

Not First #1:
SUBMISSION

Word

Scripture Reference

Matthew 26:36–46

Discussion Questions

1. Share examples of how people demonstrate pre-occupation on self. In other words, how are you the center of your attention?
2. Since the fall of man, mankind has the problem of being the center of his or her own attraction. From the way we live and the words that come out of our mouths, reality shows that we make things all about us. Even in your own prayer life, you often pray for things that only concern you. Advancement of technology that prioritizes your convenience has only fed the belief that you are number one. However, Scripture reminds us that you are not first in this life. In fact, you are last. In our study of spiritual disciplines that remind us daily of your place in this world, we first look at the discipline of *submission*. Read Matthew 26:36-46. This passage shows us how Jesus Christ, God the Son who did not have to submit but chose to do so, modeled submission to God the Father. From this example, we draw out five principles of how you can practice the spiritual discipline of submission:
 - a. **Admit that submission is a very real struggle (v. 36-38).** Jesus was about to die for the sin of mankind. Because He is 100% God, He knew this long before He came to earth. Yet in complete submission to the will of the Father, Jesus chose to become man and die. Because He is also 100% man, Jesus felt shattered at the thought of His death. This is why He went out to the garden to pray to His Heavenly Father. How did Jesus describe his feelings in that moment (v. 38)? Why would He feel that way when He knew all along about His impending death? Share how you struggled over submitting

to something or someone, feeling like you did not have a choice in the matter. Do you find it difficult to submit to God's will? What are the things that you need to give up when you submit yourself to the will of God?

- b. **Acknowledge that it is not about me (v. 39).** Jesus' prayer tells you that submission is not about Him, but about the will of God. And so, even if you think it is your right, it is still not about you, but the will of God. As a Christian, what are the things that you struggle about in submission to God's will? Discuss why it is so difficult to submit to someone else, even to God, when you think that life is all about you. How could this attitude be remedied?
- c. **A daily reminder in prayer to submit (v. 40-41).** Jesus' disciples, whom He brought with Him for prayer support, fell asleep. Jesus told them to watch and pray so that they would not fall into temptation. What does the statement, "the spirit is willing, but the body is weak," mean? As a Christian, you know what you ought to do, but why is it a struggle to do them? If it is a struggle, then you need help. How should daily prayer help you? Discuss what praying according to God's will mean.
- d. **Accept submission's consequences (v. 42-43).** Jesus prayed for a second time, and this time it was an acceptance of the inevitable. He prayed that God the Father's will be done. What was the consequence of Jesus' submission to His Father's will? Share how a result of submitting to God's will has affected your life. Have you ever prayed, "Lord, help me to accept the consequences of my submission to your will." What big difference did it make?
- e. **Submission to God's perfect will always bring joy (v. 45-46).** As Jesus submitted to His Father's will, He was able to go and welcome His betrayer. He was able to accept what had to happen: His arrest and eventual death on the cross for your salvation. It was Jesus' death that gives you the joy of salvation. When you submit to God's will, you end up getting the best because it is from Him. This gives you true joy. Share an experience of how submitting to God's perfect will has

brought you so much joy in your life. Would you consider it as one of the best, if not *the* best experience of your life?

Walk

*“J” is for Jesus for He has first place,
“O” is for others you meet face to face,
“Y” is for you, in whatever you do,
Put your self LAST and spell JOY.*

Do you want to be FIRST or do you want the BEST? Ponder of how you can live out JOY in your walk with God.

Worship & Prayer

Heavenly Father, I must admit that to submit to Your will is not an easy task because of my own pride and stubbornness. But thank You that through the example of my Lord Jesus Christ's submission to your will, which led me to the joy of salvation, I know that I can completely trust that Your will is the best for me. I also admit that praying for Your will means that I acknowledge that Your will is much greater than mine. Help me to define my walk with you in submission. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Not First #2: SECRECY

Word

Scripture Reference

Matthew 6:1-6, 16-18

Discussion Questions

1. How do people show or shout out their greatness to others?
2. In a world that exclaims, “Look at me!” it is important that followers of Jesus practice spiritual disciplines that remind us that we are not first in this world. Read Matthew 6:1-6;16-18. This passage is part of Jesus’ sermon on the Mount, and it teaches us about the spiritual discipline of secrecy. Secrecy identifies your true motive (v. 2, 5, 16). The admonition to practice this discipline is so that you will not become a hypocrite or a fraud. What is hypocrisy? Discuss why people call attention to themselves. If you do something good, but no one knows about it, is it still considered good? What’s the big difference of this belief from those who think that they should broadcast the good things they do in their lives? When is it a good time to share with others the good things you’ve done for someone?
3. There are two areas which God wants us to keep in secret:
 - a. **Secrecy in charitable action (v. 1-4).** What was the instruction in verses 2 and 3 when you give to the needy? How did the Pharisees act when they give to the Lord? How was the poor widow different from them? Discuss why it is quite difficult for some people to do a good deed and keep quiet about it? What should motivate you to be charitable without letting your left hand know what your right hand is doing?
 - b. **Secrecy in spiritual action (v. 5 ,6; 6-18).** May times when people practice spiritual matters such as praying and fasting,

because of spiritual pride they make it about themselves instead of doing it solely for God. Does this mean that you should not pray in public? When you pray in front of others, how can you focus completely on what you are saying to God instead of how your prayers sound to others?

4. In practicing the discipline of secrecy, the passage also gives us these encouragement (v. 4, 6, 8):
 - a. **God is omnipresent and omniscient.** God is everywhere always. How does it affect you that God sees and knows what you are doing, even when you may think that no one is watching you? How should these attributes of God encourage you to live for Him instead of trying to impress others?
 - b. **God rewards.** Your Heavenly Father, who sees what is done in secret will reward you. Why is God’s reward much better than any recognition men can give you? Why is it impossible to enjoy the good things that this world offers without God’s blessings?
5. When you practice the discipline of secrecy, it releases you from two things that hold you back:
 - a. It **prevents you from being in the bondage of the approval game.** Discuss why it is not healthy to always be looking for the approval and compliments from others. What happens when you only look for the approval of One, and that is of the Lord Jesus?
 - b. It **gives you freedom from comparison game.** Why is comparing yourself to others a dangerous game? What would be the best way to overcome comparison of yourself to others?

Walk

In charitable and spiritual actions, you are to practice secrecy because it identifies your true motives. What you do should not be to impress other people; it is between you and the Lord. The practice of this spiritual discipline frees us from the approval and comparison game, because the omniscient and omnipresent God sees and knows all, and will reward us openly. Knowing these things, what could you do to ascertain that your

giving, prayer and fasting are not done for show? What practical examples of giving in secret could you do this week? How can you commit your spiritual disciplines to God alone?

Worship & Prayer

Heavenly Father, thank You for the great reminders to keep what I do for you in secret so that I can identify my true motive. Help me to always remember that I should do things not to impress others, but to give glory to Your name. Help me to give without strings attached, to pray with the motive of worshiping and serving You; and when I do fast, that it should be between You and me alone. Thank You that there is no need for me to impress others because You can see every good thing that I do. Thank You that nothing can be better than the rewards You give to those who practice secrecy as spiritual discipline. Lord God, help me to have this kind of discipline that I need in my spiritual life. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Not First #3: CONFESSION

Word

Scripture Reference

1 John 1:5-2:2

Discussion Questions

1. Have you ever had to confess to someone something that you did wrong? How did you feel about it? Share the experience with your group.
2. Oftentimes, people are reluctant to say sorry because it is an admission that they have done something wrong. Pride hinders us from saying we ever did anything wrong, and so we reject the spiritual discipline of confession which the Bible clearly teaches we as believers must practice. Read 1 John 1:5-2:2. In this letter of the apostle John to the Church where he tells us about the spiritual discipline of confession, he first reminds us about three important theological truths to help us fully accept the idea of confession:
 - a. **Truth #1: God is holy, and He is never wrong in anything He does (v. 1:5).** God's character of holiness is very much emphasized in the Bible. God's holiness means that no sin is found in Him. It means He makes no mistakes, His motives are always pure, and that He is never wrong. If God's holiness means all these things, then in our relationship with the Lord, who is always right? Does God ever owe you an apology for the difficulties and trials that you experience in your life? Why or why not?
 - b. **Truth #2: Sin is inconsistent and contradictory with God's holiness (v. 1:6).** As light and darkness are on the opposite sides of the spectrum, so is sin and holiness. To a holy God, there is no big or small sin; sin is sin. Just because

God is gracious, merciful, and forgiving does not mean that He has relaxed His standard with regards to sin. Have you ever justified something wrong that you did by comparing it to other "major" sins? What are some things you are doing now that you think are wrong but that are "not really a big deal"? What excuses do you give to justify your actions? How does knowing that God is never ok with any sin change your perspective?

- c. **Truth #3: Jesus cleanses us from ALL sins so we can fellowship with God (v. 1:7).** A holy God cannot have anything to do with sin. But because He loves us and wants a relationship with us, Jesus, God the Son, had to die on the cross in our place to cleanse us from our sins and allow us to "hang out" with God. Jesus already paid the ultimate price for sin. There is no sin that God the Father cannot forgive through the cleansing blood of Jesus. But why is it that many Christians try to fix their sins with another sin? Do you go to Jesus when you have a sin problem, or do you try to fix it yourself? Discuss the deadly cycle of trying to cover up your sin with another sin. Compare it with how the blood of Christ deals with your sin problem.
3. Knowing now these truths about God, as believers we are called to do these things:
 - a. **Self-examination to reveal imperfection (v. 1:8).** An honest examination of our actions, motives, speech, and intentions reveal that none of us are perfect. That is why we do not like to do it. When was the last time you looked at your life to see areas in which you have not done right in relation to God, family, and friends?
 - b. **A daily need to practice the spiritual discipline of confession (v. 9-10).** Unless we realize that we are not perfect, that we have wronged the Lord and we have wronged others, we will never find the need to confess. What is confession? What does your confession through prayer look like? Read King David's confession in Psalm 51. What two actions does this psalm teaches us that an honest confession should include?

4. Why do we need to confess? The apostle John gives us two reasons:

- a. **Confession helps us avoid more sin (v. 2:1a).** When you do not deliberately think about your wrong actions, you tend to repeat them. Confessing your sins gives you a heightened sense of awareness of your sins. What sin--any kind of sin--do you find yourself repeatedly doing? Have you ever tried to confess it to God, or do you simply ask for forgiveness "for all the things I did wrong"?
- b. **Confession reminds us of God's grace, love, and sacrifice (v. 2:1b-2).** The word *propitiation* means that Jesus Christ's death satisfies God's rightful wrath toward our sins. It means that God's rightful anger is appeased through His Son. It means that we don't receive the penalty for our sins because Jesus Christ received it in our place. "*I deserve God's punishment, yet through His Son Jesus Christ I received forgiveness instead.*" Is this at the forefront of your thoughts everyday? How do you daily remind yourself of God's grace and mercy to stop yourself from sinning?

Walk

"If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." (1 John 1:9)

When we think about admitting that we are wrong, we feel reluctant because we associate it with shame. But these words from Scripture tells us that there is no shame in confessing to the Lord our sins. There is forgiveness instead. Isn't that awesome? Through Jesus Christ, God forgives ALL of our sins. But this is not a license to keep on sinning. As a follower of Jesus Christ, you are called to daily self-examination and confession of unrighteousness so that you will be reminded of God's grace, love, and forgiveness, which in turn should remind you to no longer sin. What sins do you find difficult to confess to God? If it would help to write it down, do so. Then find a quiet time and place where you won't be interrupted, when you can, one by one, confess those sins to God. You'll find that instead of feeling shame, you will instead feel the embrace of a gracious, loving Father who tells you, "You're forgiven, my child."

Worship & Prayer

Dear Heavenly Father, you are good and faithful and just. You are grace, love, mercy, and forgiveness personified. Oftentimes I abuse those qualities of yours and sin. Many times I also forget those qualities of Yours and sin. And when I sin, I feel ashamed and try to hide my sin with more sin. Then I try to make myself feel better by simply asking You to "forgive all the wrong things I did." I "confess" my sins without really admitting I did anything wrong. Forgive me, Father. Forgive me. Thank you for the reminder through Your Word that Your Son Jesus Christ has already paid the penalty of my sins. I come to you now with the assurance of His blood on the cross, asking you to forgive me for

For all these sins, Lord, I ask for Your help--for strength and guidance to overcome it. I ask for help in finding godly people who will hold me accountable and help me to change. I ask you, Lord, to create in me a clean heart, and renew a steadfast spirit within me. I ask all these in Jesus' name. Amen.

Not First #4:
SERVICE

Word

Scripture Reference

John 13:1-17

Discussion Questions

1. How would you describe an excellent customer service?
2. **The spiritual discipline of service is having joy in serving the Lord.** Read John 13:1-17. In this passage, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ set the example of how service needs to look like. It is a spiritual discipline that needs to be practiced daily to remind you that life is not about us, but about God and others. In order to serve effectively, the Bible teaches us three foundations that need to be set:
 - a. **Love forms the basis of service (v. 1-2).** Jesus was in the upper room with his closest disciples. He knew that he would be arrested that night and would soon die for the sins of mankind. He knew He was going to go through the hardship of dying, yet He gladly chose to die to save EVERYONE, including those who would betray Him, because of His love for mankind. This is the greatest act of service: to lay down your life for someone you love. Discuss why you think people in general do not have joy in doing things for others? Have you ever asked yourself, “Why am I doing what I’m doing?” Is your reason for serving others motivated by the desire to be seen/recognized, or is it because you really care for the people you are serving? On the other hand, discuss how you can develop an attitude of serving joyfully. How does love make a big difference in serving others?
 - b. **Humility forms the basis of service (v. 3-5).** Jesus, God the Son, worthy to be worshipped, washed his disciples’ feet. He exemplified the fact that humility is needed in serving others. Discuss how humbling it is to wash the feet of others, especially during Jesus’ time? Is it possible to serve another person without humility? Why?

- c. **Sacrifice forms the basis of service (v. 6-11).** Peter did not fully understand why Jesus wanted to wash his feet, and he refused the gesture, but Jesus told him that unless He does it for Peter, Peter would have no part with Him. This is in reference to Peter’s betrayal of Jesus. Jesus exemplified the ultimate kind of service, which was formed by sacrificially laying down His own life for everyone in order to be saved. What does sacrifice really mean? Discuss what sacrifices you are making when you serve another person. Does your service to God make an impact on others because of the sacrifices you are making?

3. **A call to serve others: no exemptions because Jesus is the example (v. 12-16).** Before the washing of feet, the disciples were arguing who would be number one in Jesus’ kingdom. This is not what service is about. No one is greater than Jesus, and so no one is exempt from serving. Discuss the many ways you can serve the Lord in your church. What excuses do you often hear when you find that it takes sacrifice to serve the Lord? Discuss how you can “wash the feet” of others in your context?

Walk

Serving others is a great way to check your pride. In serving others you realize that you are not first in this world, that it is not by your convenience but about the sacrifice you do. It checks your motives, testing if you have genuine love for God and for others. It makes you care more and complain less. Think of someone from your home, school, or workplace whom you can serve this week. How would you serve that person? How about in your church? Are you actively serving the body of Christ? If yes, think about how you can continue to joyfully do so. If you are not yet actively serving in your church, ask a minister or staff how you can best serve God and serve others in your community.

Worship & Prayer

Heavenly Father, thank you for teaching me how to serve You and others. Thank you for the example of my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, that in spite of Who He is, He humbly and sacrificially laid His own life for a sinner like me as an ultimate gesture of love and service. In return, please help me to learn how to truly serve You as well, by serving others around me. Open my eyes Lord to see the needs where I can serve, and open my heart to be willing to act on it.

Not First #5:
BIBLE-READING

Word

Scripture Reference

2 Timothy 2:14-26

Discussion Questions

1. Growing up, especially during your teenage years, whose approval did you try to seek?
2. All churches are to do the work of evangelism and discipleship, but there are certain things that some churches do better than others (i.e. some churches have great prayer meetings, others are social justice-focused, some are mission-minded, and others are known for music styles, etc.). According to many, our church (GCCP) generally is known for its strong Bible teaching. It's a good characteristic to have, but if your church does not have a strong pulpit ministry, would you self-initiate to read and understand the Bible for yourself, or are you too lazy to do it on your own because you're being "fed well" each week? Remember that weekly messages in church is not a substitute for your personal practice of the spiritual discipline of Bible reading. In Paul's letter to his protege Timothy, we see Timothy's church dealing with an issue: There were people who were propagating wrong teachings, teaching things that are not taught in Scripture and taking passages out of context. Read 2 Timothy 2:14-26. What did Paul admonish Timothy to do (v.14). How do you filter what you do through the lenses of the Word of God?
3. Reading God's Word is a spiritual discipline that EVERY believer needs to practice, because it reminds us that we are not #1. The passage teaches us five compelling reasons why you need to personally read and know the Bible well:

- a. **Reason #1: To be approved by God (v. 15).** Simply reading the Bible is not enough. You need to comprehend what it says, so that you know and understand what actually is in the Word of God. How did Paul encourage Timothy to make himself known before God? Does handling the Word of God correctly mean that you have to be an expert? Share how you are able to handle the Word of God correctly, thus you don't need to be ashamed.
- b. **Reason #2: To prevent the spread of wrong theology and false teachings (v. 17-18).** You know that what you are hearing is really from the Bible if you are reading it yourself. The people in the church need to know the Bible well, or the danger of wrong theology and false teaching will infiltrate the church. Christians who do not read the Bible, then claim promises that the Scripture never made to them end up believing in wrong theology, resulting in their living in disappointment. Share common examples of what some Christians would quote or believe about God's promises when in actuality, the Bible does not teach it. Discuss how this infiltration can destroy a church. Why is having a solid, biblically-rooted statement of faith in the church so important? How can you show your love for your church by being defender of what the Bible teaches?
- c. **Reason #3: The truths the Bible contains never change (v. 19).** Paul reminded Timothy that the foundation and head of the church is the Lord Jesus Christ, and the truths of His Word is based on a God who keeps His promises, not on the opinions of the majority. Paul was encouraging Timothy to stand his ground on the solid foundation of God's Word, which never changes because He does not change. This means that the standards of truth the Bible speaks about will always be the same regardless of culture, generation, gender, ethnicity, or age. Discuss why you should be happy that unlike culture and tradition, the truth in the Word of God never changes.

- d. **Reason #4: It will prepare you for life (v. 20-21).** Paul further explained that there are many types of containers, but the important thing is the purpose they serve: Is it for honorable or dishonorable use? Timothy had to separate himself from the false teachers so that he would be a vessel of honor, set apart for God's use. Discuss why sin would make your usefulness to the Master dishonorable. Discuss how the Bible helps you to prepare for every good work useful for the Master? Why is it necessary to read the Bible daily?
- e. **Reason #5: It is a practical guide for daily living (v. 22-26).** These verses admonish us to pursue righteousness, avoid petty fights, treat gently those who are wrong, etc.—a very practical character-building guide in life. The Bible is your instruction manual for life. Share how the Bible has been your guide in living out your life.

Walk

Reading the Bible is a must in your daily life. Like an instruction manual for a gadget or machine, it gives you the right instructions on how you should live your life. If you don't follow it, then you will break your life. Think about how you can present yourself as one approved to God. If you don't have a habit of reading the scripture daily yet, would you ask God to motivate you to do it?

Worship & Prayer

Heavenly Father, You have given me Your Word to teach, rebuke, correct, and train me in righteousness. I cannot thank You enough that such a guide for my daily life—spiritually and practically—is so available for my use. It is a shame that I don't always use it for the purposes that You want me to do. May You help me to love Your Word and to read, comprehend, and apply its truth in my life. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Not First #6:
SIMPLICITY

Word

Scripture Reference

1Timothy 6:6-19

Discussion Questions

1. Which of your belongings do you think you can't live without? Why? Share with the group.
2. The Bible reminds us that this present life is not our final destination. We are just pilgrims in this land, and so we should not be accumulating things that might weigh us down when God calls us to move, like the baggages of prosperity, possessions, position, promise, pride, and property. This is why Christians should practice the spiritual discipline of simplicity. To leave simply is a reminder for a believer to live for eternity. Read 1 Timothy 6:6-19. Living in simplicity is not necessarily about physical things, but about one's attitude. In his letter to Timothy, Paul gives wise counsel from which we can draw out four principles on simplicity:
 - a. **Simplicity is about contentment (v. 6).** Simplicity is being satisfied with what God has given you. It is developing the attitude of contentment by doing your best for the glory of God. Do you find it difficult to be content? Why? Discuss what happens when people are discontent with their lives or with what they have. If someone with a problem of being content approaches you for advice, what would you tell that person?
 - b. **A truth to remember: We come with nothing, we leave with nothing (v. 7).** How do you react to this truth? What is the purpose of wanting to gain so much if you can't take it

with you when you pass on from this world? How can you invest for eternity?

- c. **The essentials of life: Food and clothing (v. 8).** Food and clothing (used in the context of covering, shelter, or protection from the elements) are necessities that you should be content with. Sometimes you should be reminded that you can survive without some of the things that you think are essential for you to live. What are the things that you give so much importance aside from food, clothing, and shelter? Discuss why you can survive even without those things.
 - d. **A warning to live simply (v. 9-10).** When you are not content, the Bible gives a stern warning that you could fall into a trap that plunge men into ruin and destruction. To counteract, you need to live simply. Discuss why the get-rich-quick schemes that people have fallen for look attractive to many. Why is the love of money a root of all kinds of evil (v. 10)? Since everyone needs money to pay for necessary things, in what way can you keep a proper perspective on money and possessions?
3. To help you live out these principles, here are four questions you can ask daily to practice the spiritual discipline of simplicity:
 - a. **Do I really need it (v. 11)?** The pursuit of what is spiritual is what you really need to do. What is the difference between need and want, or necessity and luxury? Read verse 8 again if you find it difficult to distinguish what is really necessary from luxury.
 - b. **Does it have eternal value (v. 12)?** Paul urged Timothy to fight the good fight, which is to persevere to hold on to what is eternal. Does what you are pursuing have eternal value? What does God expect of you? Discuss the things that you can invest here on earth that has eternal value.
 - c. **Does it bring glory to God (v. 13-16)?** The emphasis here is to live for the Lord. We pursue God for His glory! What attributes did Paul refer to God on verses 15-16? Does the way you live your life brings glory to God?

- d. ***Does it bring you closer to God or draw you away from Him (v. 17-19)?*** It is a command that those who are rich should not put their trust in their wealth, but in the Lord. Just because you are rich in the present time does not mean that you will be rich in the life to come. In what way does a person's possessions keep him/her away from God? How does living simply bring a person closer to God?

Walk

The many pieces of life's baggage can weigh you down, that's why you are to cultivate the discipline of simplicity to help you focus on the work of the Lord. Does what you have make your life so busy that it keeps you from pursuing what you are called to do, which is to further the kingdom of God? Is there an area in your life wherein you need to learn to be content, or is there anything that keeps you away from God that you need to give up? Ask the Lord to help you to live simply in order to be closer to Him.

Worship & Prayer

Heavenly Father, I acknowledge that there are many things in life that hinder me from pursuing your Kingdom. Those things make me so busy and preoccupied that I hardly have time for You. Please help me to surrender those things to You. Help me learn to cultivate a life of simplicity for Your sake, and to choose to invest for eternity instead of working hard for the things that I cannot take with me when I die. Help me to be wise and follow Your instructions in Your Word so that I can live a life that gives glory to Your Name. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Not First #7:
WORSHIP

Word

Scripture Reference

1 Chronicles 29:10-20

Discussion Questions

1. What motivates you to come to church to worship God?
2. Worship is expressing adoration for Who God is and thanksgiving for what He has done. It is about the Living God, not you. What does the Bible teach about the discipline of worship? Read 1 Chronicles 29:10-20. King David wanted to build a temple for God, but gave that privilege to David's son, Solomon. David, however, sincerely wished to participate in the building of the temple, and so the Lord tasked him with the gathering of materials needed for its construction. It was not a job that others might not be enthusiastic about, but David did it with so much joy. How would you feel if you wanted to be in charge of a certain project--and you know you can do a great job--but was tasked to simply be an assistant? How will you take the task given to you?
3. Note that in verses 10-13, David demonstrates a very important principle about the spiritual discipline of worship: David recognized who God is, acknowledging God's presence from eternity past to eternity future (v. 10) and that all greatness and power belong to God (v. 11), worshipping God for what He has done (v. 12), and giving thanks and praising God's name (v. 13). Who God is and what He has done is far, far greater than we could ever understand, yet because of His grace He does wonderful things even to ordinary people like you and me. Share how you feel that nobody can really explain who God is apart

from what He revealed about Himself in the scriptures. Could you take any credit for God's power and greatness? Discuss your attitude and how you should respond when you think of God's awesomeness--that everything in heaven and on earth belong to Him. Share one or two things He has done for you these last few days.

4. From the passage we also draw out six expressions of worship--how we respond to who God is and what He has done:
 - a. **Giving (v. 14-15).** David said that God has given him the privilege of giving back to Him the materials for the temple. He considered it an honor to give back to God what actually were God's already. What are the things that you give to God as an act of worship? Discuss why expecting the recipient of your giving to be eternally grateful to you is wrong. How is it different when you are thankful because you have something to give back to God?
 - b. **Serving (v. 16).** As an expression of their worship, many people would be involved in the building of God's temple. In what ways can you serve God in the church, in your home, or at work/school?
 - c. **Righteousness (v. 17).** The Bible teaches us that righteous living and a life of holiness is an expression of worship. David said that God is pleased and happy with upright living. Discuss what is righteous and holy living. How would your other acts of worship (like giving) be affected by the way you live your life? Would your worship be acceptable to God if your heart is full of sin? Why or why not? What should you do so that your heart's condition would prepare you to worship?
 - d. **Loyalty (v. 18).** David prayed for the people's heart to keep being loyal to God. How do you show your loyalty to God in your worship of Him? Could you show your loyalty when you worship Him yet remain so committed to the things of the world? Discuss why this is not right.
 - e. **Obedience (v. 19).** David prayed that his son Solomon would not only be loyal to God, but also be obedient to God's principles. You don't have to come to church to worship

everyday, but you can be obedient everyday as an act of worship (Romans 12:1). Why does obedience seem to be such a tall order? Share how you live a life of obedience.

- f. *Words (v. 20)*. David concluded by encouraging all the people to worship God through their words. Words reflect is in someone's heart. How do you worship God in words? What do you actually tell Him in your worship?

Walk

Your worship is a reflection of your understanding of who God is and what He has done for you. It begins in your heart with righteous living, loyalty, and obedience, and is expressed outwardly through words, giving, and service. How does your worship look like? What inner condition of your heart does your outward expression of worship reflect?

Worship & Prayer

Heavenly Father, thank You for reminding me what worship should be all about. You deserve to be worshipped because of who You are and what you have done in my life. Forgive me if I come to church to worship You with an unprepared, uncleansed heart that it is unacceptable to You because of the sins I have committed against You. Lord, please help me to be constantly reminded of how I should worship you. Search my heart and cleanse me from within, so that how I outwardly express my worship may be acceptable to You. May Your Name be praised and may I be humble in my worship of You. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Not First #8:
SACRIFICE

Word

Scripture Reference

Luke 21:1-4

Discussion Questions

1. What sacrificial thing has someone done for you?
2. In this generation of “me first” mentality, it is quite difficult to ask someone to sacrifice their comfort, time, or resources for the sake of others, even among Christians. We are willing to make a sacrifice if it benefits ourselves, like when we give up a stable job to start a business; but we find it very difficult to give up something for the sake of others. But sacrifice at its root level is first and foremost about others. How do you practice/demonstrate sacrifice? Examine if what you view as a sacrifice is about yourself or about others.
3. In this generation of entitlement, the Bible teaches us to practice the spiritual discipline of sacrifice. Read Luke 21:1-4. Here we learn about three principles of sacrifice:
 - a. **God notices the sacrifice of small things (v. 1-2).** Sacrifice is giving up what you already have in order to draw closer to God. From these two verses, what did Jesus observe the rich men were doing? On the other hand, what did He notice about what the poor widow did? Jesus took notice and commended the widow’s offering instead of the rich men who gave more money. Discuss why your motives in giving matter more to God rather than the amount of what you have given. Share examples of small sacrifices that the Lord notices when it is done for His sake.
 - b. **God assesses sacrifice based on how it affects you (v. 3-4).** Sacrifice means your giving has to affect you somehow. If it doesn’t hurt you or transform you, then it is not as sacrificial as you think. How does the Jesus describe the widow’s offering? Why do you

think that giving out of abundance is a rather easy thing to do? How are you sacrificially giving to God? Is what you are giving to God a mere leftover of what you have? On the other hand, does sacrifice mean that it is okay to neglect your other obligations in life? Why or why not?

- c. **God teaches you the lesson of faith and trust when you sacrifice (v. 2-4).** The Bible stresses that the woman was poor and a widow. As a widow, there was no one to take care of her (this is why the Bible admonishes to take care of the poor and the widow), yet in her two mites she gave all that she had. The Bible says that God will take care of His children’s needs. How do you see faith in this woman that God would take care of her? What do you think happened to her after she had given everything she had? Share an experience when God has provided after you have sacrificially given something for His sake. How does sacrificial giving teach you about faith and trust? How does big faith starts from small sacrifices?

Walk

Christmas is a story about sacrifice; every character in the Christmas story made sacrifices. Describe what sacrifice did Mary, Joseph, the shepherds, the wise men, and Jesus Christ make for God’ sake. How about you? Besides money, what can you give sacrificially to others this Christmas for the sake of Christ? How do you plan to do it?

Worship & Prayer

Heavenly Father, thank You for the lessons on the spiritual discipline of sacrifice. Thank You for the reminder that sacrifice is not about me but about others done for Your sake. Thank You that You notice the sacrifice of even small things, and You assesses it based on how it affects me. Thank you also for the lesson of faith and trust when I sacrifice. As I think of the sacrifices made by my Lord Jesus Christ for my sake, may I also willingly sacrifice for the good of others, doing it for Your glory alone. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

Not First #9:
PRAYER

Word

Scripture Reference

Luke 1:46-56

Discussion Questions

1. Share about a time when you felt blessed after sincerely praying.
2. Prayer is the most talked-about, least-done thing in the Christian life. If we look at how we pray and the content of our prayers, it mostly centers on me, myself, and I. Our self-centered prayer requests reveal our shallow view of God and His redemptive purpose in this world. If we are honest, our prayers show that we see God mostly as Someone who provides our wants and needs, Someone to alleviate our sufferings. This is not the God presented in the Bible. While the Bible indeed says to “Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God...” (Philippians 4:6,7), there is so much more to pray for other than supplication. How often do you pray? Is your daily prayer focused only on your needs, your family, your health, your convenience, etc.? How would praying for someone other than yourself change your mindset about prayers? How could you be an effective prayer warrior for others?
3. Read Luke 1:46-56. Mary just heard from the angel Gabriel that she would be with child—the Savior. To encourage her, she was told that her cousin Elizabeth, who was advanced in age, was six-months pregnant. Mary went to visit her, and Elizabeth, who knew that Mary was with child, assured Mary that what the Lord had said to her would be fulfilled. Mary was so overwhelmed that among all of the women in all generations, she was the one

chosen to be the mother of Jesus. She responded with a prayer to God. Mary’s prayer shows us six areas (other than supplication) that we can pray about daily that can transform our self-centered mindset and help us cultivate a healthy prayer life:

- a. **A word of our adoration to God (v. 46).** Mary started her prayer by praising God. When she first heard about the news, she had some doubts—how could she be with a child when she was a virgin?—but then felt truly overwhelmed and blessed that what the angel told her has come to fruition. Discuss why adoration of who God is, which is a very important part of prayer, oftentimes being neglected? In your prayer life, how do you express your adoration to God. Why is He worthy to be worshipped and adored? What are the numerous characteristics of God that you can mention in your adoration and worship of Him.
- b. **A reminder of our salvation (v. 47).** By referring to God as her Savior, Mary personally recognized that she was a sinner who needed a Savior. Discuss why the doctrine that Mary is without sin wrong. Why do you need a Savior? Why is it so important to remember that you needed to be cleansed from your sin? How are you reminded in your life that Jesus is your Savior? How do you express your joy and thankfulness that you have a Savior only in Jesus Christ?
- c. **The recognition of God’s grace (v. 48).** Mary recognized the unworthiness of her life, calling herself a maidservant. Because of God’s grace she was chosen to be the mother of Jesus, and therefore, she considered herself blessed. What does “blessed” mean? What is the connection of being blessed with God’s grace? Discuss why you would call Mary a woman blessed by God. Share how you feel blessed because of God’s grace in your life.
- d. **An acknowledgement of God’s character (v. 49).** Mary recognized God’s characteristics in her prayer. She affirmed that He is mighty, someone who could do the impossible, the God who is holy. It is not for God to lower His standard of holiness to our level, but for us to reach His level of holiness. You should adjust to God and not the other way around. How do you recognize God’s holiness and wisdom in your life?

How should it move you to pray for His will to be done rather than yours and have an effective prayer and a changed life as a result?

- e. ***A resolve in our actions (v. 50-53).*** In her prayer, Mary said that God's mercy extends to those who fear Him, from generation to generation. A fear of God means honoring and having a healthy respect for the Lord. Mary further said that God doesn't honor the proud and will humble the prideful. Why do you think God hates the proud? How does God lift up the humble? In your personal life, how do you respect and honor the Lord?
- f. ***Remembering God's promises (v. 54-55).*** Mary mentioned how God has fulfilled His promise to Abraham and his descendants, that although the nation of Israel disobeyed him, His mercy was still upon them, and the Messiah was born. Have you ever reminded God of His promises? How does claiming God's promises in Scripture work? What promise of God can you claim right now?

Walk

Elizabeth, the mother of John the Baptist, and Mary, the mother of Jesus, were together for three months encouraging each other. Mary returned to Nazareth with so much joy, even knowing she has to deal with scandal. What did you learn from her prayer life? Are you intentional in praying for others instead of just praying for your needs?

Worship & Prayer

Heavenly Father, thank You for reminding me through Mary's prayer how I should pray. I must admit that most of the time, I do pray for my own needs and for those who are close to me. Help me to be intentional in praying for others as well, that my prayer life will reflect how I adore You for Who you are. Thank You for being almighty and holy among the many things about who You are. May you help me to resolve what actions I should do for You for Your glory. Thank You for the many promises I can claim from Your Word. Please help my prayer life to be effective and life-changing. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Not First #10:
CELEBRATION

Word

Scripture Reference

Luke 2:8-20; Matthew 2:1-12

Discussion Questions

1. How would you describe a spirit-filled, Christ-like person?
2. The bible tells us that joy is one of the fruits of the Holy Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23), and that as believers we are to rejoice in the Lord always (Philippians 4:4). Celebration is part of being a Christian because we have reason to celebrate every day. How you exude joy in your life announces to the world that Jesus Christ resides in your heart. So how can we practice the spiritual discipline of celebration daily to remind us that we are not first in this world? We learn important principles from how the shepherds and wise men in the Christmas story celebrated the birth of Jesus Christ, and draw out three reasons for why we can celebrate and be joyful daily:
 - a. **Reason #1: There is a Savior, and His name is Jesus (Luke 2:8-12).** For generations, the people of Israel have been looking for the Messiah. There have been many who promised to lead the people out of foreign oppression in the 400 years between the Old and New Testament, but all failed. The people were discouraged, wondering when the Chosen One would come, and now here is a definitive statement, and from a real-life angel, no less! The Savior has been born! This announcement got the shepherds so excited. Every Christmas we see various kinds of announcements that says “Jesus Christ is born!” Think about how you react to that. Do you celebrate Jesus with the same joy and passion as the

shepherds who anticipated His coming? As a follower of Christ, how can you be intentional in anticipating the Savior’s work in your life? What can you do daily to demonstrate that you celebrate His presence in your life?

- b. **Reason #2: We have experienced the Savior (Luke 2:13-20).** The gospel of Luke does not give us many details about what the shepherds did once they saw Jesus. The only thing recorded is that the shepherds heard the news, made the effort to find Jesus, and their experience with Him filled their hearts with joy. Unless you have a personal relationship with Jesus and experienced Him in an authentic way, you will not think that there is reason to celebrate. What is the difference between knowing about Jesus and experiencing Him? When was the last time you really celebrated your experience with the Savior by boldly and excitedly telling others about something that happened to you?
- c. **Reason #3: Faith Rewarded (Matthew 2:1-12).** The wise men from the East saw a star and traveled to Jerusalem to look for Jesus. Their journey of faith (they didn’t see the star for a long time) took more than a year. Upon leaving Herod’s palace in Jerusalem to go to Bethlehem, when the same star they saw in the East appeared again to lead them to the place where Jesus was, the Bible tells us “they rejoiced with exceedingly great joy.” Matthew used words of extreme description, trying to convey the exuberance of these wise men upon realizing that their journey was not in vain. Faith realized and faith rewarded calls for celebration and laughter (Psalm 126:1-3). Examine your life. How is your faith rewarded by God’s grace and mercy every day? Discuss the difference between a believer and non-believer’s funeral. For a Christian, what is there to be joyful about in death?

Walk

Our Asian culture is a culture that loves to celebrate, yet sometimes amidst these celebrations there is still great sadness because the celebrations we have built up in our lives are superficial, empty, and not rooted in what we should actually be celebrating. Read the Christmas story again in the gospels of Luke and Matthew. Ponder upon how Jesus’

coming to earth meant that you have a Savior, and that you can personally experience Him in your life by inviting Him into your heart, and that your faith in Him will be rewarded not only in this life, but in the life to come. Let that thought renew your joy in the Lord, and let that joy spill out in bold celebration so that others may also find reason to celebrate. Then think of how you can be intentional in celebrating Jesus not just in church or during Christmas and Easter, but on normal everyday conversations in your circles of influence.

Worship & Prayer

Father, thank You for Jesus, for sending Him to be my Savior so that I can have a reason to celebrate. Forgive me for not being as enthusiastic about spiritual things as I am about non-spiritual things. I often forget that everything I have, every good thing I experience is because of your grace and mercy. Help me remember everyday that because of Jesus, I am blessed with forgiveness, hope, love, grace, comfort, peace, and joy every day. Give me the boldness to celebrate Jesus, so that in my words, attitude, and actions, others may also be encouraged to experience Him. In Jesus' name. Amen.