



Questions for Reflection and Discussion

Discussion questions for week 1: Growth, Community and Servanthood

1. What insights did you gain from the message this past Sunday? What was most helpful for you? What did you find uncomfortable?
2. Watch our "vision video" at www.crc.org/our-vision-and-history/ or read it on the back of this page. How does this vision make you feel? What inspires you and what makes you feel uncomfortable about it? In what ways do you feel part of this vision? In what ways do you feel disconnected?

3. Read the following passage:

"Are you tired? Worn out? Burned out on religion? Come to me. Get away with me and you'll recover your life. I'll show you how to take a real rest. Walk with me and work with me—watch how I do it. Learn the unforced rhythms of grace. I won't lay anything heavy or ill-fitting on you. Keep company with me and you'll learn to live freely and lightly."

Matthew 11:28-30 (The Message)

How do you relate to Jesus words here? Currently, would you say you are more at the "tired, worn out, burned out on religion" end of the spectrum or more at the "living freely and lightly" end? What accounts for this in your life? Is there anything you feel you could do about it?

4. In the above passage what do "unforced rhythms of grace" mean to you? How would you describe the rhythms (or cycles) of growth in your own life? How could you be more intentional about this?
5. Read John 13:34-35 and John 17:22-21. What kind of future does Jesus imagine for humanity? How realistic do you think this is? What are the main barriers to this kind of future? What could you personally do differently to make this a reality? What could we do differently as a community?
6. Read Matthew 20:25-28. In which of your current personal relationships right might you need to be more intentional about taking an approach like this? What are some ways you could serve within our church community?
7. Take a moment of silence to reflect on ways you feel most challenged to take action and make a difference in the year ahead. These could be personal growth issues, or engaging more deeply in community, or serving practically. Try to prioritize no more than one or two of these. Then break into groups of 2 or 3 and share as you feel appropriate about your reflections. When everyone has shared, spend some time praying for one another. If you are reflecting on these questions alone, quietly open your heart to God and received God's love and empowerment.

Practice for the week – Coming to Jesus

"Are you tired? Worn out? Burned out on religion? Come to me. Get away with me and you'll recover your life. I'll show you how to take a real rest. Walk with me and work with me—watch how I do it. Learn the unforced rhythms of grace. I won't lay anything heavy or ill-fitting on you. Keep company with me and you'll learn to live freely and lightly."

Matthew 11:28-30 (The Message)

This week try to make a brief time each morning to center yourself and be consciously aware of the presence of Christ with you. Sit quietly in a comfortable position and read the Matthew 11:28-30 passage overleaf. Then close your eyes and center yourself by focusing on your breathing. As you breathe in, allow God's love to fill you. Imagine it as an unforced, unconditional gift that Jesus is offering, and receive it. As you breathe out, let go of fear, tension, pressure, or anything that feels forced on you. Relax and sink into Christ's presence with you. Feel the rhythm of your breathing as you breathe in love and breathe out tension and pressure. Receive it as a rhythm of grace to take you into your day. Throughout your day, in moments of fear, tension, conflict or difficulty, simply be aware of the rhythm of your breathing as Christ's presence with you.

Our Vision

Cedar Ridge is a community of hope and transformation dedicated to following Jesus.

Imagine a community that dares to dream of heaven on earth; a community where everyone is accepted and respected and their journey cherished, regardless of their background, beliefs or place in society; where everyone looks out for the concerns of others and no one is alone.

Imagine a community of peace and safety where it's possible to shelter from the frenzied pace of life, in order to slow down and explore the mystery and meaning of our existence; where we can take time to address the roots of our anxieties and pain; a place of hope where we can find help and healing and the power to change, no matter how desperate our situation.

Imagine a community of people devoted to following Jesus together, learning to live like him and helping one another grow in their relationship with God; where we are gradually transformed to become better people: better friends, better family members, better workers, better neighbors; becoming people who enjoy life to the full and who can also deal with adversity well, learning to grow through failure and suffering.

Imagine that community scattered throughout the region around Washington, Baltimore and beyond working as agents of love, peace and hope wherever they are; serving our neighbors, caring for the poor, helping the oppressed. Imagine a community of people who live simply and ethically, who share their land and resources with their neighbors; a community that treasures the Earth and reaches out beyond global, cultural and political barriers to offer friendship and practical support.

Imagine a community of people who make the world a better place.

Discussion questions for week 2: Why we Gather to Worship

1. Was there anything that struck you from the message this past Sunday? What was most helpful or timely for you? Was there anything you disagreed with?
2. What are the main reasons you come to Sunday morning services at Cedar Ridge? Have those reasons changed over time? If so, how and why?
3. Read Hebrews 10:19-25. Hebrews is a difficult book to understand because it is steeped in Jewish temple culture—which itself draws from many different stories of Israel's history.
 - Can you see any ways the author here makes connections between the Jewish temple rites and the church?
 - The context for the book of Hebrews appears to be one of increasing hardship for followers of Jesus. In such a context, why might it be particularly important for people to keep meeting together?
 - How does this relate to our own time and culture?
4. Think of a time you were there for someone in your faith community (at Cedar Ridge or a previous church) or someone was there for you. What happened, and why was this meaningful for you?
5. The Psalms express a wide variety of human emotions—including hatred, violence and self-righteousness. Read Psalm 149. What does this psalm have to say about praise that is helpful? What do you think is unhelpful? What might we learn from this psalm overall about how God views our songs of praise?
6. Read the following verses. What light do they shed on the meaning of communion? Which of these meanings resonates most with you, and why?
 - John 6:48-51
 - Matthew 26:26-28
 - Luke 24:30-35
 - 1 Corinthians 10:16-17
7. The speaker on Sunday said that at Cedar Ridge we try to reflect our values of mystery, humility and inclusion in how we worship together, in addition to maintaining a focus on justice and service.
 - How do you feel about that?
 - What would help you to worship more meaningfully in our worship services?
 - What positive contribution can you make to community worship when we come together (even if no one else necessarily notices)?

Take some time to pray for one another. If you are reflecting on these questions alone, express your thoughts and desires to God, knowing God hears us and loves us.

Practice for the week: An everyday act of worship

So here's what I want you to do, God helping you: Take your everyday, ordinary life—your sleeping, eating, going-to-work, and walking-around life—and place it before God as an offering.

Romans 12:1-2 (The Message)

This week take some time to think about your everyday routine. Identify something you do regularly that you could consciously make an act of worship. Is there a way you could serve, pursue justice, develop gratitude, or show love in some way as an offering to God? Ask God to help you as you commit to doing this on a regular basis.

Discussion Questions for Week 3: Why I Follow Jesus

1. What stood out to you from Sunday's message? What insights did you gain for your own spiritual life?
2. In Sunday's message, Wesley shared his personal faith story, including key moments in his spiritual journey. As you reflect on your faith story, what are some key moments in your journey?
3. How would you respond if asked why you follow Jesus? Are there any meaningful Bible verses that have helped you along the journey of following Jesus?
4. At Cedar Ridge, we often talk about being on a journey. This is a way of acknowledging the value of being open to growth and transformation. Reflect on how you first learned what it meant to follow Jesus. Has your understanding of following Jesus changed? If so, how?

5. Walter Bruggeman, Old Testament scholar and theologian, has written:

"The Gospel is not to be confused with or identified with the Bible. The Bible contains all sorts of voices that are inimical to the good news of God's love, mercy and justice. Thus, "biblicism" is a dangerous threat to the faith of the church because it allows into our thinking claims that are contradictory to the news of the Gospel. The Gospel, unlike the Bible, is unambiguous about God's deep love for all peoples."

Do you find anything about this quote insightful? Does it cause you to feel any tension? What "claims that are contradictory to the news of the Gospel" have you derived from the Bible?

6. In the message, Wesley mentioned that "exclusion is a human tendency that has the potential to creep into all of our lives." Exclusion is antithetical to the Gospel! How have you failed to welcome and include others in the way God has welcomed and included you?
7. Reflect on Jesus' words in Mark 9:40: "...for whoever is not against us is for us." What are the implications of this verse? What are some practical ways that we can live this out?

Practice for the week: Listening for God's word to you

Slowly read through Mark 9:38-41 three or four times. Between each reading, sit silently for at least a minute. As you read, listen for how God might be speaking to you through this ancient text. Write down a word/phrase that stood out to you. Spend some time journaling about why that word/phrase is meaningful. Write down any action you feel like God is guiding you towards.

Discussion Questions for Week 4: Why We Are Inclusive

1. What insights did you gain from the message this past Sunday? What was most helpful for you? What did you find uncomfortable?
2. What has been your previous experience of inclusion and belonging in churches (including Cedar Ridge)? What has helped you feel a sense of belonging? What has made you feel less included?
3. In Galatians 3:28, Paul writes: "There is no longer Jew or Gentile, slave or free, male and female. For you are all one in Christ Jesus." (NRSVUE) What do you think he means by this? In what ways is seeing beyond identities like race and gender helpful in being inclusive, and in what ways could it be unhelpful?
4. In the message on Sunday, we reflected on the metaphor of bounded and centered sets as a way of thinking about inclusivity in communities. Why do you think churches seem to have struggled so much down through the ages with conflict and exclusion, when the founder of the movement (Jesus) was so inclusive?
5. What might be some of the advantages of being a "bounded" community, where there is a clearly defined boundary about who belongs? In what ways could this help with inclusion, and in what ways could it hinder it? What might be some of the potential weaknesses and dysfunctions of a community like this, and how could they be avoided?
6. What might be some of the advantages of being a "centered" community, where belonging is determined by a journey towards a vision? In what ways could this help with inclusion, and in what ways could it hinder it? What might be some of the potential weaknesses and dysfunctions of a community like this, and how could they be avoided?
7. How could the whole notion that we are all on a journey and "works in progress" encourage inclusion and belonging? How could it help with the initiation and resolution of disagreement and conflict?
8. Read the passage below and discuss how you could apply this to your own group and/or your role as part of the larger community at Cedar Ridge. What would a community like this look like? What actions do you need to take? After discussion spend some time praying for one another—and if you are reflecting on these questions alone, pray for our church community as a whole.

So speak encouraging words to one another. Build up hope so you'll all be together in this, no one left out, no one left behind... Gently encourage the stragglers, and reach out for the exhausted, pulling them to their feet. Be patient with each person, attentive to individual needs. And be careful that when you get on each other's nerves you don't snap at each other. Look for the best in each other, and always do your best to bring it out.

1 Thessalonians 5:11-15 (The Message)

Practice for the week: Looking for the best in each other

So speak encouraging words to one another. Build up hope so you'll all be together in this, no one left out, no one left behind... Gently encourage the stragglers, and reach out for the exhausted, pulling them to their feet. Be patient with each person, attentive to individual needs. And be careful that when you get on each other's nerves you don't snap at each other. Look for the best in each other, and always do your best to bring it out.

1 Thessalonians 5:11-15 (The Message)

This week try to set aside a brief time each morning to read this passage again. Read slowly, and intentionally absorb the words and concepts. After reading, sit quietly and reflect on all the people you are likely to encounter today – family, friends, co-workers, etc. Invite God into this reflective space, and set your posture to one of compassion (as in this passage). Let compassion soak into your stance towards each person. Return to this stance throughout your day, and take ownership of any negative or critical attitudes by consciously looking for the best in others and taking responsibility to do your own best to bring it out in them.