

the christian life

introduction

FACILITATOR: *In this 'four pack' we will be thinking about some of the major characteristics of the Christian life. We begin with holiness, as holiness is God's own outstanding character. He is totally separate from the sin in the world, but creation joyfully announces he is still present. He is utterly pure and righteous, full of justice and truth. Moreover, when God brought the Israelites out of slavery and made them his own people, the first lesson he taught them at Mt. Sinai was concerning his own holiness.*

1: holiness

welcome

CELL: What are the first three words that come to mind when you think of 'holiness'?

worship

CELL: Read aloud Matthew 16:15-16 and Colossians 1:15-20.

FACILITATOR: *Ask the group to sit quietly and reflect on who Jesus is and then feedback their thoughts. Similarly, read Matthew 16:21 and let people reflect on what Jesus has done for us then turn these thoughts into prayers of thankfulness and celebration of Jesus.*

word

FACILITATOR: *If time allows, read the following passage in Exodus together and discuss. If time does not allow, simply come prepared to summarize this passage for the group and then move directly to the passage in 1Peter 2:9-10 below and proceed from there. The core of the lesson is not the Exodus passage so there should only be brief time spent on it. Allow plenty of time for the cell activity in Colossians and prayer following it.*

CELL: Read Exodus 19:3-6 and 14-25 together and then answer the question.

If you had been an Israelite at that time, what would you have learned about the holiness of God and about his plans for his people?

FACILITATOR: *Note how this passage leads straight on to the Ten Commandments...in grace, God gives his people definite rules to show what holiness requires.*

Coming to the New Testament, Peter, Jesus' leading apostle, presented the early Christians with the same challenge for holiness as the Israelites faced.

CELL: Read 1Peter 2:9-10 together.

FACILITATOR: *Pick out one descriptive phrase from the above passage in 1 Peter for each member of the group and think about what it implies. Then give an opportunity for each person to share their findings with the group. (ex. chosen race, royal priesthood...)*

CELL: Read 1John 1:5-7. John, the beloved disciple, expressed holiness as 'walking in the light'. Discuss and answer these questions.

-Why are we tempted to hide part of ourselves?

-What does 'walking in the light' mean?

-What remedy has God provided for when we fail to live up to his standards of holiness?

FACILITATOR: *Paul, the outstanding missionary, wrote to the Christians in Colossae about the radical change that their lives must show now they have become Christians.*

CELL ACTIVITY: Have someone read Colossians 3: 5-15. Then take a large sheet of paper and make two lists, one showing the things Christians must totally reject, the other, the things God wants to see in our lives. In silence, study the completed lists.

FACILITATOR: *Ask everyone to pick two items from the first list that they personally find hardest to battle, and then two from the second list that they specifically pray God would make true for them.*

Break into pairs to discuss these thoughts, pray for one another and make plans to incorporate this change into lifestyle.

witness

CELL: Remind each other who our friends are that we would like to see becoming Christians and pray that God's holiness would begin to affect their lives.

what now?

CELL: God has called us to be holy and set apart. As we've discussed and prayed about things we struggle with rejecting and things we are asking God to make true, what is our plan to take action regarding these things? Before you leave the cell, tell someone about your plan and ask them to hold you accountable to it. This week set aside extra time to pray about these things and begin to take action.

2: servanthood

introduction

FACILITATOR: *Servanthood is in the very nature of God (Philippians 2: 6-7), so during this cell we want to understand and apply what that means for us. The aim is for all the cell members to go away from the cell having embraced a new level of the nature of servanthood.*

welcome

CELL: When was the last time you went out of your way to help someone? What did you do? Does it come naturally for you to help someone or do you have to make conscious effort?

worship

FACILITATOR: *If you are meeting in the evening, try to get out and see the stars. Ask people to count them and then use that to talk a bit about how our blessings are more numerous than even the stars. Go around saying what our blessings are and then use that to worship God. Allow God to meet you where you are at as you focus on him.*

word

CELL: If you were to choose four characteristics of Christian discipleship, what would they be? Stop a moment and discuss.

-Was servanthood one of them?

(FACILITATOR: *This will only work of course if you have not already told them the subject for this cell meeting!)*

FACILITATOR: *When the apostle Paul wrote his many letters which we now find in the NT, his favorite description of himself was a 'doulos' (slave); a slave of Jesus Christ. He saw himself completely at his Lord's disposal: to travel or stay put, to speak and act, exactly as God showed him. The other apostles used a similar term, servant (Acts 4: 29), to refer to themselves. What is even more amazing, they applied the same word to Jesus in Acts 4: 27, calling him, "your holy servant Jesus". Therefore, servanthood lies at the heart of Christian discipleship.*

CELL ACTIVITY: As a cell, split into groups of three and each group discuss the following question:

-How did Jesus show through his life what it meant to be God's servant?

(FACILITATOR: *Have each group find their own examples or look at 2 Cor. 8:9, Jn. 4:34, Jn.5:19-20 and 30, Jn. 19:30 and 1Pet. 2:21-24.)*

There is much emphasis today placed on peoples' rights. Yet, Paul was willing to call himself a slave and a slave has no rights.

Stay in your groups for these questions and then feedback together.

Read 1 Corinthians 9: 3-6, 12:19-23.

-How far was Paul willing to go in giving up his rights?

-What was his overriding purpose?

-If you have the same goal as Paul, how far are you willing to give up your rights?

FACILITATOR: *As a group, discuss the following: If we are to follow the example of Jesus, then we are to be servants to those around us. How practically can we be servants to one another in our cell?*

CELL: Read Luke 9: 23-27 together.

Discuss its implications for your life as a Christian both in college and at home, for example:

-What specific areas should we deny ourselves?

-What does following Christ as a servant involve?

-What might be the cost of following Christ?

-What are the rewards?

-As we look ahead to life after college, what can we learn now that will be important for then?

FACILITATOR: *What has God been speaking to individuals in the cell and challenging them on? Are there areas they know need to be denied for the sake of following Jesus more closely? That may be future ambitions, current boy/girlfriends, excesses in lifestyle etc. Give people an opportunity to share, confess, repent and pray for people in the light of what is said.*

Do encourage the cell to hold people to account! Remember what is talked about and later on in the term ask whether this area has been followed through.

witness/what now?

CELL: How can we be servants to our friends? Talk and pray about what we could do practically and then decide what action we will take. Write it down and then feedback next week to each other.

3: faith & faithfulness

introduction

FACILITATOR: *Faith lies at the heart of the Christian life. We begin it with a step of faith, trusting in what Jesus Christ has done for us, and giving our lives over to him. God's plan is that we should continue our Christian lives in an attitude of faith: each day relying on him for help, and coming back again and again for all the resources we need. This faith should then merge into faithfulness, for they are two sides of the same coin. The aim of this cell is to help us engage our faith more fully with every day life and to recognize that the testing of our faith is necessary for faithfulness in God.*

welcome

FACILITATOR: *Feedback on how people have managed to serve their friends from last week. What were the doors that were open for the Gospel as a result of serving? Were there any pitfalls in serving?*

worship

FACILITATOR: *Use Isaiah 40 for your worship. Give sections (Is. 40:1-8, Is. 40:9-17, Is. 40:18-31) to different people to meditate on, and then give their reflections. Together lay hold of those things in God that Isaiah experienced.*

word

FACILITATOR: *Read Hebrews 6:13-18 together.*

Some people imagine that when Christians talk about faith we mean a leap in the dark. But our faith is based on sure foundations.

CELL: What was the strong evidence on which Abraham based his faith?

FACILITATOR: *Take some time to share what evidence we each have which helps us to have faith in God. Give people a few moments to reflect back on their life with God. Then go around the group and ask everyone to talk about the things they have experienced in their lives that give them faith.*

Have someone read Hebrews 11: 8-19.

Discuss Abraham's initial faith developed into faithfulness over many years. Discuss what faithfulness involved for Abraham, looking in detail through the passage. See, for example, vs.8-10: ideas such as obedience, willingness to go anywhere for God, to live in uncongenial situations, in material poverty, living not for the present but for God's eternal reward.

Faith is cultivated in seasons of pressure and uncertainty. How we respond in these times is a measure of the quality of our faith.

CELL: Allow people to reflect on the following questions:

- Will we keep going even when the going is tough?
- How will we react when everything appears to have gone wrong and even God seems deaf to our prayers?
- Is our initial faith growing to such an extent that we will remain faithful to God whatever happens?

FACILITATOR: *Building our faith up is an important part of being a Christian so that we may always bear fruit, even in times of drought (Jeremiah 17: 7-8). Discuss together the things we can be doing to give us a stronger grasp of our faith. (ex. studying the Bible, meeting together, embracing suffering, fasting, getting a heart for the lost, discipleship) Are we doing this? What decisions are we brave enough to make today?*

Remember again to hold one another to account and find out in a few weeks time whether or not we are following our decisions!

FACILITATOR: *Is anyone in your cell going through a situation at the moment that is hard and where faith and perseverance are needed? It would be good to give people an opportunity to say if there is any situation like this that they would like the cell to pray about.*

witness

CELL: Pray for any of your friends going through a difficult situation. Let them know during the week that you are praying for them in your cell.

what now?

CELL: During the meeting, we talked about how we react in difficult times. When you come to a difficult situation this week, take note of how you react and what you could do differently. Pray and ask God to help you respond to these situations in a way that is pleasing to him.

4: love

welcome

CELL: I know someone loves me when...

worship

FACILITATOR: Paul emphasizes the pre-eminence of love in 1 Corinthians 13. Look at verses 4-7. Before the group meets you, as the leader, should pick out the descriptive words from this passage (patient, kind, not envious, etc.) and write them on a large sheet of paper and then cut between them, making a big jig-saw. At the meeting, give one or two pieces of the jig-saw to each member and ask them to think of practical illustrations for each one from your life at college. Then share together, gradually forming the jig-saw.

Move on to use 1 Corinthians 13 as a basis for your worship and praise to God. Ask each member to worship based on the word he had this section.

word

FACILITATOR: Love is a word used very loosely today. We apply it to our favorite breakfast cereal, band or leisure activity. We speak of someone 'falling in love' as if love were something that just happens to you - something which you can't help. Many people also believe that it is just as easy to fall out of love if something else or someone else now tickles your fancy. But the word 'love' in the Bible is a much richer and nobler word. 'Agape' love is the love God has for all his creation. It is strong and constant and active. It is not merely a warm, glowing feeling...God's love always expresses itself in activity: reaching out, helping, blessing, sacrificing himself on behalf of those he loves. As someone once said, 'love is an active verb'. Love is to be the distinguishing mark of Christians.

CELL: Read John 13:34-35 and John 15:12-13 together.

-What kind of love demonstrates we are truly God's disciples?

FACILITATOR: John, the beloved disciple, explains further about 'agape' love in 1John 4: 7-16. Read the passage and then discuss, in groups of two or three, John's detailed teaching on love as the essential characteristic of Christians (ex. verses 7-8). After this time, feedback together. Encourage the groups to be transparent.

Have the groups address the following questions:

-Where does love come from?

-Is love a mere activity of God or part of his essential nature?

-What can we draw from this?

1 Corinthians 13:13 says that the greatest goal is that we be filled with love.

-Who do you find it difficult to love and in what situations is it difficult to love?

Have the groups pray for each other about these specific things, that God's love may fill their hearts.

witness

CELL: Take time as a group to demonstrate God's love to those around you. (Maybe as simple as handing out bottles of water or cans of soda to those in your dorm or simply having a cooler of beverages near your meeting area with a sign saying "please take one - FREE".) As we offer 'free gifts' to those around us it is amazing how that can lead into sharing about the "gift of eternal life from God"!

what now?

CELL: Discuss what effect it would have on your friends if they knew the true love of God. What aspects can you demonstrate to them this week? Think of someone in particular that you know needs to know the love of God. Pray for them now and then find an opportunity this week to show them God's love.