

Life Group Questions

Kingdom Power – a sermon series in Matthew 8-10

Sheep Among Wolves / Pastor Rob Penner / Matthew 10:16-25 / Nov. 20/21, 2021

To the Life Group leader: thank you for your ministry leading this Life Group. **Take time to review the questions, selecting those you believe will be most helpful for your group study.** You will not have time to use all the questions. Ask the Holy Spirit to guide you as you lead, as you select questions, and as you guide the discussion. As a team, we're praying for the Holy Spirit to guide you, lead you and speak through you.

As we near the end of this series on Kingdom Power from Matthew 8-10, today, we find ourselves in difficult territory, dealing with the topic of persecution. Though it often seems like persecution is something that someone else in the world may be experiencing, Jesus teaches that it is part of the normal Christian life.

Reconnect

Come together with these preliminary questions:

- Have you experienced persecution for any reason in your lifetime?
- How did the persecution impact your life?
- How did you deal with the persecution?

Open in Prayer

Invite God to speak into the lives of your group through His Spirit, through His Word, and through each other.

Message Recap

Review the message using these questions

1. What stood out to you most in this week's message?
2. What was the most meaningful thing you heard in the message? Why?
3. What questions are still lingering?

Choose discussion and application questions

1) **Jesus promised that Christians would be persecuted.**

According to the website of Open Doors, in the past year:

- Over 340 million Christians live in places where they may experience high levels of persecution and discrimination.
 - 4761 Christians were killed for their faith.
 - 4488 churches and other Christian buildings were attacked.
 - 4277 believers were detained without trial, arrested, sentenced or imprisoned.
- a) What thoughts go through your mind when you hear Jesus' "promise?"

- b) Many believers equate a prosperous life without conflict as a sign of God's blessing. How do you reconcile that teaching with Jesus' promise that his followers will be persecuted?
- c) Do you know believers who have endured persecution? How did it impact them?

2) The Sender: HE knows what HE is doing

Matthew 10:16a *"Behold, I am sending you out as sheep in the midst of wolves,"*

"Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you." (1 Peter 4:12)

- a) Pastor Rob highlighted three words in Matthew 10:16a:
 - i) Sent: Jesus sends us.
 - (1) What does it mean to be sent?
 - (2) Is any Christ-follower not sent?
 - (3) How does being "sent" impact your view of your life (home, work, school) situation?
- b) You: meaning the church plural rather than you, individually.
 - i) How does being sent as a group impact your understanding of being sent?
 - ii) How does being sent as a group impact your understanding of how we are to support and care for each other?
- c) Sheep: sheep are stupid, weak, and vulnerable animals.
 - i) Why would Jesus send his people into situations where it is almost inevitable that they would be hurt?
 - ii) How did Jesus' kingdom come into this world?
 - iii) How does Jesus teach us to bring the kingdom of God into our worlds?
 - iv) What is the "secret weapon" pastor Rob referred to that every Christ follower has in their arsenal?

3) The sent ones: we will know what to do

Matthew 10:16b-20, *"...so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves. ¹⁷ Beware of men, for they will deliver you over to courts and flog you in their synagogues, ¹⁸ and you will be dragged before governors and kings for my sake, to bear witness before them and the Gentiles. ¹⁹ When they deliver you over, do not be anxious how you are to speak or what you are to say, for what you are to say will be given to you in that hour. ²⁰ For it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you."*

- a) *"be wise as serpents and innocent as doves."*
 - i) How can we be wise as serpents?
 - (1) Pastor Rob reference that we need to be discerning.
 - (a) What do we need to discern in our current context in Canada?
 - ii) We are also to be "innocent as doves."
 - (1) How does a Christ-follower live as an "innocent dove?"
 - (2) Pastor Rob said that an illustration of innocence is relying on Jesus to fight our battles. Our innocence before our accusers is always our greatest asset in the court of heaven. Jesus promised, *"Do not worry about what you are to say, for what you are to say will be given you in that hour."* Matthew 10:19
 - (a) How do you see the teaching applying to your life? How do we apply this teaching to the increasing marginalization that Canadian Christians are experiencing?
 - (3) Pastor Rob said, *"We are not entering into debates about political systems, we are not decrying tyranny and advocating democracy. We are simply testifying to the kingdom of which we are part, and the King who we believe rules over every kingdom in the world."*
 - (a) When should Christians hold the government to account, and when should Christians focus on sharing the gospel and living as citizens of God's kingdom?
 - (b) What can we learn from history? How has the church responded to persecution in the past? If you are unfamiliar with church history, we have provided this comprehensive study in the leader resources.

4) Always expect to bear the cross

Matthew 10:21–25 ²¹ Brother will deliver brother over to death, and the father his child, and children will rise against parents and have them put to death, ²² and you will be hated by all for my name's sake. But the one who endures to the end will be saved. ²³ When they persecute you in one town, flee to the next, for truly, I say to you, you will not have gone through all the towns of Israel before the Son of Man comes. ²⁴ "A disciple is not above his teacher, nor a servant above his master. ²⁵ It is enough for the disciple to be like his teacher, and the servant like his master. If they have called the master of the house Beelzebul, how much more will they malign those of his household.

Pastor Rob said, "What Jesus is doing for us here – we the sent ones, called to proclaim the kingdom in the world – is shaping our expectations."

- a) What do you expect from Jesus? We've touched on this earlier in the group questions, but it bears revisiting.
 - i) Given the teaching and experience of Jesus, his disciples, and the global church family, what should our expectations of following Jesus be?
 - ii) Why have Canadians been able to avoid persecution?
 - iii) Author Nik Ripken says that all Christians can avoid persecution as long as they remain silent about their faith. How do you respond to that statement?
- b) Matthew 10:22 tells us that Christ-followers "will be hated by all for my name's sake." This includes being hated by friends and family members.
 - i) Do you know anyone who fled from their home, country, and family because they followed Jesus?
 - (1) Ask them to share their story if they are comfortable doing so.
 - ii) Pastor Rob said that all Christ-followers are called to Jesus' invitation, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me." The persecuted church around the world offers this constant and loud message to the rest of the body of Christ: we are a people who are called to death.
 - (1) How have you processed denying yourself and taking up your cross?
 - (2) So much of western Christianity applies Jesus' teaching as means to self-fulfilment rather than self-sacrifice.
 - (a) Why do you think that is?
 - (b) How do we get back to the Christianity that Jesus calls us to?

Pastor Rob said, "Death is the way to life. This holds true at every level as we carry our crosses through life. Each time I say no to my anger, when I nail my anger to the cross rather than express it, I give life to those around me. Each time I hold my tongue, when I nail my words to the cross, it leads to life. Each time I choose to forgive someone instead of harboring bitterness, and I crucify again my right to be right, I bring life into the world. The apostle said about himself, "I die daily." We who are practicing the way of the cross – the way of death – in all parts of our lives, are partners with the persecuted church. And as we practice bearing the cross every day – at home, at work, on the roads – we'll be developing the cross-bearing muscles we need for when the really heavy lifting of persecution is required."

- c) How does death become a way of life for us?
 - i) Is there a specific way you need to choose the way of the cross?
 - (1) Someone you need to forgive?
 - (2) A "right" you need to let go of?
 - (3) A place you need to speak up about your faith?
 - (4) A friend you need to support sacrificially?

Pray for the Persecuted Church

God, sustain the faith of our persecuted brothers and sisters so that they might faithfully endure trials and suffering for Christ's sake.

God, we ask that the gospel will continue to spread through the persecuted, in prisons and in secret places, and that you will use both their words and faithfulness to bear witness to the gospel.

God, we ask that believers in persecuted areas might be able to experience the blessing of gathering with other believers for worship, as well as the regular fellowship and equipping of the church.

God, give to pastors in the persecuted church courage, wisdom, and joy as they proclaim the gospel and exhort their people to hold fast to Christ.

God, in your mercy, put an end to violence, intimidation, and other forms of persecution aimed at silencing persecuted believers and stopping the spread of the gospel.

God, we ask that you will provide access to Bibles and other resources for our brothers and sisters who live in places that are hostile to your Word.

God, provide for the physical needs of our brothers and sisters, those who have lost jobs or are in prison for the sake of the gospel.

Choose Your Next Step

What next step will you commit to for the upcoming week (and beyond)?

If people have shared their desire to discern Jesus' leading in their lives, commit to following up with each other during the week. Call, text, or email each other words of encouragement, specific prayer requests, or answers to prayer.

Closing Prayer

This would be a great week to pray about who your group could bless this Christmas with a hamper or an act of kindness.