

JESUS' MANIFESTO



Discussion Questions Feb 22: Introduction to Lent

Beginning with the End in Mind Discussion Questions

Before coming to this discussion read through all three chapters of “The Sermon on the Mount” in Matthew 5-7 to get a general feel for it. Read it all the way through and imagine being there and listening.

1. What stood out to you from the message this past Sunday? Was there anything that seemed timely or relevant to you? Was there anything which made you uncomfortable, or with which you disagreed?
2. We’ve just entered the season of Lent. Share your own thoughts and feelings about Lent with one another. Is this a familiar season or does it feel new to you? What experiences (positive and negative) have you had with Lent and why? What hopes and goals do you have for Lent this year?
3. How does the term “The Kingdom of Heaven” make you feel? Does it inspire you or does it seem overly idealistic? The speaker on Sunday suggested that “Kingdom” as a metaphor might have connotations of dominating power (ruling monarchs). If Jesus’ teaching is an invitation into loving harmony with God, how might change occur in you or in others? Is it realistic to expect the world (or anyone) to be transformed if not forced to do so?
4. Read Ezekiel 36:26-28 and Jeremiah 31:33-34. In what way are these scriptures an invitation? What personal response do they elicit in you? What does partnership with God look like for you in your life?
5. Read the follow metaphors for the kind of life and way Jesus is calling us to in the Sermon on the Mount:
 - Salt and light (Matthew 5:13-16)
 - Good and bad fruit (Matthew 7:16-18)
 - Wide and narrow gates (Matthew 7:13-14)
 - Rock and sand (Matthew 7:24-27)

For each one: what do you think the metaphor means? Jesus seems to be saying that a wholesome, loving life is possible but it’s not easy – what makes it so challenging? How do these metaphors apply to you personally? Can you share any examples in your own life where these have played out?

6. Take a moment to do this week's Prayer Practice below together and discuss your experience of it afterwards. Then take a moment to pray for one another.

Prayer practice for this week: Immersion in Unconditional Love

Take some time this week to consciously and intentionally immerse yourself in God's love and open your heart in honesty and courage. Sit with eyes closed in a physically neutral and comfortable posture so your body is not a distraction. Center yourself by focusing on your breathing. Consciously be aware of God's complete love for you. Imagine the room filled with God's love. You are immersed in it and breathing in this love. Any time you have a negative or unloving thought or feeling about yourself, don't panic – just let it go and breath it out. Return to a focus on God's love.

Once you have centered yourself this way, "look" at yourself. Do this in an atmosphere of love – just be honest but don't condemn. What are some of the behaviors, habits, and actions that you feel need to change in your life? How would you like to be different? Just take your time with this; relax and don't force it. Just be honest and for now don't worry about how you will change but just what needs to change. Keep breathing in God's love and consciously see yourself as completely immersed (completely loved) no matter what needs to change.

When you have finished, take a moment to write down your thoughts about this experience (perhaps in your journal if you keep one). Note down any thoughts or feelings you had about God's love and acceptance. Was this easy to feel or difficult? Then write down what you feel emerged with regards to what needs to change in your life. Be as honest in your writing as you were in the stillness and keep this to return to another day.

Alternative Practice: Immersion in Unconditional Love Through Embodied Awareness

If seated stillness or silent meditation is not helpful for you, consider immersing yourself in God's unconditional love through embodied awareness. The invitation is to simply place yourself where you can become more aware of the love that already surrounds and sustains you.

You might create something, draw, paint, cook, build, or write, allowing the act of making to remind you that you are surrounded by God's love. You might take a slow walk outside, noticing birds, trees, and sky, remembering that the same love that sustains creation sustains you. Gentle movement, everyday tasks done attentively, or listening to music that opens your heart can also become ways of receiving love rather than striving for it.

However you enter in, let yourself be exactly as you are. Trust that even here, in motion, in creativity, in sound, you are completely and unconditionally loved.