

Seeking God Series Discussion Guides January - February 2022

Week 1 - Surrendered Hearts

SURRENDERED HEARTS

Teaching Text

2 Chronicles 16:9

“For the eyes of the LORD move to and fro throughout the earth that He may strongly support those whose heart is completely His. You have acted foolishly in this. Indeed, from now on you will surely have wars.”

Recap

This Sunday, we began our January sermon series, “Seeking God.” Pastor Jon pointed out that though we know God is a “seeking” God, we rarely consider who or what He is seeking. This week we saw that God is seeking surrendered hearts, wholly devoted to Him, by looking at the life of King Asa in 2 Chronicles. Asa’s reign over Judah displays both whole-hearted devotion and the tragedy of half-heartedness.

In the early days of his rule we see attributes of whole-heartedness on display. King Asa passionately calls the people to repent of generations of idols and compromise, ushering in a reformation and peace in the whole kingdom. Later, we see him turn to God in prayer under pressure of military attack, choosing to depend on God, rather than embrace self-reliance. Right after this, the prophet Azariah comes to him with a word that God will continue to be

with him if he continues to seek Him. King Asa is not only encouraged, but responds to the prophetic by destroying idols in his new territory with courage and confidence. Finally, in response to God's faithfulness, King Asa gathers the people together to sacrifice the plunder, acknowledge and rejoice in what God has done, and make a covenant to continue seeking Him as a people.

The Lord then gives Asa peace on every side of his kingdom, but in this time of peace and prosperity, King Asa actually begins to forget God, becoming half-hearted. We see his half-heartedness grow as a similar military problem arises, and instead of turning to God, he turns to a neighboring king, making a covenant with man and forsaking his oath to God. King Asa displays self-reliance, not Godly dependance, and ultimately would face on-going war because of this decision. When another prophet, Hanani, comes to rebuke him with the Word of God, Asa is convicted and angered instead of encouraged, in-prisoning the prophet and abusing his influence over the people. At the end of his life, the king is suffering from a disease in his feet and refuses to seek God, so consumed by himself that He cannot even lift his eyes to the God that has helped him so many times before.

If King Asa, who saw signs and wonders and a whole nation declaring a covenant to God, experienced the tragedy of half-heartedness in his life, then we must certainly expect that the same could happen to us if we do not take care to keep seeking God with whole hearts. Pastor Jon exhorted us to resolve to diligently seek God, identify and renounce any division in our hearts (not managing idols but destroying them), and reignite our passion for seeking God. A half-hearted response is inappropriate towards a whole-hearted God who loves us and spared no expense to save us. God is seeking hearts that will whole-heartedly love Him back.

Week 2 - The Lost

THE LOST

Teaching Text

Luke 19:1-10

Jesus entered Jericho and was passing through. A man was there by the name of Zacchaeus; he was a chief tax collector and was wealthy. He wanted to see who Jesus was, but because he was short he could not see over the crowd. So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore-fig tree to see him, since Jesus was coming that way. When Jesus reached the spot, he looked up and said to him, "Zacchaeus, come down immediately. I must stay at your house today." So he came down at once and welcomed him gladly. All the people saw this and began to mutter, "He has gone to be the guest of a sinner." But Zacchaeus stood up and said to the Lord, "Look, Lord! Here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount." Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house, because this man, too, is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost."

Recap

This Sunday, Pastor Jon continued our January sermon series, "Seeking God," by examining the story of Zacchaeus and the lengths that God will go to seek to save the lost. Jesus' Great Commission at the end of Matthew's gospel commands His followers to "go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit,"

establishing that the priority of Heaven is bringing the lost home, and forcing us to ask, “Is it also ours?”

In Luke 19 we see this priority on display as we find Jesus coming to the end of His ministry, heading to Jerusalem and the cross, when He decides to make an unexpected stop in Jericho. The crowds have come to see Him, and in a moment of desperation to catch a glimpse of Jesus, a man named Zacchaeus climbs into a tree for a better view of this ‘friend of sinners’. Zacchaeus was a wealthy, chief tax collector, notorious for increasing the elite’s wealth, but outcast by the Jewish people for taxing them and the Holy Land so severely. However, in an inappropriate and extraordinary moment of mercy, Jesus stops under the tree to call Zacchaeus down by name, telling him that He must stay at his house that day. This moment of recognition from Jesus scandalizes the crowds. They did not understand why He would want to spend His time with such a man, but Jesus’ free, radical grace and acceptance transforms Zacchaeus on the spot, causing him to give away half of his wealth and pay back anyone he had cheated four times the amount. No matter what Zaccheous had done, Jesus did not ask him to clean up his act before He would commune with him. This is the good news of the Gospel, that all you have to do is see Jesus calling to you, and come down from your place of observation and enter into the invitation of intimacy and relationship with the Savior of the world.

Pastor Jon called us to reclaim the heart of Jesus for the lost seen in this story both as individuals and as a church. Very little of Jesus’ ministry happened in moments of comfort or caution, but at the redemptive edge in places of criticism and darkness. If we want to see the things of Jesus happen in the world around us, we must be willing to go to those places too. Scripture says “God so loved the world,” so should we. Today, ‘lostness’ looks like people hiding their longing and desperation for more underneath the veneer of success and striving. However, we cannot comprehend the hunger of the human heart or the power of the gospel to satisfy it, but we can be willing to see every person who does not know Jesus through His eyes: not yet redeemed, but redeemable. For the Gospel of Jesus is the only message in the world that acknowledges both the beauty of the human soul and the brokenness of it, and still says it is worth saving. The church of Christ was made to continue His mission to seek and save the lost, meeting them with the unexpected, life-altering, grace of the Gospel.

Week 3 - Intercessors

INTERCESSORS

Teaching Text

Isaiah 59:16 (NKJV)

*He saw that there was no man,
And wondered that there was no intercessor;
Therefore His own arm brought salvation for Him;
And His own righteousness, it sustained Him.*

Recap

This Sunday, guest pastor Corey Russell continued our Seeking God series by teaching on the Intercessor. Anchoring his teaching in Isaiah 59, Pastor Corey pointed out that the lack of justice on earth is tied to the separation between God and humanity because of our sin nature, and this displeases God. The text also revealed that God is deeply and emotionally invested in the state of humanity, and in His longing for justice, sought out a human intercessor to stand in the gap for the purpose of our reconciliation to Him. Intercessors are living proof of God's love for humanity, emerging for the purpose of salvation, and when God could not find an intercessor on earth, He stretched out His own arm towards us, becoming fully human in Christ Jesus, so that He could be our intercessor.

The purpose of intercession is redemption. We see this fully lived out through Jesus, who bridged the breach of sin and death with His resurrected body, so that we might dwell with God in eternal glory. Outside of His death, the greatest impact Jesus left on His disciples was

His prayer life. While He displayed His role and function as the ultimate intercessor, He also taught us how to intercede for others in prayer, and that we should. Marked by humility, power, and persistence, the outward fruit of Jesus' ministry was connected to a private life of prayer and surrendering His will to the Father's.

What Jesus accomplished on the cross frees us from ourselves, justifying us, so that we can fully receive His intercession. Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is living out eternity in the throne room of heaven, interceding for us to be sanctified and completely caught up in His goodness, love, and mercy, so that we might join Him in prayer for others. He has sent us His own Holy Spirit to be our eternal intercessor, making us in one spirit with Jesus' feelings, prayers, and thoughts. The offer available to us as believers is to give over control to the Holy Spirit, saying, "Employ me in the work of intercession," and believe that God can imbue power into our prayers to transcend time and distance to touch people in real ways and in real time.

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Week 4 - Worshipers

WORSHIPERS

Teaching Text

John 4:3-42

So he left Judea and went back once more to Galilee. Now he had to go through Samaria. So he came to a town in Samaria called Sychar, near the plot of ground Jacob had given to his son Joseph. Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired as he was from the journey, sat down by the well. It was about noon. When a Samaritan woman came to draw water, Jesus said to her, "Will you give me a drink?" (His disciples had gone into the town to buy food.) 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.[a]) 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." "Sir," the woman said, "you have nothing to draw with and the well is deep. Where can you get this living water? 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?" Jesus answered, "Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, 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." 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." He told her, "Go, call your husband and come back." "I have no husband," she replied. Jesus said to her, "You are right when you say you have no husband. 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." "Sir," the woman said, "I can see that you are a prophet. Our ancestors worshiped on

this mountain, but you Jews claim that the place where we must worship is in Jerusalem.” “Woman,” Jesus replied, “believe me, a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. You Samaritans worship what you do not know; we worship what we do know, for salvation is from the Jews. 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. God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in the Spirit and in truth.” The woman said, “I know that Messiah (called Christ) “is coming. When he comes, he will explain everything to us.” Then Jesus declared, “I, the one speaking to you—I am he.” 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?” Then, leaving her water jar, the woman went back to the town and said to the people, “Come, see a man who told me everything I ever did. Could this be the Messiah?” They came out of the town and made their way toward him. Meanwhile his disciples urged him, “Rabbi, eat something.” But he said to them, “I have food to eat that you know nothing about.” Then his disciples said to each other, “Could someone have brought him food?” “My food,” said Jesus, “is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work. Don’t you have a saying, ‘It’s still four months until harvest’? I tell you, open your eyes and look at the fields! They are ripe for harvest.

Recap

On Sunday, Pastor Jon continued our Seeking God series with the John 4 story of Jesus and the Samaritan woman at the well. Through this passage, we see how God wants to satisfy the deepest cries of our heart by thrilling us with Himself. God has a passion for worship. He invites us into a relationship with Him so we can taste Living Water and find in Him the satisfaction of our thirst that cannot be quenched by anything or anyone but Him.

In John 4, we see Jesus confront false religion, man made traditions, and sin in order to free the woman from lesser forms of love. In response, the woman worships, celebrates, and spreads the good news of the Messiah. When we are confronted by Jesus and His love in our own lives, we can use this as a model for our own response: worship, celebration, and mission.

Discussion Questions

Connect

1. What is your funniest, coolest, or most secretive talent?

Character

Ask multiple people to split up the teaching text (John 4:3-42) and read it aloud, then ask your group the following questions:

1. What words, images, or phrases stuck out to you?
2. What does this passage reveal about God's character?

Consider

1. We all have a thirst that can only be quenched by Jesus, our Living Water. Did the Holy Spirit reveal any specific things you do to quench this thirst apart from Him? What can you do about this?
2. What can worship practically look like in your life this week? Celebration? Mission?

Cover

Spend time (at the end or the beginning of your meeting) casting vision and setting goals for this next season of Community Group. You can ask what group members hope to give/receive from this group, and what they want to commit to together.

Talk about how this season's focus will be MISSION: living missionally, justice, and evangelism. Outline the different missional practices for each month:

1. February—fasting one meal a week and pooling money together to bless a person, family, or organization.
2. March—handing out meals to those experiencing homelessness.
3. April—experiencing Alpha and inviting friends to join the course.

Week 5 - Advocates

ADVOCATES

Teaching Text

Ezekiel 22:23-31

Again the word of the Lord came to me: "Son of man, say to the land, 'You are a land that has not been cleansed or rained on in the day of wrath.' There is a conspiracy of her princes within her like a roaring lion tearing its prey; they devour people, take treasures and precious things and make many widows within her. Her priests do violence to my law and profane my holy things; they do not distinguish between the holy and the common; they teach that there is no difference between the unclean and the clean; and they shut their eyes to the keeping of my Sabbaths, so that I am profaned among them. Her officials within her are like wolves tearing their prey; they shed blood and kill people to make unjust gain. Her prophets whitewash these deeds for them by false visions and lying divinations. They say, 'This is what the Sovereign Lord says'—when the Lord has not spoken. The people of the land practice extortion and commit robbery; they oppress the poor and needy and mistreat the foreigner, denying them justice. "I looked for someone among them who would build up the wall and stand before me in the gap on behalf of the land so I would not have to destroy it, but I found no one. So I will pour out my wrath on them and consume them with my fiery anger, bringing down on their own heads all they have done, declares the Sovereign Lord."

Recap

This Sunday, Pastor Suzy continued our "Seeking God" series by preaching from Ezekiel 22. The prophet Ezekiel delivers a vision he receives about the judgment to come on Jerusalem in return for the sins of God's people. In the face of this sin, God in His holiness must bring about justice, yet He longs to show mercy—instead of immediately pronouncing judgment, He declares that He looked for a man among them who would repair the broken wall and stand in the breach on behalf of the people. Ultimately, as Ezekiel prophesies, though God seeks He cannot find a single person to stand in the breach and advocate for the Israelites. This pattern continues with every generation, as God continues to seek one righteous person to be an advocate for a sinful people, not finding one until finally He sends Jesus to come and stand in the gap. This is the faithfulness of God: when He can't find anyone to restore the wall, He sends His own Son to live in perfect relationship with God and with others, and to intercede for us even as He is dying on the cross. Today, those of us who have been brought into a new covenant with God by the blood and intercession of Jesus are called to become like the type of person God is seeking—those will stand in the gap on behalf of a sinful city and nation and call our communities to repentance. To do this, we must repent of our own sins; live righteously, disciple others, work to rebuild society; and become people of prayer who serve our city.

Discussion Questions

Connect

1. What's your favorite way to keep warm in the cold winter?

Character

Suzy talked about God's search for an intercessor throughout the Bible and mentioned Abraham, Moses, and Hezekiah (just a few of many).

1. What do their stories tell you about the character of God?
2. What does Jesus do differently from these people?

Consider

God is always actively looking for ways to extend mercy. Have your group sit with this idea for a minute, and consider what the Holy Spirit brings up. Then, ask at least one of the following questions:

1. Why do you think God disciplines those He loves? What can you remember the next time you experience His discipline?

2. Why do we need the Holy Spirit to be intercessors for others? What are some practical ways you can practice interceding for others this week?

Cover

Pray with each other, and ask God to reveal the things that are keeping you opposed to Him. Then, ask for opportunities to stand in the gap for others.

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