



The Story Church Discipleship Groups | Spring 2021

Introduction:

Christians believe salvation is all about God's grace, right? No amount of good works can get a person into heaven; only trusting in Jesus can do that. So what's the point of living a good life after deciding you believe in Jesus? Why should Christians subject themselves to discomfort, self-sacrifice, and self-discipline if simply believing in Jesus is enough to punch their tickets to heaven? Part of trusting Jesus means allowing him to shape our lives - not just in eternity - but in the here and now. In this series, we'll explore the ways God's saving grace can transform the believer's character in this life. From your love life to your priorities to your personality, God calls out and equips believers to live lives that are shaped by the cross of Jesus Christ.

Session 1: A Cross-Shaped Marriage

[WATCH THE SERMON HERE](#)

Discussion Questions:

What is the source of most of your marriage expectations?

How do you typically react when your expectations are not met?

Read Ephesians 5:31-32. *"For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh. This is a profound mystery—but I am talking about Christ and the church"*

List out the guiding principles you find in a marriage and in a relationship with Christ. What is the same? What is different?

What are the characteristics of a me-shaped marriage? How can these be destructive in your faith and in your marriage?

What are the characteristics of a cross-shaped marriage? How can these produce fruit and life in your faith and in your marriage?

Read Hebrews 12:2. *“For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.”*

What is the joy set before you in your faith? What is the joy set before you in your marriage?

How can you joyfully endure seasons of suffering?

What are some of the ways you've been in "neutral" in your faith and in your marriage?

What does the author of Hebrews mean by “scorning its shame?” How can you scorn shame? How can you fight for your faith and for your marriage?

List out a practical step forward you can take today to pursue holiness in your life. How can your group hold you accountable and pray with you for this next step?



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Session 2: Cross-Shaped Masculinity

[WATCH THE SERMON HERE](#)

Discussion Questions:

How would you define "character"?

Why is it important for Christians to talk about developing character?

Read Genesis 2:15, 18, 20-25

The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it. Then the Lord God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him." But for Adam no suitable helper was found. So the Lord God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep; and while he was sleeping, he took one of the man's ribs and then closed up the place with flesh. Then the Lord God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man.

The man said,

"This is now bone of my bones
and flesh of my flesh;
she shall be called 'woman,'

for she was taken out of man.”

That is why a man leaves his father and mother and is united to his wife, and they become one flesh. Adam and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame.

What was God’s first observation about the man? What does this tell you about the importance of relationships and community in a man’s life?

Have you noticed any negative stereotypes or low expectations of masculinity in our secular culture (media, academia, entertainment, or social sciences)? If so, jot down an example or two here.

Why do you think boys and young men are falling behind in school and graduating from college at a lower rate than women?

What was Eric’s point in comparing “female hysteria” to “toxic masculinity”?

Read Matthew 5:38-42

You have heard that it was said, ‘An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.’ But I say to you that you must not oppose those who want to hurt you. If people slap you on your right cheek, you must turn the left cheek to them as well. When they wish to haul you to court and take your shirt, let them have your coat too. When they force you to go one mile, go with them two. Give to those who ask, and don’t refuse those who wish to borrow from you.

Summarize some of the ways Christians have misinterpreted these teachings of Jesus over the years.

What did Jesus actually mean with “Turn the other cheek,” “Give them the shirt off your back,” and “Go the second mile”? How is this different from the “doormat philosophy” we often associate with Jesus?

How should this new understanding of Jesus’ teachings in Matthew 5 shape our vision for masculinity today?

What does Christian masculinity look like?

What should be the #1 priority for Christian parents who are raising boys today?

If you’re a man, list a few practical ways you intend to change in order to become more like Jesus.

If you’re a woman, what are some practical things you can do differently to support or encourage your brothers in Christ as they seek to follow Jesus more closely?



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Session 3: Cross-Shaped Forgiveness

[WATCH THE SERMON HERE](#)

Discussion Questions:

Why is forgiveness such a tender topic for so many of us?

Read [Matthew 9:1-8](#). What does this story say about Jesus' perspective on forgiveness?

If it's true that who you are under pressure is who you really are, who are you?

As he died on the cross, under an immense amount of pain and pressure, Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing." What does this tell us about the true character of Christ?

Imagine if, instead of offering forgiveness, Jesus said something like, "Father, make them pay." How might that change the way we look at Jesus?

What are some of the key differences between the dominant social philosophy in our culture (oppressors/villains vs. oppressed/victims) and the way of Jesus Christ?

When Jesus said "...they don't know what they're doing", was he excusing the soldiers' bad behavior? What's the difference between forgiving sin and passively enabling sin?

What is the connection between being forgiven by God and forgiving others who've sinned against us? (See Ephesians 4:32, Matthew 6:14-15)

How has the past year been a time of testing for you and your faith? What has the stress, pressure, and pain of the pandemic, the shutdown, the election, etc., revealed about your character?

What's the relationship between forgiveness and empathy?

Can you think of someone (or a bunch of someones!) against whom you're still holding a grudge? What is that unforgiving resentment doing to your soul? What steps can you take to begin a process of true forgiveness?

For more on this important topic, check out this short episode of the Maybe God Podcast called "[Forgiving an Enemy](#)".



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Session 4: Cross-Shaped Conflict

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Discussion Questions:

Why is it so important for us to talk about managing conflict well?

What were the events that precipitated the Jerusalem Council in Acts 15?

What was the conflict?

The leaders in Jerusalem led the church through a four-step process to resolve this conflict.

Step One: Name the _____.

Why is it important that we identify the issue when resolving a conflict?

Step Two: Listen to _____.

Who did the Christian leaders in Jerusalem listen to, and why?

Who are some of the people in your life whose insights you would seek in the midst of a conflict?

Step Three: Surrender to _____.

How were the insights of Peter, Paul, and Barnabas affirmed by Scripture, and what difference did that make to the Christian leaders?

Many people think surrendering our opinions, emotions, and politics to Scripture is repressive and limiting. How might surrendering to Scripture actually be liberating?

Why is this step the most important one of all?

Step Four: Offer Clear _____.

What instruction did James, as the leader of the Jerusalem Church, offer to the other Christian leaders? On what basis did he change course?

How could these four steps apply to a conflict you've dealt with in the past, or one you're dealing with right now? One step at a time, write a short summary of how a real-life conflict might be addressed with the process found in Acts 15.

the cross-shaped life

A Practical Guide to
Christian Character

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Session 5: Cross-Shaped Legacy

[WATCH THE SERMON HERE](#)

Discussion Questions:

Why is it so important for Christians to have conversations about the topic of legacy?

Read **Colossians 3:2-4**. Paul writes: **“Since you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God.”**

What is Paul asking believers to do that is opposite to the way in which we often live?

What advice did Paul offer in verses 9 and 10, as a way to reframe our thinking and to redirect our energy into kingdom-building purposes? **Colossians 3:9-10: Colossians 3:9-10: “Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator.”**

Some of the biggest hurdles we encounter in today’s society are distraction, instant gratification, and temptation. How can we overcome these great hurdles on a daily basis?

What are the practical steps we can take to build a long-lasting legacy?

- 1. Set your minds on things above, not on the things of this world**
- 2. Leave the old self and old practices behind**
- 3. Adopt new practices, and embrace the new self that you have found in Christ**

John Wesley said this about his mother: **“I learned more about Christianity from my mother than from all the theologians in England.”** What did Susanna Wesley prioritize in order to build a Godly legacy through her children? You can find a helpful article about her motherhood style [here](#):

In Matthew 6:19-21, Jesus said: **“Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moths and vermin destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moths and vermin do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”**

Knowing and loving Jesus is one of the greatest treasures we can receive. The implication is that helping others know and love Jesus is also sharing a treasure that far exceeds anything this world

has to offer. What are some practical ways in which you have shared the gospel with others? How can we be more effective as the body of Christ in helping each other build a gospel legacy?



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Session 6: Cross-Shaped Struggle

[WATCH THE SERMON HERE](#)

Discussion Questions:

For Christians, how and when does character transformation happen?

Eph 4:1-2,12-15,17-24 As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love...so that the body of Christ may be built up until we reach all unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.

Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of people in their deceitful scheming. Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ...you must no longer live as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their thinking. They are darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardening of their hearts. Having lost all sensitivity, they have given themselves over to sensuality so as to indulge in every kind of impurity, and they are full of greed.

That, however, is not the way of life you learned when you heard about Christ and were taught in him in accordance with the truth that is in Jesus. You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.

What are the key differences between the spiritual “infants” Paul described and the mature believers “attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ”?

What are some of the ways you’ve experienced “The Struggle” throughout your life? How have your struggles affected you?

Jesus equips his followers to overcome the struggle by teaching us to:

1. _____ for the Struggle

What are some of the ways Jesus intentionally prepared his disciples for the struggles they were going to face after his death? (Look at Luke 9 and 10 for some help)

Before every season of struggle, there is a season of preparation. What are some ways you can use your “downtime” or “slow seasons” more intentionally to prepare for the next struggle?

2. _____ through the Struggle

What did Jesus do in Luke 11 to further prepare his disciples to overcome their future struggles?

What is the relationship between prayer and faith? If you are lacking enough faith to believe in the power of prayer, where can you get more faith? (see Ephesians 2:8-9, Romans 10:17)

3. _____ beyond the Struggle

Where does the word “persevere” come from, and what does it mean?

What role do grit and toughness play in overcoming adversity? What does that have to do with Jesus? (See Hebrews 12:2)

2 Cor. 6:3-10 - We put no stumbling block in anyone's path, so that our ministry will not be discredited. Rather, as servants of God we commend ourselves in every way: in great endurance; in troubles, hardships and distresses; in beatings, imprisonments and riots; in hard work, sleepless nights and hunger; in purity, understanding, patience and kindness; in the Holy Spirit and in sincere love; in truthful speech and in the power of God; with weapons of righteousness in the right hand and in the left; through glory and dishonor, bad report and good report; genuine, yet regarded as impostors; known, yet regarded as unknown; dying, and yet we live on; beaten, and yet not killed; sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; poor, yet making many rich; having nothing, and yet possessing everything.

How has the grace of Jesus Christ transformed your character so far?

How would you like to see his grace continue to change your character in the future? Be as specific as possible.