

Life Group Questions

Sep 15th, 2024

What's It All About? – Pastor Ray Harms-Wiebe – [1 Corinthians 1:1-9](#)

Note from Pastor Jonathan

Hey Life Groups!

Our ministry season's starting back up again. I hope you all had a great summer. As always, send me photos and videos of your hangout! During Fall Fest, we played photos of our Life Groups on a slideshow and many people stopped to look at them. These photos help potential Life Group members have a picture of what Life Groups can look like and encourage them to sign up.

We've had lots of people signing up to join Life Groups and it can take a while to get them plugged in. We're taking this opportunity to start **Bridge Group** so that people who are waiting for a group can benefit from a community. It'll be on Tuesdays from 7:00 pm to 8:30 pm at our Willingdon campus in the Chapel. We'll have a time of catching up, worship through song, sermon discussions, and prayer.

Here's where I'll need your help! We need facilitators to help with discussion groups. If your group has potential leaders or people who would like to practice leading discussions, please let me know!

OPENING QUESTIONS (Pick Any Questions You Like)

1. How do you identify yourself in different situations? Why?

Introductions are a quick way to establish a relationship by setting a common ground.

At a company mixer, you probably share your job title or department. That starts the conversation. "Oh! I worked with your team on the recent audit." "Do you know Lisa Manager who works at your store?"

As students go back to school, they're sharing their year and major, leading to, "Did you take Dr. Professor's class? Did you like it?" "You're studying Canem Amplexology? I got the textbook if you need it."

My son recently started a new daycare, so I introduced myself to the teachers as Caleb's father. Now they have an idea of who I am and when they see me they know which toddler to talk about.

At church, I introduce myself as the Life Groups Pastor (and sometimes as a Doan's Darling). That way people know to direct their Life Group questions to me.

If I went to the daycare and told people I was a pastor at Willingdon Church, they'd probably think, "Ok, cool. So ... do you have a kid here or what?" If at the Life Group kiosk at Fall Fest I introduced myself as Caleb's father, people would probably wonder, "Who is Caleb? Should we ask him about Life Groups?"

2. In what ways are your group members different from each other?

Willingdon Church is such a diverse group of people and your group is probably diverse, too!

How many countries/provinces or languages are represented in your group?

What is your favorite food?

What is your favorite genre of movie?

Which generation are you in? (Builder, Boomer, X, Millennial, Z, Alpha)

Who prefers dogs, cats, or neither?

It's amazing that even though we all have different past experiences and current preferences, we're all connected because of our shared belief in Jesus. It overcomes all these differences to bring us together.

1 Corinthians 1:1-9

¹ Paul, called by the will of God to be an apostle of Christ Jesus, and our brother Sosthenes,

² To the church of God that is in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints together with all those who in every place call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, both their Lord and ours:

³ Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

⁴ I give thanks to my God always for you because of the grace of God that was given you in Christ Jesus, ⁵ that in every way you were enriched in him in all speech and all knowledge— ⁶ even as the testimony about Christ was confirmed among you— ⁷ so that you are not lacking in any gift, as you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ, ⁸ who will sustain you to the end, guiltless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. ⁹ God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

LET'S DIG IN (Pick Any Questions You Like)

3. How does Paul identify himself and what does it say about his identity?

For Paul's history with the Corinthian church, check out Acts 18:1-17.

Check out **Paul's Greetings** in the NOTES to see how Paul opens some of his other letters.

Apostle. Paul's an *apostle*. Apostle is the Greek word ἀπόστολος (apostolos), referring to "messengers with extraordinary status, esp. of God's messenger, envoy" (BDAG). Paul isn't just some guy sharing his opinions or best practices about what church should be like. He has a special role and assignment from Jesus; therefore the Corinthian church (and Willingdon) should pay attention.

Check out more about apostles: <https://www.gotquestions.org/what-is-an-apostle.html>.

Of Jesus Christ. Paul's an apostle *of Jesus Christ*. Paul isn't promoting the Church of Paul or Paul Ministries LLC. He's sent by Jesus to share the Good News about Jesus in order to expand Jesus' kingdom. This will be an important point later in the letter when he confronts the divisions in the Corinthian church. They had rivalries based on different leaders, so Paul reminds them they're all on Jesus' team.

As a side note, Christ isn't part of Jesus' name, but a title. The Greek word Christ (Χριστός, christos) is the translation of the Hebrew word Messiah (מָשִׁיחַ, masiah). It's someone who's been anointed with oil, meaning they've been picked by God for a special purpose. By saying Jesus Christ, Paul is identifying Jesus as God's chosen one. Learn more about Christ: <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/essay/jesus-as-messiah/>.

Called. Paul's *called* to be an apostle. He didn't choose this title or role for himself. He didn't send Jesus a resume and an application. If anything, this was exactly the opposite of what he had wanted.

Before Jesus called Paul, Paul was "breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord" (Acts 9:1). Yikes! Paul was like that uncle who always mentions how much he hates that one politician or party. It doesn't matter if you're talking sports or weather, he'll bring the conversation back to his hobby horse. But Paul was worse. He was happy with Stephen getting murdered (Acts 8:1) It got him fired up to get more Christians arrested and killed (Acts 9:1-2) in an attempt to wipe Christianity out (Galatians 1:13).

Out of grace, Jesus still loved Paul and literally called him (Acts 9:4) to be His missionary to the non-Jewish people (Acts 9:15). Paul was a man of focus, commitment, and sheer will against Jesus (Galatians 1:14). Now all that energy was spent for Jesus (Philippians 3:8-9). Jesus' call completely changed Paul so much that everyone who heard about it was baffled (Acts 9:13-14, 21).

4. How does your identity in Jesus affect how you identify yourself?

I'm only sharing two examples. I'm sure your group can come up with many more! Paul will go into how identity in Christ plays out in his letter and we'll cover those in coming notes.

Humility. Believe it or not, we're not too different from Paul. Some of us used to persecute Christians, but I'm guessing most of us haven't. But we've all broken God's law.

God's law has two components: love God with all we got and love the people around us (Matthew 22:35-40). Everything else in the Bible fleshes it out. It's easy, right?

But I'm sure we're all guilty of making God a low priority. We blow our energy hanging out or partying Saturday night so we're dead tired or even hungover during Sunday worship. We look for dates, jobs, and places to live without asking God what He thinks. We feast on TikTok brain rot and barely nibble on God's Word.

We've cheated on tests or tax forms, lied to a parent or spouse, or became impatient with a slow driver in front of us or a customer service agent on the phone. We get upset when others don't live up to our expectations or meet our needs. We only want to talk to people who have something to add to our lives but aren't willing to sacrifice to add to theirs.

All of us are guilty of breaking God's law, so we all deserve God's punishment (Romans 6:23).

If our identity is in Jesus, we can't think we're better than others. We're sinners who can't save ourselves (1 John 1:8). There aren't levels of guilt because God's law is all or nothing. If you break one law, you're just as guilty as someone who breaks all of them (James 2:10). We're no less guilty than people on death row, because we're on death row. We all deserve God's wrath so we're unworthy (Luke 18:13).

I'll share a concrete example for me. As with any church, there are some "extra grace required" people. Sometimes they're aggressive or mean, have problematic ideas, or otherwise cause headaches. In the past, I would get angry at them and condemn them in my heart. I'd make fun of them behind their backs. But God's been teaching me to be compassionate. I've also been aggressive or mean in church. I've had wrong ideas and caused trouble. I've been there. I deserve God's wrath just as much as they do. That leads me to the next point.

Dependence. Just like Paul, we need Jesus' help. We can't pay the penalty for our sins, so Jesus paid it for us (Romans 3:25). For some reason, Jesus offers it freely by grace (Ephesians 2:8). Even though it's a free gift, our hearts are so messed up we can't naturally choose Jesus (2 Corinthians 4:4), so God has to change our hearts. And as we follow Jesus, He works to make us more like Him (2 Corinthians 3:18).

So Jesus pays the penalty for our sins, enables us to believe in Him, and makes us more like Him. From start to finish, this is Jesus' work.

If we're struggling with a sin, do we go to Jesus? Of course, He can use people, books, sermons, therapists, and other means to change us, but do we go to Him first? All of those resources are useless without Him.

Do we thank Him for what He's done? He's the only reason we aren't destined for eternal hellfire. He's the only reason we have a relationship with God and a life after this one. Let's praise Him and thank Him.

Does your time in Bible study and prayer reflect dependence on Jesus?

Back to my example. I used to try to argue with those difficult people. Surely, I can convince them why they're wrong with clear biblical teaching! But this was a sin issue of the heart, not a knowledge issue. It always has been. The Pharisees knew the law inside and out, but look where it got them.

No matter what I say, I can't change them. If I try to make things happen, I'll get frustrated and it'll backfire. So now I pray for them. I'll share the truth when I get a chance, but I know it's up to Jesus to change them. If Jesus can change me, He can change them. So I depend on Jesus.

5. What makes the church the church?

Called. Not only is Paul *called* by Jesus, but the church at Corinth is also *called* by Jesus. Church in Greek is ἐκκλησία (ekklesia), where we get *église* (French), *igreja* (Portuguese), and *iglesia* (Spanish). The root of ἐκκλησία is καλέω (kaleo), meaning *called*. Even the Greek word for church refers to people *called* by Jesus.

If you're a Christian, you're not a Christian because you believed in Jesus first. Jesus had to *call* you and enable you to believe in Him.

In modern parlance, we often use the term church to refer to the building. "We're going to church." "We're remodeling our church." "That church is so beautiful." But in the early days of Christianity, church always referred to the people. So Willingdon Church is a group of people called by Jesus that just so happens to meet off of Willingdon Avenue.

Saints and Sanctification. Saints is the noun form of holy (ἅγιος, *hagios*) while sanctify is the verb form (ἁγιάζω, *hagiazō*). At its core, being holy is being set apart. God is holy because He's set apart and nothing in the world is like Him (1 Samuel 2:2). Things used for the temple were holy because they were set apart for temple use and couldn't be used elsewhere (e.g., Exodus 30:30-38). The Sabbath was holy because it was a day set apart for the people to stop working and worship God (Exodus 20:8-11). God's people were holy because they were set apart to love Him, receive His blessings, and be a blessing while other nations followed their gods.

Christians are set apart and made holy through Jesus' work on the cross.

Although at Willingdon we have believers and non-believers coming together for our Sunday worship and events, only people who believe in Jesus are part of the church.

Special Saints. Although the Roman Catholic Church refers to all believers as saints, they hold to a special category called saints who are extra spiritual or heroic (<https://www.usccb.org/offices/public-affairs/saints>). These people are recognized as a special class of Christians. These are believed "to intercede with the Father for us, as they proffer the merits which they acquired on earth through the one mediator between God and men, Christ Jesus" (CCC 956). Because these saints did so much good work, they can leverage that in their prayers.

The problem is that the Bible doesn't make that distinction. There aren't super Christians who earn a special title or abilities or access to God based on their good work. Likewise, we only pray for others based on Jesus' merit (good work), not anyone else's. If you're a believer, you are equally a saint alongside all other believers.

Although God has set us apart, there are parts of our sinful lives that stick around. God is still at work in us (Romans 8:13). He's continually making us holy like Him. That's a big part of what we do in Life Groups. We

come together and seek God's power to grow to be more like Jesus through studying God's Word, encouraging one another, confessing sins, and praying together.

For more reading on sanctification: <https://www.ligonier.org/guides/sanctification>.

Call Upon. Because we call upon Jesus, we are also part of the same group of people as the Corinthians thousands of years earlier. Not only that, we're also joined to those who have called upon God throughout history (e.g., Genesis 4:26).

6. What would a holy Life Group that calls on Jesus look like?

Being holy has become a negative. Way too many people think they earned holy status from good works and look down on others for not meeting that standard (Luke 18:9-14). They focus on others' faults while ignoring their own (Luke 6:37-42). Jesus repeatedly called out religious leaders in His day for that.

From Metallica's Holier Than Thou (<https://youtu.be/wUtwZs1yI5o>) to Ned Flanders (<https://youtu.be/cbHA4zWlQHE>), I'm sure you've come across our culture pushing back at the idea of being holy.

So how can we be holy in a way that honors God? I'll offer a few suggestions.

Set apart. Remember we're set apart for God's purposes. Author Thom Rainer interviewed people from churches that shut down and wrote a book called *Autopsy of a Deceased Church: 12 Ways to Keep Yours Alive*. They kept the church like in the good old days, used the budget on themselves, ignored the Great Commission, and fought for their preferences. Church existed for them. Life Groups also stagnate or die for the same reason.

Let's remember that Willingdon Church doesn't belong to the elders, Pastor Ray, or any leader here. Your Life Group doesn't belong to the Life Group pastor, your Life Group leader, or you. It belongs to God. That means we need to be clear about our mission. Our groups aren't cliques or social clubs. They're not study groups to just learn stuff. They're here so we can know Jesus and carry on His ministry.

So how can we spend our Life Group meetings learning to love Jesus and others more? How can we fill ourselves up with God's love and equip ourselves to show the world that being holy for God isn't a dirty word?

Perhaps your group can take a minute and ask yourselves, "How does your group decide what you do?" If you realize your group isn't set apart for God, that's great! Because now you see your problem and can begin taking steps to move in the right direction.

Call upon Jesus. We should rely on Jesus for everything. We seek Him for guidance and vision, ask Him for help when we're in need, thank Him when He works in our lives, worship Him because of all He's done and who He is, and more.

How is your group practicing dependence on Jesus? How much time does your group spend in prayer both during your meetings and outside of them? If you're encountering problems in your life, group, or family, do you spend more time praying or just talking about the problem?

Let's remember that our group's success depends on Jesus, not ourselves.

NOTES

1 Corinthians Background

Check out this Bible Project video for an overview: <https://youtu.be/yiHf8kICCc4>. I'll go more in-depth with relevant background information as we study the letter.

Paul's Greetings

Paul's Self-Identification

Paul, **called by the will of God** to be an **apostle of Christ Jesus** (1 Corinthians 1:1)

Paul, a servant **of Christ Jesus**, **called** to be an **apostle**, set apart for the gospel of God, (Romans 1:1)

Paul, an **apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God**, (2 Corinthians 1:1)

Paul, an **apostle**—**not from men nor through man, but through Jesus Christ** (Galatians 1:1)

Paul, an **apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God**, (Ephesians 1:1)

Paul, an **apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God**, (Colossians 1:1)

Paul, an **apostle of Christ Jesus by command of God our Savior and of Christ Jesus** our hope, (1 Timothy 1:1)

Paul, an **apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God** (2 Timothy 1:1)

Paul, a servant of God and an **apostle of Jesus Christ**, (Titus 1:1)

Paul's Identification of the Church

To the church of God that is in Corinth, to those **sanctified in Christ Jesus**, **called** to be **saints** together with all those who in every place call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, both their Lord and ours: (1 Corinthians 1:2)

To all those in Rome who are loved by God and **called** to be **saints**: (Romans 1:7)

To the church of God that is at Corinth, with all the **saints** who are in the whole of Achaia: (2 Corinthians 1:1)

To the **saints** who are in Ephesus, and are faithful **in Christ Jesus**: (Ephesians 1:1)

To all the **saints in Christ Jesus** who are at Philippi, with the overseers and deacons: (Philippians 1:1)

To the **saints** and faithful brothers **in Christ** at Colossae: (Colossians 1:2)