

LEADER'S GUIDE for
Getting Equipped II: A Disciple-Making Curriculum
(Last updated: September 2021)

Introduction

Setting up your Group Gatherings:

- Ideally, group size will be no more than 12 people to encourage people to participate.
- Co-ed groups are fine—different, rather than better/worse.
- A 75-minute meeting may be sufficient, but 90 minutes would be more relaxed, especially with a larger group or more emphasis on prayer and building relationships.
- Decide how and how much you want to encourage Bible memorization.
- Decide about levels of accountability and discuss: periodic vs. regular attendance; “just show up” vs. more insistent discipleship.
- Avoid Mondays to minimize schedule/holiday disruptions.

Ground Rules / Running your Group Gatherings week-to-week:

- Add opening/closing prayer (ideally, often led by others).
- Consider what to do with “prayer requests”. 1.) You probably want to avoid requests such as “the neighbor’s dog’s goiter is flaring up”. 2.) When you get impersonal requests, recast them as more personal—e.g., if someone wants to pray for a neighbor’s health, turn it into praying for the person to be effective as a minister to that neighbor. 3.) Have a frank discussion with your group about this and revisit/reset the discussion as useful.
- The group should be facilitated not taught; leader comments should be no more than the most active GE’ers.
- Aim for even levels of “class participation” (CP). How aggressively/subtly you do this will depend on your goals and standards for the group and its members.
- Questions on the Bible Reading should be rare compared to comments. And encourage comments to be less technical and more personal. But communicate that there are no stupid comments or questions.
- Watch your “time management” (TM): As a default, spend 1/6th of your time on each day’s reading. Feel free to strategically (Spirit-led) deviate from that norm. But don’t settle for floating (in “the flesh”) into a pattern where you don’t spend adequate time on each day’s reading.
- Help participants to understand the difference between interpreting and applying the Scriptures—e.g., the sin in Genesis 3 was not sexual, but the temptations described in Genesis 3 can be applied to sexual immorality.
- Look for opportunities to encourage them to share what they’ve learned with others and to “obey”, applying what they’ve learned to everyday life.

Shepherding your group members outside the Group Gatherings:

- Be purposeful and strategic in enhancing accountability—e.g., a mid-week text.
- Provide intentional and personal shepherding, especially for more-marginal group members.
- Add missional service and encourage relational community outside of your group gatherings.
- Discuss appropriate “next steps” for participants as they exit the group. (Corollary: make sure that you have good next steps available for them!)

How to engage the Bible Reading:

- Use whatever translation you want. If you’re relatively familiar with the Bible, I’d encourage you to try a unfamiliar translation this time.
- Say at least a brief prayer before reading: “Lord, help me understand and apply Your Word to my life.”
- Reading the Bible is different than studying it. Studying is fine, but remember that we’re reading. Likewise, questions are ok, but we’re much more interested in what God is saying to you as you read.
- Key questions to consider as you read: What does this passage tell me about God? What does it say about me and how to treat others?
- Mark up your Bible. And write in this book—both answers to the questions and key verses/phrases that the Lord uses to speak to you. There are no stupid comments.

How to engage the Bible Memory:

- Spend a minute or two on this every day. Cramming is not as effective for memory—either short-term or long-term.
- Say the book/chapter/verse reference before and/or after saying the verse. (It’s useful to get a better understanding of verse locations.)
- You can use whatever translation you want. But I had to make a decision to produce supplemental resources to help with memory—and I chose NIV.
- I’m making other resources available to help you memorize new verses and review previous verses:
- You can also use other memory verse resources if you prefer—e.g., BibleMemory.com.
- The leader should spend a few minutes discussing the new verses. Spending that much energy on a single verse will likely lead to fruit in terms of discernment and revelation.

A note to guinea pigs: I appreciate your help with improving this. Please send any ideas, edits, points of confusion, feedback, etc. to me at DSchansb@ius.edu.

Week 1: Intro

- Use name tags and sharpies to help with names; encourage them to learn names as soon as possible (have some fun with this—quizzes, contests, etc.).
- Put together a roster with at least name, cell phone, email.
- Use an ice-breaker or two.
- Have people share something about their “story”—faith, family, work.

Weeks 2-7: On John Ortberg’s *The Life You’ve Always Wanted...*

- the first week is lighter, so be prepared to have discussion questions
- chapter 13 will be covered much later in GE-II (when we talk about suffering)
- You might consider alternative books:

-Dallas Willard’s *The Spirit of the Disciplines* (excellent on the why of the disciplines; good on the how): Week 1: Preface and Chapters 1-2; Week 2: Chs. 3-4; Week 3: Chs. 5-6; Week 4: Chs. 7; Week 5: Ch. 8 and Appendix 2; Week 6: Ch. 9 (chapter 10 then becomes optional in week of stewardship/SS; chapter 11 becomes optional in the week on eschatology)

-Richard Foster’s *Celebration of Discipline* (the classic—thorough on how; ok on why): Chs. 1-3, 4-5, 6-7, 8-9, 10-11, 12-13

-Donald Whitney’s *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life* (good on how; ok on why): Chs. 1-3, 4-5, 6-7, 8-9, 10-11, 12-13

Comments on selected days in *The Word Diet*

Week 1, Day 1b: Note 7’s dust and breath (material and spiritual). Note 15’s work and 18’s wife—denoting vocation and relationships/family as first two institutions developed by God.

Week 1, Day 2a: Larry Crabb makes the point that Adam’s silence here is not “golden”. When God spoke, He turned darkness and chaos into light, order, and beauty. When Adam failed to speak in 3:1-6, he turned light, order, and beauty into darkness and chaos.

Week 1, Day 3a: In sum, Noah gets on the ark “men first” (7:13); God commands Noah to come off the ark with his wife before his sons (8:16), but Noah comes off the ark again “men first”—putting his sons ahead of his wife (8:18). Granted, this is obscure and something I overlooked until reading Leon Kass’ great commentary, *The Beginning of Wisdom*. In a much longer discussion about God’s far-greater work with Abraham (compared to Noah), Kass notes that God is trying to fix “the man’s world” of post-Fall / pre-Flood Genesis 4-6 (Cain’s murder and then a range of typically-male shenanigans in the passage we’re skipping—from polygamy to the “heroes of renown” in the mysterious Nephilim passage). Kass sees Noah’s failure here as a clue that Noah doesn’t “get it” and the reader knows that God will be moving on to Plan C—which will involve Abraham.

Week 1: Consider adjustments this week, including how to address memory. If you didn't get much, maybe ask a few to do the verses using the initials—and build from there. Especially if you started in the OT, it may be more difficult to memorize and get motivated to memorize narrative.

Week 1, Day 5b: Finding something to admire is more challenging, but we can start with Rebekah and Jacob care about the things of God—while Esau is apathetic and Isaac is careless with them (in trying to give them to the son who doesn't care and is otherwise a mess). Beyond that, there is an interesting debate among commentators about the extent to which Rebekah is properly vs. improperly taking action given 25:23's prophecy and Isaac's deficiencies. The critique is easier and has broad applicability to us: When the ends (seem to) justify the means, we're more prone to use coercion, rush God's timing, act out of the Flesh (vs. the Spirit), etc.

Week 1, Day 4a: Note 1's leave and go. Note 1-3's blessed in order to be a blessing.

Week 1, Day 5b: Whenever the ends (seem to) justify the means—but specifically, the use of coercion, rushing God's timing, acting out of the Flesh (vs. the Spirit), etc.

Week 1, Day 6b: Judah's development throughout the narrative is impressive, including 38:26's penitence. Here, in the climax of the story, Judah's willingness to take Benjamin's place in slavery is staggering—and a total reversal of the debacle in chapter 37. Judah's self-sacrificing love is amazing enough, but in the face of the depravity of selling Joseph into slavery is awe-inspiring. No wonder, then, that David and Jesus come through the line of Judah—as the “lion of Judah”.

Week 2, Day 1b: The third of Moses' three rescue/justice attempts works really well—and then Jethro's response to hearing about “a good man” is amusing.

Week 2, Day 3a: Among other things, 16:2's reference to “community” can lead to some useful discussion about how to stop grumbling (or other negative attitudes/actions) from spreading like contagion. In 16:8 (and in other places), it's impressive that Moses does not take their complaints personally.

Week 2, Day 4a: The 2nd Commandment's “generations” can lead to confusion—and did in Israel—when read too literally. See: Ezekiel 18:2-4 for a prophetic effort to correct Israel's misperceptions. Even if read literally, note that 1000's dwarfs 3-4. The 3rd Commandment is “misuse” God's name—which is often (and inappropriately) reduced to merely certain sorts of cussing. As another example, we misuse God's name whenever we claim it and then engage in public sin. The 9th Commandment is a legal reference to giving false testimony in court, rather than lying per se. The 10th Commandment is an attitude which is relevant for everyone. Even if you think you've avoided sin in the first nine commandments, you're busted here. Jesus uses this to great effect with the “Rich Young Ruler” in Luke 18.

Week 2, Day 5b: On this day or others throughout the Old Testament, you may end up with useful discussions about the Old (vs. New) Covenant. Here's my review of Andy Stanley's book on the topic, which includes a link to comparing the Old/New Covenants.

<https://schansblog.blogspot.com/2019/02/andy-stanleys-irresistible.html>

Week 2, Day 6a: For some people, the thought of “unintentional” sin is radical and life-changing. The good news: where sin abounds, grace abounds that much more.

Week 2, Day 6b: Psalm 103:12 is a nice reference for the scapegoat running into the desert.

Week 3, Day 2a: The lack of faith is sobering enough, but then, their desire to kill Joshua and Caleb—to silence their dissent—is horrifying.

Week 3, Day 2b: Striking the rock is disobedience—and replicates what Moses did (and was commanded to do) in Exodus 17. In *The Saving Life of Christ*, Ian Thomas draws a parallel between “striking” and crucifixion vs. “speaking” and the Holy Spirit. He sees this as re-crucifying Christ, relying on “the flesh”, and failing to depend on the Spirit. Beyond that, Moses fails as a leader on many levels—and is thus prone to greater punishment (James 3:1).

Week 3: Interested readers might enjoy my book on Joshua, *Inheriting the Promised Land*. Of particular interest, God arranges for various battles to be different combinations of His provision and their participation—from the miraculous at Jericho (chapter 6) to conventional warfare at Ai (chapter 8) and then a powerful combo (chapter 10).

Week 3, Day 4b: 18’s “scarlet cord” is one of Joshua’s two types of Christ.

Week 3, Day 5a: It’s interesting that seven days of marching must have included a Sabbath.

Week 3, Day 5b: Achan was a widower or his wife was not involved/implicated.

Week 4: Judges is as pessimistic as Joshua is optimistic. We won’t read it this time, but Judges 17-21 is as dark as it gets, including the nasty parallel to Genesis 19 in Judges 19. On Samson, reviews of his early ministry (in Judges 13-15) range from looking for evil in everything he did (Walvoord and Zuck) to graciously interpreting everything he did (Matthew Henry).

Week 4, Day 1a: This dialogue is worth a good bit of discussion—on our ability to dispense and receive wisdom well.

Week 4, Day 2b: All of these are impressive: God’s patience with Gideon in the matter of the fleeces; Gideon’s courage with his father; and the father’s “conversion”.

Week 4: The memory verses overlap. I didn’t see many good options—and it’s still an op to choose an easier/harder passage.

Week 4, Days 4b and 6b: Various comparisons/parallels to Moses may be useful here.

Week 4, Day 4b: It’s always struck me as noteworthy and perverse that Saul builds his first altar—as things are going down the toilet for him spiritually (14:35).

Week 4, Day 6b: The harp/warrior combination is impressive.

Week 5, Day 2b: It’s interesting (and cool) that Nathan felt confident enough to agree with David’s plans—and that God corrects him (gently).

Week 5, Day 3a: David rightly receives a ton of critique here, but note that Joab is complicit in the sin, rather than a true friend.

Week 5, Day 4a: Along with Romans 1:20, Psalm 19:1 is a great verse that indicates that all know something about God—through what they can observe in Nature/Creation.

Week 7, Day 2b: Like Solomon, Josiah’s reign has an unseemly end: after his reforms and dependence on God, it’s sad to see him depend on foreign governments and military power/strategy rather than God. And it’s interesting to speculate on how Judah might have continued spiritually if Josiah had lived longer.

Week 7, Day 5a: Paul makes clear that “success” in God’s kingdom is measured by faithfulness and obedience, not by how other people respond. This theme is echoed in the concept of “the watchman” in Ezekiel (week 18).

Week 8, Day 5a: Verse 9’s “Holy One among you” combines both God’s “set-apart-ness” and his desire for intimate relationship with us.

Week 9, Day 2a: Note the structure of Lamentations: in each chapter, the 22 verses start with the letters of the Hebrew alphabet in order. (There are 3 sets of 22 in chapter 3, for a total of seven 22’s). Aside from being impressive as creative writing, it also signals to us that God will bring beauty, order, and redemption out of brutality, sin and chaos.

Week 10: Next week is a good op to memorize both (half) verses.

Week 10, Day 6a: A rugged passage in rough-and-tumble times. Keep in mind that Haman’s friends in particular and the natives in general were willing to exterminate the Jews. The long history of the opposition of Agag (as well as Amalek and Esau) is communicated wonderfully in Ian Thomas’ *The Saving Life of Christ*.

Week 11, Day 1: The timing of events and characters can be confusing for people. Note that Ezra does not appear in the book named for him until the second half of the narrative.

Week 11, Days 2-3: Among other things, it’s worth discussing Nehemiah’s strengths as a leader.

Week 12: This can be a depressing week of reading for some people. So, it’s a good time to emphasize prayer for your people and to check with them during the week.

Week 12, Day 2b: Wisdom is applied knowledge, often through experience.

On Lewis’ *Mere Christianity*:

-Lewis organizes his book by “books” and then chapters”. (Look at his Table of Contents.)

-We don’t assign the Preface, but some coverage of its last page is probably useful—to understand the project and what Lewis means by “mere” Christianity.

-It’s probably worth providing an overview of the book: Lewis was asked to give talks about Christianity for public radio in England during World War II. These radio talks were later compiled into this book. *Mere Christianity* is a wonderful “modern” apologetic, focused on logic, reason, etc. (His story *The Great Divorce* is a stronger “post-modern” apologetic, relying on the power of narrative to communicate truth.)

-Audio versions are available (including a few snippets of Lewis). Some folks, especially those who struggle with the reading, may value this approach. If they rely on this method, they need to find a reliable way to take notes as they listen, so they can contribute fruitfully to the discussion in your group meeting.

-Make sure to encourage them to read daily or 2-3 days per week—and not to procrastinate. (Beyond encouragement, also consider some mid-week accountability.) Reading it in one sitting will be somewhere between not as rewarding and prohibitively difficult for many people.

Week 27

-2a.: This concept points to God’s sovereignty—that God initiates and is responsible for our ability to embrace salvation. It all starts with God (vs. us)—and is available to all from God. It is God’s grace that we can even embrace God’s grace. Note also the second verse of “Amazing Grace”—“*Twas grace that taught my heart to fear; And grace that fear relieved; How precious did that grace appear; The hour I first believed.*”

-2b: Some degree of free will is necessary for love, obedience and virtue, faith and hope, and the dignity of the human person made in the image of God. God can be “blamed” insofar as this is His system, but free will underlines our accountability and His justice in judging our conduct and character. Free will is also important in that it focuses on the Biblical theme of “what we do with what we have”—character over circumstance. The most interesting passage for this question is probably Exodus 21—where God “lets [vs. causes] it to happen”. This sets up “the problem of suffering” (our topic in two weeks), but here, underlines the interplay between God’s sovereignty and our free will.

-2c: God worked with them in a “special” way—but not to the exclusion of others. (See: Rahab, the Gibeonites, the “aliens among you”, Ruth, Solomon’s evangelism and God’s plan for Israel [centered on a popular trade route] to be “a light to the Gentiles”.) Ephesians 1 also notes that we are elected to a position but also for a purpose; we are chosen to/for God’s purposes.

-2d: Pre-destination and election emphasize God’s sovereignty and eternity (and our hope). The concepts keep God “big”; God must be beyond our comprehension or He wouldn’t be much of a God. They bolster the connection between faith and obedience (Rom 8:28). And they emphasize that it’s not just our decision/glory (Rom 8:29-30), promoting grace vs. works; it’s all about God and His love, not us and our choice. (See also: Jn 15:16a vs. usual practice of choosing a rabbi who then approves the choice through an application process of sorts; no other rabbi would have chosen Peter, James and John.) The biggest point: Chosen speaks to our value in God’s eyes, our security, our purpose, etc.

-4a: Salvation has *always* been by faith and grace (vs. works), through Christ. People were *never* saved by observing the Law (Gal 2:21) or sacrifice per se—except in the sense of believing that obedience reflects faith and understanding what sacrifice represents about God, sin, grace, and so on. We face the same dilemma today—as people reduce relationship with God to ritualistic observances.

-4b: In light of the earlier questions, God may have all sorts of arrangements for working with those who do not have a knowledge of the historical person of Christ. That said, again, all are saved through Christ, by faith and God’s grace. The story/ministry and person of Christ is the ultimate personification/representation/manifestation of God’s grace. A more liberal view can take some “pressure” off of evangelistic efforts, but it’s still commanded. We should not tempt God with our inactivity and we would miss out on what God has in store for us.

-5a-b: The wording may be confusing here. The idea is to list key verses that support the “conditional security” view (5a) and the “unconditional/eternal security” view (5b). Note that those who hold the view implied by 5a must finesse the verses in 5b, while those who hold the view implied by 5b must finesse the verses in 5a.

-5c: The II Timothy passage apparently makes a distinction between those who are passively “faithless” and those who actively “disown”.

-5d: Although the passages are talking about the nation of Israel rather than individuals, the divorce analogy seems to leave room for a divorce from God and thus, provides some support for “conditional security”. But the child analogy seems to make the possibility of separation impossible or at least far more remote, thus providing support for “eternal security”. (How can one no longer be a parent’s child?) Ian Thomas offers another picture in *The Saving Life of Christ*—Egypt represents bondage; the Wilderness indicates the relatively faithless/carnal Christian; and Canaan represents the Spirit-filled life of fruit and fight in the Promised Land. This doesn’t close the deal, but if this analogy holds, can one go from the Wilderness back to Egypt—and if so, how?

-5e: The first question here is absolutely key: it is important that one’s views—both believed and enunciated—avoid the heresy of a works-based salvation. The “conditional security” also begs some questions: how much sin is too much &/or what kinds of sin are too heinous (see: Moses, David)? On the second question, some might say that losing out on abundant life and eternal rewards is insufficient. But a failure to acknowledge this point underestimates “abundant life” and probably misunderstands God’s character. On the third question: the idea that “they never were saved” is presumably true at times, but an easy embrace of it is probably a cop-out. In Matthew 18:21ff, if you don’t routinely extend grace to others, why are you comfortable in assuming that you’ve embraced the grace of God?

Week 28

-You may find it useful to compare the Trinity to an apple—with God as the overarching skin, Christ as the meat, and the Spirit as the seed—an OK analogy except that it's three parts of one thing.

-You may find it useful to picture the Trinity as a three-fingered hand (a three-dimensional entity) perceived by a two-dimensional creature. Most of the time, the two-dimensional creature would be unable to see the hand; at best, would be able to see the hand as one circle or the three fingers as three circles.

-1a: A Trinity of answers: surrender to God's will, Christ-likeness, and relying on the empowerment of the Spirit.

-2a: The opening set of verses point to the difficulties in seeing Christ as divine—even though the bulk of Scripture argues for his divinity—leading to the tensions and errors in #4a and 4b.

-4a: Forcing “Unitarianism” misses the partnership/unity within the Trinity (as Christianity is meant to be communal/relational). Heresy here also (falsely) reduces God to something we can comprehend (vs. merely apprehend), signaling a lack of comfort with a “big God”. Make sure they understand that these troubles with the Trinity are a big problem within false religions.

-5a: It may be helpful to distinguish between being Spirit-filled and the Spirit merely being present, between the Spirit as resident vs. dominant. It also might be helpful to note that Eph 5:21 stems from 5:18's being filled with the Spirit.

-5b: Recommend Robert Munger's pamphlet, *My Heart, Christ's Home*, Watchman Nee's *The Normal Christian Life*, and Ian Thomas' *The Saving Life of Christ*.

-5c: It's interesting that we talk about Acts 4&6, but skip Acts 5:11 where the Spirit is connected with anger (see also: Jud 14:19, I Sam 11:6).

-5d: Avoid sin and distractions (Heb 12:1)—as well as legalism (flesh vs. spirit).

-5e: Note that the “carnal (vs. spiritual) man” can be either libertine or legalistic (Col 2:20-23).

Week 29

-1b: One denomination would imply monopoly power—usually a problem in a fallen world. In terms of practice, could one denomination fulfill I Cor 9:22 and its call to be all things to all people? If we could reach unanimity on doctrine, would imply a small God. Sometimes dividing (vs. continuing acrimony) is perhaps a good thing. Note also that, in contrast the OT with the Jews, God did not prescribe the form of worship in the NT (at least in nearly as much detail).

-1c: "Spiritual gifts" can be defined as a manifestation or motivation of the Holy Spirit enabling one to minister more effectively within God's Kingdom. Moreover, there should be a distinction between talents (given at birth, developed in life) and gifting (given at 2nd birth, developed within sanctification). Ultimately, the distinctions here are not totally clear, but the bottom line is what we do with what we've been graced with by God.

-3b: Examples may be helpful here. For instance, one can have the gift of prophecy, but that will manifest itself differently within various ministries. Or given a ministry, someone with the gift of prophecy would be a different sort of pastor or counselor than someone with the gift of teaching or mercy.

-4a: It (having gifts) is all about love. In I Cor 12, Paul talks about the purpose and place of gifts in general. In I Cor 13, Paul discusses motives and the temporal nature of gifts vs. the eternal nature of faith, hope and love. In I Cor 14, Paul gets to the specific problem of the Corinthian church—tongues.

-4d: Two errors are possible with respect to tongues—dismissing or mandating them.

Week 30

-If someone has an old edition of Ortberg's book, I can send you/them a PDF of the missing chapter. Email me as needed at DSchansb@ius.edu.

-2a: Note that Christ challenged the Samaritan woman, going beyond the excuses she offered—when it is common for us to treat delicate people/groups with apathy or kid gloves.

-2c: Some scholars believe that the issue was class more than race—that Moses had married “above” himself, since Ethiopians were viewed as skilled soldiers.

-2e: Note also Acts 6:3's emphasis on character (“full of the Spirit and of wisdom”)—and if you have that, then nationality doesn't matter. That said, dealing with perceptions and the difference between treating people equally and treating them equally well. Note also that Israel's treatment of aliens was based in their experience as aliens. Likewise, we should have empathy for those who are not “of this world”.

-2: See also: Rom 9:1-7, I Cor 12:13, Eph 2:14-16, etc. Ethnicity matters (but how much?)—vs. ethnicity is irrelevant or supersedes Christ. Voddie Baucham's talk on “Ethnic Gnosticism” is excellent on this topic.

-4a: Equal but different, supplement and complement, teamwork in marriage and ministry. With respect to I Pet 3:7, you may find it useful to remind them of the differences between a coffee mug and a tea/china cup.

-4b: In Corinth, cultural issues dictated Paul's instructions—in particular, that female behavior in the church might resemble that of pagan priestesses and prostitutes.

-5b: “Diakonos” is usually translated servant (vs. “doulos”—servant as slave), but as “deacon” in Phil 1:1 and I Tim 3:8,12. Some scholars believe that Paul's instructions in II Timothy 2:9 are about economic modesty and class distinctions. It is interesting that if one believes in a relatively conservative standard on this issue, women's options are reduced by only one category—the same issue that Eve faced.

-5: On women, if your group seems to have reached an easy consensus, consider provocative examples for women who are: invited to preach in a worship service while on a mission trip; asked to be President of a Sunday School class, while the teacher is the “leader”; asked to teach a mixed Sunday School class on occasion; asked to lead a men's choir; or in a church setting with few if any men qualified to lead.

-6a: We're only reading Lev 18:22, but 18:24 indicates that failure to be holy in this realm led the nations to be “defiled”, indicating that lining up with the world's standards is dangerous for the Christian and the Church.

-6c: Assuming a fully-benevolent and fully-knowledgeable God, sin is necessarily harmful to the human person. We can still debate what is a sin, but once any of us have decided this in any given context, we will not want people to make those choices. That said, non-Christians engage in all sorts of sins, so there's no need to elevate this one above others or to have expectations about their conduct when they're outside the Kingdom at present.

-6d: It has been said that one is “an X” before becoming a Christian, but “a Christian who struggles with X” after becoming a Christian. One might have been a drunkard, but is now a Christian who struggles with alcohol.

-6: Wesley Hill's *Washed and Waiting* is excellent here. Hill is a NT theology professor who has a homosexual orientation but has decided to live a celibate lifestyle.

Week 31

-Article: Tada's personal story is somewhat dated now but remarkable. Share a summary of it with your group to give more context for the author's views.

-1a: Note that God has built us to handle only so much. Somebody once noted that he would feel far more if the last knuckle of his pinky was cut off than if he learned that 10,000 people in a far-away place died last night. If this weren't the case, we would quickly over-load with the pain and suffering of the world.

-1b: Stories here can be very interesting, but be conscious of your time management.

-2c: Asking "tough questions" of God is fine—even desirable. Along these lines, recommend C.S. Lewis' *A Grief Observed* as optional reading. As does Job, Habakkuk turns from tough but legitimate questions to unreasonable demands (a la Crabb's *Inside Out*).

-4c: We are often incapable of comprehending the whole; if not, God is not much of a God. And often, it doesn't help to know more anyway. God is glorified by our trust and dependency (I Cor 4:9). And whatever assistance God gives cannot be allowed to supersede our free will too much.

-5c: Psalm 73:16-17 is the turning point, leading to the psalmist's conclusions in 73:21-22 and 73:27-28.

-5d: This is an important principle when counseling those in grief. Often, as in the old Keith Whitley/Alison Krauss song, "you say it best when you say nothing at all". Usually, our presence and our role as a listening board are far more important than our words. (Job's friends provide a sobering/wonderful example of this—in their initial success and later failures.)

-6a: His character, faith, and perspective—but not his circumstances or God's plan

-p. 123: The C.S. Lewis quote here is part of the framework of the movie/play, *Shadowlands*. He delivers this line three times—once before, once during, and once after the crushing trial he endures during the movie. The words are the same, but they sound completely different given the context in which they are delivered.

Week 32

-1a: As with other key doctrines, our eschatology is correlated to a general pattern of Scriptural interpretation. Beyond that, Revelation is very useful in providing Christians with an eternal perspective and a substantive hope (especially in the face of persecution).

-1b: a (spiritual) separation from God (perhaps surrounded by hell-ish people) and a (physical) place of darkness and agony; the importance of stressing the opportunity to be with God (vs. avoiding Hell per se) answers the second question and ties into 1b. Fear is only “the beginning of wisdom”. See: Fear vs. love as prime motivators within relationships (e.g., parenting). See also: salvation as merely “fire insurance”.

-2a: Revelation 20 is clearly figurative in part (e.g., key, chain, bound) and past tense, but what does it mean? What does it mean that Christ ties/tied up “the strong man” in Matthew 12? Note also that Matthew 16 refers to the church on offense—against the gates/“defenses” of Hades.

-2b: The “Kingdom of God” is the sphere of God’s rule—today (universal in one sense but limited in another sense) vs. future (completed).

-2c: historically...

-pre-M: dominant thru Roman Empire (pre-Constantine/Augustine); after that, Chris Hall’s “a distinguished but minority perspective” until recently; gained recent widespread popularity in the 19th Century, esp. thru the work of Ryrie and Scofield; in general, more prominent in times of historical pessimism (in times of war, late-19th Century America when Protestants were losing control with the influx of Catholics, late-20th century America when Christians were losing control of the culture)

-a-M: dominant from Augustine to Reformation; still popular since then

-post-M: rarely the dominant view, but popular throughout history; in America, dominant until WWI and esp. WWII—but much more rare today; popular outside of America and Western Europe today, given Christianity’s aggressive growth; in general, most prominent after times of spiritual revival and optimism about the influence of Christianity

-2d: Good people—today and throughout Church History—have held a variety of views.

-2: In cast you’re interested in the strengths and weaknesses of each viewpoint—theologically or with respect to “hermeneutics” (biblical interpretation)...

-Pre-M stems from as literal and chronological a reading as is possible of Revelation—a big strength in relying on “the plain sense of the text”. But is reading Revelation like prose appropriate when its style is apocalyptic?

-Pre-M is consistent with God’s other judgments—sudden but only when things got *so bad* that they could not be reconciled (Gen 6:5, 15:16, Gen 18-19). But pre-M typically requires two judgments/resurrections (unless one embraces a post-Tribulation view; see: Question #3)—before and after the millennium—when the text reads as if there is one.

-Pre-M often implicitly downplays impact of Revelation on early/earlier generations—only contemporaries of the End Times will *really* understand what John meant.

-Post-M’s focus on the power of the gospel to redeem all parts of life and our call to be salt and light in the world. This parallels the increasing dominion/abundance for which we are

designed. In contrast, pre-M implies that the world will degenerate—vs. idea elsewhere that God will start and finish a good work (Phil 1:6, Is 9:6-7). Thus, the emphasis of pre-M tends toward “rescue” and the gospel as fire insurance. Putting it another way: will the Gospel and God’s Kingdom fade or expand over time? Is God’s plan mostly/largely about future victory in Heaven or, in large part, focused on current victory on Earth?

-3: The concept of “rapture” is not clearly mentioned in Revelation (except perhaps 17:14, 19:14), but note that the focus of Revelation 19-20 is the defeat of evil rather than the glorification of Christians. (Likewise, the White Throne Judgment of unbelievers is mentioned while the Judgment Seat of Christ—for believers—is not mentioned in Revelation.)

-4b: The plural reference may refer more figuratively to the weight of the evidence against those who will be judged by their works or more literally as the amount of material that would go into a book on our works (John 21:25).

-4c: The concept of purgatory may come up in your discussions. But the Bible indicates finality—“cannot cross over” and “die once and then judgment”. (I Cor 3:10-15 implies that you may build garbage on the foundation, but either you're on the foundation or you're not.) Moreover, it's difficult (if not impossible) to resolve purgatory with a works-based salvation as anathema (Galatians 1:8-9).

-5: Hell is both fire and “blackest darkness”?! This is possible as if going a mile deep within a lake or deep within a fire, but seems to read figuratively.

-6: Given the weight of tradition on this topic, it will be difficult for some to wrestle faithfully with the Scripture, theology, etc. Especially for those who are struggling, make the point that being able to enunciate this position may be helpful in removing a stumbling block within evangelism or ministry. As so many other difficult theological issues, one should be able to coherently make the case for more than one answer.

-6: There are implications here for God’s justice and evangelism. On the one hand, evangelism seems less powerful in that Hell would be “reduced”. On the other hand, some people wrestle earnestly with the justice of eternal punishing in Hell. To them, annihilationism may provide a way around a potential stumbling block. At least two other questions come to mind: Can sin and evil last forever? And will God’s fire not destroy it? A larger issue here is the role of tradition in forming our beliefs.

-7: What is love? How would God be just without punishing evil? God doesn’t send but many choose to go—as God respects one’s dignity and freedom to choose not to have relationship with him. C.S. Lewis’ easy-to-read *The Great Divorce* is a provocative and enjoyable read—and a terrific apologetic—on this topic.

Week 33

-1a: Focusing on life in the present is natural since it's more concrete. Greater focus on heaven, earth, or hell is a function of circumstances, personality, and church tradition. It's also helpful to note that it can often be easier to have a hope for heaven for others who are suffering. Note also that the Biblical hope is a confident assurance rather than merely wishful thinking. (For example, we often say things like "I *hope* it doesn't rain today".)

-3a: We're looking for general perceptions (old/new, pleasant/unpleasant, light/darkness, magnificence, level of detail) and pictures (city, bride, Eden, the presence of God).

-5a: Why walls at all? (See also: John 14's "rooms".) They are necessary to provide measurements of a "city" (by definition) vs. an incomprehensible eternity. Walls imply physical proximity and the closeness that obtains from community. (In a similar vein, Lewis' *The Great Divorce* paints a picture of those in Hell as those who want to get away from God & others—so much so, that they want to move infinitely far away from them.) Note also that the walls are transparent and that Zechariah 2:4 implies that there are *no* walls! In a word, remember that John is trying to describe the indescribable—using the pictures of a bride, a city, and a garden—so don't take the city references too literally.

-5c: At the least, Revelation 21-22 resolves Genesis 1-3.

Week 34

-1: This question should lead to quite a bit of discussion. One of the ironies of this passage is that it would have been so “fresh” to a contemporary audience, but it is among the most familiar (and potentially tired) to us today.

-2a: It’s interesting that this takes place on the mountain—as if drawing a parallel to the giving of the Law on Mt. Sinai. The direct audience is the disciples—although others were apparently allowed or even encouraged to listen, perhaps alluring some into the Kingdom which Jesus was describing. Note also that Jesus moves away from the crowd, requiring anyone who wanted to listen to make some sort of effort (to follow or listen carefully). Finally, the setting illustrates why “*Sermon on the Mount*” is a bit of a misnomer.

-2b: “Blessed” must refer to joy and peace within character vs. happiness in circumstances. Willard notes that the good news for Jesus’ audience is that the kingdom—and being “esteemed by God”—is available (vs. unavailable) for the people in these categories. In contrast, the Old Covenant seemed to tightly connect obedience with material blessings (although stories like Job certainly introduced some wiggle room!), resulting in the assumption that the materially blessed were also spiritually blessed.

-2c: The term “poor in spirit” denotes, among other things, humility, repentance, a dependence on God vs. self, and an ability to accept the grace of God. The term peace-makers implies those who (purposefully/aggressively) *make* peace—vs. merely being peaceful. (See also: Rom 12:17-18, Eph 4:3.)

-2d: We are called to be salt and light in an often rotten and dark world. (See also: I Pet 2:12.)

-3a: Jesus words here anticipate the likely complaint—that he was preaching heresy in diminishing or trashing the Law. (See also: Gal 1:8.) Connects to the Law, but disconnects them from the Pharisees as authority and their understanding of the Law.

-3b-3c: Romans 12:9-21 is a less-familiar passage with similar themes. If merely considered as a tougher standards, this could be taken as a new (and tighter) set of legalisms. Instead, Christ means this to point to the spirit of the law and the sort of life available to those living in God’s kingdom—both individually and corporately. Being results in doing—and so, the focus is rightly placed on the heart rather than external behaviors. (See also: the order of Gal 5:16 [as in Ian Thomas], the Willard quotes in this week’s study, and the “inside out” emphasis of Crabb’s book.)

-4a: The key phrase is “to be seen” in 6:1,5.

-6a: Judgment in the sense of discernment is all over this passage (e.g., plank vs. speck, wolves vs. sheep, narrow vs. wide), so Jesus clearly did not mean to throw away judgment of that sort. Rather, this is a warning to judge situations with humility and a recognition of our ignorance.

-6c,e: An application for both of these questions is the tension between the errors of legalism and libertine behavior.

Week 36

-1: These questions are aimed at a common lack of competence and/or confidence when people consider leadership positions and mentoring relationships. Of course, we hope that people are in much better shape on both counts after completing GE1 and GE2.

-2a: What would we hope for Jeremiah to say in 1:6—given his reasonable fears? Quick and unconditional acceptance is perhaps worrisome, but excuse making on the other extreme is also problematic. Something in-between—accepting the task but asking for provision or questioning some aspect of the mission—is probably a preferred response.

-2b: Along with the passage here, the end of the first Lewis quote on p. 141 talks about “a secret society”—again, a helpful reference to the “conspiracy” of Willard’s *The Divine Conspiracy*.

-2c: If time allows, you may want to have a significant discussion of Exodus 18.

-3b: Among other things, note Daniel’s nuanced responses to unrighteous rulers and his ability to switch kings and kingdoms. The integrity of Daniel in 6:4—neither negligence nor corruption (what’s the difference?)—is an especially high calling.

-4c: On I Tim 4:15’s progress, note that it does not say “perfection”. Moreover, progress implies improvement which implies past failure. Showing progress implies illustrating both past failure and current improvement/success.