



A MINISTRY OF GRACE COMMUNION INTERNATIONAL



# The Journey

2017 GenMin Camp Curriculum

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The Journey—(with Jesus): Camp Chapels, Devotionals and Resources

Life is a journey. But not one to walk alone. Life is meant to be a journey with Jesus. Life winds its way across all kinds of terrain. At times it's exciting, sometimes it boring. There are challenges to face and griefs to bear. There are joys to know and sorrows to share. But on that journey, the central thing going on is getting to know Jesus and the Father through him. And it takes a lifetime.

And second, it's about relationship with others: family, friends, brothers and sisters in Christ, teachers, employers, and others. For life is mainly about relationships. First with God because loves us so much that he has a grip on us and wants us to be in a growing relationship with him. And second with others—being a channel of God's love for us to others, and receiving from them reminders of God's love for us.

But how do we enjoy the gift of relationship God gives us by his grace? How can we get to know God and receive from him all he has to give? And how can we pass that love on to others? This week we'll explore how God's grace and love provides us everything we need so that we can come to know and trust him deeply and grow in our ability to pass on to others what he gives us—so that others too can know and enjoy his love, his grip on us.

We'll look at five ways we can receive from God and respond to him. We'll explore each of these ways to be in relationship, one a day. The chapel talk will introduce the main theme for the day and consider one primary Bible passage. We will provide two or three open reflection questions that can be discussed right afterwards. There will be a daily Devotional that addresses the same aspect of relationship for the day that can be done by counselors with their campers. It will focus on a different Bible passage. It can simply be read. Then there is one question provided with each Devotional to see if campers want further discussion or to ask questions.

This week is designed to get the students practicing these relationships during their time together. Suggestions will be made along the way about other ways to practice what they're learning about. One exercise will be the possibility of being in Prayer Partnerships during the week as well as thinking about serving others in simple ways. Instructions on setting up the Prayer Partnerships up will be provided. Throughout the week good Bible study will be modeled. The discussion times can foster a bit of genuine fellowship if made use of. Of course the chapel talks and morning meetings will provide opportunities for worship.

There are several places in these talks and devotionals that will get campers to consider joining a GCI church and/or youth group once they return. And also they will be prompted to think about continuing what they practiced and learned about their journey with Jesus, once they get back. A study from the Gospel of Mark will be provided for a youth leader or pastor to take the campers through after they've "come down from the mountain." We want campers to connect with a church, a community of faith and stay on the journey with Jesus and others.

### **Talk-Day 1—Our Journey with Jesus: Made for Relationship**

#### **Mark 12:28-31 Two Great Commands Matt. 11: 28-29 Take My Yoke upon you**

*We are yoked in relationship with Jesus on the life-long journey.* God has given us by his grace a good and right relationship with him through Jesus Christ. He loves us and wants us to live and benefit from all he's done for us. So he designed us to be in relationship with him, a life long and even eternal relationship of love. He sees us and takes an interest in us and will enable us to live in a growing relationship with him. For God's own life and being is one of relationship: between the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, for all eternity.

### **Talk 2—Our Journey with Jesus: A Relationship of Worship and Prayer**

#### **Mark 4:36-41 In the boat with Jesus**

*Relating to God through Prayer (especially in difficult times) on the life-long journey*

Being in a relationship with Jesus is like Jesus being with us in a boat as we sail through life. He's with us, even when we're going through stormy weather, when things don't seem to be going right. By prayer we can hand everything over to him, ourselves, our circumstances, our relationships. We can share anything and everything with him and we can receive from him his peace in prayer. Prayer is one way we can enjoy our relationship with God.

### **Talk 3--Our Journey with Jesus: Following and Getting to Know Him**

#### **Mark 1: 14-22 Calling of Andrew and Simon: Follow me, learn from me.**

*Following Jesus and learning about him and his ways from the Bible on our life-long Journey with him as he calls us by name to be with him.* Jesus invites us into a relationship of following him. In that relationship we become life-long learners about him and his ways. As we live out that relationship we grow, we are transformed from the inside out. And we learn about Jesus and his ways primarily from the Bible, which was written by those appointed by Jesus to be his representatives, who knew him and his ways well.

### **Talk 4: Our Journey with Jesus: Loving others with God's Love**

#### **Eph. 4:14-16: No longer infants, speak truth in love, build up body of Christ.**

*Being in relationship with Jesus and following him involves learning who he is and receiving his love.* But when we receive his love we want to pass it on to others. But that means we're also learning to love others. Being in relationship with God and others means learning how to love with God's kind of love. Staying in relationship with God will teach us how to love. And we learn how to love not alone, on our own, but with others. We'll talk about what true Christ-centered friendships are like and offer some ideas about what they are not. We'll point out that they don't have to be perfect and ideal for God to use them as channels of his blessing.

### **Day 5---- Our Journey with Jesus: Serving and Sharing with Others (in Hope)**

#### **John 4:1-45 The Woman at the Well—Come and see.**

*We are on a life-long journey with Jesus that reaches beyond our earthly life. We live in hope of him making everything right, in the end.* That's his promise. Because we can trust him to love us and to keep us forever, we can

freely serve others and share Jesus with them. And we can do so in very simple and ordinary ways, or in more complex and involved ways. We can be witnesses, like in a courtroom, to Jesus. We can introduce others to Jesus, like the woman at the well—so they can see and believe and trust in Jesus for themselves. We don't have to make anything happen. But God will prepare some people to receive from us, the best we have to offer—a relationship with God through Jesus. God can get us involved in his saving and reconciling work. That's why we're here. To receive from God and to pass what we receive on to others. That's the hope and joy of life.

## **Chapel Talk-Day 1—Our Journey with Jesus: Made for Relationship**

Have you ever noticed how so much of life is about relationships? We live in all kinds of relationships: between parents and children, between a husband and wife, (or your own Mom or Dad and a stepmom or stepdad) between brothers and sisters, between students and teachers or bosses and employees. Sometimes our lives are affected by the relationship between persons of different cultures, nations or races, or about those who live in different places in the world or in our own cities or towns.

And how things seem to be working out and how we seem to be “doing” has so much to do with what's going in some or all of these relationships. When relationships are going right, the whole world seems to be going right. When relationships are going wrong the whole world seems messed up.

Did you know the Bible (God's story) is all about relationships? Did you know that Christian faith is all about relationships? And not just Christian faith, life at its core is all about relationships. What the Bible tells us is God made us to live in relationship - right relationship. That's why we were created, and that's what makes our life good - living in right relationships.

But there's an even deeper reason we're made to live in relationship. We live in relation because God is Trinity! The deepest reason is because our Creator and Redeemer God is a fellowship a communion of the Three Divine Persons in Holy relationship. From all eternity and from before creation even existed, there has been loving, knowing and glorifying going on between the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Because God is Triune, God is Loving in his very being. If there were not three Persons, if there were not relationship in God, God would not be God—God would not be. So we were created by our Triune God for relationships.

God created and designed and intended for you to live in two right relationships: First with God, and then with others. And in that order. That's why when asked what's most important thing in God's mind or view, Jesus answered by saying that the greatest command for right living is to love God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength. And the second command for right living is to love your neighbor in a way that is like how you are loved by God (Mark 12:28-31). For that's what life is about. It's about who we're related to and how we relate to them.

And so we're going to talk about relationships this week. And were going to start with our most important relationship - our relationship with God - and his relationship with us. Why start there? Because that's where everything starts. It starts with God's relationship with us. Last year we talked a good bit about that. God has his grip on us because he loves us. That's a good way to think about God's relationship with us. The God of the universe has taken hold of us in Jesus Christ, his only begotten Son.

God's relationship with us is the foundation for everything else. The foundation for every other relationship we have, whether with parents, guardians, brothers or sisters, friends, teachers, employers, other Christians and even those who don't like us or who have something against us.

But as you know relationships involve two or more people. And because that's the case, when things are going right between both persons, the relationship is often amazing, and wonderful. But when they go bad, things can get pretty horrible. They sometimes go wrong because the problem is on both sides, but things can also go wrong when only one or the other person involved is off. And this is what happens a lot in our relationship with God. Let me explain.

Because we know God never releases his grip on you because he is perfect love and perfect rightness or righteousness and perfect truth and perfect goodness, we don't have to worry about God's side of things. God is always for us. He is always on our side. He knows what we need and what will harm us - even when we don't want to admit that what we are doing might not be the best. He is good and will always treat us out of his holy love. We're in his grip. He's got the whole world in his hands. And we see this in the life and teachings of Jesus. Jesus came to repair our broken relationship with God at his own cost and he is the one who told us and reassured us of God's good will and loving purposes for us—and for him. Jesus is the one who was crucified and resurrected to eternal life for us and for our salvation.

But here's the thing. To be in good relationship with God and with others, we need to learn to love like God loves us in Christ. We have bad habits that go way back that block us from receiving God's love and block us from sharing God's love with others. You see, we don't naturally trust God with our whole hearts, mind, souls and strength. We don't automatically treasure God and our relationship to God above all other good things because we don't understand the value of relationship. We don't fully listen to God's Word and believe that what it tells us will lead to abundant life, because we might not be convinced God is really for us - which he is. Because of this, we try to have a pleasant and easy life on our own with the idea we will turn to God only if we think we need him, or to help us get what we want.

But in his love for us, and because the way we think doesn't surprise God, he sent a way to not only make his relationship with us right, but to make our relationship with him good and right, full and free, leading to a abundant life. The way, of course is through Jesus Christ the Living Word of God and by his Holy Spirit who gave us the Written Word of God. As some great Christian teachers almost two thousand years ago said, God loves us with both his hands, and embraces us with both his arms, Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit.

The abundant or full life we are talking about happens as we grow up into God's love for us, growing into trusting and believing persons. And it will be a life-long process—because it's a

life-long relationship—in fact it's an eternal relationship that will never end. So life is about receiving from God and trusting more and more in God's goodness, his holy love and his good purposes for us and for all - even for the whole creation. And that's what this camp is about: Learning more and more to love and trust and hope in God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

We want you to learn this because your relationship with God works itself out in your relationship with others. As you receive and learn about God's love for you, you learn about loving others - even those you might think are "unloveable." Believe it or not, we do not naturally and automatically love others. Sometimes this is because others don't seem lovable, they do not always treat us well. They are not honest and faithful. They are not giving, forgiving or gracious. Well, they are not God. But probably just as often, others might feel the same about us and the problem is on our side, because, well, we aren't God either.. We can be just as mean, selfish, dishonest or greedy as others.

But sometimes it is simply because we are confused about what is loving, or how to love. There are many definitions of love floating around. Movies, songs, social media - even family and friends - give us very different examples of what a good relationship is like. Often good relationships are reduced to romantic relationships, being in love, or falling in love. Having a soul mate. Other times true love is being a hero, or better a super-hero with lots of power and influence and money to help others. Sometimes it's just being nice, not causing trouble, getting along with everyone. Sometimes love is said to mean needing to get angry or even rioting. Taking up a cause and pursuing it at any cost. Figuring out just what love is and what the most loving thing to do in a situation is not easy.

That's why we say that learning to love with God's kind of love is a life-long journey. It calls for growing in wisdom. For it's easy to be fooled and deceived or simply used and manipulated.

But God has provided for this as well. First he's given us his Living Word of God, Jesus Christ, and then he's given us His Holy Spirit and the Written Word of God. But then also God has given us people to travel along with us, those who are also on the road to learning to love God as God has loved us and to love our neighbors as we have been loved. We don't take this journey alone.

That's why God gives us his church, where we learn to help one another love God and love others by listening to, learning and receiving from God's Word, Living and Written. Some of us who are a bit older, or who have had a relationship with God longer can share what we've learned - much we've learned from hard lessons. The best thing we can do with our mistakes is to pass along the lessons we've learned to those of you who haven't yet committed those errors. It's interesting, because some believe we are telling people how to live to make their life seem restricted, or less fun. But it's just the opposite. We want to save you from some of the grief many have gone through before you. We do this because we know we are all traveling together as the children of God, regardless of age.

The life God has given you is a journey of relationships - relationships with God, with others, and with creation itself. It's a journey to grow in your relationship with God and receive from him all he has provided you and is providing you; you are in his grip. And out of that relationship

you also grow in learning how to be in good and right relationships with others. And that includes helping others learn to know God and receive from God his love and live by his wisdom about life and relationships. And you do this, not alone, but as part of God's people, as part of the Body of Christ, as those who belong to his church.

That life-long journey with Jesus is what today's devotional is all about. Let's read the passage together from Matthew 11:28-30:

*"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."* (NIV)

By speaking of our being yoked with him, Jesus is talking about our relationship with him. He's explaining a little bit of what it's about, what it's like. But even as he spoke to those disciples 2000 years ago, he is also speaking to you and me today. He's helping us live in right relationship with him, helping us receive and respond to him with all our heart, soul, mind and strength. He's setting us free to trust him fully, wholeheartedly as we listen to his word today.

In this passage, Jesus is inviting his listeners into a certain kind of relationship with him. He welcomes people to come to him to receive something from him. He tells them to be willing to learn from him. And he directs them to take and put on a yoke of some sort that he will give them. He is calling them into a very particular relationship with him of receiving from him and being directed by him. Even being tied in a certain way to him.

But he knows there is likely to be a barrier to their coming to him, or at least staying with him. There is possibly resistance to learning from him. They may think they know more than he knows or that he will deceive them, or that he doesn't have their best interest in mind. They may not trust him and not be willing to put on his yoke—whatever that is.

So what does Jesus do? He does not just tell them what to do; he tells them why they should do what he's inviting them to do. And the reason he gives for them to come to him, learn from him and to take on his yoke is because of who he is. He tells them who he is. He tells them about himself. This is vital, wouldn't you agree? It's very, very difficult to place our trust in someone we don't know. If we're going to trust him and do what he directs us to do, we have to know him. So he tells us about himself. That's the only way his listeners will do what he's asking of them. If they trust him and come to love him for who he is.

Here's what we find out from him: he is gentle, he is humble from his very heart. He also tells us his purpose, his intention. He shares with his listeners his heart. He wants to give us rest, a rest that reaches deep down to the bottom of who we are, to our very souls, the core of our being. That's how deep his compassion, his holy love, reaches

And notice that the way he speaks to those around him demonstrates right then and there that he is who he says he is. He is inviting. He is hospitable and welcoming. He is offering an invitation. And notice whom he invites. He knows that people are weary and burdened down by many things in life - probably mostly from bad relationships of one kind or another. So he invites those

in particular who are looking for help and relief. And recall this is the eternal Son of God speaking here, the creator of all things, the Holy One of God. He invites those who know and admit, at least to him, that they need his help; they need exactly what he has to offer.

Also notice also he offers two related things: first he offers them rest, a deep rest, a rest that reaches their very souls. This would remind many of his hearers of God's rest, of the Sabbath rest. Jesus has come to give something in particular—namely God's rest for the soul. Second he gives us *his* yoke.

The yoke was the wooden bar that joined two animals so they could work together. But in this case, unlike animals, we aren't just putting on any old yoke, we put on *his* yoke. Jesus wants us to be yoked together with him, not to share the load of what he has done, but to be with him and share in what he is doing. He wants us to stay in harmony with him, to go where he goes, get involved in what he's doing. We are yoked together in relationship *with him*. In that way we share in *his* life. And as we take on his yoke we will also share in his rest.

We should also remember that Jesus knows a lot about being yoked in relationship with others. He has been yoked with his Heavenly Father for all eternity. As we are yoked with him, we are also yoked with the Heavenly Father, through him!

So how can we respond to him and his offer of this kind of relationship? How do we benefit from the gift that he freely offers us of a close relationship with him?

Jesus tells us that as well. We simply come to him and walk with him, learning to live in a relationship with him as if we are yoked to him. And what's really cool is that he tells us that he will even teach us how to be yoked to him as we begin to be guided by him, receive from him and walk with him, yoked together with him.

We might be afraid or concerned that this will be too hard, too heavy. But Jesus knows we might be feeling that way and assures us that since the yoke of relationship we have with him is *his*, that it will be easy and light, especially compared to all other things we could be bound to, caught by, or enslaved to.

Jesus uses the image of the yoke to tell us of the kind of relationship he desires with us and to assure us that being yoked with him is never a burden. Rather, he takes our burdens upon himself and gives us rest. The closer our relationship with him is, the more rest we will experience. Jesus is humble and gentle with us; our relationship with him will not be heavy and hard, but a joy. And that's what the Journey with Jesus is like—for all our lives.

#### Discussion Questions:

1. What are one or two things that you found helpful in this chapel talk? And say why.
2. Is there something from the talk you'd like to discuss further?

3. What are some of the other things we can be tempted to be yoked to, bound to, caught by? How have you found these things to be heavy and wearying? (for example, yoked to the need to be liked by everyone and the burden that this brings of having to always make sure everyone is okay with us)

4. Think about some of the challenging situations or relationships you currently have in your life. Can you imagine how to go about dealing with these situations yoked to Jesus?

## **Chapel Talk 2 -- Our Journey with Jesus: A Relationship of Worship and Prayer**

*Mark 4:36-41 "And leaving the crowd behind, they took him with them in the boat, just as he was. Other boats were with him. A great windstorm arose, and the waves beat into the boat, so that the boat was already being swamped. But he was in the stern, asleep on the cushion; and they woke him up and said to him, "Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?" He woke up and rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, "Peace! Be still!" Then the wind ceased, and there was a dead calm. He said to them, "Why are you afraid? Have you still no faith?" And they were filled with great awe and said to one another, "Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?"*

Jesus came to earth so that we might have a deep and lasting relationship with God. Last chapel, we showed how Jesus used the image of a yoke to tell us about that relationship and what it would be like to be in a relationship with him. The most important thing about the yoke is who it belongs to, *whose* yoke it is. And so Jesus told us something about himself. But he also tells us we're going to be learning from him as we are yoked into relationship with him, and that relationship will bring rest.

Throughout all the Gospels, which tell us about Jesus and his relationship with his disciples and followers, we can learn about this Jesus who wants us to be yoked in relationship with him.

Today let's look at the story of Jesus and his disciples being yoked together in a boat, in the middle of a storm.

At the end of a long day, Jesus and the twelve disciples got into their boat and headed out to sea. The Sea of Galilee is large enough to have great storms with mighty winds that can seemingly come out of nowhere. This is exactly what happened on that day. The unexpected storm was powerful and dangerous. The winds pushed great waves of water into big heaps, maybe 6 to 8 feet high. And water was coming into the boat and threatening to eventually sink it. Like anyone would be, the disciples were scared and fearing for their lives. Jesus, on the other hand, was asleep, totally undisturbed by all the commotion.

In their panic, the disciples woke Jesus up and questioned him. Was he not concerned for them? Did he care? Jesus saw what was going on, heard their panic, and responded in a way that

shocked them. Rather than joining them in their panic, he rebuked the wind by simply saying: “Peace. Be still.” And his word had immediate effect. The storm was completely stilled to a “dead calm.”

Imagine the scene. And then, perhaps just as odd as Jesus’ remaining asleep during the storm was the fact disciples were still afraid. Why? Because now the object of their fear changed. They were no longer afraid of the storm, but they were wondering about Jesus. Who was this man who could calm the sea? Who could even imagine that a man could control the wind—and do so by talking to it? They had terribly underestimated who was in the boat with them.

They didn’t realize they were in a tiny boat with the one who was the creator of all things. The simple command they heard was the Word of the One who spoke everything into existence, and they were afraid. But their fear wasn’t a “let’s get away from this guy” kind of fear. Rather it’s with a fear called awe. This is a reverence, an amazement that took their breath away. Their fear was not of evil, but of the powerful good of God. And they were in that tiny boat with someone who had amazing power.

This type of awe and holy reverence leads us to worship. This moment was one of the times in Jesus’ life and ministry that the disciples realized this was not simply a man, but one who was from God and was one with God. They were in the presence of God as they stood frozen in the boat with the man Jesus.

Jesus asks them, have you no faith? He’s not trying to make them feel bad, he wants to reassure them by helping them see they can have trust and confidence in him. Further, he wants them to see that when he displays God’s power, it is for good. The Son of God was entrusted with the power that can control nature itself. When we see the power Jesus has, and that he uses it only for good, we know we can trust him. This trust leads to worship.

One of the purposes of this story is to help us see that our relationship with God through Jesus is not like any other relationship. It is a relationship of *worship*. That’s why we address Jesus as our Lord and Savior. What those first disciples began to discover was continually filled out as they walked with him day by day. Jesus is Lord because he is over everything that exists. Everything was created by the Father and through the Son, before the Son came to earth. And everything was to belong to the Son and reach its perfection through him. And he is Lord over every aspect of life since he created it, invented it, and knows it from the inside out. He designed it and knows how it works and what it’s for, its purpose. The Son of God knows every aspect of life from physics to biology to psychology, from history to engineering, to relationships, mental health, music and the all the arts. From politics to private life. He is Lord over all.

And this Jesus is not only Lord by being the creator and sustainer of all things, but he is also Savior. He is the one through whom God creates, and he is the one through whom the Father rescues, redeems, and restores. He is the one who makes right everything that is wrong, out of harmony, broken. He is the one who overcomes evil and sets us free from it. He has come to overcome evil and, in the end, to do away with it entirely. This Jesus is Savior, as well as Lord.

And finally, He is Immanuel, God with us. And that would be simply a fearful thing, except that he is totally good and uses his power to do good, including overcoming evil.

The Apostle John gives us one of the most important revelations about God in the whole Bible: “This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light and in him there is no darkness at all” (1John 1:5). We read it also from James who tells us that God is “the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change” (James 1:17). God is exactly like Jesus, all the way down. There is no dark, evil God behind the back of Jesus.

In Chapel 1 we learned we are yoked together with Jesus as Lord as God, who is creator of the universe. But his yoke is easy and burden is light and in him we find rest. But we all know life can be hit with a storm. We don’t feel rested in the midst of a storm, so where is Jesus in your storm.

This story reminds us that Jesus is with us even in the midst of storms. And sometimes it does indeed seem as if he doesn’t care—because he doesn’t do what we think or want him to do in that moment. There will be times like that for all of us. But he is with us and because of that, we need not fear evil, the evil that is out of our control, beyond our responsibility. Being yoked with him means giving him our full trust, our full confidence in his faithfulness.

But it also means we can come to him at any time, under any circumstances. ***And we can do that by prayer.*** He is always ready to listen. In fact he is in prayer for us. He continually intercedes for us as our Great High Priest. And he can help us pray, even when we don’t know how or what to pray.

So we can bring to him all our anxieties, all our troubles. Peter tells us to cast all our cares upon him because he cares for us (1 Peter 5:7). Paul tells us to rejoice in him always, and to pray: “*Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus*” (Phil. 4:6-7).

Did you know you can talk to him about anything and everything? Even if you’re sad or mad or fearful. You can come to him with all the good and with any guilt and shame. He knows all about you and wants you to come to him. You can talk things over with him. Even tell him jokes! You can especially express thanks to him for anything and everything good. After all, all good things exist because of God. And they are all gifts.

Most of all, we can especially be thankful that he has guaranteed that he will work everything together in such a way that it will contribute to good and to his good purposes. He can take bad and even evil things and make them contribute to something good. Even suffering. He’s that good. That faithful. You can entrust anything and everything to him: circumstances, relationships, feelings, thoughts, family, school, friends. You’re yoked with him and he’ll lead and guide you through any storm of life. That’s what it means to be yoked to him, to be in his boat, with him.

Did you notice that Paul says as we hand over all that is on our hearts to God, we can thank Him since Jesus already knows about all these things and is faithfully at work? You see, as we learn to entrust everything to him God gives us his own peace. We rest in his peace because God is not

made anxious by our anxieties. He knows who he is and what good he is up to in making us his children. He's confident in his work in us to make us more and more able to live in him by his Spirit. As we give him our anxieties, he gives us his peace in exchange.

And His peace, Paul tells us, is deeper than all understanding. We don't have to know how God will work in our lives or why we are dealing with what we are dealing with when we trust him. We simply know he is near and he will help us find our rest in him. This peace, Paul goes on, will guard our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus Himself. It will keep us close to him no matter what obstacles we may face. We may not see the answers to our prayers that we expect, but we will know by his Spirit that Jesus has us in his grip and God is committed to keeping us there as he works out his good purposes.

Being in the same boat with Jesus, Lord and Savior, we can bring all our hopes and fears to him. And in such a relationship with him, we can ride out any storms that may come along. He can give us his peace, peace that does not come from our circumstances, but comes from him, the One who is Lord of all.

1. During Jesus' ministry on earth, he revealed his power and authority as Lord and King. In today's chapel, we saw that Jesus has power over nature, over his creation. What are other areas that Jesus demonstrates his authority over? (illness, demons, sins)

2. How does knowing and remembering Jesus' power and authority over the earth and his commitment as Lord to bring about his good purposes help you in your daily life?

3. What do you think Paul means when he tells the Philippians to "rejoice always"? How can we rejoice even when we are facing difficult situations, ones that make us anxious, afraid, worried or confused?

### **Chapel Talk 3--Our Journey with Jesus: Following and Getting to Know Him**

This week we're exploring what it's like to live in a relationship with Jesus Christ, as Lord and Savior. Fortunately, we have stories throughout the Bible about people who were in relationship with God. Some of these people were used in powerful ways. The greatest story, of course, is that God himself came to us and revealed who he is and what being in a right relationship with him is like. Jesus brought with him "insider" knowledge of the eternal God and what it means to be in relationship with God. He would know, since the Son of God has been in an eternal relationship with the Father and the Holy Spirit. As we said before, eternally yoked to the Father in the Spirit.

Jesus is Immanuel - God with us - who tells us things we could never know unless he told us and told us in ways we could understand. And more than that, he appointed specific individuals to be his spokesmen, his interpreters—those he knew who "got it." These are the first apostles who first preached and were responsible for the writings we now call the Bible. We now trust the writings of those apostles who Jesus himself entrusted with what he told them about himself, about God the Father and Spirit. Through these apostles Jesus the Living Word of God has provided for us the gift of the Written Word of God, the Bible.

So what's it like to live in relationship with God through Jesus Christ and by the Holy Spirit and how does the Bible, the Written Word of God fit in?

A very simple passage from the life and teachings of Jesus tells us a whole lot—and provides the basis for us to live in relationship with Jesus. Let's read the passage:

*Mark 1:14-22 "Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God, and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news." As Jesus passed along the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the sea — for they were fishermen. And Jesus said to them, "Follow me, and I will make you become fishers of men." And immediately they left their nets and followed him. As he went a little farther, he saw James son of Zebedee and his brother John, who were in their boat mending the nets. Immediately he called them; and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men, and followed him. They went to Capernaum; and when*

*the sabbath came, he entered the synagogue and taught. They were astounded at his teaching, for he taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes.”*

Jesus himself came to proclaim or announce a message of good news. That’s what we call the Gospel—Gospel means good news. It’s like what a messenger would tell a small kingdom whose king had gone out to battle with an enemy of another kingdom. The good news announced would be that their King had won the war and they would not be ransacked and taken over by the enemy king. Their own King would return and continue ruling over them. They were freed from their enemies.

So Jesus announced the good news that his kingdom has come. He was bringing the good news of the victory of God over evil. Because Jesus came and because of what he accomplished, people could now begin to live under the rule and reign of God. People could now live under the kingship of Jesus as King of kings and Lord of lords. That’s God’s grace.

God came to us in Jesus because of his love and his grace. We didn’t do anything to make God do it. We did not deserve it. But God freely gives us his Son, Jesus, and began to establish his Kingdom with Jesus as its King. That’s another way to speak of how God has a grip on us. The King has come and so now we can be citizens of his Kingdom, living under his rule and reign. Always safe under our eternal loving King.

So being in relationship with Jesus is like living in his kingdom and knowing our King loves us, has the best in mind for us, and is for us. This makes living under his rule and authority part of enjoying all the benefits of belonging to him and to his kingdom. It means taking on his ways of living, the ways of his kingdom, the ways he sets out for us.

But how do we begin? If Jesus has brought the good news of the glorious victory of God near to us so that we can live as citizens of his Kingdom and follow his ways, how do we respond? This was the same question the first disciples had. Jesus’ response to them is the same response to us.

There are two basic parts to our response of Jesus’ announcement of who he is and what he has done for us: repent and believe. Though these two responses sound like separate things, they are closely related.

Repenting is far more than simply being sorry for something you have done. To repent means to turn away from something and to turn towards something else. When we turn away from something that is wrong we are at the same time turning toward something that is right.

Jesus is telling his very first disciples to turn away from living under the rule and reign of any other lord or king and to turn towards him and live in relationship to him as Lord and King. This is a matter of trust, which requires belief. Let me explain:

When we turn towards Jesus as our Lord and King, we are believing or trusting in him over any other person or authority and we trust or believe in his ways over any other ways. So we repent of belonging to any other kingdom or king and believe and trust alone in Jesus and his kingdom. We live in total trust and loyalty to him as our Lord and Savior. We worship him alone. We give

him alone our ultimate allegiance. We live as if we belong to Jesus, with all we are and all we have. Nothing left over. His apostle Paul put it this way:

*“Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God, and that you are not your own? For you were bought with a price; therefore glorify God in your body.” (Cor. 6:19-20)*

You might be asking, “But what if I can’t make that response, especially consistently and perfectly?” Jesus knows you can’t, and he can take care of it. In fact he has already provided for that. And that’s why he does two things in relationship to us, two things we see right here in his relationship with his first disciples.

First, he calls us to himself by name. Jesus comes to each person individually. He knows each one of us and he knows all about us. And in his time and in his way he calls us by name to begin to respond to him and be in a relationship with him. He invites us in; he welcomes us. He gives us his hospitality, like someone who invites you into their home, has you sit down and offers you a drink and a snack. Or like someone who says, “Make yourself at home.” Jesus takes the initiative. He makes the first move, and continues to reach out and draw us in. He does not give up.

Second, notice that Jesus not only approaches and calls each one by name; he invites them into a very particular kind of relationship with him. That is a relationship that matches being a part of his coming Kingdom and relating to him as Lord and God. He instructs these men to follow him. Following him means joining him - going where he goes, being involved in what he is doing, listening to what he says. It’s really sticking with him, no matter what. That’s a lot like being yoked to him isn’t it? It’s a lot like being in a boat with him! That’s the kind of relationship he offers to us and invites us into.

Being a Christian means becoming a follower of Jesus, being in relationship with him every day, every minute. Trusting Jesus, being one of his followers and being a citizen of his coming Kingdom means *it’s a life-long relationship*. While sometimes our relationship with Jesus will have a recognizable starting point, from our side, that relationship is for life. And it’s daily. Being a follower of Jesus is not just a Sunday only or every other day affair. It’s 24-7, as we say these days. And so it involves all we do and say, all we are and have.

And that’s because Jesus is going somewhere. He’s not standing still. So as we follow him, he’s taking us somewhere with him. Jesus does meet us where we are and accepts us as we are. We don’t have to move an inch. But as our Lord and Savior, his love is so great that he does not leave us where he finds us. He loves us too much to do that. He takes us with him to where he is going! He’s taking us to better places - on a spiritual journey that affects us at the deepest roots of who we are, the deepest and darkest places too.

Notice that Jesus tells us that as we follow him he will make us *become* something far more than we could be on our own. He tells these fishers of fish that as they follow him they’ll become fishers of men. Now that’s a big change - a huge transformation. He doesn’t tell them all that that will involve, but they know that it is a far greater and higher calling than they ever aspired to.

No one who ever meets Jesus stays the same after they meet Jesus. He's too good and loving to simply leave things alone and not bother us. Love desires the perfection of the beloved - that's you. But also love is patient and kind and so does not rush things. But God's love and grace does not give up. He keeps working with us, and on us, and in us.

Notice too that as these first followers began to trust in Jesus and count on his coming Kingdom, they left things behind. They repented of their fishing careers and their broken nets that needed mending. They even left their family business, showing they could even leave perfectly good things behind to be with him and go where he was leading, so they could get to know him and get involved in what he was doing.

So repenting and believing in Jesus and in his coming kingdom involves a daily and life-long following him, being with him, staying with him.

And if we stray from him, that's not the end of the line at all. He remains a faithful Lord and comes after us so we can turn around and come back to him as he welcomes us. We saw this happen with his own disciples. At times they all had trouble following him, sticking with him, working out his plan.

And notice another thing I think you'll find interesting. The fisherman followed Jesus right into the place where the worship of the God of Israel was taking place, in the synagogue. It was in the synagogue where the word of God was read, discussed and lived out. And in that place of worship, Jesus began to teach those who were willing to listen to him and learn from him.

Jesus would read from the portion of the Bible they had in their day, the Old Testament. And he would explain to them what it meant and how it revealed who God was and how it pointed to his own coming. And the listeners who were willing to learn from him noticed something. They noticed how Jesus had an authority far, far greater than anyone they had ever known. Jesus explained scripture that came from God's prophets in such a meaningful way, they quickly recognized he knew what he was talking about!

That was because Jesus was not just explaining to them something about a word from God, but he was explaining about himself - the Living Word of God. Imagine it, the Living Word of God was explaining to them the Written Word of God. He was the one behind the Written Word of God, so yes, of course, he did know what he was talking about. It wasn't that difficult for the disciples to begin to respond to his absolutely unique authority. They trusted what they heard from him and began to live by it as they followed him. For he alone spoke with the authority of God, the God who gave life and who saves life.

A little bit later in the story, the followers of Jesus were called his disciples. Being a disciple meant that you learned from the one you were following. Being a disciple means coming under the discipline of a spiritual teacher. *A follower of Jesus is a life-long learner* because Jesus is a life-long teacher. His disciples recognized his absolute authority and so listened and lived by his teaching, his words, as if he was their Victorious King and Savior—because he was!

They spent time with him and got to know him. The more we follow Jesus, the more we learn about him. The more we learn about him the more we learn to trust and receive from him. We become more responsive to him and to his leading and guiding. We get to know his ways, his will and his purpose and aims. We get to know his heart and his mind. We come to desire to be a better follower of his and live under his Lordship as members of his coming Kingdom.

This is a life-long journey that changes us from the inside out. That transformation is the gift of becoming truly who God made and intended us to be. And it happens in and through our relationship with Jesus as his followers, as his disciples. He is the one who blazes the trail for us, as we walk on the journey. He is the one who frees and enables us to follow him where he takes us—our whole life long.

To help illustrate this relationship, let me share what most people learn when they first adopt a dog. Everyone wants a well-trained dog, so they start by teaching the dog to do certain things. Sit, Stay, Shake, Roll over. The owners assume that what you want to do is issue a command, then the dog understands the command and does what you want. But if that's all you're aiming for, that is not true training. These commands are simply teaching the dog a few tricks.

Training a dog is much harder than teaching it a few tricks. It involves teaching the dog to pay attention to you and to go with and follow you. You become the leader (the Alpha dog) and the pet becomes the follower. The dog doesn't so much obey your commands as learns to respond to you—sometimes without you saying a word.

For example: teaching a dog to “heel” is more than teaching a dog to walk with you. When a dog “heels” properly, it's walking next to you, a little behind and with you. And it's on a “loose leash.” You're not pulling the dog along and the dog is not taking you for a walk! How does this happen? You teach the dog to pay attention to you. When you go, the dog starts to go with you. When you go fast or when you go slow, the dog goes at your speed, adjusting to you. When you stop, the dog senses you're stopping and stops right with you. The dog continually attends to you—the relationship and communication is happening every moment of the whole walk. You're walking together. It's a joy then for you and the dog to go on a walk, a journey with each other. No pushing and pulling, no shouting or barking. It's a wonder, simply being together. A real relationship develops.

Most humans can go on a walk together without using a leash or barking commands at each other. But that happens only if you're paying close attention to each other (and not looking at your smart phone). You can see this even as birds, for instance, fly in formation together or as fish swim in their schools. But they all are paying attention to each other moment by moment.

But then the problems arise. As you are training your dog, it gets distracted by everything. Another dog, a leaf blowing in the wind, a drainage grate along the curb, a child riding a bike, a squirrel running across the pathway. At first all these things take the dog's attention entirely away from the trainer. When this occurs, you know your dog is not taking its cues from you, but from all the circumstances encountered. It takes time, but a well-trained dog learns that all it needs to do is pay attention to whomever is taking him or her for a walk. When this happens, there is harmony and all is well.

And isn't that how it is with us? We're not that much different from an easily distracted and often-spooked untrained dog. We're distracted, worried or far more interested in things around us. We forget we're on a journey with Jesus and that he is Lord and Savior. He is the one we want to pay attention to, to learn from. It's his will and ways that lead to good and abundant life. He is the one overseeing everything. He is the one who can give us his peace, his joy, his very presence as we walk through life with him. He is the one in whom we can put our hope. And God's gift of Scripture is the training manual for Jesus followers. The written Word of God is indispensable for learning about Jesus' ways and paying attention to him—to where he's doing, what he's up to, what captures his heart and mind, as we are on our life-long journey with him. And that way, we are not just doing tricks for Jesus, but are enjoying a walk, in ever deeper relationship with him.

When you believe that God knows what he is doing and that he is true to his promises, you can believe that God is working everything together for good - for your good. When we believe this, we can believe we are on a journey as followers of Jesus living by his Word each and every day our lives.

1. What are one or two things that you found helpful in this chapel talk? And say why.
2. Is there something from the talk you'd like to discuss further?
3. What do you already know about Jesus – His character, His concerns and purposes? What might you do to get to know him better?
4. The illustration about dog training pointed to the importance of distinguishing the dog owner's voice over the other "voices" or distractions. What other "voices" are you dealing with in your life and what are they saying? How do you distinguish Jesus' voice from the others? What is Jesus telling you in contrast to what other voices are saying?

#### **Chapel Talk 4: Our Journey with Jesus: Loving others with God's Love**

When Jesus is the center of how we live our lives - meaning we are loyal to him and dependent upon him - all our relationships are affected. When we allow Jesus to direct and guide us, then he is present in every one of our relationships. And it changes the way we view others. Let me explain:

With Christ at the center of our lives and our relationships, we stop thinking in terms of "Christ for us" and "Christ against them" - rather, we start to see others with Jesus Christ standing with them, and being *for* them. And just like with he is with us, he is against anything that is against them. We know that Christ came and died and rose again for them just as he did for us. He freely offers them the same forgiveness and healing he gives us. With Christ at the center, we recognize everyone we meet belongs to Jesus Christ. For he is their Creator and Redeemer. He is their God - whether they acknowledge this truth or not.

With Christ at the center, we relate to others knowing that the best thing we can give to them is Jesus Christ so that they might know him and put their trust in him and surrender their lives to him. In that way they join us in our fellowship with God through Jesus and begin receiving from him like we do. We want them to know that Jesus came to shed light on their lives and give them true life. We want them to receive from Jesus all he has to offer by trusting him and living by his Word.

Since Jesus is Lord and Savior of all, and since we are, by grace the children of God and servants of Jesus Christ, we realize that Jesus Christ is involved in every relationship we have, whether with parents, teachers, employers, friends, relatives, FB friends, or pastors. Jesus Christ is Lord and Savior of all our relationships. He rules over, watches over and has good plans and purposes for all our relationships. He works them together for good - so that together they reflect the goodness, truth and love of God.

The problem is we don't *know* automatically how to love, we have to learn.. And some of the examples and/or experiences we have of love are distorted or misleading. *Everything that goes by the name of love is not necessarily true love, nor a reflection of God's own kind of love.* When we experience false or warped things done in the name of love - especially by those close to us -

it's difficult to trust. And we may even question if we even want God to be close or involved in our lives.

God understands this and wants us to understand his definition of love, so he sent us Jesus. Jesus teaches us what it means to be loved and to love others with God's good kind of love. We learn of true love first by looking at Jesus' relationship with the Father. We can find that especially in the Gospels of the New Testament. We are given quite a bit of information about that relationship from Jesus himself in the Gospels, especially in John chapter 17. You might want to read that sometime.

In his life Jesus continually demonstrates true and real love for God that leads to life and good and right relationships. He also shows us how to have good relationship with others. In those relationships with others, we find that Jesus lives out his relationship with the Father and the Spirit towards others. A careful study of his *whole* life in *detail* will show us that he alone has perfectly fulfilled the two greatest commands: the love for God and, out of that relationship, the love for neighbor. But notice the point, Jesus love for others came from his relationship of love for God.

God gives us the story of Jesus and his teachings so we can learn from those relationships. As we read about how he relates to God as his father, and we see the special relationship he had with others, our heart desires to be in that kind of relationship. And more, our heart desires to pass that kind of love on to others.

And one thing you will find is that God's kind of love (and the love Jesus demonstrated) is far more than simply being nice or kind - love is much more than simply giving others what they want or simply eliminating anything that is uncomfortable, or costly or inconvenient, or even sometimes painful. Sometimes people want what is not best or even good for them. God's kind of love has to do with offering and directing us to what is actually and always good and true and that leads to an abundant life - a life that flows from our belonging to God and living in a worship relationship with him.

We learn some things about good and true love from the writings of the Apostle Paul. We are going to read a passage from his letter to the Church in the city of Ephesus, but first let's make it clear that Paul is speaking to a group in relationship, not just to individuals who are all on their own. Unfortunately we can sometimes get the idea that we *are* all on our own with God. That God simply deals with us individually and apart from one another. But that flies in the face of a relational God who designed us to be in right relationship with him and then with others. A special and particular community of people God wants to work through are those who know him, trust him and worship him as the Body of Christ, or the church. When we're with Jesus we're brought together with all those others who are with him.

So in this passage Paul is writing to a church group, explaining to them how *together* they can lead a life that demonstrates the significance and value of their relationship with Christ and how *together* they could grow up to become mature human beings with Christ. Here's the passage in Ephesians 4:14-16:

*“Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of people in their deceitful scheming. Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the head, that is, Christ. From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.”*

There are many benefits to having a relationship with others in the body of Christ. When we share stories of our personal journey with Jesus, they too, can learn and benefit. When we listen to others, we too can learn. Together we grow closer to him and we don't allow ourselves to fall for lies about him. Together, and with good teachers, we can recognize false teachings that move us away from Christ being the center, and therefore away from enjoying the peace and joy he is sharing with us in his Spirit. It's easier to do this together than to try to do this alone. God designed it to be that way.

Another benefit Paul notes is that as we grow up together and come to know Christ and his word better, we can “speak the truth in love” to one another. Now that's a very interesting way to put it, and it makes sense. If the truth is what we come to know of Jesus and his ways, then truth and love work perfectly together. We speak the truth out of our love for others. And because we love them, we speak truth.

Sadly, sometimes people - even in the church - are loving while neglecting the truth, or are truthful without being very loving. Keeping love and truth together is not easy. But that is where God wants to take his people as we all help one another move into relationship with Jesus - who loves all of us more than we could ever imagine. Paul reminds us elsewhere that we will need at times to be forgiving of one another, but not to give up on either the truth or the love in the process.

Think about your own life and relationships. Isn't what you really want, (or perhaps I should say, what you want to want), especially from people you trust, both love *and* truth? You want their patience, kindness, gentleness and hope, but you also want them to tell you the truth, be honest, and to give you help you cannot give yourself. You want truth that helps, that encourages, that builds up, and that even corrects if it helps you avoid making a costly mistake. And you want it only from those who truly care for you.

Makes sense, doesn't it. We want truth from those who are for us, who are on our side, who want us to succeed and flourish - in other words, from people who love us. Truth without love often comes across as hurtful, condemning. And love without truth comes across as dishonest and fake. A love that simply approves of everything and everyone without a thought, with no discernment, isn't worth very much, is it? To grow up, to find real life, we need God's kind of truth and love working together.

Paul was telling the Ephesians and us that's a lot of what belonging to a church and having true friends and family is all about—the truth and love of God directing us towards what is good in life here and now, and also beyond this life, in eternity. And the best we can offer others is the truth and love of Christ and the good life in relationship to him we find there.

Now notice the final point in this passage. Paul is telling us that when we are growing up in Christ together, when we are learning how to speak the truth in love with one another, that whole church is built up, strengthened, encouraged. It becomes truly knit together. We find this at camp, don't we? When we are growing together, learning how to speak the truth in love with one another, our relationships are stronger and camp is better. In just a few days we go from being individuals at camp, to being a camp family.

It is in this environment that we start to develop a desire to share God's love with others so they can also participate in a church family.

Perhaps now it makes sense why the Bible calls those who are living in relationship with Jesus, under his Word, *brothers and sisters*. We are all brothers and sisters. Now some of us are elder brothers and sisters, and others are younger ones. But that's how to think of relationships among those who are followers of Jesus.

Another word that indicates this kind of relationship is *friendship*. Members of Christ's body experience friendships that are directed by God's kind of love. And for the first time in our life, we can have relationship with a friend, Jesus Christ, who never lets us down, is never disappointed, and who loves us unconditionally. Sounds too good to be true, doesn't it.

Have you ever looked for what you think would be the perfect friend? Have you found one yet? Every time you think you have, disappointment occurs—doesn't it. Have you ever tried to be the perfect friend? It's impossible. One of the reasons you may have not found the perfect friend or have given up is because God's kind of love, centered in Jesus Christ wasn't a part of what you were looking for. *Being involved in Christ-centered and directed friendships makes a world of difference—even if it doesn't bring perfection.*

While I say being a perfect friend is really impossible, I'm not suggesting that you don't offer the very best you have. But you know you aren't perfect, and so you sometimes feel guilty about the way you treat a friend. And you might even feel guilty because you realize you aren't treating Jesus as the perfect friend. But that's OK because perfection is not what Jesus needs from you right now. Why not? Because you are not yet perfect, and he knows it, and he loves you just the way you are! We are all becoming who God intends us to be in our relationship with him through Jesus, and by his Spirit and according to his Word. We are all becoming beings. And God's not worried about that.

Let's cover some things a good friend is not:

- Being a friend does not mean that you mean everything to someone or can save them. Only Jesus can be your friend's savior.
- Being a friend does not mean you can always solve or even help solve your friends problems. But that's when we turn to others and ultimately to God himself.
- Being a friend does not mean you totally and completely understand each other. We don't even totally or completely understand ourselves! What we want to do is turn each other towards God who does know us completely and totally.
- Being a friend does not mean you have to approve, like and be enthusiastic about everything your friend thinks, feels, believes or does. Some differences may be simply personality and preferences. You can still be friends with others with Christ at the center.

Some of the difference may be that some things you or your friend thinks, feels or does are not in line with friendship with Jesus and not being guided by his Word. But your job is not to fix the other person. You can share with them your difference or listen to them when they indicate a difference to you and weigh them up, perhaps with the help of an older brother or sister in Christ who knows the Word of God well. (Remember that your parents are also elder brothers and sisters in Christ! They should probably be the first ones to consult!)

- And finally, being in a Christ-centered friendship as brothers and sisters does not mean that you have to be able to perfectly empathize with them: feel what they experience, or know exactly what they're going through. We can go through things with them—even tough times. But only Jesus knows exactly what they're doing through. He does understand. But he will also lead us into the truth and lead them to put their faith, hope and love in him no matter what their circumstances may be. Friends remind each other of this.

The best way to be a good friend to someone is to go on a journey with them, to grow together in your relationship to God. It is to remind them of who God is, what God is like and what he has done for them. A true friend invites others into their relationship with God just like Jesus invites us into his relationship with God the Father and the Holy Spirit. Being a friend means reminding others by words and in how we act toward and around them of God's love, of God's forgiveness, of God's faithful work in their lives. We remind and encourage one another of the peace of God, the joy of God and the hope we have in God. We review and study God's Word together. We pray with and for each other.

Good friends get involved in things together that Jesus is doing now in the world by his Word and Spirit. These can be very simple and ordinary things. Good friends work together to avoid things that pull us away from Christ and his ways, and discern together what those things are. And again, we often need help from others who are more mature and informed about God's Word. Good friends are truthful and loving to each other.

One last thing to be reminded of about God's kind of love. God's kind of love does not manipulate or control others. It does not give in order to get. God's kind of love freely gives and freely receives. This is the kind of love God is giving us, right here and now! And it's the kind of love he wants us to give to others.

When we extend the kind of love to others that we are receiving from God, we love them with no strings attached. We love them whether or not they love us back. We give freely—and if something good is given back we freely receive it—not out of obligation or feeling we will now have to repay them but out of love. But here's the key: the only way to love others with no strings attached and to receive love from others with no strings attached, is to have *all* our strings attached to Jesus Christ. That is, we worship God alone. We do not worship our friendships; we worship the one who gave us our friendships.

That's what Christ-centered relationships are all about.

1. What points in this talk about Christ-centered relationships were most helpful to you in thinking about your own relationships?
2. What do you think makes good friendships hard to develop and keep?
3. Is there something from the talk you'd like to discuss further?

### **Gen Min Chapel 5-- Our Journey with Jesus: Serving and Sharing with Others**

This week we've been sharing about our life and relationship to God through Jesus. We've talked about how being yoked to Jesus unfolds in a life-long journey of following him through all our joys and struggles. And we find that the Lord and Savior of the universe has been in the boat with us all along, and he can calm any storm we might face. We talked about how our trust and confidence in his faithfulness leads us to regular prayer and worship, praise and thanksgiving, and to making him the center of our lives. We become followers as we grow up as his true adopted children. And we shared that Jesus, as Lord of all, is involved in all our relationships and has a design and purpose for them. He can work in and through us to encourage and strengthen others by helping us see others as he sees them. In all our relationships we learn to love as Christ loved us, with truth and hope.

We're on a life-long journey with Jesus, joining him in what he is doing. We don't know how long the journey will be; it's pretty obvious that none of us in this room have reached the end of the road. Jesus is still blazing the trail and asks us to join him. And he promises to see us to the end. He will never give up on us; he will never abandon us or leave us orphans. He is faithful for eternity, and he asks us to be faithful as well.

Our final destination - what Jesus calls our perfection - is not in this life or age, it is in a future we can only imagine - a future where everything is made right. It's a future we hope for. And hope is key.

Many people today live in despair, anxiety, fear, resentment, anger and frustration. They don't see a solution to their problems. They live without hope because they don't know they have been called, welcomed, redeemed, forgiven and loved. They don't know God who sent his only Son and who raised that Son from the grave. They don't know Jesus is alive forever, and that he is our hope - our only hope. They don't realize that God in Christ is lord over all of history and will bring an end to all evil—and put everything right.

And this is where we begin today's lesson.

Because we live in hope of our Lord and Savior and what he has in store for us and for the world we can sum up our response to that hope in two words: **Worship and Witness.**

**First we live in a worship relationship with the Triune God through Jesus Christ.** The chapel messages have been talking about what this is like: following Jesus, being his disciples, loving God with all we are and have. In our daily worship and our weekly gatherings in worship we use words and actions to point to God, and we hear from God as we listen to his Word read and proclaimed. We respond directly to him in prayer, song, confession, praise and requests or petitions.

Notice that worship is just the name for the central way we demonstrate our personal relationship with God through Jesus. Worship is the core of our relationship with God, given to us as a free gift of grace simply because God loves us and has provided everything for us in Jesus and by his Holy Spirit. That is why we worship God alone, and that's why we love this God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength!

Our worship to God leads to the second response: Witness.

**We live in a witness relationship with all others, through Jesus Christ.**

The word witness may bring up a negative feeling. We've seen "witnesses for Jesus" portrayed on TV, and no one wants to be one of those witnesses. So rather than define witness by what we see on TV or in the media, let's use the New Testament meaning for the word. A witness is someone who tells others what he or she has seen or heard.

Think about a courtroom setting. A witness tells the court, the judge, jury, the lawyers, and the public what they know and what they have seen. They are sharing first-hand experience with those who were not present and therefore do not have the knowledge they need to make a decision. They are needed to present the facts for those who did not see or hear what they witnessed. Witnesses tell about what others don't and couldn't know directly at that point in time. What is even better in a courtroom is when there are multiple witnesses, all sharing the same story..

And notice that witness don't just testify about themselves. Yes, they will share their involvement with the story - often called a testimony - but usually they witness to what they saw, or heard. A witness passes on to others what the others don't yet know or understand, or haven't yet heard. And a witness helps others know more directly the truth about something. They are helping others understand something significant.

And this is exactly what we do when we witness about Jesus. We are passing on to others what they don't yet know or understand about God, his love for them, and his desire for relationship with them. And often, we can start by sharing our personal story of what it means to be in relationship with Jesus Christ and to know him as the Lord of our life.

Witnessing enables those of us who are in a Worship relationship with God to serve and love those around us by sharing what we know, as far as we know, of who God is and what he has done, is doing and will do for us. And we do so, so that others might also live in relationship with the Triune God.

A witness is a representative - or as the Bible terms it - an Ambassador.

A witness is a representative of what it means to walk in Christ. A witness points others to Jesus, who points them to the Father. In everything we do and say, we represent to others the one we Worship so that they might worship with us. And of course as they do, they will assist us in our worship. They'll point us to who God is. They'll remind us and encourage us. And together, we'll be witnesses and representatives of Jesus, sharing relationship.

A witness introduces others to Jesus so others can share in the joy of living in relationship.

Henrietta Mears, a Christian education pastor in southern California, years ago summed it all up by saying we're here "To Know Jesus and Make him Known." That's the meaning and purpose of life. It's all about knowing God in worship and making him known in witness. Being such a witness or representative is a good way to sum up our relationship with others while here on earth. This is sometimes also called evangelism.

Until he returns, Jesus is continuing to gather people to himself. He's seeking worshipers of the Father by making the Father known and sending his Spirit to be with us and in us. When we're witnessing, we're not doing something *for* God as much as we are doing something *with* God. It's participating in what God is doing. In tremendous love and joy, Jesus continues to serve and minister and make God known so that others might believe, trust, love and hope in God. To share that joy with us, he invites us to participate. So when we're being witnesses, we're actually getting to work with Jesus. For he is the One True Witness of God.

Let's look at a story in the New Testament about Jesus inviting someone to participate with him in witnessing and see what we can learn from this story. We are going to read John 4 and talk about "The Woman at the Well."

*John 4:1-6 - Now when Jesus learned that the Pharisees had heard that Jesus was making and baptizing more disciples than John (although Jesus himself did not baptize, but only his disciples), he left Judea and departed again for Galilee. And he had to pass through Samaria. So he came to a town of Samaria called Sychar, near the field that Jacob had given to his son Joseph. Jacob's well was there; so Jesus, wearied as he was from his journey, was sitting beside the well. It was about the sixth hour.*

*John 4:7-15 A woman from Samaria came to draw water. Jesus said to her, Give me a drink." (For his disciples had gone away into the city to buy food.) The Samaritan woman said to him, "How is it that you, a Jew, ask for a drink from me, a woman of Samaria?" (For Jews have no dealings with Samaritans.) Jesus answered her, "If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is*

saying to you, 'Give me a drink,' you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water." The woman said to him, "Sir, you have nothing to draw water with, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water? Are you greater than our father Jacob? He gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did his sons and his livestock." Jesus said to her, "Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again. The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life." The woman said to him, "Sir, give me this water, so that I will not be thirsty or have to come here to draw water."

*John 4:16-26* Jesus said to her, "Go, call your husband, and come here." The woman answered him, "I have no husband." Jesus said to her, "You are right in saying, 'I have no husband'; for you have had five husbands, and the one you now have is not your husband. What you have said is true." The woman said to him, "Sir, I perceive that you are a prophet. Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, but you say that in Jerusalem is the place where people ought to worship." 21 Jesus said to her, "Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father. You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship him. God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth." The woman said to him, "I know that Messiah is coming (he who is called Christ). When he comes, he will tell us all things." Jesus said to her, "I who speak to you am he."

*John 4:27-30* Just then his disciples came back. They marveled that he was talking with a woman, but no one said, "What do you seek?" or, "Why are you talking with her?" So the woman left her water jar and went away into town and said to the people, "Come, see a man who told me all that I ever did. Can this be the Christ?" They went out of the town and were coming to him.

*John 4:31-34* Meanwhile the disciples were urging him, saying, "Rabbi, eat." But he said to them, "I have food to eat that you do not know about." So the disciples said to one another, "Has anyone brought him something to eat?" Jesus said to them, "My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to accomplish his work..."

*John 4:39-42* Many Samaritans from that town believed in him because of the woman's testimony, "He told me all that I ever did." So when the Samaritans came to him, they asked him to stay with them, and he stayed there two days. And many more believed because of his word. They said to the woman, "It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is indeed the Savior of the world."

Notice first that Jesus introduced himself to the woman. He took the initiative. It was a surprising initiative because Jewish persons like Jesus were not expected to interact with any Samaritans, especially a woman, and especially midday at a well. But that opened up a door to the beginning of a relationship through a conversation.

And notice how the conversation moved gently step by step. He was letting her know bit by bit who he was—since she had no idea. But he didn't just pull up in a truck and dump the whole load at once. Notice he was engaging and listened to her. In fact he begins by asking her for her help! He needs a drink of water.

His asking for water leads to a revelation that she has a kind of spiritual hunger. She responds to Jesus with questions and he follows that up by answering her questions as each one comes up. Then Jesus asks her a question—one that leads to her admitting that she has no husband. Jesus responds by affirming her honesty and reveals that he knows more of her story than she has told him. She has experienced a number of failed marriages and now seems to have given up on marriage or perhaps has let a man take advantage of her.

But she is not primarily focused on her past or present. It is clear that she is also interested in worshiping God and worshiping God rightly. Speaking to her concerns, Jesus leads her to see more of who he is and that he has unimaginably good things to give her from God: life itself. And finally he tells her outright, who he is: "I am he." And at that point she is ready for this revelation. She takes it all in. She received everything Jesus gives her—and begins to recognize who he is, the Messiah, God's Son come to fulfill all God's promises. She has begun to worship God, in Spirit and in Truth as Jesus describes it. Her heart was opened by the Spirit and Jesus poured his life into her. And it began to pour out of her too! Like living water.

At this point, she becomes a very simple witness. What does she do? She testifies about Jesus' knowledge of her life and wonders aloud to others if he is the Messiah. She's being a witness. She tells them what she knows and invites them to come meet him themselves: "Come, see a man who told me all that I ever did." And then she puts forth the same question she had asked herself about Jesus as he told her who he was, "Can this be the Christ?" She simply directs them to Jesus. And some apparently began right then to believe that God's Messiah had come. But not everyone.

But notice that she does not expect all of them to believe her just because of what she tells them. She has a bad reputation among most of them. She is not the best witness as far as her character goes. But that does not stop her. She doesn't get in an argument with them and say they really ought to believe her. She is not offended and does not storm off. She knows it's not about her. She's a witness not to herself but to Jesus. So what does she do? She points away from herself to him, directly to the one she's pointing to.

And what happens? Many of them do go and see. She introduces them to Jesus and they go and meet him and begin to enter into their own relationship with him. Verse 41 "So when the Samaritans of the village came to him, they asked him to stay with them, and he stayed there two days. And many more believed because of his word. They said to the woman, 'It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is indeed the Savior of the world.'"

This Samaritan woman - a woman of poor reputation - got to be a witness. God used her to direct others to the Savior of the world and to begin worshiping God now in Spirit and Truth. She did not have to have all the answers. She did not have to be a perfect example. She did not have to convince them herself. She did not convert them. But she experienced the honor and dignity of simply being a witness, an ambassador. What a joy. What a privilege. Her fellow villagers would now be able to drink with her the living water that Jesus freely gives. She got to be a part of what God himself was doing in and through Jesus—bringing people into relationship so that they might receive him and the eternal life he brings to us all.

In this simple story we see both worship and witness lived out in this woman's life, as she responds to Jesus' ministry to her. Jesus reveals to her who he is and what he has to offer her through a relationship of faith and trust in him and his word and Spirit. As she begins to worship, she also is moved, in a natural sort of way, to become a joyful, free and enthusiastic witness to Jesus. This Samaritan woman is a wonderful example of the essence of living the Christian life in relationship with Jesus Christ—a relationship and journey that will be life long, yoked to her Messiah, Lord and Savior and serving as a joyful, free and living witness to him.

There are many ways to be a witness or express our witness to Jesus. There are many ways to represent Jesus to others. Most of them are very simple and not too difficult.

- Jesus talks about giving or even receiving a cup of water.
- He talks about giving to others out of what you might have, even if very little.
- Forgiveness is another way to show God's love.
- Being patient and helpful to others is another way.
- Helping those in need in a way that signals God's own help counts.
- Studying God's word together can also simply serve.
- Being a peacemaker so that differences can be worked out between people or groups is also another way.

There are also larger and more life encompassing ways to be witnesses in word and deed.

- Being simply among those who gather together for worship as a community is one.
- Being brothers and sisters in Christ, another.
- Being a child of a parent or of guardians or being parents of children are other huge ways to live out a witness to God.
- Getting an education can also be a way—as we seek knowledge and truth, usually about some aspect of the creation.
- A very simple job paid or volunteer can be a way—any good work, points to God's own good work.
- Being someone (or being someone who thanks those) who clean or take care of children or do maintenance, or deliver mail, or check groceries, or fix cars or houses or are beauticians or gardeners or farmers. Any work done well and cheerfully can point to God.
- And then there are more complex ways too, such as being a nurse, doctor, lawyer, a scientist, a legislator or engineer or an artist or musician These often require more

education and experience, but God can still use them. The amount of money made has little to do with being a witness in our lives.

The point is God can use all these avenues, all these channels to point others to him and to the goodness of his universe—a universe which is still good, even if distorted and broken. Being a witness does not require making a big difference, it simply requires a faithfulness that is based on relationship with Jesus: being yoked to him, sailing through storms with him, following and learning from him, letting him be the center of all our relationships and discovering ways to serve others and bear witness to him. In all these ways we get to know Jesus and make him known.

1. What are one or two things that you found helpful in this chapel talk? And say why.
2. Is there something from the talk you'd like to discuss further?
3. Is there a time in your life where Jesus worked in a wonderful way that you would like to share with others to encourage them?
4. Can you think of some act of service you can do for someone in this camp today?