

GROUPS

INNERKIP PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

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the journey begins ■

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Life

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In Matthew 28:19-20 we read, *“Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely, I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”*

We are all familiar with this passage. The great commission of Jesus for His disciples. Fulfilling this commission requires first and foremost an understanding of our identity in Christ. Are we just Fans of Jesus of Nazareth or are we Followers? If we claim to be His, members of His body the Church, then we are also called to follow His example and His leading. Over the next six weeks, we will dig deep into what it means to be a disciple of Christ. By God’s grace we will all discover again, or perhaps for the first time, what it means to not just be a fan of Jesus Christ, but to become His followers.

It is our hope and prayer that each one of you will move closer to Christ because of this study and that you will be transformed by the renewing of your mind (Romans 12:2) into faithful followers of Jesus.

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LIFE GROUP TIPS AND REMINDERS

1. Videos for this series are available on RightNow Media which is free to members of IPC. If you're not registered for RightNow Media, this is a great time to get registered. Connect with the office at admin@thriveatipc.com or James Heidinga at james@thriveatipc.com to get registered.
2. Is your group meeting in-person, online, or maybe both? Use **Groups** in RightNow Media to host a **Watch Party**. This service makes sharing a video together so much better than other platforms because each user streams the video directly from the website. No more screen sharing! (**Note: everyone who attends remotely needs to be signed in and connected through RightNow Media to use this service**)
3. This study guide is just that, a guide! Its purpose is to spark discussion and help your group get the most out of the Study. If your group responds constructively to the material without following the guide, that's ok. Alternatively, if your group gets lost in the weeds, the guide can help you get back on track!
4. Reflect over the week on the parts of the guide you may not have had time for. Share thoughts and insights together over email or social media. Planning Centre Groups can be a great resource for your group and is a great place to manage contact information and group membership. Connect with James if you need assistance with Planning Centre Groups.
5. Make worship and prayer a part of your Life Group experience. Sing along with worship videos and pray openly and honestly for each other. Make your life group a Small Church experience.
6. Share responsibility for the group. Let each serve according to their gifts and passions. The one who leads the discussion does not have to be the one to host as an example.

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SESSION ONE: FAN OR FOLLOWER

Watch Session 1 Video - <https://www.rightnowmedia.org/Content/Series/1277>

This video introduces the concepts of fan and follower as well as the cast of characters around which the not a fan story will be centred.

(Optional Reading from the not a fan. book for this week – Prologue, Chapter 1 and 10)

Discussion: Define The Relationship (DTR)

Do some preliminary reflecting as a group on how each of you might respond to Jesus' desire to "define the relationship." Do you see yourselves as Fans or Followers?

Read John 3:16 and Luke 9:18-25

Take a few minutes to discuss your thoughts about these two themes.

Belief In Jesus and Commitment To Jesus

Reflect upon your own faith journey. Was one of these more valued than the other as you learned about Jesus?

Diagnosing Fandom: Ask the following questions and be willing to be vulnerable.

1. *Denying Myself* - Has following Jesus cost me anything? What, if anything, have I sacrificed for Him? What sorts of things might it cost us to follow Him?
2. *Losing Myself* - Are there areas of my life that I have labelled "off limits" to Jesus? Are there things that I refuse to surrender? What areas do we tend to exclude Jesus from?
3. *Going "All-In"* - Have I ever been ashamed to acknowledge Christ? Is my relationship with Jesus "in moderation?" What motivates us to hide our faith sometimes?

Prayer: Holy Spirit, reveal the areas of our lives that need to be relinquished to Jesus, exposed to the light of His truth, or surrendered to His authority.

For Further Reflection: Read James 2:14-26 and reflect on how this passage contributes to the discussion around belief in and commitment to Jesus. Do you think James addressed his letter to Followers or Fans?

Prayer Challenge: The Lord's Prayer - The Jewish people have a daily prayer called the Shema; "Hear O Israel, the Lord our God the Lord is one." This daily prayer was commanded by Scripture to remind Israel daily of their covenant relationship with YHWH. Likewise, Jesus taught His disciples to pray using the Lord's Prayer. Praying the Lord's Prayer every day when you wake up is a great way to build regular prayer into your daily walk. You probably already have it memorized but just in case I've added it here.

**Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be your name.
Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in
heaven. Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our
sins as we also forgive others. Lead us not into temptation
and deliver us from evil. For yours is the kingdom, the
power, and the glory forever. Amen**

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SESSION TWO: FOLLOW ME

Watch Session 2 Video - <https://www.rightnowmedia.org/Content/Series/1277>

(Optional Reading from the not a fan. book for this week – Chapter 2, 8)

Discussion: Anyone...

The Stained Cushion

Thinking about the illustration of the stained cushion, reflect on Gary's story from the video. What would the cushion of Gary's life look like? What about your own?

Read Romans 3:23 and Matthew 9:9-13

Consider Romans 3:23 and Jesus' audience at Matthew's home. Discuss what is meant by the categories in verses 12 and 13? Were the Pharisees healthy?

Think about the stains you may be living with in your own life. Is it possible that these things are preventing you from enjoying the abundant life Jesus promised in John 10:10?

Kyle's wife tells their daughter, "You could never make a stain so big that we would stop loving you." Discuss how the daughter's relationship to the stain changed because of grace. Have you experienced such a transformation regarding your stains? If not, why?

Diagnosing Fandom: Ask the following questions and be willing to be vulnerable.

1. *Healthy?* – Is Jesus Kyrios (Master/Lord) of your whole life? What about the stains?
2. *Sick* – Have you ever felt like God can't use you, like your stains disqualify you? How might you grab hold of grace at those times?
3. *Remedy* – When we choose to follow Jesus, we choose to live in His grace. His grace has the power to replace our guilt and our shame. How does Jesus' reference to Hosea 6:6 help?

Prayer: Holy Spirit, reveal areas where fear, guilt, or shame may be holding us back from following Jesus. Enable us to embrace the grace freely offered to us in Christ and transform our stains into testimonies.

For Further Reflection:

“Pain insists upon being attended to. God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our consciences, but shouts in our pains. It is His megaphone to rouse a deaf world.” – C.S. Lewis

At one point in the video Eric says to Gary, “Maybe God’s trying to tell me something.” Have you ever had a “megaphone experience” in your life? If so, reflect on how your life changed (or didn’t change) because of it. If your life didn’t change, you fell back into old routines, or if you’ve never had such an experience, reflect on whether God might be whispering or speaking to you through your current circumstances. Perhaps it would be wisdom to start listening?

Prayer Challenge: Prayer of Examen - Prayer today is often unstructured and that is not a bad thing. Some prayers are highly structured however and come to us from the historical expressions of Christianity. One such prayer that comes to us from St. Ignatius of Loyola is called the Prayer of Examen. In it, we invite the Spirit to join us as we examine our lives and allow Him to reveal to us the ups and downs of our walk with Jesus. We encourage you to investigate the Prayer of Examen and consider making it part of your daily prayer life.

Description - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SbqLaDJYV8E>

Guided Exercise - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AZFulbBMGnM>



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SESSION THREE: WHAT MUST I DO?

Watch Session 3 Video - <https://www.rightnowmedia.org/Content/Series/1277>

(Optional Reading from the not a fan. book for this week – Chapter 3, 12, 13 and 14)

Discussion: Commitment

Eric's illness is a "crossroads moment" in his life. Take a few minutes to reflect on Eric before and after his illness. Who or what is Eric committed to before and after?

Read Matthew 19:16-30 and 22:37

Does Jesus condemn the young man for having wealth? If not, what was Jesus addressing in His challenge to the young man?

We live in the most affluent society in recorded history. Most of us, even if we are not wealthy by North American standards, still enjoy a quality of life far beyond that enjoyed by the rest of the world. What if Jesus asked you to follow Him by giving it all away?

Diagnosing Fandom: Ask the following questions and be willing to be vulnerable.

1. *Heart* – What else does your heart yearn for? How might you make God your "heart's desire?"
2. *Soul or Being* – God wants to be the Lord of our whole lives because we are His image bearers. How might you reorient your life around surrendering yourself to Him and His authority?
3. *Mind or Strength* – Jesus prayed that His Father's will would be done, and He spent His strength in being obedient to it. How might we surrender our will to God's and spend our strength being obedient to it?

Prayer: Holy Spirit, enable us to love God with all our heart, soul, and mind. Let our love for You transform us and our surroundings. Let that transformation be a witness to the redeeming light of Your Kingdom.

For Further Reflection: Christian Flexitarianism – Kyle says that fans want to follow Jesus as long as it doesn't interfere with their own plans. He suggests however, that there is no such thing as selective allegiance to Jesus. Only total surrender will do.

Reflect on how our affluent and materialistic culture has shaped our expectations of God's providence.

Reflect on how relativism and pluralism have impacted Western Christianity.

Relativism: the idea that knowledge, truth, and morality are culturally defined and highly contextual.

Pluralism: the acceptance of worldviews as equally valid within society.

Prayer Challenge: Breath Prayer – The breath Prayer is a prayer which can be uttered in the rhythm of breathing. It is easily repeated throughout the routines of life and can help to focus our attention on Christ in every circumstance. One of the most common breath prayers is the Jesus Prayer: "Lord Jesus Christ, son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner." Try it out.



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SESSION FOUR: BURY THE DEAD

Watch Session 4 Video - <https://www.rightnowmedia.org/Content/Series/1277>
(Optional Reading from the not a fan. book for this week – Chapter 4 and 11)

Discussion: Convenient Faith?

Reflect on Anna and Eric's relationship arc during this session. Do you empathize with one or the other? Maybe you empathize with both for different reasons. Take some time to tug at your own 'gut reactions' to the tensions that the couple faced.

Read Luke 9:57-62

The three potential Followers in the text represent struggles we still face today when it comes to following Jesus. Look at each and discuss what Jesus is saying about the cost of discipleship?

When churches talk about following Jesus today, where do you think the emphasis typically falls? Costs or benefits? Why do you think that is?

"Jesus has many who love the kingdom of God, but few who bear a cross. He has many who desire His comfort, but few who desire His suffering. All want to rejoice with Him, but few are willing to suffer for Him. There are many who admire His miracles, but there are few who follow in the humiliation of the cross." – Thomas A. Kempis

To what degree do you think Thomas' words are true today?

Diagnosing Fandom: Ask the following questions and be willing to be vulnerable.

1. *Comfort* – We are a culture of comfort seekers. Have you ever felt the Spirit nudging you out of your comfort zone? How have you responded?
2. *Security* – Have you ever put Jesus off, placed Him on the backburner of your life, or made him ride shotgun? What motivates us to do it on our own?
3. *Significance* – Has pursuing "success" ever prevented you from living your faith? What might it mean if our definition of success is incompatible with Jesus' definition?

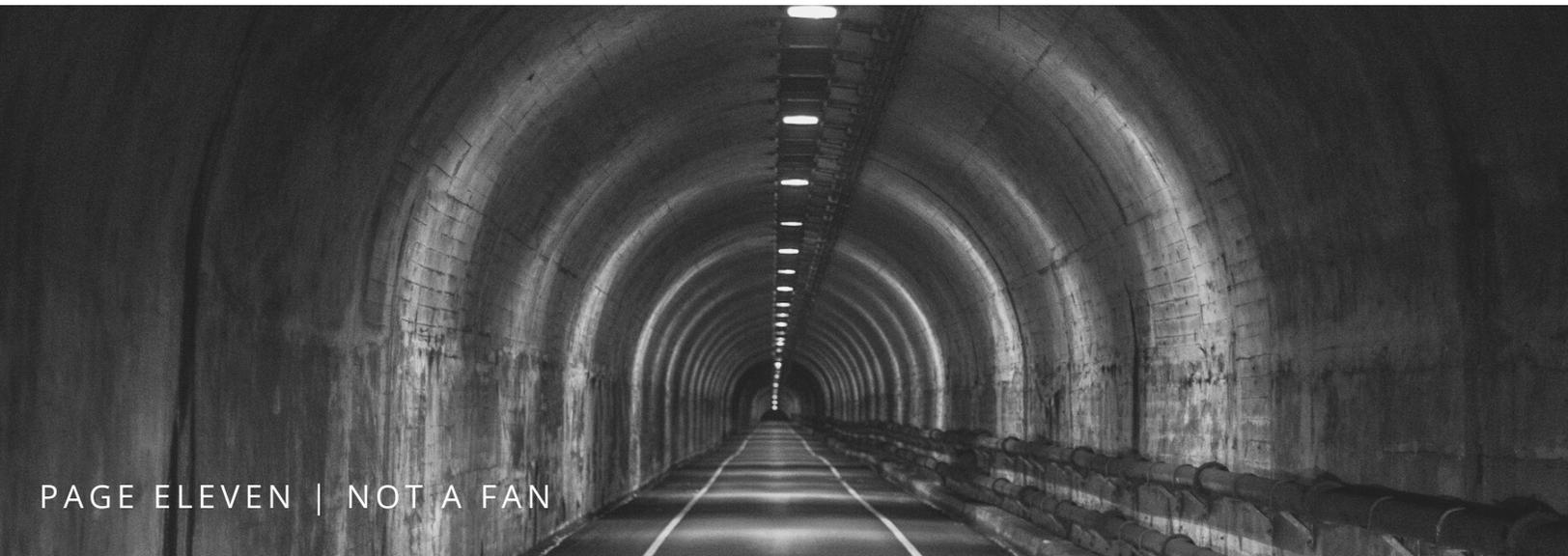
Prayer: Lord, forgive us if we have ever cheapened the Gospel. Help us to count the cost of following Jesus and find in Him the comfort, security, and significance we need.

For Further Reflection:

“When Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die” – Dietrich Bonhoeffer

Kyle suggests that the most challenging part of Jesus’ call to follow is the need to die to ourselves. That death is not a one-and-done scenario but, rather is a daily recommitment to Christ’s rule and reign in our lives.

Prayer Challenge: Try setting aside a specific time of day, every day, for prayer. Once you pick a specific time for prayer, make prayer the number one priority for that piece of your day. Don’t let other priorities encroach on it. Schedule meetings and appointments around it, not during it. When selecting your time for prayer, be realistic about your schedule to prevent unnecessary conflicts. See how long you can make this part of your routine without interruption.



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SESSION FIVE: DEAD MAN'S BONES

Watch Session 5 Video - <https://www.rightnowmedia.org/Content/Series/1277>
(Optional Reading from the not a fan. book for this week – Chapter 5, 6 and 9)

Discussion: Come After

We all know a Bill. If we're honest, we might even see ourselves in Bill. Bill knows his Bible by heart, but has it transformed more than just his behaviour? What is missing from Bill's understanding of faith?

Read Matthew 23:1-12

Re-read verses 2 and 3. These verses are important. Discuss the tension Jesus reveals between the Pharisees words and their deeds. What do they lack?

Read Mathew 23:15-32

It's clear that Jesus' issue with the Pharisees is that they have missed the point. Faith is more than religious box-checking. What are some of the check boxes we use today?

Diagnosing Fandom: Ask the following questions and be willing to be vulnerable.

1. Why do so many Christians settle for *religion* when they could have relationship? Has that ever been your reality?
2. Think about what it takes to build relationships with people. Is your pursuit of Christ characterized by those same things? Will pursuing Christ take any less effort? What are some ways you could pursue Christ more deeply?
3. Religion can be a blessing in that it keeps us "faithful" in our relationship with Jesus, but it must never become a substitute for the relationship with Him. How might this perspective help you in your pursuit of Jesus?

Prayer: Dear Jesus, help us to remember that relationship with you is the primary goal of our religious expression. Keep us from reducing that relationship to a set of rules that need to be followed and increase in us the desire to pursue intimacy with you in our lives.

For Further Reflection: Are you *In Church* or *In Christ*? If you had to complete the sentence, "I'm a Christian because _____," how would you fill in the blank? What would you describe as the evidence of your relationship with Jesus?

"I was one way... and now I am completely different. And the thing that happened in between... was Him." – From: *The Chosen*

Prayer Challenge: Whenever you spend time in prayer this week, set aside a few minutes to just be silent before God. Often when we pray, we tend to do all the talking. Sometimes we might be tempted to think that God doesn't speak to His people today. But being silent before God allows us to listen for His prompting and His voice. If you're feeling disconnected from God, perhaps you just need to take time to listen.

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SESSION SIX: DECISION TIME

Watch Session 6 Video - <https://www.rightnowmedia.org/Content/Series/1277>
(Optional Reading from the not a fan. book for this week – Chapter 7 and 15)

Discussion: Imaging Christ

Kyle says, “Confessing Jesus as Lord is not just something we do with our mouths it’s something we do with our lives.”

Read Matthew 7:13-14, 21-23

Reflect on the impressive credentials Jesus describes in this passage. Jesus says that “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.” Think about Kyle’s example of the House sitters and the notebook. Discuss the difference between knowing God’s will and living it.

Jesus is our example of what it means to do God’s will. In Him we see perfect love and perfect obedience. Are you prepared to love Him enough to lay down your life every day so that you can be fully committed to Jesus?

In Matthew 28:19-20 we read, *“Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely, I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”*

Lily gives a moving eulogy at the funeral. She says, “You showed me your father (Eric) was real because his daughter was real, and that made the Lord real.” What if we shortened that statement slightly, “You showed me your Father (God) was real because His son/daughter was real.” That’s what being a follower looks like. It’s becoming like Jesus so that when others look at us, they see Him. When you look at yourself, do you see Him?

Lily adds one more comment to her eulogy above. She says, “And I am forever grateful.” This is what followers do, they fulfill the great commission. They help others become followers too because the gift of salvation is the gift everyone needs.

So, it's time to define the relationship. Are you a Fan or a Follower?

Spend some time reflecting on this study and your experience of it as a group. If some of you were Fans and have decided to become Followers, pray for each other, and talk about ways that you can start following Jesus together.

Prayer:

Dear Lord, being a Follower is tough, but it is what you have called us to be. It requires supernatural strength for which You have provided your Spirit. Help each of us to get plugged in to that inexhaustible source of encouragement and strength as we step out in faith to become Jesus' Followers.



