



# NEXT STEPS

MAY 1-22

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

## Discussion questions for week 1: Step Out and Seize the Day

1. What resonated with you from the message on Sunday? Was there anything that seemed relevant to your current situation? Was there anything you disagreed with or found uncomfortable?
2. Take a few moments to share with one another how the pandemic has affected you personally. We've all had multiple conversations about this over the past two years but try to think about some of the deeper impacts on your life. What has changed in you? How is your life different now? What have been some of the negative outcomes of this? What have been some positive outcomes?
3. Read Mark 16:1-8. This is how the author of Mark concludes the Easter story and their gospel as a whole (vs. 9-20 seem to have been added much later). What emotions do you see in this passage? Where do you see closure, where do you see uncertainty? How does this passage make you feel personally? Why do you think the author ends their gospel this way?
4. Read Matthew 28:16-20. This is how the author of Matthew ends their gospel. What emotions do you see here? How does this ending differ to the one in Mark? What do you think is the author's intention here?
5. In the passage from Matthew above it says some doubted, but Jesus still empowers his followers to take on his mission. In what ways do fear and doubt hold you back in your spiritual journey and action in the world?
6. One way of understanding Easter is to see it as a story about rescue—God seizes the day and intervenes. But we could also see it as a story about empowerment—God empowers us with new life so that we might seize the day and take on Jesus' mission. In what ways do you feel you need rescuing at the moment? How might these situations look and feel different with an empowerment mindset? In what ways do you need to seize the day right now, despite your fears and doubts?
7. Read Acts 2:1-13. How do you relate to this passage personally? In what ways can you identify with it in your own experience? The speaker on Sunday suggested we could read this as a story that symbolizes the early disciples' realization that they too could be one with God—full of the Spirit just like Jesus. How do you personally experience God's Spirit empowering you from within? What practices have helped you to "be being filled" in daily life?
8. Take a moment to sit in silence as a group to be aware of and welcome God's Spirit. Quieten your hearts and center yourselves in a way that feels comfortable for you. Then simply focus on breathing God in with every inbreath and letting go of fear with every outbreath. Do this for a few minutes, and then share about your experience together.

### Practice for the week: Seize the Day

For this week's practice, simply choose something that you have been meaning to do and go do it! You may have been held back by fear, doubt, or procrastination for all kinds of reasons but determine now to seize the day. This could be something that you've got out of the habit of doing because of the pandemic. It could be a spiritual practice, or an act of service, or a volunteer role in your church community. Determine what you need to do and share that with a trusted friend—and then go do it!

## Discussion questions for week 2: Step Into a World of Possibility

1. What resonated with you from the message on Sunday? Was there anything that seemed relevant to your current situation? Was there anything you disagreed with or found uncomfortable?
2. How do the following statements make you feel? What thoughts come to mind?
  - “God is in control”
  - “Everything happens for a reason”
  - “You just need to have faith”
3. Read Acts 11:1-18. The speaker on Sunday said that Acts presents Peter (and the other apostles) as learning over time. What different elements in this passage —divine and human—contribute to a new understanding?
4. Read Galatians 2:11-14. In what ways is this exchange relatable, and in what ways is it not? Think about something that was uncomfortable for you to learn. What factors helped you be more open to learning? What factors inhibited this process?
5. Paul accused Peter of “not acting in line with the truth of the gospel.” Thinking about the traditions that have influenced your faith journey, as well as your own life experience, how do you determine “the truth of the gospel”? How has this changed over time?
6. Read John 14:27-28 and 2 Timothy 1:7. What is the role of the Holy Spirit in helping us to learn? How might the Holy Spirit help us to embody the “good news” of Jesus with regards to some of the major issues of our culture today?
7. Is there a situation or issue where you feel yourself repeatedly responding out of fear rather than out of “power, love and self-control”? Share briefly with the group, and take some time to pray for one another.

### Practice for the week: Hope, joy and peace

*May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit. (Romans 15:13, NIV)*

Take some time this week to reflect on the verse above. First quiet your thoughts and center yourself in a way that feels comfortable to you. Read the verse slowly several times, pausing between readings to allow the Holy Spirit to speak to you. Ask yourself if there is a situation in your life where you feel a particular need for hope, joy or peace. Invite the Holy Spirit to fill you with those things as you choose to trust God to be with you and empower you in that situation.

## Discussion questions for week 3: Step Up for One Another

1. What resonated with you from the message on Sunday? Was there anything that seemed relevant to your current situation? Was there anything you disagreed with or found uncomfortable?
2. Share with one another about your own personal experience with community currently. Do you feel lonely? Do you feel overwhelmed with too many connections and relationships? Do you have enough time for the relationships that matter most to you? How have things changed through the pandemic?
3. Take a moment to discuss the current state of your small group. How would you like to see the group change or develop? If you are not in a group, would you like to join one at Cedar Ridge? Check out [www.crc.org/discipleship-groups](http://www.crc.org/discipleship-groups) and/or email us at [info@crc.org](mailto:info@crc.org).
4. Read Matthew John 17:20-23. What insight does this passage give us about Jesus' vision for humanity? How realistic is this vision in your view? Can you describe a time when you experienced God through the closeness of a relationship? Can you describe a time when your closeness to God impacted a relationship with someone else?
5. Jesus taught about very real and down-to-earth practices to help us live out this kind of vision. For example, he said, "So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets" (Matthew 7: 12, NIV). Why do you think this is so hard to practice? Have you ever experienced someone practicing this towards you? What change did it bring about in you?
6. Read Acts 6:1-7 and discuss how the leaders of the fledgling first century church respond to inequity in the community. In what ways do you observe or experience inequity in our own church community at Cedar Ridge? How do you think we should respond?
7. The speaker on Sunday suggested that the pathway to authentic community is more about "stepping down" than "stepping up." Read Philippians 2:1-11 and each spend some quiet time reflecting on ways you feel you need to "step down" to make room for others. Think about all the arenas of your life—Cedar Ridge, home, neighborhood, workplace, school, etc. After this reflection, share your insights together and spend some time praying for one another.

### Practice for the week: Stepping Down

Read each of the brief sayings of Jesus below and take some time to reflect honestly about your own life. For each one, consider whether there is a specific situation or a specific relationship where you need to practice this teaching. As you reflect in stillness invite and become aware God's presence. Let go of any guilt or fear and receive this as an invitation to grow in loving others more. Let God's love flow through you and empower you as you determine to "step down" in those situations and relationships to love another as yourself.

*So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets. (Matthew 7:12, NIV)*

*You have heard that it was said, 'Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.' But I tell you, do not resist an evil person. If anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to them the other cheek also. (Matthew 5:38-39, NIV)*

*You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you. (Matthew 5:43-44, NIV)*

*Do not judge, or you too will be judged. For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you. (Matthew 7:1-2, NIV)*

*Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, "Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother or sister who sins against me? Up to seven times?" Jesus answered, "I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times. (Matthew 18:21-22, NIV)*

## Discussion questions for week 4: Step Forward with Courageous Hope

1. What resonated with you from the message on Sunday? Was there anything that seemed relevant to your current situation? Was there anything you disagreed with or found uncomfortable?
2. Would you describe yourself as a hopeful person? In general, is the glass half full or half empty for you? What do you think has developed this perspective in you?
3. What story (or stories) inspire you to hope courageously? These could be non-fiction or fiction (books, movies, mythology, history, etc.). Share with one another about why you find them so inspiring and how they have impacted your life.
4. Read Matthew 13:31-33. These are two of Jesus' parables, and parables often have ambiguous and multi-layered meanings. What do these ones mean to you? How do you read them? Why do you think Jesus is talking about the kingdom in terms of small things? How does this relate to hope and courage?
5. At Cedar Ridge we have a vision of "hope and transformation" lived out through a commitment to personal development (growth), love for one another (community), and working for healing and justice in our world (servanthood). Reflect on each of these three and consider:
  - How might you have lost hope and given up on yourself, other people or the world?
  - What would courageous hope look like for you in each of these situations?
  - What small thing(s) do you sense you need to do to now to embody hope?
6. Read this short essay by the civil rights leader and congressman John Lewis, who died on July 17, 2020 ([www.nytimes.com/2020/07/30/opinion/john-lewis-civil-rights-america.html](http://www.nytimes.com/2020/07/30/opinion/john-lewis-civil-rights-america.html)). He wrote it shortly before his death, and asked for it to be published via various outlets on the day of his funeral. After reading, take a moment of silence for reflection. Then discuss the following:
  - a. What is he saying about the past? How can this inspire hope and courage for us? When you think about his life, how could the past have been a source of despair for him rather than hope?
  - b. What is he saying about the future? How can this inspire hope and courage for us?
  - c. What is he saying about the present moment and how to activate hope?
7. Each spend some time in quiet personal reflection about the ways in which past disappointments and pain might be suffocating hope in your life. This might be disappointment with people you trusted, or disappointment with faith and God. It could be disappointment with yourself and/or life in general. Take a moment to quiet your heart and identify an area of pain and disappointment. Invite God into that space and consider what you need to let go of the past (given that you have no control over that now) and what you need to do (and keep doing) in the present to move forward courageously. After everyone has had an opportunity for some quiet, spend some time sharing your reflections with each other. Then pray for one another and invite God's love into each situation.

## Practice for the week: The Examen

One way of viewing hope is as a decision in the present moment not to allow the present circumstances to overwhelm us such that we give up on the way of love. One of the challenges is that we are not always conscious of this in any given moment. The Examen is a helpful exercise to help us become more aware, and can be practiced at the end of each day.

Sit quietly alone and take a moment to center yourself. Then “relive” your day in your imagination by allowing your thoughts to guide you through the day’s events. As you do this, focus particularly on your interactions with others—in your family, at work or school, in your neighborhood or online. These “interactions” might be your internal thoughts or attitudes, or they could be actual conversations and encounters. Do this without judging yourself, but simply notice and ask the following two questions:

At what times during your day were your thoughts and actions grounded in courage and hope?

- What happened?
- How were you hopeful and what empowered you in this way?
- Were you aware of this hope, or is it only now as you look back that you realize it?
- What was the outcome?

At what times during your day were you fearful and despairing?

- What happened? Did you give up on yourself, judge someone else, or were you overwhelmed by circumstances?
- Were you aware of this fear and despair, or is it only now as you look back that you realize it?
- What were your feelings or beliefs about the situation and any person(s) involved, including yourself and God?
- How would being more conscious and grounded in courageous hope have made a difference in this situation for you?

When you have finished reflecting on your day, continue to sit quietly without self-judgment. Invite God’s presence and allow yourself to sink deeply into God’s total acceptance—feel this love as the source of hope and courage for you as you let go of fear. Invite God’s love to empower you to live more consciously from this center tomorrow.