*The Big Picture*

*Study 11: Following Jesus*

*2 Corinthians 5:11-21*

**Icebreaker**

Go around the circle, everyone say your name, where you are from, and answer this question: As we have looked at the story of the Bible this semester, what have you found the most interesting? What was your favorite part?

**Intro**

Tonight we are going to read a story from the Bible together. As Christians, we study the Bible because we believe that it is God’s word to us. We believe that humans wrote the different books of the Bible, but they did that with God’s help and guidance. God gave us the Bible so that we could use it to learn who he is and understand His plans. So the Bible is full of lots of different stories and teachings, but they all help tell a bigger story about God and about the world we live in, and how He is going to restore the brokenness we see through Jesus. It is the story of God and the story of us!

In this series, we have been looking at the big picture story in the Bible. We started at the very beginning and are ending tonight by looking at a passage that explains what it means to be a Christian. It is from a book of the Bible called 2 Corinthians, which is actually a letter that a man named Paul wrote to Christian people in the city of Corinth. Because we believe that God wants to help us understand as we read, we are going to pray and then we will get started.

**Pray**

**Intro to the Passage**

Anyone remember what we read about last week? *(Last week we read about how Jesus was killed but came back to life three days later. He appeared to two of his followers and explained that He completed the story of the Bible, that all of the Old Testament pointed to him and explained how he was going to suffer and die but come back from the dead and make all things new.)*

In this series we’ve read about the story of God and of the world- how He created the world and everything in it, but how it was messed up because human beings decided to do things their own way and disobey God. Because they sinned, their relationship with God was damaged, their relationships with each other were damaged, and their relationship with the world itself was damaged. But God loved us so much that He didn’t abandon us even though that is what we deserved…he sent Jesus to fix the brokenness. Jesus came to show us who God was and help us see what life is like in His kingdom, but most importantly He came to suffer and die on the cross to pay the punishment that we deserved. Because He died on the cross and was a sacrifice for us, we can be forgiven for our disobedience because our punishment has been paid. And we can have a new, restored relationship with God!

The only requirement for all of this is to believe in Jesus…to accept Him as your Savior who paid the price for you and as your Lord, whom you will follow and obey. But many people wonder, what happens after you make that decision? What does it mean to be a Christian? The passage we will look at tonight helps to explain that. It is written by a man named Paul (who was one of the early leaders in the Christian church) not very long after Jesus died and rose again. It is an excerpt from a letter he wrote to the Christians in a city called Corinth.

*Have everyone read the passage silently to themselves, and write down questions they have as they read. Then, read the passage out loud, each person reading one verse.*

**Now we are going to look at questions to help us understand this passage.**

**1. In the beginning of the passage, the author explains that he and his friends have a responsibility to God to work hard to persuade others and that God knows that they are sincere. Why do you think he said these things?** It seems like the author is bragging, but he explains that he isn’t trying to do that. Instead, he says he is giving them a reason to be proud of him and his friends, so that the Corinithians can respond to people who brag about the wrong things (Like having a spectacular ministry but not having a sincere heart). From the rest of this letter, we learn that there were people who criticized Paul and what he did, and tried to say that he was a bad leader, so he is simply trying to defend himself.

**2. What does the author say controls them? What do you think that means?** The love of Christ. When he says the love of Christ controls them, he means that every decision they make and everything they do is motivated by the love of Jesus (instead of a love for yourself.) They care more about what Jesus cares about and commands than they do about their own desires, so their lives are directed by Jesus and what HE desires. (And what HE desires is always good!)

**3. In verse 15, he says that people who become Christians live for Jesus instead of themselves. Again, what do you think that means? Why do you think they chose to live for Jesus?** Jesus sacrificed His life for them! They know how much He loves them and cares for them, so they want to live fully for Him, because they trust that it is better than living for themselves anyways.

**4. What do you think the author means when he says “Anyone who belongs to Christ has become a new person”?** Anyone who belongs to Christ is anyone who has believed in Jesus and given their life to Him. When it says they have become a new person, it means they are transformed in a more spiritual sense. When you give your life to Jesus, he begins to change what you care about and how you act. So you are a new person because Jesus has given you a new heart and new desires. He washes you clean from your sin and gives you a new purpose in life!

**5. What would you say is “a gift from God”?** Love, peace, new life, salvation, freedom from sin, forgiveness, etc.

**6. In verse 19, the author says that God gave them the wonderful message of reconciliation. What do you think that is? (What is the wonderful message?)** It is the good news about Jesus…that though we are sinful and disobedient, Jesus chose to die for us and take our punishment. And we can have a new, satisfying life, we can have forgiveness for our sins, we can have a relationship with the God who created us, all because of Jesus. It is the wonderful message of how Jesus can save us and satisfy our souls! He endured such a terrible, humiliating death on the cross in order to bring about a beautiful new way to live and know God.

**7. Do you feel like you have a purpose in life? Why or why not? And if so, what is that purpose?**

**8. According to this passage, what is the purpose for Christians? What are they supposed to do?** God has given us the task of reconciling people to him (What does that mean?). He wants us to share about him with other people so that they will return to Him and have a restored relationship with Him. Christians are supposed to be ambassadors for Jesus. An ambassador represents his or her home country and government in a foreign land. In the same way, Christians are to represent Jesus here on earth until He comes back. They are to show people the love and truth of Jesus, so that God can speak to people through them. And they are to live differently and love generously so that people can see who Jesus is through them.

**9. Why do you think a Christian would be willing to give up time and energy in order to be an ambassador for Jesus? Why would they want to share about Jesus so much?** Jesus died for us! He reconciled us to God when we were not able to do so, and he has made a way for us to be forgiven for our sins. He saved us when there was no hope! And he loves us and provides for us and is always with us, even when we face hard or challenging times. So for a Christian who has experienced the incredible blessings Jesus offers, it is only natural to share about those incredible blessings with everyone else! Think about it…if you eat some really delicious food, you want to share that with other people so that they can know how good it is as well! So Christians are motivated to share about Jesus so that other people can have their lives transformed like they have.

**10. So, after talking about all of this, what do you think it means to be a Christian? What does life as a Christian look like?** To be a Christian is to be someone who realized that they were sinful and in need of a Savior, and someone who chose to believe that Jesus was the Son of God who died to pay for their sins, and that He came back to life. To be a Christian is also to be someone who grows to become more like Jesus and lives in a way to represent Him in this world…all so that other people might learn about who He is and choose to follow Him as well! Christians trust that Jesus has saved them, not their own good works. Because they have been shown so much love by Jesus, they choose to love others in response!

**11. Do you have any other questions?**

**Conclusion**

We do international Bible study and keep doing it because we as Christians have experienced something incredible because of Jesus. We have experienced His love and an amazing sense of peace and joy, and we deeply want other people to know and experience those same things! We give up our time and energy to prepare and cook and lead because we want you to have a chance to know the one person who has honestly changed OUR lives. We want you to learn about Jesus, and like in the passage, we plead with you to think about who Jesus is, to give him a chance, so that you might be able to know Him! And I don’t say this to make you feel pressured into becoming a Christian…it is ok if you don’t feel ready for that. BUT, you are our friends! And BECAUSE you are our friends, we want you to know Jesus and experience all the goodness he offers! Being a Christian is not easy, and making a decision to follow Jesus can be tough, but we believe it is always worth it. It is the best decision you could ever make!

So to finish tonight, we’d like you to spend some time reflecting about what you think about Jesus and fill out these response sheets. And if you have experienced God’s love in any way this semester, or have been fascinated by what you read, or felt anything stirring inside of you…please take some time to think about what it might look like for you to follow Jesus . We are all in different places spiritually and some of you might not be interested in Jesus at all (and that is ok), but some of you have experienced something special here, and maybe that is God trying to get your attention. So just take some time to look at these questions. And you can be honest! We would love for you to know Jesus and follow Him, but even if you think it is all made up we will still be your friend! We would just like to know what you have learned and where you are at spiritually. So take a few minutes, and then we will close in prayer.

**Pray**