



re.gifting

you have to get Jesus
to give Jesus

Autumn Ridge Small Group
Study Guide
Fall 2022

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Welcome! We're so glad you've joined us in this church-wide small group experience for the Regifting sermon series. Small groups are an integral part of our spiritual formation as we encourage each other to go deeper into Scripture and the application points of each week's message.

Regifting is incredibly well-suited for small group engagement, as we reflect on how others encounter us as people who represent Jesus Christ. Working through these Scripture passages and sermons in our small groups will undoubtedly yield much fruit as we grow in our spiritual and emotional health together.

I want to thank my husband, Steve Merry, for helping me to process this material and whose contributions to this study guide are inestimable. Thanks also to TJ Schultz for his excellent design work on this study guide, and to Pastor Rick Henderson for his outstanding preaching and vision for this series.

May God be glorified in all that we hear, read, learn, discuss, and apply!

Svea Merry
Spiritual Formation Pastor
Fall 2022

OUR GROUP MEETING DATES:

Sermon Date	Bible Passage	Meeting Date/Time
NONE	INTRO WEEK	_____
OCT 1/2	LUKE 10:38-42	_____
OCT 8/9	MATT 16:21-28	_____
OCT 15/16	MATT 4:1-11	_____
OCT 22/23	LUKE 22:39-46	_____
OCT 29/30	JOHN 4:1-30; 39-42	_____
NOV 5/6	2 COR 12:8-10	_____

HEALTHY SMALL GROUPS

- Deepen spiritual friendships
- Encourage each other to live out their faith
- Support each other through prayer and care

HEALTHY SMALL GROUP PARTICIPANTS

- Commit to attending
- Join in the discussion and listen well to others
- Are real about their thoughts and feelings
- Seek to care for others

HEALTHY SMALL GROUP LEADERS

- Provide a safe and welcoming atmosphere
- Facilitate good discussion
- Prompt everyone to take a next step in their faith

HOW TO USE THIS STUDY GUIDE

Bring this guide with you to church each weekend.

There are dedicated places for you to record questions or thoughts from the sermon that you'd like to discuss with your group.

Before your small group meets, look through the Bible passage material and questions.

Though completing homework is not required for this study, your discussion will be even richer if you've familiarized yourself with the week's Scripture. The commentary and Study Questions reveal each passage in its context and deepen your connection with the biblical foundation for the insights to be discussed.

Bring this guide with you to your small group gathering.

The small group discussion questions are included here for each week. Also, there is dedicated space for you to record prayer requests and care needs for your group.



Scan the QR code for Pastor Rick's weekly video.

This brief introductory video for your small group gathering will be available just prior to the associated weekend service.

Throughout the week, use what you've recorded here to stay mindful of your intentions.

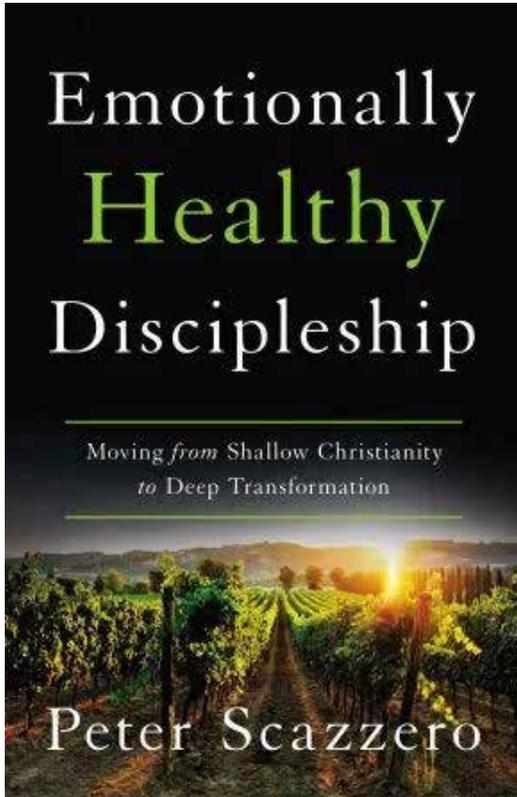
Reviewing what you've written will help you achieve your goals for what you'd like to apply to your daily life and will help you be a great small group member, as you faithfully pray for and follow up on the needs within your group.

RECOMMENDED RESOURCE

Emotionally Healthy Discipleship:

Moving from Shallow Christianity to Deep Transformation

by Peter Scazzero



We are indebted to the work of Peter Scazzero and his book, *Emotionally Healthy Discipleship*. At times in this study, it may be difficult to tell where his thoughts end and where ours begin. The pastors of ARC have benefited from this book and we are happy to recommend it to you.

re.gifting

you have to get Jesus to give Jesus

SERIES THESIS

WE ARE THE WRAPPING PAPER THAT PEOPLE HAVE TO GET THROUGH
TO GET TO JESUS.

- Oct 1/2 **Just Sit** Luke 10:38–42
Discovering The Value Of Simply Being With Jesus
- Oct 8/9 **Trade Off** Matthew 16:21–28
Following The Crucified Jesus
- Oct 15/16 **Into the Borderlands** Matthew 4:1–11
Embracing Jesus' Gift Of Limitations
- Oct 22/23 **Good Grief** Luke 22:39–46
Facing Difficulties Like Jesus Did
- Oct 29/30 **Heart of the Matter** John 4:1–30; 39–42
Measuring Maturity By Jesus' Definition
- Nov 5/6 **Shields Down** 2 Corinthians 12:8–10
Leading From Weakness So That Jesus Shines

YOUR FIRST WEEK

GETTING TO KNOW YOU

The sermons informing this series begin Oct. 1/2, but we've built in an introductory week ahead of the study series for your group to connect and get to know each other better. Your small group experience will greatly benefit from investing time into learning each other's stories, backgrounds, and perspectives.

IF YOUR GROUP IS BRAND NEW

Enjoy this first week getting to know each other. Share introductory things such as how long you've been part of Autumn Ridge, what brought you to Rochester, and how you would describe your faith background in 3–4 sentences. It would also be helpful to discuss the hopes each person has for this small group experience.

IF YOUR GROUP HAS BEEN TOGETHER A LITTLE WHILE

You'll still benefit from taking a week to get to know each other better. You may want to share what you have most valued in your small group so far, look through the series overview on page 9, and discuss which passages/topics most excite or intimidate you. Prepare for this material by discussing your thoughts on how emotional health relates to spiritual health.

IF YOUR GROUP HAS BEEN TOGETHER FOR A LONG TIME

Celebrate the deep connections you've made over time, and evaluate how vulnerably transparent you've been able to be with each other. This may be an opportunity to commit to being even more authentic about your lives than you've been before. Consider looking through the "Wrapping Paper Questions" from each week ahead, and use these questions as preparation to go deep with each other in this series.

HOW TO BE A GREAT SMALL GROUP MEMBER

BE DEPENDABLE

I commit to make our gathering a priority. If there are times when I absolutely cannot come, I will let you know.

BE HONORABLE

I commit to make our group a safe place where people can be heard and feel loved (no quick fixes or snap judgements). Unless someone's health or safety is at risk, I will honor anything that is shared by keeping it confidential.

BE TRUSTING

I commit to have a positive attitude when you encourage me to be transparent and to take a next step in my faith. I trust that when you are seeking to help me grow, it's because you want something better for me.

BE CARING

I commit to care about the needs in our group. I will pray for you when I say I will and follow through on needs I agree to meet, whether it is providing snacks or supporting you in times of difficulty.

PRAYER AND CARE NOTES



JUST SIT

Text: Luke 10:38-42

Message Date: October 1/2

PASTOR RICK HENDERSON

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SERMON THOUGHTS

WRAPPING PAPER QUESTION

*Do I believe I earn
God's approval/love/favor
through what I do for Him?*

LUKE 10:38–42

38 As Jesus and his disciples were on their way, he came to a village where a woman named Martha opened her home to him. 39 She had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet listening to what he said. 40 But Martha was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made. She came to him and asked, "Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me!"

41 "Martha, Martha," the Lord answered, "you are worried and upset about many things, 42 but few things are needed—or indeed only one. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her."

COMMENTARY

The original Greek reading of Martha's question makes it clear that she expects Jesus to side with her. Martha is doing respectable and honorable work for her Lord, but she misses the point of what is most valuable at that moment: taking the opportunity to simply be with the Lord. Mary emerges as the example of one eager to sit at Jesus' feet and to fellowship with him as his disciple.

In our current day, we may miss the incredible significance of Jesus encouraging women to be his disciples. In first-century culture, women were often deemed unworthy of receiving instruction, let alone following a rabbi with equal standing to men, so Jesus' openness to crossing gender and social barriers is instructive for us.

Beyond its significance for what this passage says about Jesus' view of women, it is a key discipleship text. In the hustle and bustle of life, we do well to pause for times of reflection before the Lord. Jesus' response to Martha indicates just how appropriate it is for Mary to simply be with him and listen to what he had for her rather than to do for him. Discipleship sometimes requires that tasks be suspended while fellowship with the Lord is prioritized. Unfortunately, often when things get busy, the first thing to go is time with the Lord. Let this text be an encouragement to you to emphasize the importance of simply being with God in your own discipleship.

STUDY QUESTIONS

Earlier in this chapter, Jesus stated that the greatest commandment is to love God and love others (Luke 10:27). Immediately following, the Good Samaritan parable illustrated loving others. How does this story illustrate loving God?

Imagine yourself in the room when Martha came in and expected Jesus to tell Mary to go help with the preparations. How do you think you would have reacted to Jesus' response?

Martha and Mary are sometimes stereotyped in this passage, but consider their relationship with Jesus as seen in John 11:1–44. How does this additional depiction of these sisters broaden your view of one's relationship with Jesus over time?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What impacted you most from this week's sermon?
2. Do you more naturally demonstrate your love for God by doing for Him, or by being with Him? Does one make you feel loved by God more than the other?
3. Read Proverbs 8:34–35 and discuss what these verses say about the person who sits and waits on God. Have you experienced this to be true? How?
4. Mary had the joy of getting to literally sit at Jesus' feet and learn from him as his disciple. What could be our equivalent experience of this today?
5. What practical tips could you share with each other that might help to enhance time spent being in God's presence?

PRAYER AND CARE NOTES

TRADE OFF

Matthew 16:21–28

Message Date: October 8/9

PASTOR RICK HENDERSON

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SERMON THOUGHTS

WRAPPING PAPER QUESTION

What ideas might I have about what I think Jesus should be like that may differ from what I see of him in Scripture?

MATTHEW 16:21–28

²¹ *From that time on Jesus began to explain to his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things at the hands of the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life.*

²² *Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. “Never, Lord!” he said. “This shall never happen to you!”*

²³ *Jesus turned and said to Peter, “Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; you do not have in mind the concerns of God, but merely human concerns.”*

²⁴ *Then Jesus said to his disciples, “Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. ²⁵ For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will find it. ²⁶ What good will it be for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul? Or what can anyone give in exchange for their soul? ²⁷ For the Son of Man is going to come in his Father’s glory with his angels, and then he will reward each person according to what they have done.*

²⁸ *“Truly I tell you, some who are standing here will not taste death before they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom.”*

COMMENTARY:

This passage records the first of four times Jesus predicts his death and resurrection. Peter's reflexive reaction is motivated by what he wants to be true for his Savior, but it goes against the gospel and God's plan for salvation. This leads to Jesus' strong words for him in verse 23. People expected Jesus to be a liberator and conqueror. Being arrested and killed was not compatible with their view of Jesus' kingship.

Do not miss the context of this passage. Immediately before this, in Matthew 16:13–20, Peter is the disciple who claims understanding that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of the Living God. Jesus not only expresses joy and blessing that Peter correctly understood this incredible truth, he makes an amazing announcement about Peter's future leadership and authority.

But that "win" was short-lived for Peter because he refused to accept what Jesus said was coming next. He may have understood Jesus' identity, but he didn't understand his mission. With audacious presumption, Peter wanted to prevent the Son of God from suffering for his very good purpose. Within Jewish master-disciple relationships, it was unthinkable for a disciple to correct his master, let alone "rebuke" him. And yet, how many of us struggle to reconcile the difficulties God may lead us to with how we think He should act?

Peter probably recoiled at Jesus' response of, "Get behind me, Satan!" but this was not meant cruelly towards Peter. Rather it was Jesus' recognition of how, once again, Satan was trying to thwart the plan of God. As we'll see in next week's passage, he had tried to tempt Jesus away from carrying out his Father's will at the start of his earthly ministry (Matthew 4:1–11), and here he is trying to hinder Jesus' mission through Peter.

Jesus' disciples were likely disturbed by the discussion of taking up one's cross. Their only context for crucifixion was that it was a terrible and shameful death, so to use the cross as an image of discipleship was probably a shock. Although the image is often understood by modern society as bearing up under some personal hardship or life's cruel fate, as used here by Jesus the cross has a much more profound significance: One must die to his or her own will, and take up God's will even if that does not line up with what one thinks it should be.

STUDY QUESTIONS

Read Matthew 16:13–20 and then reflect on verses 21 and 22. How might Peter’s “victory” have contributed to his outburst in verse 22?

What do you think Peter was thinking about as he rebuked Jesus? What was he asserting shouldn’t happen?

How does Jesus’ discussion of the need for his followers to take up their metaphorical cross instruct Peter on where his thinking was off?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What realizations has this scripture or message prompted for you?
2. Peter's misstep in verses 22–23 did not nullify the prior blessing of verses 17–19. As we seek to follow Jesus, what could we learn from observing Peter that might help us trust God more deeply even when He doesn't make sense to us?
3. The Message version of the Bible paraphrases verse 24 this way: Then Jesus went to work on his disciples. "Anyone who intends to come with me has to let me lead. You're not in the driver's seat; I am. Don't run from suffering; embrace it. Follow me and I'll show you how." What are your reactions to this? Does your view of God allow for Him to lead you into suffering and to embrace it rather than avoid it?
4. An "Americanized" view of God that loves to disproportionately focus on Him as healer, comforter, and victor could distort our perspective of what He ultimately intends for us. How have "crosses" such as illness, hardship, and losses actually deepened your discipleship?
5. What does it mean for us to follow "Christ crucified" in our context today?

PRAYER AND CARE NOTES

INTO THE BORDERLANDS

Matthew 4:1–11

Message Date: October 15/16

PASTOR RICK HENDERSON



SERMON THOUGHTS

WRAPPING PAPER QUESTION

Where might I need to limit my own rights/privileges to live more fully in God's purposes and plans? And/or what limits might God be asking me to break through by faith for His glory?

MATTHEW 4:1–11

Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil.

² After fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. ³ The tempter came to him and said, "If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread."

⁴ Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.'"

⁵ Then the devil took him to the holy city and had him stand on the highest point of the temple. ⁶ "If you are the Son of God," he said, "throw yourself down. For it is written:

"He will command his angels concerning you, and they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone."

⁷ Jesus answered him, "It is also written: 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'"

⁸ Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor. ⁹ "All this I will give you," he said, "if you will bow down and worship me."

¹⁰ Jesus said to him, "Away from me, Satan! For it is written: 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.'"

¹¹ Then the devil left him, and angels came and attended him.

COMMENTARY

Satan's intention was to persuade Jesus to go against God's will, and the emphasis of the story is on pushing limits Jesus had chosen to submit to in order to glorify his Father.

The devil who comes to tempt Jesus is not an impersonal evil force or bad feeling but a real person, the intelligent, powerful, evil, fallen angel, diametrically opposed to and bent on thwarting the will of God. His strategy is to twist truth, to augment awareness of our unmet needs, to shortcut God's process and plans for our lives, and entice us to turn from God's narrow path and walk the wide, easy road of his ruinous, destructive will. If we, like Jesus, set our faces towards the will of the Father for our lives, maintain and use our defensive armor (Eph. 6:10-17), and count on God for help (Eph. 6:18), we will overcome. We can face such trials with joy, knowing they produce perseverance, maturity, and wholeness (James 1:1-4).

The first temptation was for Jesus to use his divine authority to meet his very real human need for food by creating some bread. Of course, he could do so if he so chose; yet He laid aside His privilege for greater purposes. How often the tempter augments our awareness of our perceived and real unmet needs - food, respect, sex, money - to entice us to meet them through wrong means. Just as Moses reminded Israel in the desert that God's 40 years of testing was to teach them to depend on God's provision of manna, so by waiting, Jesus was soon going to enjoy some real angel food (Matt. 4:11). God intends to meet our true needs in His time according to His will.

The second temptation was for Jesus to confirm His Father's love for him by putting the Father to the test - would God the Father save His fully God but fully human Son from death if Jesus jumped off the highest point of the temple (likely the 450' high SW corner of the temple) into the Kidron Valley? And wouldn't that be just a fantastic display of power that would powerfully launch Jesus' ministry?

How often do we put God to the test by foolish decisions we might call “stepping out in faith” or seek to shortcut the path of service, suffering, and long, steady obedience? There will be times when, clearly seeking to do God’s will, we find ourselves outside our limits. But don’t jump. Testing God is not spirituality mature. Rather we should seek to accomplish His will by embracing the limits He’s created us with. They serve as useful indicators of what He’s created us to be and to do.

Jesus came to preach the good news of the kingdom, to gather in the nations (Matt. 25:31-34) in the means and method ordained by the Father. The third temptation was to offer Jesus a shortcut to avoid suffering the ignominy and agony of the cross. Though allowed significant power, Satan, in self-delusion, believes he controls the world, which is a lie. And like all sin, Satan’s temptation to Jesus is to cast aside the Father’s plan. No, the Father’s will for Jesus was to be a suffering, praying, servant-leader who would be the One we look to for life. The Father’s will for us is clearly revealed in Scripture: “Love the Lord your God with all of your heart and with all of your soul and with all of your mind,” “Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness,” and “deny [yourself], take up [your] cross and follow me,” (Matt. 6:33, 16:24, 22:37).

STUDY QUESTIONS

In verses 1–4, summarize the type of good thing the devil uses to tempt Jesus. Important: who had the power to make this good thing materialize? Identify the beneath-the-surface reason why Jesus limited his own capabilities in this case.

In verses 5–7, what type of good thing does the devil use next to tempt Jesus? Was there anything morally wrong in what the devil was pushing Jesus to do? Why did Jesus choose to limit the power at his disposal?

In verses 8–11, what does Satan tempt Jesus with this time? (Ironically, this was already promised to Jesus, but Satan was trying to get him to acquire it in a way that appeared faster and easier.)

What do we learn from Jesus here about how we resist the devil so he will flee from us (c.f., James 4:7; 1 Peter 5:8-9)?

Don't miss the detail about Jesus being tended to by angels in verse 11. What does this image stir within you?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. In what way might God be calling you to limit yourself from attaining something you have every right to enjoy in order to live more fully for Him?
2. Rather than trying to “force God’s hand” to make Him prove Himself, what limits might He be asking you to embrace as an invitation to trust Him?
3. How are you tempted to shortcut God’s plan by not waiting on His timing or by trying to attain something for yourself rather than trusting Him to work it out in His way?
4. How do you react to embracing limitations? (i.e. Does it frustrate you to have to lay aside your own preferences for a bigger purpose? Does it thrill you to see God’s power at work? Does it force you to accept realities that are tough to accept?)
5. God created each of us with certain abilities and gifts that help to define how He intends for us to serve in His kingdom. How have you been tempted to go outside of those limits in your own strength this week? How might God be encouraging you to trust Him for His limitless strength this week?

PRAYER AND CARE NOTES

GOOD GRIEF

Luke 22:39–46

Message Date: October 22/23

PASTOR RICK HENDERSON

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SERMON THOUGHTS

WRAPPING PAPER QUESTION

Do I try to hide my struggles from others and pretend like I have everything together, or am I transparent about the difficulties I face and willing to display my need for God and others as I go through them?

LUKE 22:39–46

³⁹ Jesus went out as usual to the Mount of Olives, and his disciples followed him. ⁴⁰ On reaching the place, he said to them, “Pray that you will not fall into temptation.” ⁴¹ He withdrew about a stone’s throw beyond them, knelt down and prayed, ⁴² “Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done.” ⁴³ An angel from heaven appeared to him and strengthened him. ⁴⁴ And being in anguish, he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground.

⁴⁵ When he rose from prayer and went back to the disciples, he found them asleep, exhausted from sorrow. ⁴⁶ “Why are you sleeping?” he asked them. “Get up and pray so that you will not fall into temptation.”

COMMENTARY

Embracing grief and loss is not something most of us do comfortably; indeed some of us were deliberately raised to “walk it off,” get over it, or stuff it. We may ignore or paint over pain, pretending it’s all better when it’s just more deeply hidden. Because we feel out of control, we resist thinking about our pain, deny our feelings, and focus on other things. Worse, we may misuse Scripture and our faith to wrongly assert that difficult emotions are ungodly, and even to shame fellow believers into ignoring or suppressing grief and pain.

By feeling our difficult emotions, we stretch our souls, gain acceptance of God's ordained plan, and gain compassion for others who suffer. The Scriptures guide us to pay attention to our pain, to patiently wait in the confusing in between of life, and to allow the old to birth what is new. The Scriptures provide a path through grief and are full of lament. There's even a whole book dedicated to it. From displays of sackcloth and ashes, Job's 35 chapters of grief, to the Psalms where David laments his hard emotions to God, we can clearly see God intends us to spend time reflecting on grief and loss.

The pre-crucifixion misery of Christ is a worthy place to go see our Lord model emotion as He faced ultimate suffering, the weight of the world's sin, and the turning away of the Father's face. One might ask why Jesus was in such agony as he faced death? After all, others, including many martyrs for the faith, have faced death quite calmly and stoically. It cannot simply be death that caused Jesus this tremendous depth of feeling—it was the kind of death He would die, that death in which he was forsaken by God (Mark 14:34) and in which He bore the full weight of sin for us (2 Cor. 5:21).

The custom of the time was to pray standing with the eyes raised to heaven (cf. 18:11, 13), but on this occasion Jesus *knelt down*. His prayer reveals a natural human shrinking from the awful burden that lay ahead of him. If the perfect, sinless Son of God felt such dark emotion and sought the support of others amidst it, how much more should we be free to do so?

In his distraught state, Jesus sought prayer support from his friends, prayed for release from this suffering, prayed so earnestly that He sweat as if bleeding, suffered the disappointment of seeing the friends whom He asked to pray (albeit friends who were "exhausted from sorrow") sleeping while He was crying out in anguish to His Father, and yet he recommitted to being faithful to His Father's will.

Notice verse 43. As Jesus transparently laid bare His intense emotions and needs before His Father in prayer, an angel was sent to Him; sent not to remove His pain or to prevent the coming trial, but to strengthen Him for this process of grief and lament.

STUDY QUESTIONS

Jesus displays such strong emotion in this passage that some early manuscripts put verses 43–44 in the margin of the text because it was incompatible with their understanding of the deity of Jesus. How do you feel about seeing Jesus this way?

Look closely at the text, and notice why it says the disciples were sleeping. What does this imply about them and their friendship with Jesus?

Examine Jesus' prayer in verse 42. What can you learn about prayer, particularly grief-filled prayer, from his example?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Have you experienced church/religion as “loss-denying” or “grief-phobic”? Why do you think Christians sometimes bristle against grief/agonies/dread rather than acknowledge and feel it like Jesus did in the garden of Gethsemane?
2. Notice that Jesus brought companions to join him in prayer in this period of agony and is ministered to by angels. What does this imply about the needs of even the perfect, sinless Son of Man? What implications could we derive from that for ourselves?
3. What treasures have you gained through grief/sorrow/loss?
4. What additional insights did this weekend’s message add for you into this conversation?

PRAYER AND CARE NOTES

HEART OF THE MATTER

John 4:1–30; 39–42

Message Date: October 29/30

PASTOR RICK HENDERSON

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SERMON THOUGHTS

WRAPPING PAPER QUESTION

Would people describe me as a person who overflows with love for everyone, especially for people who may not be the most likely candidates of my love?

JOHN 4:1–30; 39–42

Now Jesus learned that the Pharisees had heard that he was gaining and baptizing more disciples than John—² although in fact it was not Jesus who baptized, but his disciples. ³ So he left Judea and went back once more to Galilee. ⁴ Now he had to go through Samaria. ⁵ So he came to a town in Samaria called Sychar, near the plot of ground Jacob had given to his son Joseph. ⁶ Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired as he was from the journey, sat down by the well. It was about noon.

⁷ When a Samaritan woman came to draw water, Jesus said to her, "Will you give me a drink?" ⁸ (His disciples had gone into the town to buy food.)

⁹ The Samaritan woman said to him, "You are a Jew and I am a Samaritan woman. How can you ask me for a drink?" (For Jews do not associate with Samaritans.)

¹⁰ Jesus answered her, "If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you living water."

¹¹ "Sir," the woman said, "you have nothing to draw with and the well is deep. Where can you get this living water? ¹² Are you greater than our father Jacob, who gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did also his sons and his livestock?"

¹³ Jesus answered, "Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, ¹⁴ but whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life."

¹⁵ The woman said to him, "Sir, give me this water so that I won't get thirsty and have to keep coming here to draw water."

¹⁶ He told her, "Go, call your husband and come back."

¹⁷ "I have no husband," she replied.

Jesus said to her, "You are right when you say you have no husband. ¹⁸ The fact is, you have had five husbands, and the man you now have is not your husband. What you have just said is quite true."

¹⁹ “Sir,” the woman said, “I can see that you are a prophet. ²⁰ Our ancestors worshiped on this mountain, but you Jews claim that the place where we must worship is in Jerusalem.”

²¹ “Woman,” Jesus replied, “believe me, a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. ²² You Samaritans worship what you do not know; we worship what we do know, for salvation is from the Jews. ²³ Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in the Spirit and in truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. ²⁴ God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in the Spirit and in truth.”

²⁵ The woman said, “I know that Messiah” (called Christ) “is coming. When he comes, he will explain everything to us.”

²⁶ Then Jesus declared, “I, the one speaking to you—I am he.”

²⁷ Just then his disciples returned and were surprised to find him talking with a woman. But no one asked, “What do you want?” or “Why are you talking with her?”

²⁸ Then, leaving her water jar, the woman went back to the town and said to the people, ²⁹ “Come, see a man who told me everything I ever did. Could this be the Messiah?” ³⁰ They came out of the town and made their way toward him.

³⁹ Many of the Samaritans from that town believed in him because of the woman’s testimony, “He told me everything I ever did.” ⁴⁰ So when the Samaritans came to him, they urged him to stay with them, and he stayed two days. ⁴¹ And because of his words many more became believers.

⁴² They said to the woman, “We no longer believe just because of what you said; now we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this man really is the Savior of the world.”

COMMENTARY

There is much we can learn from Jesus in observing how he converses with the woman at the well. Two major social taboos made this exchange potentially scandalous. First, Jews were not supposed to associate with Samaritans, a people group who descended from the former Northern Kingdom of Israel and had assimilated into Assyrian culture. The Jews viewed the Samaritans as having thrown away their racial and religious integrity and scorned them because of it. Second, Jewish men generally did not associate with women in public. A Jewish rabbinic teaching in Jesus' day stated, "One should not talk with a woman on the street, not even with his own wife, and certainly not with somebody else's wife, because of the gossip of men," and "It is forbidden to give a woman any greeting."¹

Despite these cultural norms, notice that Jesus converses with this woman just as he would with anyone else, a woman who, in addition to the obstacles mentioned already, also had a scandalous reputation within her own community. Their conversation appears to flow easily, and it drives toward her full realization of who Jesus is and his love for her, resulting in her overflowing joy which becomes the catalytic force behind the proclamation of the gospel to her community.

1 Bruce Milne, *Bible Speaks Today Commentary on John*, page 83.

STUDY QUESTIONS

Looking at the passage, note the ways Jesus demonstrates love and respect for this woman. How did he model excellent listening, value her as a unique image-bearer, demonstrate nonjudgmental acceptance, curiosity, vulnerability, openness to learn and be moved by her story?

Two of Autumn Ridge's values are to "take truth seriously" and to "give grace relentlessly." How do you see Jesus modeling these values?

When Jesus addresses her as “Woman” in verse 21, it may sound a bit rude to us, but in its original Greek usage, it was not rude; in fact it was a term of respect, somewhat similar to how we might kindly address a woman as “Ma’am.” On two significant occasions (performing his first miracle and at the cross), Jesus addressed even his own mother this way. How does the woman’s response affirm that she did not feel disrespected by Jesus?

Verse 27 confirms the disciples were surprised to come upon Jesus talking alone with a woman, particularly a Samaritan woman. They may have felt the instinct to question Jesus’ propriety, or even to intervene in his social misstep, but the verse infers they stopped themselves from doing so. Why do you think they held back?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How did this passage and/or this week's sermon impact you?
2. When you think of someone as "a mature Christian," what are the characteristics that come to your mind? Is the way they love outsiders among those top characteristics?
3. How have you been tempted to judge others as being morally inferior, possibly based on their political views, approach to COVID, ethnicity, education, or biblical literacy?
4. Do you think other people would consistently say they believe you love them, even if they know you do not agree with everything they do? Is this a goal of yours?
5. What tangible step could you take this week to show love to someone who is not an expected recipient of your love?

PRAYER AND CARE NOTES

SHIELDS DOWN

2 Corinthians 12:8–10

Message Date: November 5/6

PASTOR RICK HENDERSON

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SERMON THOUGHTS

WRAPPING PAPER QUESTION

Would people be more likely to describe me as someone who always presents an image of having it all together, or as someone who is able to be vulnerable and authentic about my weaknesses?

2 CORINTHIANS 12:7–10

7 So to keep me from becoming conceited because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, a thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to harass me, to keep me from becoming conceited.⁸ Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. 9 But he said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ’s power may rest on me. 10 That is why, for Christ’s sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

COMMENTARY

So that Paul would not be tempted to boast in his own excellence, God gave him a constant reminder of his weakness. Read 2 Corinthians 12:1-10 for context. Paul had extraordinary missional successes and spiritual experiences that could make him proud. But implicit in his writing is the strong truth that such boasting (whether in things suffered for Christ or in ecstatic spiritual experiences) is foolishness. Like false teachers attracting followers among the members of the Corinthian church, Paul claims similar experiences. However, he says, such experiences are nothing to boast about. They do not establish his authority nor that of the false teachers. No, our faith is based on nothing less than Jesus’ righteousness applied to us when we believe in the historic truth of His sacrificial death and resurrection for our sin. This truth is the lens through which we humbly view our life and ministry and indeed, all of reality (1 Cor. 2:2).

What was Paul's "thorn in the flesh"? Countless explanations have been offered throughout the ages. Theories from hints within Paul's writings range from incessant temptation, dogged opponents, chronic maladies (such as visual impairment, malaria, migraines), to a disability in speech. No one can say for certain what it was, which in many ways is a blessing to us so that we can all share in his feelings of weakness. Paul seemed to consider this thorn a hindrance to wider or more effective ministry (cf. Gal. 4:14–16), and he repeatedly petitioned God for its removal (2 Cor. 12:8). But he learned from this experience the lesson that Christ's power is best displayed against the backdrop of human weaknesses.

How can we reconcile this hinderance given and perpetuated to Paul by God with American Christianity which often suggests that the Christian life should be a life of success, power, wealth, health, and prestige? We can't. In this passage the emptiness of this false doctrine is exposed.

God desires that we recognize the reality of His grace and sufficiency in our suffering; His power and glory shining through the "cracks" in our lives (2 Cor. 4:7). Despite this, we may have a tendency to present an image to others of having it all together and a desire to hide our weaknesses. Let these verses minister to your soul as we acknowledge together that not only do we all have weaknesses, they may be ordained by God so that *His* strength can be seen in us rather than our own. How amazing it is that God so chooses to display His glory and power through us! Let's lower our shields, and let His majesty be seen by all!

STUDY QUESTIONS

Paul calls his metaphorical thorn “a messenger of Satan,” but his unanswered pleading for God to remove it demonstrates God’s authority over evil, pain, and brokenness. Read Job 1:6–12 for an even clearer depiction of this, and record your thoughts.

Though it is difficult to understand why God may permit suffering in our world, what do you see in 2 Cor. 12 that may help us comprehend His goodness in it?

Verse 9 says God’s power is made perfect; obviously it doesn’t mean His power was imperfect prior to encountering our human weakness. The original Greek root verb used here is teleo, which means to complete or to fully accomplish. Interestingly, it is the same root word Jesus spoke on the cross when he said, “It is finished.” What additional insights do you gain from the following verses where this word is also used to describe something as “perfect”: James 1:4 and Hebrews 5:9? (Read them in context.)

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Earlier in this series, we saw Jesus plead for his Father to remove his agony from him, but He didn't. And just as Jesus was strengthened to face His Father's will, here too, Paul is strengthened by God's sufficiency. How has your faith been strengthened by God's sufficient grace (or how could it be) because of a prayer not answered the way you asked?
2. In what ways could you have bought into the lie that good Christians are put-together, popular, powerful, prestigious people who have everything going along perfectly in their lives?
3. How have you sought to hide your weaknesses and suffering from friends and family? How might attempts to hide your weaknesses from others be hindering God's work in your life and His display of strength in your witness?
4. In what specific ways could you become more transparent with co-workers and neighbors and friends about your weaknesses that would provide genuine evidence of God's sufficiency (not just boasting in weakness to indirectly show how great you are, but to show how great God is in sustaining you through life's messes, your hurts and hang-ups) and thus glorify Him?

5. As we seek to be a church that displays God's power in our weaknesses, our ministry will inevitably and increasingly look more like Jesus' ministry: caring for the poor, marginalized, sick, and suffering. What will help you keep embracing the truth that Jesus desires to display his power and glorify Himself in our weaknesses as we "move toward the messes" of suffering, conflict, and failure?

PRAYER AND CARE NOTES

APPENDIX A:

ENGAGING WITH OTHERS AS AN EMOTIONALLY HEALTHY PERSON

As a healthy, growing person I strive to:

- Ask for what I need, want, or prefer — clearly, directly, honestly.
- Recognize, manage, and take responsibility for my own thoughts and feelings.
- When under stress, state my own beliefs and values without becoming adversarial.
- Respect others without having to change them.
- Give people room to make mistakes and not be perfect.
- Appreciate people for who they are: the good, the bad, and the ugly.
- Accurately assess my own limits, strengths, and weaknesses and freely discuss them with others.
- Be deeply in tune with my own emotional world and be able to enter into the feelings, needs, and concerns of others without losing myself.
- Have the capacity to resolve conflict maturely and negotiate solutions that consider the perspectives of others.

APPENDIX B:

SUGGESTED RESOURCES FOR SPIRITUAL GROWTH

Study Aids

- Notes from a good study Bible
- Bible Dictionary
- biblestudytools.com
- bibleproject.com

Commentaries

- *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*

This 2-volume commentary on the entire Bible is a great resource for anyone desiring a comprehensive and accessible look at all of Scripture.

- *Life Application Commentaries*

These commentaries on individual books of the Bible are easily readable and suitable wherever you are on your faith journey. They shine in the aspect of helping us apply Scripture in our daily lives.

- *Warren Weirsbe's "Be Series" Commentaries*

Weirsbe's writing on each book of the Bible offers thought-provoking perspectives that are great for further contemplation of Scripture.

- *NIV Application Commentaries*

The NIVAC series strikes a great balance for the serious reader between a devotional and a scholarly approach to Scripture. If you are looking to increase your academic knowledge while still embracing the need for practical application, this is a great resource.

APPENDIX B, CONTINUED

Spiritual Formation

- *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life* by Donald Whitney
- *The Ruthless Elimination of Hurry* by John Mark Comer
- *Celebration of Discipline* by Richard Foster

Theology/Church History

- *Basic Christianity* by John Stott
- *Christian Theology* by Millard Erickson
- *The Story of Scripture, Vols 1 and 2* by Justo Gonzalez

Small Groups

- *Leading Small Groups with Purpose* by Steve Gladen
- *Making Small Groups Work* by Cloud and Townsend
- *Leading Life-Changing Small Groups* by Bill Donahue

Leadership/Discipleship

- *Spiritual Leadership* by J. Oswald Sanders
- *Emotionally Healthy Discipleship* by Pete Scazzero
- *Discipleship Essentials/Leadership Essentials* by Greg Ogden

Must-Reads

- *Mere Christianity* by C. S. Lewis
- *Knowing God* by J. I. Packer
- *What's So Amazing About Grace?* by Philip Yancey

APPENDIX C:

IDEAS FOR SMALL GROUPS WITH CHILDREN

Children benefit from seeing you prioritize spiritual growth and spending time in community with other Jesus-followers. Groups with little kids have additional considerations to work out, but it is well worth it!

SOME TIPS FROM SUCCESSFUL SMALL GROUPS WITH YOUNG CHILDREN:

- Hire babysitters from church who are raising funds for upcoming mission trips or camp opportunities.
- Consider inviting an older couple missing or wishing for grandkids to enjoy sharing Bible stories and snuggles with your little ones.
- If your children are school-aged or in daycare, consider meeting over a week-day lunch hour while they're occupied.
- Include your children for part of your meeting time and talk through the material on their level with them before dismissing them to play. (Bonus – this is a great warm-up for grown-up discussion.)
- Meet at a playground or park so children can play while the adults talk nearby.
- There is a possibility for groups to meet at ARC on Sunday morning or Wednesday evening while the kids are in children's programming. Space is very limited, but if you're willing to be accommodating and flexible, so are we!
- Occasionally meeting on Zoom after kids go to bed might be useful on weeks when other options don't work.

APPENDIX D:

FOR QUESTIONS AND SUPPORT

Scan the QR code for access to Small Group introductory videos.



SUBSCRIBE TO PODCASTS

Our podcasts are available on all the major platforms.

FOR QUESTIONS/CONCERNS/FEEDBACK

- Leader resources, leader training, small group curriculum, spiritual formation strategy, spiritually-focused classes:
Svea Merry, Spiritual Formation Pastor
Shannon Gladkowski, Spiritual Formation Assistant
email: grow@autumnridgechurch.org
- Getting connected in small groups and other opportunities at ARC including membership, Let's Connect, baptism, and serving teams:
Paul McDonald, Connections Pastor
Dorothy Morris, Connections Assistant
email: [serving@autumnridgechurch.org](mailto:-serving@autumnridgechurch.org)
- Small group serving opportunities with local and global partners, care needs:
Otis Hall, Executive Pastor of Outreach
Mary Van Peurseem, Outreach Assistant
email: outreach@autumnridgechurch.org
- Publications, website resources, social media:
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