

January 22-28, 2012
Good Questions, Straight Answers: Pointing Our Lives Toward Jesus
Life Notes for Missional Community Groups

For Missional Communities following Pastor Mark's sermons.
(supplemental reading: The Gospel of John by Paul Louis Metzger)

Note: If you're following the text by Metzger, consider leaving the "Transition" chapter (pages 38-42) for our future discussion of the Trinity.

This week's sermon materials are supplemented in Metzger by pages 43-52.

Ask someone in the group to slowly read John 1:19-34, and ask everyone to pay attention for key words, phrases or ideas that particularly stand out for them in this reading. While many in the group have likely read these verses before, God's word is living and active, which means it's always at work in our lives. And learning to listen for key words, phrases or ideas helps us listen in a new or fresh way each time to what God is speaking into our lives right now.

"Now this was John's testimony when the Jews of Jerusalem sent priests and Levites to ask him who he was. He did not fail to confess, but confessed freely, 'I am not the Christ.'

They asked him, 'Then who are you? Are you Elijah?'

He said, 'I am not.'

'Are you the Prophet?'

He answered, 'No.'

Finally they said, 'Who are you? Give us an answer to take back to those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?'

John replied in the words of Isaiah the prophet, 'I am the voice of one calling in the desert, "Make straight the way for the Lord."'

Now some Pharisees who had been sent questioned him, 'Why then do you baptize if you are not the Christ, nor Elijah, nor the Prophet?'

'I baptize with water,' John replied, 'but among you stands one you do not know. He is the one who comes after me, the thongs of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie.'

This all happened at Bethany on the other side of the Jordan, where John was baptizing.

The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, 'Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world! This is the one I meant when I said, "A man who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me." I myself did not know him, but the reason I

came baptizing with water was that he might be revealed to Israel.’

Then John gave this testimony: ‘I saw the Spirit come down from heaven as a dove and remain on him. I would not have known him, except that the one who sent me to baptize with water told me, “The man on whom you see the Spirit come down and remain is he who will baptize with the Holy Spirit.” I have seen and I testify that this is the Son of God.’”

Invite people in the group to share any key words or phrases that stood out while reading the passage. Allow God’s word to speak to the group before moving into this week’s **Life Notes**.

John 1:19-34

Invite a few people in the group to answer the following. (If no one has something to share at this point, no problem! We’re just providing an opportunity.)

Was there something in the sermon this week that particularly touched you or opened up some personal awareness for you? If so, please share for a few minutes.

Pastor Mark gave us several key elements to think about this week. We’re suggesting two focal points for conversation, but feel free to let the group discussion flow or to read below and choose an avenue most appropriate for your group. If you’re accustomed to open discussion, this will be no problem for you! If you’re new to sharing openly as a group, it can seem awkward to have no clear outline of what will be addressed. We know we’re asking a lot of some groups to begin to form around conversations and questions, and we are so grateful you’re willing to work with us.

John, Jesus and the Gospel

Pastor Mark talked about John, Jesus and the significance of the gospel then and now.

Cousins and companions of a sort from birth, John and Jesus were destined by God to intertwine. John’s purpose was to point to Jesus. The Jews were expecting a king to lift them to their rightful place in the world. The Gentiles weren’t expecting much at all. And along came John with his message.

“Look! The Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.” (John 1:29)

“He must become greater; I must become less.” (John 3:30)

As Pastor Mark said, *“Everything John did was to reveal or point people to the coming of Christ.”*

Why? What moved John to point to Jesus with every word...with his entire life?

Pastor Mark summarized whom John was pointing to and why.

“Out of infinite love for you and me, Jesus willingly and intentionally took upon himself all the guilt and shame and filth of all our sin. All the vile, ugly, hurtful, putrid sin of each one of us – all this was laid upon him. Every ounce of it was laid on him. Every lie, every act of deceit, every broken promise, every sexual sin, every bit of pride and greed, all of it that ever was and ever will be was laid upon Jesus. Then with the full weight of guilt and shame from our sins, Jesus allowed himself to be led like a lamb to the slaughter. He didn’t fight back. He didn’t put an end to the cruelty. He willingly went to his own brutal, bloody slaughter. And there on the cross, our Lord, in perfect submission to the Father, and perfect love for us, was crushed for our sins. He bore our suffering in his body, so through faith in him we could be forgiven. Through faith in him we are declared not guilty, because the guilt of our sin has already been paid for in the sacrifice of Jesus. Then after the suffering and death, when the enemy thought he had won the battle, Jesus turned the tables and rose from the dead, conquering sin and death once and for all. And our risen Lord says to us, ‘follow me, and you too will rise to new and eternal life.’”

“This is the gospel, the good news. This is why we gather to worship Jesus, because he is in every way worthy. He is our Savior, our life, our hope, and our Lord! This is the good news John the Baptist was pointing to... Jesus is the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.”

Most in your group likely believe the gospel message, but was the gospel’s impact on your life an historical one or is the gospel influencing your life in an ongoing way?

If you do a search for “gospel” on a site like www.biblegateway.com, you’ll see that gospel, or the good news, is described as first being preached to Abraham – the reality that God would save his people is a story that goes back all the way to the beginning. And the gospel continues today, not as a one-time message of conversion to Jesus, but as a life-transforming power that guides us every step of the way.

Invite the group to go around and complete the following sentence:

Since we last met, I have seen the gospel impact my life in this area or in this way...

Since we last met, I have needed the gospel to impact my life in this way...(If you feel comfortable doing so, discuss any difficulty you may be facing applying the gospel to a specific area of your life.)

The Gospel, you and me.

Think about our lives for a moment. We are taught to prepare. We go to school to prepare for our future. We practice to prepare for a game or a contest or a concert. We study to prepare for a test. We choose professions to prepare for a career or take care of a family. We save money to prepare to buy a house or a car or to continue our education or get married. We save money to prepare for losing our job, just in case. We save money to prepare for our retirement. We are constantly preparing for our own future, trying to “get ahead” or hedge ourselves against some yet unnamed change or difficulty. We prepare, and then we try to figure out how to add Jesus to our equation.

Let’s be honest about our own lives for a minute. Read the following questions and summarize your response for the group (you don’t need to answer each question independently).

What do you find yourself thinking about most often?

What do you do with your time?

What is it that you pray about the most?

What are you preparing for and how are you preparing?

Now consider your life through the lens of those around you. Think about people who know you really well. Again, read the following questions and summarize your response for the group.

What do you talk about or do with your friends?

What do you talk about or do with your family?

What do you talk about or do with coworkers?

What do you talk about or do with teammates or activity groups you belong to?

What would those who know you best say are some of the purposes right now in your life? What might give them that impression?

What is the main focus of your life or where does your daily life “point?”

The gospel message is in Jesus, and it’s not just a “one-time,” “now you’re saved” gospel message. John’s work didn’t stop when Jesus was baptized that day long ago. Jesus changes lives. The Gospel impacts our life daily, moment-

by-moment, forevermore. John shared the good news until his last breath, and so can we.

Our lives have a magnificent purpose – to allow the Gospel to grow us up in all aspects and to point the way to Jesus. As we allow Jesus to light our lives, we carry his light to others and point them toward him.

“Next steps” are often fairly clear to us, though not always easy to follow. When you sense the Holy Spirit leading you to move your heart just a little more in his direction, you simply agree and ask him to help you take that step.

Do you sense God speaking to you in any specific area about pointing your life toward him?

If there’s anything that the Holy Spirit is saying to you now, feel free to share it with the group as you conclude your time together.

For Missional Communities following a different track than Pastor Mark’s sermons.

Please allow 15-20 minutes for those in your group to respond to this two-sided question:

Since we last met, I have seen the gospel impact my life in this area or in this way...

Since we last met, I have needed the gospel to impact my life in this way...

Next week’s sermon text is John 1:35-51.

Note to Missional Community leaders and members. Thank you for taking time to form together around questions and personal sharing. Responding to questions has long been a formative experience, and we appreciate you stepping in to this kind of intimacy with each other. Your honesty opens up dialogue about God and our response to God’s presence and daily work in our lives. We prefer answers, but sometimes God is best understood as we share in questions together.