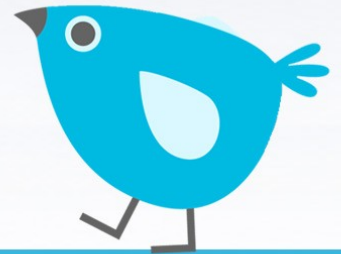




WHITE RIVER CHRISTIAN CHURCH

LOVE GOD AND LOVE OTHERS

who do You



Follow?

SERMON SERIES DISCUSSION & STUDY GUIDE

Sermon Schedule

Date	Series	Key Event	Scripture
1/5 & 1/8	Who Do You Follow?	Praying	Hebrews 4:16
1/12 & 1/15	Who Do You Follow?	Praying	Matthew 21:22 Mark 9
1/19 & 1/22	Who Do You Follow?	Giving	1 Samuel 15:21-23
1/26 & 1/29	Who Do You Follow?	Giving	Various
2/2 & 2/5	Who Do You Follow?	Fasting	Various
2/9 & 2/12	Who Do You Follow?	Fasting	Various

Who Do You Follow?

Week 1: Praying Hebrews 4:16

We are called to *follow* Jesus. But how do we do this? And *why* do we do this? What makes Christ someone we would want to follow? In this lesson we will learn how we are exhaustively *known* by Jesus. And yet, the one who knows our every fault and weakness is the same one who chose to live amongst us, to endure temptation and hardship, and ultimately suffer and die for us.

An essential aspect of following Jesus is through the discipline of prayer. We can only grow in Christ if we consistently spend time in His presence. As we learn to pray, there are many things that keep us from boldly coming to the Lord in prayer. It is important we identify these issues so we can experience true freedom in the Lord's presence and boldly call out to Him to meet our needs.

CONNECTING AS A GROUP:

Think about a person with whom you feel the safest to share your heart. What characteristics about this person make you feel safe?

Is it possible to feel safe with someone who doesn't truly know you?

STUDYING GOD'S WORD:

Read Hebrews 4:12-13

What is one function of the word of God, according to this passage?

How does it make you feel to know you are "naked and exposed" before God?

Read Hebrews 2: 17-18 and 4:12-13

The same God who exposes our hearts is also the High Priest who sacrificed himself for us! How does knowing this give us boldness/confidence to approach his throne of grace?

While being naked and exposed can be uncomfortable, it should also be freeing. Everything about you is known to the God who holds us accountable, and yet He responded to our sin by "being made like us in every respect", experiencing pain, temptation and suffering for our sake.

Think about your prayer life. Do you approach God with the kind of boldness he asks of us? Is a lack of boldness something that keeps you from prayer?

DISCIPLESHIP TRAINING:

For these next seven days, commit to setting aside a time during which you can pray. As you pray, ask the Lord for help with your own needs, but also ask His help for the needs of a person in your small group as well as issues in the world.

PRAYING FOR EACH OTHER:

What is keeping you from approaching the throne of grace with boldness and confidence? Pray for the Lord to grant you a sense of safety and rest in His presence.

Who Do You Follow?

Week 2: Praying

Mark 9:14-29

Jesus taught his disciples to pray for the kingdom to come on earth as it is in heaven. If we are to follow Jesus, we need to put this command into practice and become a people of prayer. As we will see in today's text, evil is defeated through the prayers of those who believe in the power and ability of God to respond to our requests. Disciples of Jesus have the power to defeat evil in this world. But we can do *nothing* for Jesus if we aren't praying.

CONNECTING AS A GROUP:

Share a time in which you prayed for something and God answered your prayer.

STUDYING GOD'S WORD:

Read Mark 9:14-29

Why is Jesus angry in verse 19?

R.T. France writes about Jesus' anger in verse 19, stating that "[The disciples] faithlessness is symptomatic of the wider human condition, as Jesus in his ministry so often encountered it, an unwillingness to take God at his word and a horizon limited to merely human possibilities."

The father of the demon-possessed boy states in verse 22, "Have mercy on us and help us, if you can." How does Jesus respond to this statement? How can we apply this to our prayer lives today?

Discuss the paradoxical statement in verse 24: "I do believe, but help me overcome my unbelief!" Notice that this statement was not an obstacle to the father's request being granted. While imperfect, the father's belief was all that was needed for his son to be healed. According to Jesus, why were the disciples unable to cast out the demon?

DISCIPLESHIP TRAINING:

While it is true many prayers do not receive the answer we desire, it can also be said we do not pray enough for the things needed on this earth. For the next seven days, ask the Lord for help in a specific situation where healing is needed, whether it be for yourself, for a family member or for a friend. When praying, believe He is capable of answering your prayer! Remember even if this belief is imperfect, it is enough for Him.

PRAYING FOR EACH OTHER:

James 4:2 states we don't have because we don't ask God for it. Make sure you are regularly lifting up the needs of others in your group. Remember all things are possible for the one who believes.

Who Do You Follow?

Week 3: Giving-Obedience to God

1 Samuel 15: 10-23

When it comes to giving, the Christian church can sometimes get a bad rap. There are countless stories of dishonesty and deceit when it comes to Christian leaders asking and then misusing funds. But the fact remains that followers of Jesus are asked to give, of ourselves, time, talent, and treasure. How we give is just as important as what we give. As we seek to follow Jesus, it is important to know what He is asking of each of us.

CONNECTING AS A GROUP:

- What are some of the stereo-types regarding church and giving?
- What are some positive stories of how the church gives and/or handles money?
- What is the difference between giving and sacrificing?
- Does giving have to be all about money?
- Why do you think money is such a taboo subject among Christians?

STUDYING GOD'S WORD:

Read 1 Samuel 15:10-23

- How did King Saul disobey the Lord? What were Saul's intentions?
- Why did Saul think he was doing right?
- Why is partial obedience equal to disobedience in God's sight?

Read Galatians 5:13-14

- How are we to obey God?
- What should our motivation be to give to others?

MAKING APPLICATION:

Below is a list of ideas and ways to give. Read & discuss the ones you may use in your world. As a group, come up with some other ways to give.

- Help someone with their luggage.
- Pay for the cup of coffee for the person behind you.
- Leave a 100% tip on your next dinner bill.
- Serve in the WRCC Food Pantry or at Thursday Night Dinner Table.
- Carry a \$50 bill every month and give it to a complete stranger.
- Make eye contact with someone and give them a compliment.
- Donate some blood.
- Pay for the groceries of the person looking through their coupons.
- Find something of value in your house and then find someone to give it to.
- Track down a former teacher and send them a handwritten thank you note.

PRAYING FOR EACH OTHER:

Ask God to help you see opportunities to give to and serve others in His name. Pray that God would work in your heart so you can give and serve with a right heart in love and obedience to Him.

Who Do You Follow?

Week 4: Giving - Sacrifice as Generosity

There is a cost to being a follower of Jesus. God asks for our sacrifice and obedience. He asks us to give to those who have less and to serve those in need. How we answer this is up to us, and the answer may be critical as obedience is never optional. God is also concerned with how we *feel* about our obedience and giving. He wants our hearts most of all. Of course, actions will always follow what is in our heart.

CONNECTING AS A GROUP:

Discuss some of the "costs" associated with the following:

- Home Ownership
- Car Ownership
- Cell phone ownership
- Being a member of a particular team (sports, etc.)
- Being a Christian

STUDYING GOD'S WORD:

Read Hebrews 10:4-18 and Hosea 6:6

- Why was Christ's sacrifice more acceptable than the others offered?
- Though we don't sacrifice burnt offerings today, what are some rituals upon which we rely to keep us from sacrificing our whole lives to the Lord?
- According to this text, how does the sacrifice of Jesus empower us today?

Read 2 Corinthians 8:1-7

- What stands out about the characteristics of the Macedonian church?
- Notice these churches gave out of their poverty: How should this stretch us in our generosity today?

Read 2 Corinthians 8:8-15

Describe the attitude Paul is trying to impart into the Corinthian church concerning giving.

How are the people of God supposed to care for one another? How should this change our view regarding "our" possessions?

DISCIPLESHIP TRAINING:

What is something you are having a difficult time sacrificing to the Lord? Is it your money? Your time? Fifteen extra minutes of sleep in the morning? This week, identify an area you are resistant to giving up to the Lord. Commit to giving this area to Him.

PRAYING FOR EACH OTHER:

Thank God for all of your blessings and ask Him to show you ways you can give to Him and others daily. Thank Him for the ultimate gift of the forgiveness of our sins through Jesus Christ.

Who Do You Follow?

Week 5: Fasting-Reorienting Your Life to God's Kingdom

As we seek to be followers of Jesus, we are in need of spiritual disciplines to help clarify our motives and intents. Fasting is a means by which we can re-orient our lives toward God's Kingdom. Throughout scripture, fasting refers to abstaining from food for spiritual purposes. Richard Foster notes, "Fasting reminds us that we are sustained 'by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God' (Matt. 4:4). Food does not sustain us; God sustains us."

The act of fasting is counterintuitive to the way the world tells us to approach our problems. The world tells us to push forward, to strive for solutions in our own power, while fasting calls us to stop our striving and seek instead the power of God for our situation. We fast so we can be connected to the fullness of God. We fast to show our need for God to move. We fast so our lives can be reoriented towards God's Kingdom.

CONNECTING AS A GROUP

What is your initial reaction to the idea of fasting?

What is your experience (if any) with fasting?

Why do you think fasting is something God desires of his people? How does fasting orientate our hearts towards God's purposes for the world?

STUDYING GOD'S WORD

Read Isaiah 58:2-9 and Matthew 6:16-18

What parallels can you discern from these two passages regarding our attitudes towards fasting?

What are the core elements of fasting found in these verses?

In the Isaiah passage, what strikes you about the correlation between acts of justice and fasting? Why is it important our hearts are aligned with God's purposes for our fasts to be effective?

In the Matthew passage, how can fasting be subverted by pride?

DISCIPLESHIP TRAINING

This week, set aside one day to fast and pray. Make sure this is not a day where you are overcommitted and simply don't eat for lack of time. In place of the normal time where you would eat, set aside 30-minutes to pray. Be sure to journal this experience to write out what God is teaching you through fasting.

Richard Foster writes, "More than any other discipline, fasting reveals the things that control us. This is a wonderful benefit to the true disciple who longs to be transformed into the image of Jesus Christ. We cover up what is inside us with food and other things, but in fasting these things surface." Fasting will draw out the areas of your life that need to be purified (whether it be jealousy, anger, fear, etc.). As these are drawn to the surface, know that healing is available through the power of Jesus Christ.

PRAYING FOR EACH OTHER

Ask God to give us the grace to fast this week and that, through fasting, our hearts would become more aligned to his purposes in the world.

Who Do You Follow?

Week 6: Fasting-Resolve to Have God's Best

There are no shortcuts in following Jesus. Period. Discipleship takes diligence and commitment to pursue God through prayer, giving and fasting. In order to grow in your walk with Christ, you must have a resolve to grab onto God's best for your life. There is no spiritual breakthrough without prayer and fasting. Fasting is an act of faith that solidifies our dependency on God to act in our favor.

CONNECTING AS A GROUP:

What is one area of your walk with Christ you would like to see strengthened this year? What are you willing to sacrifice to make sure this happens?

STUDYING GOD'S WORD:

The book of Ezra tells the story of the Jews traveling back from captivity in Persia. King Cyrus of Persia gave them permission to return in 538 B.C. and to rebuild the Temple in Jerusalem. First, Zerubbabel led the people back to work on the Temple. The surrounding nations caused trouble, so the work went slowly, even stopping for several years. The temple was finally finished in 515 B.C. Then Ezra, a priest, attempted to lead a second group of people back to Jerusalem and was blessed by the later king, King Artaxerxes.

Read Ezra 7:21-28

What was the extent of the blessing Ezra received from King Artaxerxes?

How did Ezra respond to this blessing (vs. 27-28)? Discuss the correlation between blessing and responsibility.

Read Ezra 8:21-23

How does Ezra respond to his difficult circumstances after receiving the blessing?

Describe the resolve Ezra showed in calling a fast for the people of Israel.

How can we show more resolve in following Jesus when we are tested in our faith?

DISCIPLESHIP TRAINING:

Fasting helps to express, to deepen, and to confirm the resolution that we are ready to sacrifice anything, to sacrifice ourselves to attain what we seek for the kingdom of God – Andrew Murray

What is the next faithful step you can take to grow as a follower of Christ? Is it in generosity? Study? Prayer? Sharing the Gospel? What is the area the Holy Spirit is encouraging you to grow in? This week take a day to fast and pray so you would have a breakthrough in this area.

PRAYING FOR EACH OTHER:

As a group this week, pray that each member of your small group would show resolve in their commitment to follow Jesus. Pray that each member would be intentional in displaying generosity, praying for others, and taking risks for the kingdom of God.

Notes



For more information and resources visit
<http://www.wrcc.org/connect/smallgroups/index.php>