



## Week Four

### Opening Prayer

God, thank you for this time together. Thank you for allowing us to come to you with anything and everything — our faith, our doubts, our questions, our wrestles, and all our prayers. Help us to hear from you today. Amen.

### Talk It Over

During this series, we are examining Christlike responses to topics like racism, politicism, sexism, and pluralism. As we move through our discussion today, let's be mindful of the fact that our group is full of diverse stories and opinions. We are not here to force our views on others. Rather, our goal is to grow in friendship and faith and have a life-giving discussion that empowers all of us on our collective and individual journeys. In fact, even if you aren't a follower of Jesus, know this is a safe community to explore matters of faith.

This weekend we looked at the topic of pluralism. More specifically, religious pluralism or this idea that all religions lead to the same outcome or all religions are on the same path. As we move through this conversation today, let's remember that disagreeing with religious pluralism isn't an excuse to be condescending or disrespectful.

- What are some of the faith traditions you have been positively exposed to? These experiences can be from any phase of your life.
- From your own observations, what are some of the commonalities you have seen amongst the various faith traditions you have been exposed to?

### Read Acts 17:22-34 (MSG)

In this story, Paul is talking to a group of people who value and respect religion. This is a crowd and culture much like ours when it comes to the topic of religious pluralism. In other words, in this context, many believe that all well intended religious roads lead to the same general outcome.

- On a logical level, what challenges do you see with religious pluralism? For example, how can we say all religions are equal in value when they all claim contradictory things?
- Why do you think religious pluralism is such a common belief in our culture? Why do you think so many people are drawn to it's claims?
- One of the realities with religious pluralism is that it often comes off as love and acceptance. In what ways do you agree or disagree with this statement?

In this passage Paul is advocating to move the focus from the various gods being worshipped to the one true God who is the source, creator, and God over all. The God Paul is pointing to is the God over all the other gods.

- In your own words, how would you describe the God over all things?

### **Read John 14:6-7 (NIV)**

While the claims of this passage are considered extremely important in the Christian faith tradition, this passage is often used as a reason to force Jesus on others and bash other religions. But if you follow Jesus, remember it's not our job to force people to believe like us. We can trust that Jesus and lives changed by Jesus will tell a story of a powerful, good God.

- What good things have come to you because of Jesus?
- What keeps you committed to Jesus? Why do you follow him? Why would you say you need Jesus?
- What harm might we cause by feeling a need to force Jesus on others? If you have a story that captures this danger, feel free to share.
- There is a time and place to share about our devotion to Jesus. Describe a time you or someone else was able to share about your commitment to Jesus in a positive, life-giving, natural way.

### **Read Matthew 9:10-11 (TPT) and Luke 19:1-9 (NIV)**

This week we looked at two important clarifying details about Jesus: Jesus is for all people (not some people) and Jesus is about relationships (not religion). He didn't come to win arguments or debate. He came to offer a solution and love through the context of genuine relationships. As followers of Christ, this means we should look to invest in the Kingdom of God through the context of relationships too. This is true even when we look at the topic of sharing on our concerns with religious pluralism or the idea that all roads lead to the same place.

- Tell us about a time you were able to engage in any sort of difficult conversation in a positive way due to the trust, respect, or love invested in the relationship.
- Who in your life has modeled these ideas that Jesus is for all people and is all about relationship to you?
- In your own life, how can you grow at focusing more on people and relationships?

Jumping back to our opening passage where Paul tells the crowd about the one true God *and* looking at other passages in the Bible, we can learn various postures and attitudes to empower and equip us as we share about Jesus being the way. As we talk through these four specific ways of being that help us better engage in relationships, think of one person you love who you hope one day comes to know about God's love, grace, and power in a personal way.

### **Read Acts 17:22-23 (MSG)**

**One — Be present.** Paul paid attention to his surroundings and the context in which he found himself. Paul was so present that he was able to share his message through the customs, culture, and traditions of the place he found himself.

- Tell us about the life of the person you love and you hope one day knows Jesus. What are they into? Where do they spend their time? How are they emotionally and mentally?

### **Read 1 Peter 3:15-16 (NIV)**

Two — Showed respect.

- What does it mean to show respect to your friends customs, culture, and traditions?
- In what ways do you struggle to show respect to your friends customs, culture, and traditions?

### **Read Mark 10:44-45 (MSG)**

**Three — Serve.** Serving others is a way to show love. As we serve, we also need to always remember that people are not projects; people are the whole point.

- How can you serve your friend from a genuine, whole hearted place?
- In what ways do you struggle with serving for the sake of expecting something back?

- Have you ever been gifted with something only to discover strings were attached?
- How can we make sure to not serve others with strings?

### **Read John 3:16 (Voice)**

**Four — Love.** God loved us so much he didn't settle or give up on us.

- Why does your friend matter to you? Why do you want them to know Jesus?

This week we heard the following quote by Bryan Stone, "Evangelism is the offer of beauty rather than an exercise in positioning the good news within a crowded marketplace in an attempt to fight off the competition... The most evangelistic thing that the church can do in our time is to live beautifully before a watching world."

- In what ways do you see followers of Christ living in a beautiful way around you?
- What is something you can do to live in more attractive ways that shine Jesus?

### **Closing Prayer**

God, thank you for loving us and allowing us to extend your love to others. Thank you for inviting us to live on mission for you. Help us to see how to better invest in relationships and to better point people towards you. Give us courage to live well for you. Amen.

### **Group Logistics [A Reminder for New Groups]**

Are there are details or questions we need to cover for next week? Are we meeting at the same time and place? Who is owning snacks? Are there childcare questions to cover?

-----

### **How To Use this Discussion Guide**

The guide is meant to serve you and your group as you intentionally create space to grow in friendship and faith. Use the guide as a tool to help your unique group.

With that in mind, consider reviewing the guide before your group to see if some content or questions might resonate more or less with your group. Don't feel pressured to read all the content or to hit all the questions. The guide is not meant to be something you power through for the sake of completing. Pick the content from the guide you feel will help foster friendship and faith in your specific group.

In addition, spend some time praying for your group each week, preparing your heart, and asking God for wisdom and guidance as you lead.