you were on a sports team at one point in your life. Or maybe you were on a different sort of team, a choir or band or a cast in a play. If you can recall the experience, maybe you will remember the power of working together with a group of people for a common goal, something none of you could do by yourselves. There is power in being part of something larger than ourselves.

There is also power in being part of a team, a special group of people united by a common purpose. Teams develop their own culture. They dress differently and act differently from those not on the team and from other competing teams.

This idea introduces an often misunderstood idea in the Bible: *holiness*. The Bible is full of places, objects, animals, and people that are called “holy.” The temple in which the people of Israel worshiped God was considered holy. The innermost chamber where the High Priest met with God was called the Most Holy Place.

In the New Testament, early Christians were called *holy ones*, though most modern English translations use the word “saints.” Other words like “sacred, sanctify, and consecrate” are also related to this idea of holiness. But what does it all mean?

In modern usage, when we call someone a saint, we are saying that he or she is a good person. There is something about that person’s behavior that we recognize as extraordinarily good. Maybe he is super generous with his money, supporting local charities. Maybe she is someone who spends her time volunteering to help those in need. However, the Bible uses the word very differently.

How have you heard words like “holy” or “saint” used? What pictures come to mind when you hear these words?

Set Apart

At its core, to be holy means to be *set apart for special use*.

Let's consider some examples from modern life:

- In my house, my wife, my son, and I each have desks that we use from time to time. My desk is special to me. It is where I put my stuff when I get home from work. I know where things are on it, and I have my own system of organization. My desk is not the place for my son to set up his Legos. (Not that would go nuts if he did, mostly I would be mildly irritated.)
- A wedding dress is special to a bride. It is not something one wears for grocery shopping.
- Some sports fans have "lucky" clothing or gear that is special to them. It has to be treated in just the right way lest the luck runs out and it no longer helps their team.

In the Old Testament, objects used in the worship of God were considered holy and therefore set apart as special. For example, the Ark of the Covenant sat in the Most Holy Place of the temple, and above it, God would meet with the Jewish High Priest once a year on a special day. It would be inappropriate to then use the Ark of the Covenant like a coffee table. The same goes for the other furniture and items used for worshiping God.

Can you think of some other modern illustrations of holiness? How would you explain this idea of holiness in your own words?

Just as objects can be marked off as holy to God, so can people. The priests who served God and the people of Israel in the temple were marked as holy. Their position and act of service set them apart from their fellow Israelites. In fact, the entire nation of Israel was considered holy to God. As God's people, they were to live and act differently from their neighboring nations as a testimony to the one true God.

Exodus 19:5-6

Now therefore, if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples, for all the earth is mine; and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.' These are the words that you shall speak to the people of Israel.

The people of Israel were considered holy, not because they were good or generous or well-behaved. They were holy simply because God chose them to make them His. He set them apart for Himself first, then the behavior changed later. Listen to how author Mark Moore explains it:

What makes an object or person 'holy'? Holiness happens when God takes ordinary objects and claims them for His purpose. For example, an ordinary plot of ground can become sacred if God shows up there. An ordinary animal, set aside for sacrifice, suddenly becomes consecrated. A person elected by God becomes a priest or a prophet. These become sacred, not because their nature becomes different but

because their purpose becomes different. In one moment, they were ordinary, openly accessed by anyone. In the next moment, God claims them for His own purposes. They're still the same 'stuff,' and none of their physical properties have magically transformed.

Reflect on this quote, why does it matter that holiness is a result of God's choosing rather than our behavior?

In the same way, disciples of King Jesus are set apart as holy too. You have been chosen by Jesus and given a purpose. Holiness is part of your identity in Christ. Peter uses the same words from Exodus 19 for the followers of Jesus.

1 Peter 2:9

But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.

Set Apart *From*

To be holy means to be set apart, but set apart from what? For the people of Israel, they were set apart from the nations around them. The peoples who bordered the Israelites were often pagan peoples who worshiped an assortment of fertility gods and goddesses. Long story short, they would practice all kinds of religious acts in order to coerce and convince the gods and goddesses to act on their behalf and bless their crops and herds.

The God of the Israelites was nothing like those pagan gods, and His people were to be different from the people who worshiped those gods. Thus, there are many rules in the Old Testament that may not make sense to us today, but they served to set the people of Israel apart from their neighbors. The Israelites dressed differently, kept their hair differently, ate differently, and worshiped their God differently.

For followers of Jesus, we are not a separate nation. Rather, peoples from all nations follow and worship King Jesus. However, we are set apart from the world around us, that is, the world's way of doing things. We are part of the upside-down Kingdom of God. We are on Team Jesus. Though, there is no official jersey or way of dressing that marks us off from the world. Still, we are expected to live and act in such a way that it is obvious we are different.

Matthew 5:13-16

You are the salt of the earth, but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trampled under people's feet.

You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.

Reflect on this passage. How does salt and light connect with our discussion about being set apart as holy?

In your mind, what would set a follower of Jesus apart from the world? What differences would you expect to find in someone who follows Jesus as King?

What does Jesus give as the reason for letting our light shine before others?

Set Apart For

Keep in mind that we are not just set apart *from* the world. We are set apart *for the glory of King Jesus*. Look again at what Peter says in 1 Peter 2:9.

1 Peter 2:9 Emphasis added

But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, *that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.*

Not only do we have a new identity as God's chosen people, we also have a purpose for our lives. Peter goes on:

1 Peter 2:11-12

Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh which wage war against your soul. Keep your conduct among the Gentile honorable so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation.

In other words, live out your lives as God's chosen, holy people in the upside-down Kingdom of God so well that even when the enemies of God try to accuse you of being a bad person, all they can see is how well you love people with the love and grace of King Jesus. Our lives ought to reflect His life. When people look at us, we want to show them what our King is like.

Before starting this journey as a disciple of King Jesus, what did you consider your purpose in life? Has that purpose changed?

Action Points

Make a commitment for two weeks to set aside a certain time each day as holy to God. This is God's time in which He has your undivided attention. Use this time with God to read scripture or pray to God. If it helps, use a journal to write out your prayers.

In some monasteries, monks and nuns practice what is called the Daily Office. This practice involves setting aside multiple times each day to stop whatever work is being done and spend some time in prayer. Over the next week, do a modified version of the Daily Office. Set an alarm to go off a couple of times during your day. When it does, stop what you are doing, and spend a minute reflecting on the fact that you are holy and set apart for God.

Disciple-Partner Discussion Questions

Reread the Core Statement and the Memory Verse of this chapter. How would you summarize each of them in your own words?

How have you heard words like “holy” or “saint” used? What pictures come to mind when you hear these words?

Can you think of some other modern illustrations of holiness? How would you explain this idea of holiness in your own words?

Reflect on the quote from Mark Moore, why does it matter that holiness is a result of God's choosing rather than our behavior?

Reflect on Matthew 5:13-16. How does salt and light connect with our discussion about being set apart as holy?

In your mind, what would set a follower of Jesus apart from the world? What differences would you expect to find in someone who follows Jesus as King?

According to Matthew 5:13-16, what does Jesus give as the reason for letting our light shine before others?

Before starting this journey as a disciple of King Jesus, what did you consider your purpose in life? Has that purpose changed?

What did you learn from doing the Action Points?

Extra Resources

Pursuit of Holiness by Jerry Bridges

The Hole in our Holiness by Kevin DeYoung

Rediscovering Holiness by J. I. Packer

Session 19 -- Identity in Christ III: Set Free

Core Idea:

In Christ, Disciples are set free from slavery to sin and as well as the power of shame.

Memory Verse:

Psalms 103:11-12

**For as high as the heavens are above the earth,
so great is his steadfast love toward those who fear him;
as far as the east is from the west,
so far does he remove our transgressions from us.**

In Session 10, we talked about redemption, and how Jesus' death on the cross sets us free from sin and death. We are coming back to this topic again because of all the aspects of our new identity in Christ, this is the most difficult for people to wrestle with. I have met many Christians who can understand *intellectually* that they are set free from sin and forgiven for their past, but in their hearts they still struggle with guilt and shame.

Sharon (not her real name) is a sweet and gentle seventy-year old woman who grew up in the church. However, she struggled all her life with feeling loved and accepted having grown up in the shadow of her more popular sister. Though she knows and understands that Jesus died for her sins, that He loves her, and that He has forgiven her, she struggles to forgive herself and still feels unworthy of His love.

Jack (again, not his real name) is in his mid-forties. He was not raised in the church, but came to faith as an adult after a family tragedy. Like Sharon, he understands in his mind what forgiveness is, but is it really true? Has God really forgiven his past? Or does God expect Jack to suffer in this life as payment for his past mistakes?

Sam (real name this time) has a history of addiction. In acting out on his addiction, he brought harm to his family. He betrayed their trust and wounded them deeply. For a long time, even after pursuing counseling and recovery, Sam struggled to look at himself in the mirror. Will this shame follow him for the rest of his life?

Reflect on these stories. Do any of them resonate with yours? Which ones and why?

Have you accepted that you are forgiven for your past sins? Or do you still struggle with the idea?

Shame and Guilt

Part of the reason why it is so difficult to internalize and accept the forgiveness of Jesus is that shame touches on our identity. We have trouble distancing *who we are* from *what we have done*. If I cannot undo my actions, then I cannot change the stain of those actions on my identity. To understand this better, we need to address two distinct but related words: **shame** and **guilt**.

Guilt is related to action. Shame is related to identity.

Guilt says, "I have done wrong." Shame says, "There is something wrong with me."

Guilt ends when the bad behavior stops. Shame lingers long after the behavior stops.

Listen to how the Apostle Paul describes these two.

2 Corinthians 7:8-10 Emphasis added

For even if I made you grieve with my letter, I do not regret it—though I did regret it, for I see that that letter grieved you, though only for a while. As it is, I rejoice, not because you were grieved, but because you were grieved into repenting. For you felt a godly grief, so that you suffered no loss through us. *For godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation without regret, whereas worldly grief produces death.*

In an earlier letter to the church at Corinth, Paul chastised the Christians there for some sinful behaviors. This resulted in guilt that brought repentance. We know guilt is not a pleasant feeling. However, it is a *good feeling*. Guilt reminds us that we are acting in rebellion against God's desires. We are either betraying Him or betraying others, and we need to stop. Think of guilt like the nerve endings in your hand. If you set your hand down on a hot stovetop, you will feel pain. However, that pain forces you to *remove your hand* so that you don't get hurt even more! This is the purpose of guilt, and by God's grace, the Holy Spirit convicts us when we are heading in the wrong direction so we can repent, turn around, and go in the correct direction.

In your own words, what is the purpose of guilt?

Think of a time when guilt caused you to stop what you were doing and repent. What was the situation? What did you feel before you repented? What did you feel after repenting?

Shame, on the other hand, is the worldly grief that brings death. Shame comes from the enemy, not the Holy Spirit. God has no interest in continuing to hammer us after we have repented. That is Satan's doing. Shame is the enemy's way of attacking our identity. By attaching what we have done with who we are, shame lingers long after we have stopped doing whatever we feel shame about.

In your own words, how would you describe the difference between shame and guilt?

Because shame lingers for so long, we run the risk of getting caught up in the **shame cycle**.

- I am ashamed of my past and feel unlovable.
- I need to live in secrecy and isolation, because if anyone knew, then they would reject me.
- Feeling bad and without community support, I turn to unhealthy coping mechanisms.
- I feel ashamed of my unhealthy coping mechanisms and start the cycle all over again.

How have you experienced this shame cycle in your own life?

Embracing Freedom

Part of the trap of the enemy is that he gets us fixated on the wrong things. By keeping us looking at ourselves, our sin, and our past, he is able to continually stir up the old pains of our shame and guilt, even if we have left that behavior behind and are trying to live our new lives in Christ. Now, I cannot just tell you to not think about your past. If I tell you not to think about a pink elephant, what are you thinking about right now? Trying not to think about your past, only causes you to think about it more, thus increasing shame.

Spiritual Judo

In my own life, I have tried to put into practice what I call **spiritual judo**. Judo is a martial arts practice that takes an opponent's attack and turns it back on him. So when the enemy comes and says, "Look at what you have done, Sam! You are a sinner and an addict and unworthy of God's love!" Instead of wallowing in shame, I use that attack as a reminder to worship my King. "Yes, I am unworthy, but how great is God's grace that He loves someone like me."

Meditate on Forgiveness

In addition to worshiping King Jesus, it is important to continually meditate on His forgiveness. Remember, you do not get to decide whether you are forgiven or not. I have heard so many people say at times, "God forgives me, but I cannot forgive myself." The great news is that you and I are not the Judge. We do not get to render that verdict. And God has already rendered it for the followers of King Jesus.

Take some time right now and slowly read Psalm 103:1-22 three times. What does this Psalm say about who God is? What does it say about how God sees us?

Meditate on the New Creation

Because of Jesus, in the eyes of God, are past rebellion and sin is wiped out, removed as far as the east is from the west. Isn't that amazing? You are truly a new creation. You are not the man or woman you used to be.

2 Corinthians 5:17

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.

This is a truth that we need to remind ourselves of constantly. We do not have to resort to old coping mechanisms, old addictions, and old ways of thinking and acting. We are not that person any more. The more we meditate on and reinforce this idea in our minds and hearts, the closer we get to living out this reality on a daily basis.

To reinforce this idea, write out on a piece of paper the kind of person you used to be before you became a disciple of Jesus. On a separate piece of paper, write out the kind of person you are becoming in Jesus.

Self-Kindness

One last thing to be said before we leave this session. Many of us could benefit by practicing self-kindness. If you are like me, the first time I heard this term I was scandalized.

"Kindness? Compassion? To myself? That goes against everything I know! If I am kind to myself, I will just give myself a license to sin and do all sorts of self-destructive behavior."

The more I found out, though, the more I realized that self-kindness is just applying the gospel of Jesus to my own life. To treat myself with the same mercy that Jesus calls me to show to others. Being kind to ourselves means we recognize that we are finite human beings, not God. We are works in progress. That does not mean we do not continue to grow. Rather, it means we do not beat ourselves up over every mistake.

Would you let your best friend or spouse speak to themselves the way we often speak of ourselves?

Yet we have habits of self-chastisement and self-shaming that we need to learn to undo. Being aware of what we are doing is a start. However, we ultimately want to replace bad habits with good ones.

What do you think about this idea of self-kindness?

What would it look like for you to practice self-kindness on a regular basis?

Action Points

Practice spiritual judo this week. When negative thoughts, feelings of shame, or temptations towards sin come to mind, turn them into opportunities to worship and meditate on the goodness of God.

It is not enough to accept God's forgiveness of us, we are also called to show forgiveness to others. Who in your life do you need to forgive? Write a letter to them expressing your desire to forgive. Talk with your disciple-partner about whether or not to send the letter.

Disciple-Partner Discussion Questions

Reread the Core Statement and the Memory Verse of this chapter. How would you summarize each of them in your own words?

Do any of the stories from the first part of this session resonate with yours? Which ones and why?

Have you accepted that you are forgiven for your past sins? Or do you still struggle with the idea?

In your own words, what is the purpose of guilt?

Think of a time when guilt caused you to stop what you were doing and repent. What was the situation? What did you feel before you repented? What did you feel after repenting?

In your own words, how would you describe the difference between shame and guilt?

How have you experienced this shame cycle in your own life?

Read Psalm 103:1-22 together. What does this Psalm say about who God is? What does it say about how God sees us?

Write out on a piece of paper the kind of person you used to be before you became a disciple of Jesus. On a separate piece of paper, write out the kind of person you are becoming in Jesus. Share both with your disciple-partner. Together, destroy the first list and keep the second.

What do you think about this idea of self-kindness?

What would it look like for you to practice self-kindness on a regular basis?

What did you learn from doing the Action Points?

Extra Resources

Shame Interrupted by Edward T. Welch

Freedom From Your Past by Jimmy Evans and Ann Billington

Unashamed by Heather Davis Nelson