

Who We Are: Week 1 - Knowing God's Love

Getting Started

Share ways in which you have discovered or known God's love for yourself

Biblical Context

2 Timothy was written to Timothy with the intention of being shared with the wider church at Ephesus. Ephesus was a wealthy, political city and the church here struggled with the tendency to want to reduce the larger truth claims of Christianity to be able to ease back into a comfortable place within Ephesian society. Paul writes to Timothy here to confront some of this false teaching and to provide a means of correction and guidance.

Read 2 Timothy 3:1-17

The first of our vision as a church is 'Knowing God's Love'; the way we know about God's love is being Saturated in the Bible. As Christians we recognise that the Bible is God's authoritative word to us. It is God's revealed word for how we should live in relationship with him and with others. Throughout Scripture we are reminded of the importance of obeying God's commands in Scripture. That is why at Panshanger Church we strive to do what the Bible says even when it may not be what we want to because of what it may cost us personally or because of the way it conflicts with the culture around us.

Discover Meaning

1. In v.1 Paul says there will be 'terrible times.' Looking at v.1-5 together, is he talking about these things happening within the church or outside of the church? How do you know?

The terrible times being described by the list is actually describing people within the church. we can know this because in v.5 it says these people will 'have a form of godliness.' Therefore, these are people within the church claiming to be Christians but clearly not living that way if this list is any indication.

2. What do you think Paul means in v.5 when he says 'have a form of godliness but deny its power?'

Outwardly they seem to know the truth, but they have not allowed the truth to affect the way they live. Therefore, their faith is powerless. As opposed to true faith which is powerful because it leads to obedience.

3. Why does Paul tell the church to stay away from these kinds of people (look at v. 6-9)?

Paul urges us to stay away from people like this because they don't speak the truth (v. 8). They instead twist the truth to take advantage of people who are already sinful (both men and women) and thus make it easier to just keep living sinful lives while believing they are Christians (v. 6). Despite all they know they don't ever really grasp the truth (v. 7). Ultimately, Paul says this kind of faith will not get them very far (v. 9).

4. What do you think v. 15 means when it says that the Scriptures "are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus?"

Scripture contains God's promises and God's solution for sin. It reveals the character of God and the work of Jesus. Thus, it is this knowledge of God and what Jesus has done that enables us to find forgiveness through faith in Jesus.

5. According to v. 16, how might the Bible be used to help us when false teachers come around as in Timothy's church?

Paul says Scripture is useful for teaching - this strengthens believers in the truth; rebuking - this disciplines believers who start to go off course; and correcting - this corrects wrong doctrine and helps to adjust behaviour.

6. So far we've learned that the Bible reveals God, gives us knowledge of salvation, and teaches us truth. According to v. 17, what is another thing that Scripture does in our lives?

It fully prepares us for the work that God has for us to do.

Application for Me

1. In v. 1-5, Paul describes a list of traits that don't sound like the types of things that should be happening within the Church and yet if we don't saturate ourselves in the truth of Scripture we can easily go off course. What are some ways that it's easy for you to go off course if you start to drift from the God's Word?

2. In v. 13, Paul says that evil doers and imposters continue to deceive others and to be deceived themselves. What are some ways that Christians today can be deceived in living the Christian life? What are some false ideas that we need to be on guard against? (one example: prosperity gospel)

3. In v. 10-12, Paul talks about his own life as a measure to know that his instructions can be trusted. He points out that he has suffered and been persecuted and suggests that all who obey God's Word will experience some persecution. Do you think this is true? Why or Why not?

4. How do you think being saturated in the Bible might better help us to Know God's Love?

Why is this Important for Panshanger Church?

- Take some time to discuss why you think this might be an important value for us as a church.
- How does this shape who we are as a church?
- How do you see us doing this well as a church?
- What can you do as a home group to help us to be even better at living out this value within our church?
- How is this value lived out within your home group?

Close with Prayer

Who We Are: Week 2 - Growing in the Holy Spirit

Getting Started

Discuss:

1. What does it mean to you to be dependent on someone else?
2. What are some areas where you have no choice but to depend on someone else? How does that make you feel? What are the positives and/or negatives of this?
3. What is the hardest thing about being dependent on someone else? What is the best thing?

Biblical Context

The book of Luke was written as a letter to a man named Theophilus who was most likely a Gentile Christian in the midst of what began as a Jewish faith movement. Luke seems to be writing to give Theophilus some reassurance in his faith in Jesus and in Jesus' work of salvation. The passage we read in Luke 4 is a snapshot of Jesus' ministry. It is a moment for the reader to decide whether he/she believes that Jesus truly has fulfilled the promises spoken of in Isaiah.

Read Luke 4:14-21

The second part of our vision at Panshanger Church is 'Growing in the Holy Spirit' we do this by being dependent on God's Spirit. Throughout Scripture we see people of God being used by God through the power of his Holy Spirit. In the Old Testament we see God's Spirit rest on a prophet or a king for a time to carry out God's purposes. In the New Testament we see God's Spirit rest on Jesus as a sign that he was sent by God and empowered by God to bring about the rescue of all people. And Jesus then promises to leave God's Spirit with us as our helper and guide. Therefore, we believe that God's Spirit shapes our character, mobilises our gifting and helps us to live out our values.

Discover Meaning

1. Take a look at all of chapter 4 of Luke. How many times do you see Jesus being influenced by the Spirit?

V. 1 - Jesus is full of the Spirit and is led by the Spirit.

V. 14 - Jesus returns to Galilee in the power of the Spirit.

V. 18 - Quotes Isaiah saying the Spirit is on him

2. What do you think Luke wants us to understand about Jesus when he talks about this influence of God's Spirit?

Luke is making it clear to us that Jesus was full of the Spirit, which would mean he was sent from God. He tells us that it is the Spirit that leads Jesus' actions so it is God's will he follows and not his own. He says that it is by the power of the Spirit that he acts and not his own human ability. Ultimately, Jesus is completely dependent on the Holy Spirit for every aspect of his ministry.

3. Look again at v. 18-21. This is the passage from Isaiah 61 that Jesus read in the synagogue. Jesus declares in v. 21 that this Scripture has been fulfilled in him. What do these verses say that Jesus will do by the power of the Spirit?

He will proclaim good news to the poor (v. 18), freedom for prisoners (v. 18), recovery of sight for the blind (v.18), freedom from oppression (v. 18), and the year of the Lord's favour (v. 19).

4. What do you think is the significance of each of these things? What is it that God's Spirit has enabled Jesus to do?

For all of these statements there was a political reality for the Jewish hearers both in Isaiah's time and in Jesus'. Jews were oppressed by other nations, held captive by political realities of the time. Many would have been poor in a physical sense and would have longed for freedom from tyranny as well as the full practice of the year of Jubilee that was promised but probably never really practiced in Israel. The year of Jubilee would have been a practice in OT law whereby God declared freedom from debts, freedom for prisoners and returning of lost property every 50 years. Therefore, equality and liberation would have been possible even for the poorest within Israel. It's helpful to understand these realities when thinking about Jesus' reading of the text. However, Jesus' emphasis would have been more on the spiritual reality of salvation. In this moment Jesus inaugurated salvation and spiritual freedom. Thus, the poor (v. 18) would probably have been a reference to those most open and desiring to hear good news. The prisoners (v. 18) would have been those imprisoned by sin. The blind (v. 18) would have been those who are living in darkness without the knowledge of God. The oppressed (v.18) would have been those living under the weight of sin, pain and death apart from the hope of salvation. Jesus' coming death and the salvation he offers will bring about the year of the Lord's favour (v. 19), the Jubilee that had failed in the past would now be received by all who receive salvation. All will be forgiven of their debt of sin. All those enslaved by death and pain will be set free. All that was lost, including relationship with God, will be restored in Christ.

5. Why do you think that it is important for us to note that all of this comes as a result of God's Spirit filling, leading and empowering Jesus?

Jesus is a model for us of how a human being should live in relationship with God and be obedient to him. This shows us that the Holy Spirit is necessary for us to know and obey God.

Application for Me

1. Read 2 Corinthians 1:21-22. In light of our study in Luke, what do you think this passage in 2 Corinthians means for us?
2. How can you know if you're living a Spirit-dependent life?
3. What can you do to depend more on God's Spirit in the way that you live?
4. Why do you think it would be important to 'Grow in the Holy Spirit', to be Spirit Dependent? How might it help us live out the rest of our vision?

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Close with Prayer

Who We Are: Week 3 - Going in Christ's Name

Getting Started

Share some stories of people who have demonstrated what it is to be loving toward others. What was it particularly about those actions that was compelling to you?

Biblical Context

Romans was written by Paul as a letter to the church in Rome prior to his upcoming visit. In chapter 12 he takes time to specifically unpack how to apply Christian doctrine to everyday Christian living. As he points out at the start of chapter 12, Jesus' death made sacrifices obsolete but our sacrifice of obedience is always a part of Christian life as we pursue God's will for how we live.

Read Romans 12:9-12

The last part of our vision at Panshanger Church is 'Going in Christ's Name' a key part of this is Loving People. Scripture is full of admonitions that we should be loving to one another. But Jesus' teachings went far beyond commands to love our families or friends or even just people we liked, he tasked us with loving everyone. Jesus taught about the importance of loving strangers, loving outcasts, loving people who were not like us, and even loving people we would consider enemies. No one is exempt from God's command that we love others. We are to love all and all are called to be loving.

Discover Meaning

1. What does v. 9 tell us about love?

Love must be sincere.

2. What do you think Paul means by this statement in v. 9?

Love must be genuine. In the Greek, the word translated as "sincere" could also be "not hypocritical."

3. How do you think it's possible to genuinely love someone you don't "like" without being hypocritical?

We often think of love in an emotional sense, but Paul would probably have been referring more to what you do than how you feel.

4. Go through the rest of the passage and make a list of the actions Paul said should guide the way we love others.

5. What do you think it means to honour someone else above yourself?

Perhaps consider Philippians 2:3-4 as a helpful guide in your answer.

6. Can you notice any difference in the people who are to receive this love between v. 13 and v. 14?

In v. 13 Paul seems to imply that this love is aimed at people within our Christian community (i.e., "the Lord's people"), but in v. 14 onward there seems to be no such distinction. In fact, further down he specifically states this is for "everyone."

7. Considering v. 14-18, what do you think would be the result of loving non-Christians in this way? *It would build genuine relationships; it would improve what they think about Christians; it might draw some to want to know Jesus.*

8. Verses 19-21 speak specifically about revenge. What does Paul say is the right way to handle someone who has wronged you to the point of feeling like you'd want to take revenge?

9. In v. 20, Paul is quoting part of Proverbs 25:21-22. What do you think it means when he says, "In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head."

The sense is that by treating someone with love when they've wronged you it may cause them to feel guilty. But this is not a judgmental guilt designed to torment, but rather a Holy Spirit conviction that we pray would lead to repentance and salvation.

10. Recognising that Paul is talking about relationships and revenge, what do you think he means in v. 21?

He is reminding us not to allow ourselves to be overcome with an evil desire for revenge, but instead to overcome that evil desire with loving actions. Ultimately, the best way to overcome evil with good is to turn your enemy into a friend!

Application for Me

1. How might you demonstrate this type of genuine love for people inside and outside the church? Can you think of a specific example that you could put into practice this week?

2. Look again at the list you made earlier of the actions Paul gives us in this passage. Which of these do you find most easy to do? Why? Which of these do you find most difficult to do? Why?

3. In v. 11, Paul says to "keep your spiritual fervor," what is one thing you can do as an individual or as a group that can help you to keep your passion for serving God and loving others? What can you do when you start to feel stagnant or lacking in passion?

4. Paul gives the instruction in v. 13 to practice hospitality. This would seem a simple thing and yet it must be a necessary reminder just as much as not taking revenge. Why do you think this would be a needed reminder? What might be the obstacles that prevent us from being as hospitable as we should be? How could we change this?

5. When you have a desire for revenge, how might you overcome your evil desire with loving actions? Can you think of someone specific that you might need to let go of some anger toward? Perhaps take some time to pray within your group or on your own for that relationship and ask God to show you how you can begin to overcome the evil with good.

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Who We Are: Week 4 - Going in Christ's Name

Getting Started

Discuss how you would describe the word courageous

Biblical Context

Corinthians was written to the church in the bustling port city of Corinth. Corinth was a very diverse city. It was cosmopolitan, intellectually alert, materially prosperous and morally corrupt. Corinthian people would pursue wealth, athleticism (Olympic games) or pleasure by any means possible. It was into this atmosphere that Paul wrote to the church, encouraging them to embrace this at-any-cost attitude as a means of sharing the Gospel in their city.

Read 1 Corinthians 9:19-27

The second part of the third aspect of our vision of Going in Christ's Name is being Courageous in Mission. Jesus gave us his mission that we should share the good news of Jesus Christ to the end of the earth. We are reminded in Matthew 10:8, "...freely you have received, freely give." At Panshanger Church, we want to embrace the kind of courage that is brave, gutsy and willing to take risks. We want to embrace the mission of Jesus and courageously enter the least comfortable and most confrontational situations so that Jesus is represented there.

Discover Meaning

1. What does Paul mean in v. 19 when he says he makes himself a slave?

Though he is free to live his life as he chooses, he has chosen to limit himself according to other people's preferences and ways of living so that he can better relate to them.

2. What do you think is the point Paul is trying to make in v. 20-22? Who is he becoming like and for what purpose?

He says that he makes himself like a Jew, like a person under the law, like a person without the law and like a weak person. A Jew and a person under the law are probably a reference to the same type of person. That would be someone still living under OT law. A person without the law is probably a non-Jewish person. A weak person is probably someone who would find certain practices offensive or unacceptable. Paul sums up his point very well in v. 22. He wants to do whatever he has to do to help him to connect with as many people as possible so that they are able to share the Gospel with them.

NOTE: Paul did not set aside his principals but rather his personal preferences or comforts. It is never right to do wrong in order to do right!

3. If Paul was going to "become like" someone in order to share the Gospel, what does that imply about how well he knew them? What kind of relationship did he probably have with these people?

The implication here is that Paul was building relationships with people. He took the time to know them well enough to understand how to relate to them. He understood what was important to them,

what they valued, and how they chose to live so that he could know how best to communicate the Gospel.

4. In v. 24-27, Paul gives us a picture of why he's willing to live his life in this way. What is the picture or comparison he's using as his example in these verses? What is the end result he's aiming for?

Paul uses the example of competition and running because the Corinthian people would have been very involved with games that were much like the Olympic games. He tells them that at the end of the games they receive a crown (of leaves that will die) but if Christians who are obedient in the mission will receive a reward, a crown, that lasts forever.

5. What does v. 26 tell us about the Christian walk? Why might that be important for us to know?

It is purposeful! The courage and sacrifice it can take to share the Gospel can seem difficult but we can be encouraged that there is purpose.

Application for Me

1. The words in v. 25 that we translate as "competes in the games" is the word "agonizomai" in the Greek. This is where we get our word "agony." The implication is that the "strict training" of an Olympic athlete can feel like agony for the body - as true today as it was then. What are some situations where being Courageous in Mission could feel a bit like agony?

2. Corinth was known as a city where people pursued wealth and pleasure and physical prowess with reckless abandon. They would go to great lengths to have it all. Thus, Paul mimics this way of living saying the church should pursue Christ with reckless abandon and go to great lengths to share the Gospel. How would you describe the people where you live? What would you need to "become like" in order to build relationships and share the Gospel?

3. Paul said in v. 22 that he used "all possible means" to save even one person. What would it look like for you to use "all possible means?"

4. Paul uses vivid language in v. 27 to describe the lengths he will go to discipline himself so he can complete the race God has given him to the fullest extent of his ability. Do you honestly feel that you have the kind of passion to pursue God's call on your life even if it requires some painful discipline or reckless courage? Why or why not?

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