



SMALL GROUP STUDIES

JUNE 2010 | VOL: 3 | NO: 6



WEEK 1 :: JUNE 6

HOW TO WIN AN ARGUMENT :: COLOSSIANS 4:2-6

When I was a child, my most favorite Bible story was “The Good Samaritan.” I had a cartoon version of the story on video, and I must have watched it two or three times a week.

As I grew older—in a strict, conservative, inward-focusing-type church—the gospel I heard was always focused on me. Me, me, me. *I* shouldn’t listen to *this* music; *I* shouldn’t go to *that* movie; *I* shouldn’t be seen with *those* people. And, of course, none of these rules and regulations were for the edification of the church or the benefit of any non-believer; they were in place to map out my life as a solid, dedicated, “good” Christian.

Aside from being strictly guided to the “good” side of life, the side that made me “in the world, but not of the world,” members of my church congregation also placed a solid emphasis on evangelism. This seemed contradictory to me often times: I wasn’t meant to associate myself with *those* people; but I was meant to share the gospel with them? I’d imagine scenarios where I walked up to a group of kids at my high school, barely knowing their names, only assuming they weren’t Christians, and—empowered by the Holy Spirit, for that would be the only power enabling me to do this—I would win them over to Christianity by my supreme knowledge of the Gospel.

This never happened, I assure you.

But something else did happen. I took time to step away from what all the “good Christians” were telling me, and I looked at The Good Samaritan instead. He gave little thought to an injured man’s background, his culture, or the condition of his heart—he saw an immediate need and he filled it. He never once used words, but so powerfully shared the Gospel with a hurting man.

Ghandi is famous for saying, “Be the change you wish to see in the world.” What if we were to be the *Christ* we wished to see in the world? In a brief three-year ministry, Christ literally changed the course of mankind. Did he use words? When asked. But mostly, he reached out to the hurting, dying, and the lost in a tender, loving way. He didn’t look down his nose in judgment; rather he befriended the lost sheep to bring them into the fold. By forming these types of relationships, onlookers and the befriended wanted to know more, wanted to ask questions.

Sometimes, even when I was trying hard not to, I *did* buy that music or watch that movie or engage myself with peers who negatively influenced my behavior. Did that make me any less a Christian? Because, honestly, in those times, I felt grace more than any other time. It was in those times that I understood that being a Christian wasn’t about never saying a swear word in my life and keeping a squeaky clean record in front of my youth pastor. No, it was and still is about having a dirty black soul that has been wiped clean by the grace of Jesus Christ.

So in Colossians when Paul says, “⁵Behave yourselves wisely [living prudently and with



discretion] in your relations with those of the outside world (the non-Christians), making the very most of the time and seizing (buying up) the opportunity.⁶ Let your speech at all times be gracious (pleasant and winsome), seasoned [as it were] with salt, [so that you may never be at a loss] to know how you ought to answer anyone [who puts a question to you],” he is admonishing us to be prepared to answer questions; not to force our words on to those in the world. We act graciously because we too have been saved by grace.

CONNECTED TEXTS

Colossians 4:2-6

Luke 10:25-27

James 2:18

DISCUSSION STARTERS

How are you most comfortable sharing your faith with nonbelievers? Through word, deed, or both?

QUESTIONS

There is some controversy regarding St. Francis’ quote—whether he actually said it, and if he did, what specifically he meant. A serious line is drawn between the “word” evangelists and the “deed” evangelists. What do you think it means to live a life of evangelism? When do the words come in?

Consider the story of The Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-27). Why would Jesus point to this good man as the “hero” of the story? What if he had “preached the Gospel” with words instead of deed? What if he had done both?

Often when using words to share our faith, we try to validate ourselves as Christians, showcasing our knowledge, one-upping contradicting questions from the opposing side. At what point does this method of evangelizing become more about winning an argument instead of sharing a story? Explain how Paul’s method of being “prepared to give an answer” addresses this issue.

Finally, if Paul encourages believers to be prepared to give an answer, he clearly knew something would be sparking questions. What does this say about how we should be living our lives and the role our lifestyle plays in sharing our faith?

ACTION STEP

Analyze your daily life—you actions at work, with your friends, at home. Are you living out your faith always? If a question arises about your faith, are you prepared to answer it? Can you be held accountable for the discrepancies between your answer and your lifestyle? Determine one thing that you need to change. Perhaps your attitude toward a boss; your negligence toward those in need; the way you treat your spouse. Address that issue this week, and make a conscious effort to live your faith through that change.



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WEEK ONE NOTES



WEEK 2 :: JUNE 13

IT TAKES EVERYONE :: COLOSSIANS 4:7-17

An MVP running back for a Super Bowl championship team buys Rolex watches for each of his linemen because he understands his individual success was only made possible by their effort.

A popular national television program brings together the talents of an entire community to build a home for a needy family.

Residents of a crime-ravaged community commit to be more intentionally aware of suspicious circumstances and reporting them to the authorities, thereby significantly reducing crime.

Each of these is an example of a powerful principle: Great synergy comes when people work together toward a common goal. In fact, what one can accomplish alone grows exponentially when others come alongside.

The Apostle Paul never lost sight of this. The growth of God's Kingdom was all about one person, Jesus Christ; but the proclamation of Christ and the health of Christ's churches relied upon church families and not individuals. In his letters to the various church communities that he had served and grown to love, he writes to them as members of a body who were living and serving together, addressing his letters, for example, "to all God's beloved in Rome," "to all the saints in Christ Jesus who are at Philippi," or "to the church of God which is at Corinth, with all the saints who are in the whole of Achaia." He spoke of their faithfulness in serving together and then, after speaking to their specific needs and issues as church bodies, he would routinely close his letters by encouraging individuals and reminding them of their important roles in the greater church community.

Perhaps you have seen it when a church relied upon one individual to grow and to be effective only to see that church's ministry crumble when the leader departed. Or you may be familiar with church bodies which could never agree on anything and divided over trivial and inward debates such as the color of the carpet.

Paul did not see buildings when he wrote to the churches; he saw people, each valuable to the cause of Christ, serving together in unity, led by the Holy Spirit. In Colossians 4:7-17, he states his purpose for sending this letter through Tychicus, "that you may know how we are and that he may encourage your hearts..." Many of the people whom Paul addresses in these closing verses are known to us only by the brief mention of their names here, but their mention reminds us that "there is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Galatians 3:28).

Implied in Paul's words is that 1) no one person is more important than another, 2) all are important, 3) each is uniquely created and gifted, and 4) each is called to a specific role in God's Kingdom.



CONNECTED TEXTS

Ecclesiastes 4:7-12

Colossians 1:24-29

1 Corinthians 12:12-31

DISCUSSION STARTERS

Why is individualism so valued in our culture? Discuss the positive and negative consequences.

QUESTIONS

Read Ecclesiastes 4:7-12. Dream a little and talk about what would happen if the body of Christ were to reflect this passage. How might the universal Church stand out or be perceived differently in our western culture?

Describe a time when you were the vital member of a team – perhaps on a sports team or working on a project with a group at work – and able to be yourself, using your talents. How did you feel and what were the results?

In Colossians 1:24-29, Paul discusses his suffering on behalf of Christ's church. How does his perspective differ from what we value in 21st Century America? What does suffering have to do with serving? What benefits might suffering bring to your small group or to our church?

Read 1 Corinthians 12:12-31 and discuss what are the unique spiritual gifts possessed within your small group. How might you, together as a group, grow in the living out of those gifts?

ACTION STEP

Discuss how you are doing as a group in serving together, using your spiritual gifts. Spend time in prayer asking God for guidance in this and then plan a service project together.



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WEEK TWO NOTES



WEEK 3 :: JUNE 20

REMEMBER MY CHAINS :: COLOSSIANS 4:18

In this passage, Paul is an old man sitting in prison because of his dedication to the gospel. There is no sign that he is getting out any time soon. So his final instruction is simple: “Remember my chains.” In other words, “Don’t let everything I have passed on to you be in vain.”

Paul’s statement is rather simple. He doesn’t express complaint, demand rescue, or even dwell on the fact that he’s imprisoned. He simply asks that his work for the gospel, for which he is imprisoned, not be forgotten.

In fact, it seems that his statement has less to do with himself and his own bleak circumstances, and more to do with his legacy—the work of furthering the gospel. After asking that his chains be remembered, he signs off by wishing grace upon those who are still at greater freedom to proclaim the gospel, his ultimate goal.

Paul’s message is not to disregard suffering, or to push it by the wayside, but to embrace it—to remember it. We’ve all had seasons when we’ve been “in chains.” Though ours might not be as literal as Paul’s, part of following Christ (and even being human) is experiencing pain, going through difficulty, having to take a stand (and maybe even being oppressed) for what we deeply believe in. And it is during those times that God is intricately and purposefully at work. And it’s likely that we are more dependent upon Him, more connected to Him, during our own seasons of suffering. (Think back to Michael’s teachings on the wilderness.)

While we’re attuned to our own suffering, sometimes even consumed by it, it’s not second nature for us to remember the suffering of others. We don’t readily think of how others’ suffering has contributed to our own lives and wellbeing. But as Christ followers, as we try to know God more, it’s Christ’s suffering that we will draw closer to and most remember.

Paul’s supplication is to not forget his suffering on behalf of the gospel, and it seems that we are to in turn remember how suffering (and our experience with it) draws us closer to the story of Jesus.

The story of suffering in Christian history is to be an encouragement, though, and not a downer, for God has overcome death. Hebrews 12:1 also tells us how the story of our spiritual ancestors and fellow believers can set us free to do the work of the gospel: “since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us.”

God’s work is one great story involving centuries of believers—both great and completely unknown and with stories of victory and suffering—with Jesus and his story at the foundation. Paul’s message tells us we are not to let the work of those who have gone before us be in vain; instead, we are to remember their suffering and embrace suffering ourselves, remembering that we will better understand the gospel message if we do.



CONNECTED TEXTS

Colossians 4:18
Hebrews 12:1

DISCUSSION STARTERS

Share examples of how others, historic or present day, have suffered on your behalf, and stories of those who have suffered for the gospel in your midst.

QUESTIONS

Drawing a link between Paul in his jail cell to DCC in Denver in 2010...What do you think it means for us to remember his chains?

How can we not only remember Paul's suffering for the gospel, but more than that, remember the suffering of Jesus on our behalf?

Recall some of the themes of the wilderness teaching during lent and relate them to this passage.

How can we turn our own suffering into something creative, some kind of advance for the gospel? How can we share our suffering with others in a way that is encouraging?

ACTION STEP

Think of your own season of deepest suffering and with that in mind, answer the last question above on paper, then commit it to the Lord in prayer.



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WEEK THREE NOTES



WEEK 4 :: JUNE 27

JUST SHUT UP AND LIVE :: ACTS 42-47

We've all seen them, whether we've been a part or not. It's the group of friends who has known each other forever. They know each other's funny and dirty habits. They can push buttons, reminisce over hilarious memories, and be protective of old wounds. It's a tightly wound group—a cord that can't be broken. It's a group where each member is intimately known, loved regardless, and cared for in the deepest way.

And if you're looking in on that group, do you find yourself yearning to be a part of it? Do you desire to be committed to friends and cared for that way? It's human nature to want it—and really, it's human necessity to experience that kind of relationship in some sense.

How many of us have tried to break into that group to find that we were unwelcome? Perhaps the cord was too tightly wound to add another to its number. Rather than experience what a new member might have to offer, the existing members shut you out and focused on what they already had.

Here's a tricky question. What about when this happens, not with a group of friends, but with a church?

The Church of Acts was one crazy-close group. They shared food, clothing, shelter along with a common faith and love. They met the needs of all in their group and cared for each member as though they were a family. Within the church existed every possibility for the congregation to become inward-focused, care for their own, and forget about the world.

But instead, what happened? The Bible says they added to their number daily.

Just as an onlooker to a group of old friends desires to participate in that friendship, when nonbelievers look into a church community, what they see should make them desire to be a part. And rather than behaving as a group of friends might, we should welcome them into the arms of a loving church family, accepting them as part of the community of Christ.

While we are members of a community that loves and supports one another, it is not exclusive. Christ's love is for all. And as a family experiences growing pains with each member added, so too the church adjusts to new growth. But we never turn away. We rejoice in those being added to our number daily.

CONNECTED TEXTS

Acts 2:42-47

Romans 16:1-3

1 Corinthians 12:25



DISCUSSION STARTERS

Talk about a time in your life when you were rejected or turned away from a group. Why did you want to be a part of the group? What did it feel like to be turned down?

QUESTIONS

Why are we so protective of our church? Why is it hard to allow new people in? Are we leery that our relationships will be diluted? That things may change? That we will feel overexposed?

What are the benefits to an ever-increasing community? What are the drawbacks? What are the differences between an earthly view and an eternal view of a growing church?

Why did you join DCC? Do you still find those appealing components within the church? What about our church community would entice someone else to join DCC?

What are some practical ways that a growing church can avoid becoming inwardly-focused? How can the church do this as a whole and what do the individual members need to do to make it happen?

ACTION STEP

On Sunday, introduce yourself to one new person. Add weekly to the number of those who are a part of your faith journey at DCC.



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WEEK FOUR NOTES