

GETTING TO KNOW THE REAL JESUS

A 6-WEEK SHORT-TERM GROUP
ON THE LIFE OF JESUS

BLACKHAWK CHURCH

GETTING TO KNOW THE REAL JESUS

A 6-week short-term group on the life of Jesus

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Jesus was all in. Are you all in?

WELCOME

Welcome! This booklet is the guide for your Blackhawk Short-Term Group, an easy way to develop relationships within our larger community. We believe people grow best in intentional community with others. That just means meeting regularly with a group of people that you get to know personally - sharing and learning from each other and the Bible. Over the next six weeks, as you follow this guide, our prayer is that your experience will help you grow in *Getting to Know the Real Jesus*.

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TIPS FOR GETTING STARTED

SHOW UP.

You are an important part of the group; your presence matters!

JOIN IN.

Don't be afraid to share your thoughts; we all learn from each other.

BE REAL.

Come as you are and be yourself!

WHAT SHOULD MY SHORT TERM GROUP LOOK LIKE?

WHERE & WHAT

Get together in one or more members' houses, apartments or community rooms. Food is a great connector, so a different group member could bring a snack each week.

INTRO

Start by getting to know each other a bit. What brought you to this study? What do you hope to get out of it?

DISCUSSION

Choose one person to read the content and Bible passage. Use the questions provided to get the conversation started. Don't be afraid of silence; give everyone a chance to share. If you are comfortable, end your time together in prayer asking the Lord to reveal himself during the weeks you are together.

WEEK 1: WHO IS THE REAL JESUS?

People have been asking, “Who is Jesus?” ever since he was born. In this passage, Jesus himself asked this very question of his disciples:

Jesus and his disciples went on to the villages around Caesarea Philippi. On the way he asked them, “Who do people say I am?” They replied, “Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, one of the prophets.” “But what about you?” he asked. “Who do you say I am?” Peter answered, “You are the Messiah.” (Mark 8:27-29)

When we encounter something or someone new, we instinctively (and often unconsciously) put those things or people into categories we already know. For those in Jesus’ day, many thought he was most like the prophets of old (Elijah) or new (John the Baptist) – a person called by God to bring God’s message. His own disciples had an even more significant category for Jesus: Messiah (or King). Many in Jesus’ day had hope of the coming Messiah, but they certainly thought he would initiate an overthrow of their oppressive government. However, Jesus’ life and message would extend far beyond any category even his disciples had for him.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION:

1. What were your very first impressions of Jesus?
2. How has that changed over time?
3. What categories do people have for Jesus today (wise teacher, good person, sage)?
4. What are the categories in which you would place Jesus?

WEEK 2: WHO WAS DRAWN TO JESUS?

If Jesus had led a ministry that went along with the culture of religious trends of his day, many people never would have met him or heard his message. Levi was one such person...

After this, Jesus went out and saw a tax collector by the name of Levi sitting at his tax booth. "Follow me," Jesus said to him, and Levi got up, left everything and followed him. Then Levi held a great banquet for Jesus at his house, and a large crowd of tax collectors and others were eating with them. But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law who belonged to their sect complained to his disciples, "Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?" Jesus answered them, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance." (Luke 5:27-32)

First of all, Levi was a tax collector. As such, he would have been excluded from participation in temple worship – the religious center of his day. In other words, he would have been prohibited from “going to church.” Jesus, however, meets him where he’s at – in a job that was equated with corruption. And we can assume by Levi’s response that he was quite drawn to Jesus. He left all and followed. And the story does not end there. Levi throws a party for Jesus and his friends – no doubt due to his enthusiastic response to his encounter with Jesus.

However, the religious leaders of the day (the Pharisees) take issue with this and ask Jesus’ disciples to explain. Note that the disciples don’t respond, even though the question was directed at them. It might be that they weren’t sure themselves (and perhaps uncomfortable with the situation).

Jesus, however, does respond. The Pharisees believed they were to be holy (or “set apart”) as their God was holy. The Pharisees believed they should keep away from anything or anyone who was *unholy*, such as tax collectors. Jesus’ actions and words show that he was drawing to himself those who were aware of their need for healing and restoration. He wasn’t drawing in those who thought they were already holy, or “religious enough.”

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION:

- 1a. Have you (or someone closer to you) ever made a decision that caused you to make a dramatic change in your life (such as moving to a new location, doing something you’ve never done before)? What were your emotions during that time? What was the outcome?
- 1b. Why do you think Levi responded the way he did (got up, left everything, followed Jesus, and threw him a party)?
2. Why did the Pharisees (religious ones) have such a hard time accepting Jesus’ presence at Levi’s party?
3. In what ways was Levi sick and Jesus a doctor? How were the Pharisees sick, but not aware of it?
4. Are there those who might feel “excluded” in our day? How might they be drawn to Jesus?

WEEK 3: MORE THAN A TEACHER

When a situation seems out of our control or our safety is threatened, it's easy to be gripped with fear. Jesus' disciples were no different:

One day Jesus said to his disciples, "Let us go over to the other side of the lake." So they got into a boat and set out. As they sailed, he fell asleep. A squall came down on the lake, so that the boat was being swamped, and they were in great danger. The disciples went and woke him, saying, "Master, Master, we're going to drown!" He got up and rebuked the wind and the raging waters; the storm subsided, and all was calm. "Where is your faith?" he asked his disciples. In fear and amazement they asked one another, "Who is this? He commands even the winds and the water, and they obey him." (Luke 8:22-25)

As you read the Gospel accounts of Jesus' life and ministry, it becomes evident that his disciples (followers and students) were drawn to follow him, but constantly learning more about him and who he was. They had heard him teach and seen him heal the sick, so they knew he had authority. They had categories for that.

But they wake him up in the midst of a raging storm, not because they think he can do anything about it; they just want to make sure he knows what's happening. You can almost hear them say, "Jesus, don't you see this storm? Why aren't you stressing out like we are? This is frightening! What are we supposed to do?"

They certainly did not imagine that he had authority over the forces of nature. We see this in their response to his calming the storm. This seems to be a teachable moment for Jesus. He wanted to show them that they should have more faith. Faith in what? Well, certainly faith in God through Jesus, as one who had far more authority and power than the mere teacher they thought he was. In our day, we might say the disciples' "minds were blown." And this is what he was going for. Jesus wanted the disciples to fully understand and trust him as God's Son, not merely another wise teacher.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION:

1. Think of the worst storm you've ever been in; what was that like? Describe your emotions.
2. Why would the disciples not think to call out to Jesus to calm the storm?
3. How is their view of Jesus' authority changed after this incident?
4. In what ways might you have a limited view of Jesus' power in this world and in your life?
5. Are there any "storms" in your life right now? What role might faith play in these situations?

WEEK 4: JESUS, NO FAN OF HYPOCRISY

Most of us were taught by our parents to wash our hands before meals. What's happening in this scenario with Jesus and the Pharisees, however, involves a lot more than mere hygiene or manners:

When Jesus had finished speaking, a Pharisee invited him to eat with him; so he went in and reclined at the table. But the Pharisee was surprised when he noticed that Jesus did not first wash before the meal. Then the Lord said to him, "Now then, you Pharisees clean the outside of the cup and dish, but inside you are full of greed and wickedness. You foolish people! Did not the one who made the outside make the inside also? But now as for what is inside you—be generous to the poor, and everything will be clean for you. Woe to you Pharisees, because you give God a tenth of your mint, rue and all other kinds of garden herbs, but you neglect justice and the love of God. You should have practiced the latter without leaving the former undone. Woe to you Pharisees, because you love the most important seats in the synagogues and respectful greetings in the marketplaces. Woe to you, because you are like unmarked graves, which people walk over without knowing it." (Luke 11:37-44)

As mentioned in our second session, the Pharisees were all about being "set apart" from anything unclean. Washing around meal times had great religious significance for them. Jesus – a Jew just like the Pharisees – was subject to the same Old Testament laws as the Pharisees. So he takes this opportunity to address a more pressing spiritual matter – not the cleanliness of the Pharisees' hands or dishes, but the cleanliness of their hearts.

Jesus had very little patience for religious people who did all the right activities on the outside, but were proud, judgmental and greedy on the inside. In fact, in a few passages after this one, Jesus has a name for it – hypocrisy. The word comes from the world of the theater and it means “to play act.” Though it is an accusation that has been hurled at Christians and Christianity for ages, the idea of being hypocritical about one’s faith and religion is something Jesus spoke most stridently against. Jesus message was clear: God calls people to a life where goodness and love flows out, because a love for God is within. Anything else will undoubtedly result in play acting.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION:

- 1a. When you were young, how strict were your family’s hand-washing practices before meals?
- 1b. What did Jesus criticize about the Pharisees’ spirituality?
2. Where does it lead us if we try to be religious by merely performing religious acts?
3. What answer or hope does Jesus give to the Pharisees in this passage to break free of hypocrisy?
4. What can lead us into hypocrisy? How can we guard against it?
5. What do you notice about people whose lives are characterized by authenticity and truthfulness? How do you think they got there?

WEEK 5: COME LIKE A CHILD

Typically, people who are really important don't want to be interrupted or bothered by the *un-important*. The disciples knew Jesus was important, but Jesus taught them the importance of being accessible and helped them see what was really important:

People were bringing little children to Jesus for him to place his hands on them, but the disciples rebuked them. When Jesus saw this, he was indignant. He said to them, "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. Truly I tell you, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it." And he took the children in his arms, placed his hands on them and blessed them. (Mark 10:13-16)

When reading the gospels (accounts of Jesus), it's easy to assume the Pharisees didn't get it and his disciples did get it. But that's not always the case. Just as Jesus called out the pride of the Pharisees, he also called out pride, whenever he saw it, in his own followers.

In this account in the book of Mark, the disciples must have known that Jesus was up to something important. And, as his followers, they were up to something important too. In their minds, it was too important to be interrupted by those merely wanting their children to receive a blessing from Jesus. Jesus seizes the moment to point out the pride in his followers. But he also teaches them a lesson about the kind of heart and attitude God longs for in those who

would come to him. Here is a prime opportunity for Jesus to challenge his disciples to reject the religiosity of pride and exclusion (which they regularly saw in the Pharisees) and embrace the humble, accepting heart of a child.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION:

1. How has your definition of “what’s really important” changed over time?
2. Though they must have thought they were distancing themselves from the religion of the Pharisees, how are the disciples vulnerable to the same stumbling blocks?
3. How is it that his disciples wanted to shoo away the children, but Jesus did the opposite?
4. What does it mean to receive Jesus like a child?
5. In what ways might we be tempted to not receive Jesus and the kingdom of God like a child?

WEEK 6: WHAT IT MEANS TO FOLLOW JESUS

In our first study, we found Jesus asking his disciples who people thought he was, and who they thought he was. Here we pick up that passage again and find Jesus proceeding to explain to his disciples the ramifications of the fact that he is Messiah (their long-awaited king)...

He then began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and after three days rise again. He spoke plainly about this, and Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. But when Jesus turned and looked at his disciples, he rebuked Peter. "Get behind me, Satan!" he said. "You do not have in mind the concerns of God, but merely human concerns." Then he called the crowd to him along with his disciples and said: "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me and for the gospel will save it. What good is it for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul? Or what can anyone give in exchange for their soul?" (Mark 8:31-37)

Peter's response shows us how much Jesus' statement did not correspond with the disciples' understanding of Jesus being the Messiah. This is an important reminder that Jesus ending up on the cross was not an unfortunate turn of events for a kind and thoughtful teacher. No, Jesus saw his destiny long before he got there – to be a suffering Messiah. He knew he would take upon himself the sin and rebellion of the world, so that those who would have faith in him would know forgiveness of sins and newness of life.

Jesus was all in. As he turns to his disciples, he calls them to be all in as well.

His call to them is not to try to be good, holy, or religious enough like the Pharisees. His call is the same today. He doesn't give the option of living our lives for ourselves first and following him second. No, his call to those who would follow him is all or none; It is a call to give up our pride and our control and to submit to God's reign over our lives. That's not something merely "added on" when convenient. Instead, it's a complete dying to self, a letting go of the control of our lives so God can give us the life he has always intended for us – a gift of his grace, not something we earn. It's not a promise of a life without challenges, but it is God's plan to save us from ourselves and from death, and to lead us into eternal life with him.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION:

1. How have your impressions of Jesus changed over the course of these sessions?
2. Why did Peter have such a strong reaction to Jesus' explaining his path to the cross? And why was Jesus' response to Peter so strong?
3. What difference does it make that Jesus' death on the cross was not an unfortunate, unplanned turn of events at the end of his life, but rather the plan that he knew and submitted to all along?
4. What do we learn in this passage that challenges the thinking that we can just "add a little religion" or "a little Jesus" to our lives?
5. How might going Jesus' way conflict with going our way?
6. What does/might it look like in your life to follow Jesus if it means denying yourself, picking up your cross, and following him? What might be preventing you? What might you gain in doing so?

RESOURCES

Looking for more ideas for facilitating a group?

Additional resources can be found online at:
www.blackhawkchurch/groups/shorttermgroups

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