

Life Group Questions

Nov 10th, 2024

Stewards of the Mysteries

Pastor Ray Harms-Wiebe – [1 Corinthians 4:1-5](#)

Note from Pastor Jonathan

Hey Life Groups!

We're almost halfway through November! Will be hosting our **Evangelism Seminar** next Saturday, Nov. 16th. This year's topic is **Reigniting Hope: Sharing the Good News Is Easier Than You Think**, and we are excited to have special guest speaker, **Pr. Jason Persaud** from **Alpha Canada**

More info. on the event details and the speaker bio can be found on our event page. <https://willingdon.org/events/evangelism-seminar-reigniting-hope-sharing-the-good-news-is-easier-than-you-think/> ****There event is free but please register online.****

LET'S OPEN UP (Pick Any You Like)

1. **Have you ever lost or broken something that belonged to someone else? What happened?**
2. **What's the difference between being a servant for a king and being the king?**
3. **Have you ever tried to outsmart someone or something, only for it to backfire?**
4. **Do you have a favorite reality show competition to watch? How do they determine who wins?**

LET'S DIG IN (Pick Any You Like)

5. **How does Paul want us to regard church leadership?**
6. **What are the mysteries of God that Paul is a steward of?**
7. **Based on this passage, how is the world's idea of leadership different from God's?**

LET'S GROW (Pick Any You Like)

8. **Are you a servant and steward or a master?**
9. **How can you be a good servant and steward of the Gospel?**
10. **Who can you share the Gospel with?**

1 Corinthians 3:18 – 4:5

¹⁸ Let no one deceive himself. If anyone among you thinks that he is wise in this age, let him become a fool that he may become wise. ¹⁹ For the wisdom of this world is folly with God. For it is written, "He catches the wise in their craftiness," ²⁰ and again, "The Lord knows the thoughts of the wise, that they are futile." ²¹ So let no one boast in men. For all things are yours, ²² whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or the world or life or death or the present or the future—all are yours, ²³ and you are Christ's, and Christ is God's.

¹ This is how one should regard us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God. ² Moreover, it is required of stewards that they be found faithful. ³ But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged by you or by any human court. In fact, I do not even judge myself. ⁴ For I am not aware of anything against myself, but I am not thereby acquitted. It is the Lord who judges me. ⁵ Therefore do not pronounce judgment before the time, before the Lord comes, who will bring to light the things now hidden in darkness and will disclose the purposes of the heart. Then each one will receive his commendation from God.

LET'S OPEN UP

1. Have you ever lost or broken something that belonged to someone else? What happened?

Have you ever been at someone else's home and spilled something on their couch? Did you panic and try to help clean it up before the stain set? What face did you make as you gasped in horror?

If you're of a certain age, you've probably scratched a DVD or your VCR at a VHS tape from Blockbuster. Did you fess up to your damage or pull out a pencil to wind the tape back?

Ever damaged a rental car? I used to take mission teams to the Navajo reservation north of Nageezi. Some of the roads for my route were sketchy. I would get multiple flat tires every year. I became quick at plugging or swapping tires with the other rental cars on our team. Good thing we got the extra insurance! No questions asked.

God gave Paul the Gospel message about Jesus to take care of.

Paul tells us that he was a steward of the Gospel. Paul also knew that someday God would see how well he had taken care of it. As Christians, we are also called to take care of Jesus' Good News.

2. What's the difference between being a servant of royalty and being royal?

Both servants and the king or queen get to be around luxury, but all that luxury is meant for the royals, not the servants. The servant's job is to ensure the king can enjoy the stuff. The butlers and maids clean the castle so the princess can have a tidy place. The chefs and cooks use the kitchen and top-tier ingredients so the prince can eat a world-class meal.

Hopefully, the servants get to enjoy some of those luxuries, but by the end of the day, expensive goodies aren't for them. And it's up to the owners to decide if the servants can get a taste.

Although many saw Paul as an important, powerful Christian figure, he was just a servant of Jesus. He served the church and taught them so Jesus could enjoy His followers. Although we can and should enjoy our church, we are ultimately servants called to serve Jesus.

3. Have you ever tried to outsmart someone or something, only for it to backfire?

Maybe you tried to take a side road or exit to beat a traffic jam. You suddenly realize that *fifty* other drivers are trying to do the exact same thing so now you're just as stuck. Or you got in trouble with your parents so you try to come up with justifications for your actions. Instead of placating your parents, it just makes them even more upset with your unrepentant attitude and you get a bigger punishment.

The world's wisdom expects us to scheme and strategize to get what we want. But as Pastor Ray says in his sermons, "Empty yourself of the wisdom of this age and be filled with God's wisdom and power." We'll be comparing the world's wisdom with God's wisdom in this passage.

4. Do you have a favorite reality show competition to watch? How do they determine who wins?

Modern TV is full of reality show competitions! What do you watch?

Survivor has physical challenges and puzzles with alliances and backstabbing leading to voting. Project Runway judges judge contestants' ability to make outfits that match the brief, their creativity, and how editorial it is. Instant Hotel owners visited each other's AirBnBs and judged the home, nearby attractions, value for the money, how good the sleep was, and how each owner behaved as guests while devolving into petty squabbles.

My wife recently watched Culinary Class Wars with 100 competing chefs. For most rounds, two well-known food industry guys judged the food on flavor, texture, wow factor, story, attention to detail, and more.

Lots of people judge our lives and we often judge ourselves. Paul reminds us that ultimately God will judge our lives to determine if we've been faithful. Let's see what God will be looking at.

LET'S DIG IN

5. How does Paul want us to regard church leadership?

It's easy to associate the senior or lead pastor as the face of the church. "What church do you go to?" "Oh, I go to So and So Church." "Oh, is that Pastor Famous' church?" Others think the pastor and/or elders are the ultimate bosses of the church. "The elder board determines what our church does and believes." But leaders of all churches, including Willingdon's, aren't the boss.

Paul uses two terms to describe leaders like himself.

Servant. The first is ὑπηρέτης (hyperetes), meaning "one who functions as a helper, freq. in a subordinate capacity, helper, assistant" (BDAG). It was used for someone helping a bigger person, such as a physician's assistant or someone assisting a priest. The servant or assistant takes orders from someone higher and helps them do what they're doing.

Paul isn't the CEO/boss and the Corinthians aren't his employees/minions. Jesus is the big important person with a big important mission. Paul is just one of Jesus' many helpers working to make that big important mission happen.

The pastors, elders, and Life Group leaders of Willingdon Church are also Jesus' assistants. We're all working for the same big boss.

Steward. Paul also uses the term οἰκονόμος (oikonomos), meaning "manager of a household or estate, (house) steward, manager" (BDAG). It can also refer to a public treasurer or "one who is entrusted with management in connection with transcendent matters, administrator" (BDAG). Think of a butler managing a rich person's mansion or an accountant in charge of company finances. Essentially, a steward is someone tasked with taking care of someone else's stuff. Even though they may have lots of control, they have to do what the owner says and be accountable to them.

God gave the mysteries of God for Paul to steward. Paul is referring to the secret knowledge of God's mission to save the world that was hidden but finally revealed when Jesus came, died, and rose again. When Jesus called Paul, He wanted Paul to be "a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel" (Acts 9:15). "Hey Paul. I'm giving you my powerful, amazing, power message that can save

people. Your responsibility is to represent me and share this message with the world!" That was why Paul went to Corinth in the first place (1 Corinthians 1:17). By preaching the Good News about Jesus, Paul was being faithful and trustworthy.

Paul's readers would probably be surprised by this language. The Corinthian church elevated human leaders so much that they identified with those leaders more than they identified with Jesus. Paul, Apollos, and Cephas aren't the boss. They're servants and managers working for Jesus.

6. What are the mysteries of God that Paul is a steward of?

The expression mystery is used differently throughout the New Testament. Jesus refers to knowledge of God's kingdom (Matthew 13:11; Mark 4:11; Luke 8:10). Paul refers to Israel's salvation (Romans 11:25-26), what awaits us in eternity (1 Corinthians 2:7), and our transformation when Jesus returns (1 Corinthians 15:51-55).

But Paul's focus has been preaching the Good News of Jesus (1 Corinthians 1:17). Throughout history, God has revealed that He was the creator and ruler of the world but people always wanted to give credit to made-up gods or choose to live however they wanted. They broke God's good laws and deserved His punishment. He gave them the gift of sacrifices to deal with that punishment. Innocent animals would die in their place over and over again because this was only a temporary solution, so God promised a hero would come and save the people. The people waited and waited.

Eventually, Jesus came to earth. He wasn't a triumphant warrior hero like General Sir Arthur Currie or Zap Rowsdower. He didn't come to save His people from military oppression but to offer The Final Sacrifice to pay for their sins (Hebrews 9:25-28). Jesus lived a perfect life and followed all God's laws perfectly by loving God and loving people (Matthew 22:34-40). He allowed Himself to be hung on a cross, taking on the punishment people deserve for their sins. And to prove that Jesus was from God and could forgive sins, He came back from the dead and appeared to hundreds of people (1 Corinthians 15:1-11).

If someone believes that Jesus did this for them, their sins would be forgiven and they would have a reconciled relationship with God for eternity. This was the hidden mystery that people waited for.

7. Based on this passage, how is the world's idea of leadership different from God's?

We've all been under leadership. Parents, teachers, bosses, pastors. Some of it has been wonderful and some of it not. Here are some of my thoughts here.

Org Chart. Many of us are familiar with organizational charts that show a company's hierarchy. The executives like the CEO are at the top. They're the big dogs with the power. The lower you go down on the chart, the less important you are, the less authority you have, and the less salary you make. The people at the top are often willing to sacrifice people at the bottom for their benefit (<https://youtu.be/hiKuxfcSrEU>). It's alarming how often news comes up of companies that froze salaries or cut positions, citing budgetary limitations, only to give higher-ups bigger bonuses or perks.

On paper, Paul had authority. Jesus Christ personally met Paul and gave him a special mandate as an apostle. But Paul never used his authority for himself. He knew he was a servant sent by Jesus to serve the church. Paul

risked his life to travel the Greco-Roman world as a missionary (2 Corinthians 11:24-28). He gave up his rights as an apostle and adapted to others so that nothing would get in the way of his mission (1 Corinthians 9:1-12).

Paul followed Jesus' model of leadership. Even though Jesus was and is fully God (Philippians 2:5-8) and the world was created for His enjoyment (Colossians 1:16). Even though Jesus was rejected by His own people (John 1:10-11). Even though Jesus could call an army of angels to defend Him from the religious leaders and Roman military (Matthew 26:53). Jesus still came to serve and give up His life (Matthew 20:24-28).

In God's economy, the organizational chart is flipped upside down. It's not about how many people are under your authority, but how many people you serve.

Source. What makes leaders such good leaders? There are thousands of biographies about famous people who turned the world upside down or revolutionized their field. Millions of people read these books attempting to learn the secret sauce that made them so successful. I don't know how many times I've heard about billionaires wearing the same thing every day and if you wear the same thing, you'll succeed like them! Subscribe to my podcast for more strategies! These strategies may be helpful to some people, but they're limited due to survivorship bias, everyone's unique context, and other factors.

Paul is clear that his leadership is based on the Gospel of Jesus. He didn't develop the Gospel, starting from design sketches and prototypes. He didn't have a team of marketers use A/B testing to see which Gospel presentation was better. The message of the Gospel was powerful, even though Paul was weak (1 Corinthians 2:1-5). Paul wasn't some legendary founder of Christianity. He was just a super unworthy guy picked by God to deliver His message (1 Corinthians 15:8-9). Even his hard work is the result of God's power working in him (1 Corinthians 15:10).

In God's world, God is the source. If you want to be successful, God is the secret sauce.

Who's the Boss? I've been seeing a surge in ads promoting "Be your own boss". So many videos of (mostly) men showing off their wealth and talking about how much money they make. Whether it's a guy in his garage with his new Lamborghini and gnaw-ledge or a guy telling you how many thousands he makes every month in passive income, these people promise a life where you can set your own terms, be successful, and live out your dreams. No co-workers steal credit for your hard work. You won't be bullied by terrible bosses, because you'll be your own boss. The dream of being your own boss isn't anything new. That was what the serpent promised to Adam and Eve in the garden (Genesis 3:1-6).

Of course, wanting to start your own successful business isn't bad. We have several leaders in our church who help people with entrepreneurship and getting their businesses off the ground. The problem is when the desire to be our own boss becomes a way of life.

Paul knows that to be a leader means knowing what God has entrusted you with and whether you're faithful or not (1 Corinthians 4:5). Whether it's money, time, or health, it's from God and He wants you to use it spread the Gospel and make disciples.

LET'S GROW

8. Are you a servant and steward or a master?

Servant. At the beginning of the deeply profound movie Dumb and Dumber, Lloyd Christmas (Jim Carrey) pulls up in the backseat of a limo to ask a lady for directions. After she turns him down, it's revealed that Lloyd is the limo driver (https://youtu.be/mqVzRD_nWLQ). He just pretended to be a VIP doctor going to a medical conference so he could hit on a pretty Austrian lady.

It's tempting to think that we're the church VIPs. We should sing songs in the style that I like. The pastor should use illustrations and jokes that resonate with me; if he doesn't, I'll let him know. I want fellowships, Life Groups, and events where the people fit my style. If I don't like them, I'll complain or bug the leadership to make a group that fits me.

We pretend that the church is there for us. And to an extent, it should serve us. But we're not the church VIP. The limo driver doesn't take the limo wherever he wants to go. The passenger tells the limo driver where to take the limo.

We don't decide where the church goes, what it becomes, or what it's like. Jesus does it because He owns it.

And continuing the limo driver metaphor, in a way, we drive the church. If Jesus is calling us to be a welcoming church, you can move the church in that direction by welcoming strangers and people who seem lonely. If Jesus is calling us to multiply our Life Groups, you can move the Life Groups in that direction by equipping yourself to become a leader.

Steward. If you're a believer in Jesus, you know the Gospel. What are you doing with it? Have you decided to hide it under a basket or let it shine for everyone to see (Matthew 5:15-16)?

Halloween was a few weeks ago. People buy candy to give to the kids that pass by their homes. In a way, the Gospel is like that. Jesus gives us the Good News and tells us to hand it out to everyone. Are we doing what we can to share it? Or are we hoarding it for ourselves?

Are you teaching it to the newcomers at our church or the children who don't know Jesus yet? Are you helping the less spiritually mature people in your Life Group learn and grow? How about outside the church? Are you praying for and finding opportunities to share the Gospel with your co-workers and classmates? Are you demonstrating what a life that follows Jesus looks like to your family and neighbors?

9. How can you be a good servant and steward of the Gospel?

Know what God gave you. You can't perform your duties if you don't know what you're put in charge of. Some think the church's primary responsibility is to manage a reputation, finances, a building, or programs. But there's something bigger: the Gospel. To serve God, we need to know the Gospel first. Without the Gospel message, we are God's enemies (Romans 5:8-10).

The Gospel is the Good News of Jesus. We all naturally break God's good laws and fall short of His perfect standards (Romans 3:23), so we all deserve God's punishment (Romans 6:23). Somehow God saw us and still loved us so much He sent His Son, Jesus, to save us (John 3:16). Jesus lived a perfect life and fulfilled all of God's laws. Because He was innocent and didn't deserve punishment, He could take on our punishment (2 Corinthians

5:21). He paid the penalty for our sins when He died on the cross and experienced God's wrath. If we believe that Jesus did this for us, God will forgive us for all we've done, because Jesus covered it. God calls us His children (John 1:12) and we can begin a relationship with Him that goes for eternity (John 17:3).

If you don't know the Gospel, ask your leader and others in the group to share it with you.

Know God's mission. There are many potential problems if we don't know what God wants us to do with the Gospel message.

Many people have used the Gospel of Jesus to elevate themselves. They get good at teaching or preaching or sharing. The goal becomes getting recognition. Many pastors have risen to prominence, only to fall hard because their egos got too big and they abused their power.

Others may try to make a fence around the Gospel. They only share it with people like them. Growing up in the 80s and 90s, many churches wouldn't welcome guys who didn't wear suits and ties or girls not wearing dresses or skirts. They also didn't welcome people in homosexual relationships or other religious backgrounds. Many churches have also sadly been racially segregated. Those churches only wanted to share the Gospel with others like themselves.

On the opposite extreme, churches may put the Gospel as a lower priority to get people in the door. The focus is having the flashiest, high-production worship service that fills people with emotions. Youth ministry is about having the latest video games and the best snacks to make teens want more. Or a church hides the nasty Gospel truth that we're all sinners in need of saving to tell people that God wants them to be healthy, wealthy, and wise. Because, you know, that's what people want.

Some Christians do share the Gospel, but fall short. They have outreach events and share the Good News of Jesus. People respond to the altar call and their faith journey is more or less complete without any further growth or life change. They have their ticket to heaven so they're good to go.

But Jesus gave all Christians the mission to tell people the Gospel and teach them how to follow Him (Matthew 28:18-20). At Willingdon Church, our mission is to know Jesus Christ personally and carry on His ministry. The Gospel enables us to know Jesus and what He's done for us. As we grow in our relationship with Him, we learn how to carry on His ministry.

Know what you're doing. At Willingdon Church, we make disciples of Jesus that make disciples. So where are you in that process?

Perhaps you feel completely unqualified to make disciples and teach them to follow Jesus. Good! Now you know your job is to grow in the basics of the faith by learning the Gospel, building your relationship with Jesus and others, and learning the basic teachings of the Bible.

Maybe you know the basics but need to practice them in your life context. Discuss with other Life Group members how their faith applies to their daily lives. Pray for God to reveal how you can love your family and friends with Your love.

If you feel you're ready, but don't know what to do, ask your Life Group leader for opportunities to serve your Life Group. Check out volunteer opportunities at church (<https://willingdon.org/volunteer>).

10. Who can we share the Gospel with?

Pastor Ray shared the story of talking about the Gospel with a Uyghur (a Muslim minority with members being persecuted in China). Who has God put in your path? Are there neighbors you can share Jesus with? Or maybe your kids' parents or other ballroom dancers at the community center.

What can you do to bring the Gospel up? Pastor Ray used the Quran to begin talking about the Gospel. You can ask about their weekend activities, allowing you to share about Sunday service. If they're struggling, you can offer to pray for them. In my experience, even non-Christians feel touched by this offer.

If you'd like to learn more about sharing the Gospel, come attend the upcoming Evangelism Seminar on November 16 (<https://willingdon.org/events/evangelism-seminar-reigniting-hope-sharing-the-good-news-is-easier-than-you-think/>).