

Life Group Questions

Oct 20th, 2024

A Time to Grow – Pastor Vinh Doan – **2 Corinthians 3:1-9**

Note from Pastor Jonathan

Hey Life Groups!

Hope everyone had a joyful Thanksgiving! I am grateful that I get to serve at Willingdon Church for our Life Groups community with all of you!

On Nov. 1st, our church family has the opportunity to learn about the persecuted church in the Middle East by hearing a first-hand testimony and watching a documentary that highlights one of our mission partners. Check out the event details for **Fundraising Dessert Night for Persecuted Church** here:

<https://willingdon.org/events/mission-event/>

OPENING QUESTIONS (Pick Any Questions You Like)

1. **What was your favorite food as a child? Do you still eat it?**
2. **Have you ever been stuck with a liquid diet? What was it like?**
3. **What's the difference between basic Christian teaching and deeper teaching?**
4. **Who are the unsung heroes of your workplace? Why?**

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

5. **What does being a spiritual infant look like?**
6. **In what ways has the Canadian church (or if you grew up somewhere else your home culture) normalized spiritual infancy?**
7. **What does spiritual maturity look like?**
8. **Why should we pursue maturity?**
9. **In what ways do we need to spiritually grow up?**

1 Corinthians 3:1–9

¹ But I, brothers, could not address you as spiritual people, but as people of the flesh, as infants in Christ. ² I fed you with milk, not solid food, for you were not ready for it. And even now you are not yet ready, ³ for you are still of the flesh.

For while there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not of the flesh and behaving only in a human way? ⁴ For when one says, "I follow Paul," and another, "I follow Apollos," are you not being merely human?

⁵ What then is Apollos? What is Paul? Servants through whom you believed, as the Lord assigned to each. ⁶ I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth. ⁷ So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth. ⁸ He who plants and he who waters are one, and each will receive his wages according to his labor. ⁹ For we are God's fellow workers. You are God's field, God's building.

OPENING QUESTIONS (Pick Any Questions You Like)

1. What was your favorite food as a child? Do you still eat it?

Did you cover your toast with peanut butter and jelly or vegemite? Which did you add to your French fries: ketchup, cheese curds, or stoofvlees? Did your mom make Kids Cuisine or Totino's Pizza Rolls? How about a favorite candy or snack?

If you still like it, is it a guilty pleasure or something you're proud to eat?

I used to love eating fruit with LOTS of whipped cream. In third grade, we made Christmas trees covered in way too much green whipped cream. I couldn't eat whipped cream for a few decades because of that.

The Corinthian church was still like spiritual children and could only handle easy spiritual food for kids. Do we still only consume spiritual baby food, or has our diet evolved?

2. Have you ever been stuck with a liquid diet? What was it like?

Perhaps you had some mouth or tooth surgery, such as a wisdom tooth removal. Or you had a bad stomach bug and couldn't hold anything down. I've experienced both.

You probably missed the feeling of chewing into a steak or something substantial. Or you got sick of just drinking the same thing.

The Corinthian church only had a spiritual liquid diet. They weren't ready for solid, meaty teaching. Are we still on a spiritual liquid diet?

3. What's the difference between basic Christian teaching and deeper teaching?

Are there certain beliefs or doctrines that new Christians must learn? Are there teachings you can only teach after someone's been Christian for a while? How do you tell them apart?

Even though the Corinthian church had people who were Christians for a while, Paul had to keep teaching them the basics. Have you learned the basics?

4. Who are the unsung heroes of your workplace? Why?

Society often considers the people at the top as the most important. They're usually the face of the company and get credit for the company's success. In reality, a company's success depends on lots of different people doing their jobs. How about your workplace?

Is there someone with a cheerful personality that makes everyone in the office happy? Does someone go above and beyond to mentor or guide younger co-workers? Is there a manager who genuinely cares about the people they're managing and sets them up for success?

Paul tells the Corinthians that Paul and Apollos aren't the heroes of the VIPs of the church. They're just fellow co-workers. Do we have the wrong idea of who is most important in the church?

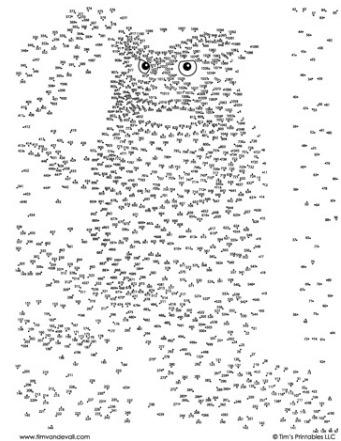
LET'S DIG IN (Pick Any Questions You Like)

Name _____

5. What does being a spiritual infant look like?

Address as spiritual people. Paul couldn't talk to the Corinthians "as spiritual people." We all know that the way we talk to young children versus adults is different. You gotta' keep it real simple.

The image that comes to mind is connect-the-dots. Little kids have limited knowledge and experience, so it's like they have very few dots to connect. You have to explain a lot.



My son is two years old, and he's in the "why?" stage. He asks it for *everything*. "You have to sleep." "Why?" "Because if you don't, you'll be tired." "Why?" "Because we need sleep." "Why?" "Uh ... because we need to rest from a busy day." "Why?" "Uh"

I'm an adult, despite what some people might think. I know that if I don't get good sleep, I feel terrible the next day. I can't think straight and my body aches. I studied biology long ago in school, so I know our bodies and brains do a lot of repairs and process waste products. Sleep is important for our immune systems and more.

My son needs dots to connect and understand why sleep is important. I have a lot of dots from personal experience, studying, and more. I get it. Over time, my son will get there, but he's not there yet.

For the spiritual teachings, spiritual infants need to learn who Jesus is. What does He do? How does He impact my life? And more.

Mature Christians have knowledge about Jesus from the Bible (e.g., prophecies, purpose, teaching, etc.) and the experience to see how He impacts their lives (from sermons, personal experiences, hearing from other people, time spent meditating on the Bible, reading books, etc.). They can connect the dots more easily. When they learn more about Jesus, they can connect the dots from teaching to life change.

It's the same way with the Corinthian church. Paul couldn't talk to them like adults because he still had to talk to them about the basics. It seems they can't connect the dots because they don't understand how Jesus changes their thinking.

People of the flesh. Also translated as "worldly" (NIV) or "belonged to this world" (NLT), the opposite of spiritual. They acted more like Greco-Roman society than like Jesus.

Jealousy. The Greek word for jealousy is ζήλος (zelos), where we get the word zealous. It can be good, like when Jesus feels jealous/zealous about the temple being misused (John 2:17) or the Corinthians' zeal for ministering to other churches (2 Corinthians 9:2). Here, it refers to "intense negative feelings over another's achievements or success, jealousy, envy" (BDAG). Instead of celebrating success when other leaders do well or praising God for lives changed, they're angry that other groups are more successful than them.

Ironically, the Jewish people felt zealous (ζήλος) when crowds gathered to hear Paul and Barnabas preaching the Good News about Jesus (Acts 17:4-5). Instead of celebrating Jesus as King of the Jews, they got jealous that these missionaries got more attention than them. This led them to persecute Paul and Barnabas, kicking them out of town.

They had strong feelings, but these strong feelings weren't in line with what God wanted. They connected the dots wrong.

Strife. The Greek word for strife is ἔρις (eris), meaning "Engagement in rivalry, esp. w. ref. to positions taken in a matter, strife, discord, contention" (BDAG). This isn't hidden jealousy but an all-out war within the church. Strife is so dangerous Paul lists it next to murder, haters of God, inventors of evil, orgies, drunkenness, idolatry, and fits of anger (Romans 1:29; 13:13; Galatians 5:20).

In a way, it's like cancer. Cancer isn't like other diseases that come from outside our bodies, like the flu or cold. Normal cells grow and function to support the body. Cancer cells just want to grow and grow and grow even if it hurts us or kills us. I've sadly seen churches with members who are like that. They don't care who they hurt, they just want their ministry to thrive, even if other ministries suffer. They'll badmouth other leaders, lie about their numbers, fight to divert resources to themselves, and more. They only care that they're growing more than others.

They haven't connected the dots to see that all Christians are on the same team, and God gets all the credit for every success.

Human way. The Corinthians looked at things from a very human angle. That's their problem. From a human perspective, a person's value depends on where you fit in society. Where do you fit within the church? Who is your crew? Even two of Jesus' disciples and their mom wanted them to be Jesus' Number 1 and Number 2 (Matthew 20:20-28).

Greco-Roman society was highly competitive. It's not about a win-win. If I win, you got to lose. If other leaders and their groups win, then I lose. Before you look down on the Corinthians, consider yourself. When others at work get promoted, but you don't, how do you feel? How do you feel when your friends post romantic photos all over Instagram, but you're still single? How about if someone else's spiritual life seems thriving and God appears to be doing amazing work, but yours is treading water? If you're like me, their win probably feels like your loss.

Instead of letting Jesus transform their thinking (Romans 12:1-2), they were still doing what felt natural to them.

As humans, we naturally look at human ability and human achievements. Jesus isn't physically present, and Apple hasn't made Spiritual Vision Pro, so we can only see the human side of things. The Corinthians saw Paul and Apollos working and attributed their success in ministry to Paul and Apollos. They didn't see that "God gave the growth" (v. 6). Paul later writes that he works harder than anyone else, but it was because of God's invisible grace working in him (1 Corinthians 15:10).

Their growth was because of God, not the leaders. And because it was a win for God, it was a win for all of God's followers.

6. In what ways has the Canadian church (or if you grew up somewhere else your home culture) normalized spiritual infancy?

I don't want this question to become a time to criticize what "those" other Christians do wrong. If we do, we're causing strife like the Corinthians! Firstly, the Christians doing things wrong are our "brothers and sisters" (v. 1). If we see them doing it wrong, we must lovingly pray for them. Secondly, I want us to consider whether we are guilty of the same thing.

Here are a few of my observations that stem from the same root idea. Young children rely on adults for just about everything. Unless there are special needs or special circumstances, they should grow to do things for themselves and eventually contribute to raising the next generation. Tragically, most of the Western church has adopted the horrible heresy that only clergy/pastors/etc. need to grow while "laypeople" and "normies" don't. I don't use the word heresy lightly here because I believe people who think this way are at risk of eternal damnation. I'll explain below.

Spiritual Ignorance. We rely on doctors knowing medicine, electricians knowing electrical codes, and pilots knowing how to fly a plane, so we don't have to.

Christians often think only "professional" Christians need to know about the basics of Christian belief. "I don't need to learn theology to teach my kid because the kids and student ministry teams do that." "I don't need to learn about prayer because I can just get a pastor to pray for me." "I don't need to understand what it means to follow Jesus because I prayed a prayer, so I'm going to heaven, and that's what counts."

Not trying to learn the basics of theology reveals some major problems. Do we actually believe in the real Jesus or another version in our mind? If we say we love God, wouldn't we want to know about Him? How can we know if we're following God if we don't know what He thinks?

As I said earlier, salvation can be on the line! Canada and the United States are supposedly Christian nations, but every time there's a survey on what Christians believe, it shows that so many supposedly Bible-believing Christians are destined for hell. Check out a recent survey of Canadian Christians (<https://www.cardus.ca/research/faith-communities/reports/still-christian/>) and US Christians (<https://thestateoftheology.com>). 20% of evangelical Canadian Christians surveyed believe that all religions are true, while 56% of evangelical US Christians believe God accepts the worship of all religions. 26% of evangelical Canadian committed Christians and 43% of US evangelical Christians think Jesus was just a man and not God.

I will say it plainly: those millions of people think they are Christian and follow Jesus, but they do not know Jesus. Most of them think they're saved, but they are dead in their sins and will face God's wrath if they continue down this path.

It breaks my heart. Many people dedicate themselves to learning more about God at Willingdon Church, but we all know that many more don't. They're in danger of thinking they know Jesus but have the wrong idea.

Not everyone at Willingdon needs to be a scholar, but every member should be familiar with the core Christian beliefs that we hold (https://willingdon.org/app/uploads/2021/08/Statement_of_Faith_2021.pdf).

Shallow Worship. Church in the West has become a spectator sport instead of a spiritual potluck. People come to sit in Sunday service and watch people on stage sing and talk about the Bible. They leave thinking that passively attending the gathering checks a box or that they just bask in the spirituality of the people on stage.

Corporate worship should be a unique experience that's the culmination of the unique collection of people God has brought together.

People get really excited by the singing or the Bible teaching. But it's just about an experience on Sunday morning to them. They don't care about God outside of that hour and fifteen minutes. After they leave the church campus, they go back to their regular lives. Jesus doesn't want people to praise Him with their mouths but have cold hearts towards Him (Matthew 15:8-9).

Instead of Sunday morning being an experience that contributes to their spiritual maturation over time, it just resets every week. Sitcoms (situational comedies like Gilligan's Island, Seinfeld, or The Simpsons) are comfortable like that. The characters pretty much stay the same throughout the series and don't grow much. Many Christians come every Sunday, and their spiritual life gets reset at the end of the service.

Shallow worship is extremely dangerous. Paul writes that we need to believe that Jesus is our Lord to be saved (Romans 10:9). He's our God, our King, our Savior. He died on the cross to save us from our sins. If we don't worship Him or grow from worshipping Him, do we believe those things? If I say I love my wife but purposefully limit my time with her or don't try to get to know her more, do I love her?

Spiritual infants may take time to bring their relationship with God outside of Sunday morning into their day-to-day lives. They may take time to understand the elements of worship so they can benefit from them. But over time, they should come to contribute to the worship and grow from it.

7. What does spiritual maturity look like?

I think a lot of us will picture a person in our lives. We may think of a Life Group leader we had or a pastor. Or a historical Christian we've heard about who did some amazing things, like a reformer or missionary.

Ultimately, spiritual maturity is being like Jesus (Ephesians 4:13). He is perfect and sinless (Hebrews 4:15). He never broke God's laws.

Here are some sub-questions you can ask to flesh out this one:

How do spiritually mature people look like Jesus?

Why is it dangerous to make other people our main example of spiritual maturity?

How does Jesus' example look different from what we see around us?

8. Why should we pursue maturity?

Assurance. As I wrote for question 6, millions of people who think they're Christian have no idea who Jesus is or what He's done. When they meet God Almighty at the judgment, and God asks why they should be saved, they'll shrug their shoulders or give a completely wrong answer. That's terrifying.

When we grow in our spiritual maturity, we'll know more about God's Word and know God more. In low moments, we may doubt our salvation, but we can pull from our knowledge of God's Word, the experiences of His grace in our lives, and more.

Christlikeness. A core doctrine of Christianity has always been that Jesus lived a sinless life (Hebrews 4:15). He is God and perfect. As we are being built up, we become more like Jesus (Ephesians 4:12).

I don't know about you, but I want to be like that. I don't want to be always stuck in my sin. I don't want to keep getting impatient with my wife because I'm not selfless like Jesus. I don't want to keep putting my self-worth on how people see me because I'm not aware of God's infinite love for me. I don't want to keep getting discouraged by life situations because I'm not trusting in Jesus.

I hate it. I want it to stop. The only way for that to happen is to grow in Jesus.

Teamwork. You've probably heard of the 80/20 Rule, also known as the Pareto Principle. 80% of results usually rely on 20% of the input. In a church setting, most of what happens in the church is the result of a small portion of people doing all the work. I'm not sharing this to make people feel bad but to think about how much more we could accomplish if more stepped up.

Let's do some rough math. We have around 100 Life Groups. Let's just assume each group has ten members for easy math. That means we have roughly 1,000 members. Of course, not everyone's called to lead a Life Group, but what if only 20% of the people in those groups stepped up to lead? That would be 200 leaders that could start up to 100 more groups, doubling our Life Group ministry!

I've heard from our children's ministry that they often don't have enough volunteers. They must keep a minimum ratio of teachers to children for safety reasons. Because they lack volunteers, they often have to turn away many children. What if more stepped up so that every child would participate?

Imagine if every Christian at Willingdon wasn't satisfied with being a spiritual infant but wanted to grow to be more like Jesus. They want to learn the basics of the faith and how God wants them to live within their specific life context. As they grow to be more like Jesus, the Holy Spirit empowers them with unique gifts to serve the body.

They step up and contribute to the church. The church grows as they share the Gospel of Jesus in word and deed with their family, friends, and neighbors. They teach and equip spiritual infants to mature. Those newly maturing Christians then go and do the same. It's disciples making disciples, just like the Willingdon mission.

9. In what ways do we need to spiritually grow up?

Think of your relationship with Jesus and how well you reflect Jesus currently. Now, look back a year or five. Have you been growing closer to Jesus and more like Jesus? Or have you been drifting away? Are you more or less the same?

Are you more loving to your family, friends, neighbors, or enemies? Do you spend more time with God through Bible reading, prayer, or in the company of other Christians? Have you learned more about the Bible? Or is your understanding of God the same?