



Week One, *Mental Health Under Pressure*

How to Use This Guide: You and your small group are encouraged to listen to the weekend message. It is not required for this guide to be helpful. This guide will complement, but not compete OR complete what was communicated in the weekend message.

Brief Intro/Teaching for Your Group:

1. **We are relational to the core of our being!** “God is a sort of continuous and indivisible community” Basil of Caesarea (330-379 AD). As Christians we begin our understanding of mental health rooted in our story of being made for relationship with God and with one another within creation. Our story of being made in the image of God gives us great insight into our unmet longings for identity and purpose that reflect God’s goodness and love for us. Our story of humanity, turning from a design of love for God, one another, and creation- also explains our fundamental relational conflict or discord within ourselves and with one another. Our hope of restoration comes from God living as Father, Son and Holy Spirit, inviting us into relationship with Himself and in community with one another.

2. **We are created in the image of God!** As Christians we believe in an “origin” that is full of dignity, honor and inherent worth. No matter how significant our struggle with ourselves or another human being becomes we can never look at our person or another person without remembering our God-given worth of identity and purpose. Frederick Buechner says it well; *“Life batters and shapes us in all sorts of ways before it’s done, but those original selves which we were born with and which I believe we continue in some measure to be no matter what, are selves which still echo with the holiness of their origin. I believe that what Genesis suggests is that this original self, with the print of God’s thumb still on it, is the most essential part of who we are and is buried deep in all of us as a source of wisdom and strength and healing which we can draw upon or with our terrible freedom, not draw upon as we choose”*

Big Idea for Discussion: We do not lose heart, even when our mental health is a struggle or causing us to suffer.

Let’s pray and invite God into our discussion.

My Story (Help us get to know one another):

For whom have you prayed a prayer to God, “Let light shine out of darkness,” because of a struggle for mental health or well-being?

Digging Deeper (Exploring the big idea in and through God’s Word):

1. Have someone in your group slowly read 2 Corinthians 4:4-18. These verses highlight an important reminder that when we struggle and suffer it is not a final verdict of our identity, purpose or worth.
2. As a group, depict as best as you are able the “treasure” that we have as we look to the light of the gospel that shines in the person of Jesus, who is the image of God.
3. There is both comfort and discomfort that comes from being described as “jars of clay” as we face the pressures of life. How do we experience both the comfort and discomfort of the limitations of our humanity?
4. According to the verses what is the “why” behind the exhortation “we do not lose heart”?
5. In verses 16-18, what is described as light and what is depicted as heavy?
6. What connections do you see between comfort / discomfort; outwardly wasting away / inwardly being renewed; light momentary trouble / heavy eternity; and what is seen / unseen?

Taking It Home (Putting this into action): A tool that may help navigate mental health conversations when someone comes to you and is feeling the struggle or suffering:

Begin...peacefully...take a deep breath and begin with an unemotional observation of the moment (Starting quiet allows the person to fill in the space).

Relate...to the person before you...relate to experience or perspective without making yourself the center of the story (try to avoid saying “I know something of the pain you are sharing” or “I remember feeling similar” rather simply stay curious about what you see and hear)

Interview...to collect data...not an interrogation...not a fact-finding mission (Foster your curiosity with the invitation “say more about that” or “tell me more”)

Echo...what you are hearing...reflect back what you heard them say in their own words without interpretation or meaning making (do not name another person’s experience)

Feedback...First ask “I wonder if you have sense of what might be helpful?” (Offer guidance, resources or a referral to someone equipped to help)

Please Practice Ministry Time



Week Two, Unity Under Pressure

How to Use This Guide: You and your small group are encouraged to listen to the weekend message. It is not required for this guide to be helpful. This guide will complement, but not compete OR complete what was communicated in the weekend message.

Brief Intro/Teaching for Your Group:

1. **The love of Christ compels us to see one another in a new way.** We are called to humility, gentleness, patience and forbearance with one another because of the love of Christ. We are called to a unity of peace with one another that comes from the Spirit of Christ in us. As a Christian, our identity in Jesus makes us one with one another and we are called to “one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.” Ephesians 4:4

2. **The work of Christ frees us to relate to one another in a new way.** The resurrection of Christ raises us to a new life that frees us from our old patterns of relating to one another with hopes of securing our power, privilege and place in this world. We are a new creation in Christ, so our power, privilege and place now comes under the reign of our King.

3. **The power of Christ sends us to reconcile relationships in a new way.** As a Christian our being reconciled to God and with one another is a powerful witness to the Kingdom of God coming to earth. As Christ’s ambassadors we share the glory that every nation, tribe, people and language will stand before the throne and cry out, “Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb.”

“We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly” -Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

Big Idea for Discussion: Our Unity in Christ implores us to “live in a manner worthy of our calling”

Let’s pray and invite God into our discussion.

My Story (Help us get to know one another):

Share a time when you were misunderstood, or treated differently because of your cultural heritage, socio-economic status or where you lived?

Digging Deeper (Exploring the big idea in and through God’s Word):

1. Have someone in your group slowly read 2 Corinthians 5:14-20.
2. How has the love of Christ changed the way you love those closest to you? How has the love of Christ challenged the way you love those who are far from your love?
3. What do you think are the implications that we “no longer regard one another from a worldly point of view”? How does our relationship with Christ change the way we relate to our power, privilege or place in our everyday lives?
4. In what ways has the work of Christ making you a new creation affected your identity? Do you have any “old” ways that you identify yourself that hinder you from relating to others freely?
5. When you think of being an ambassador for the ministry of reconciliation what comes to mind? What is one action of witnessing as an ambassador of Christ commissioned with the ministry of reconciliation you can take this week? (It might be helpful to remember that the ministry of reconciliation is a process that includes: Repentance; Forgiveness; Reconciliation; and Celebration.)

Taking It Home (Putting this into action): A tool that may help navigate conversations when someone is feeling the struggle or suffering from a lack of unity within the church: 6 Salty Practices adapted from the Nonviolence Framework of MLK.

1. **Information Gathering:** Do not go off of just what you know, gather information from a variety of perspectives.
2. **Education:** Take time to read, listen, and learn another perspective. This doesn’t mean you have to agree, just stay in the room to
3. **Personal Commitment:** You have to make the decision to show up like Christ...and commit to doing it in hard situations.
4. **Negotiation:** Where can there be compromise? Is there a give-and-take?
5. **Direct Action:** Make the decision that impacts the relationship/group. Maybe you take a break from the group or contact a pastor.
6. **Reconciliation:** This is the ultimate goal. At the end of the day, we want our differences not to divide us, we want to be reconciled to each other.

(We often go straight to five-direct action. Steps 1-4 are where we allow the Holy Spirit to walk with us in our conflict or struggle. Then, if we need to get to five, it is not about winning... it’s about reconciling.)

Please Practice Ministry Time



Week Three, A Nation Under Pressure

How to Use This Guide: You and your small group are encouraged to listen to the weekend message. It is not required for this guide to be helpful. This guide will complement, but not compete OR complete what was communicated in the weekend message.

Brief Intro/Teaching for Your Group:

1. **What does the Lord require of us?** Micah 6:8 describes both the what and the how of what is good for humanity. We learn that the Lord requires of us to do justice, to love kindness and to walk humbly with God. Here at Vineyard Columbus our leaders commit to the following: we seek to exalt Christ as Lord over all kingdoms of this world and remind ourselves that our primary citizenship and loyalty is to His Kingdom; we uphold that our spiritual unity in Christ is far more important than our political or national unity; and we will not compromise Christ's kingdom values because of personal, cultural, or political pressure.

2. **Whose side is Jesus on?** Polarization of political parties and social distinctions were just as prevalent when Jesus walked the face of the earth as it is today. The curious manner of Jesus navigating these political and social realities is that he refused to relate to folks through political or social distinctions. Even within the Twelve we can see that Jesus is intentional to call followers from "both sides," Simon the Zealot-opposing Roman occupation of Jerusalem, and Matthew the tax collector-cooperating with the Roman occupation. In Mark 8:15 Jesus once again puts "both sides" together "Be careful, Jesus warned them. 'Watch out for the yeast of the Pharisees, fierce opposition to Rome and that of Herod, a Roman ruler.'"

3. **Jesus' "Follow Me" determines how we love?** The disciples could never predict with whom they would find themselves sitting next to at meals. One of the marks of Jesus ministry is that fellowship around the table extended past political and social constructs of the day. The disciples had to learn to love "others" one step at a time. In Jesus presence there was a unity that transcended and transformed all relationships.

Big Idea for Discussion: Following Jesus shapes our values and changes how we love others.

Let's pray and invite God into our discussion.

My Story (Help us get to know one another):

What is the best example of someone in your life that you viewed as "other," either politically or socially, becoming a friend?

Digging Deeper (Exploring the big idea in and through God's Word):

Read Philippians 2:1-11 aloud together.

What are marks of Jesus reigning as Lord over all kingdoms in heaven and on earth?

How do these verses describe the manner in which Jesus reigns?

What appeal is the Apostle Paul making about relating to one another?

Read Ephesians 2:11-22.

In verses 13-16, how does Jesus bring unity to our hostility and differences?

In verses 19-22, how is our citizenship defined?

What do you find significant about verse five?

Read Colossians 3:12-14.

How do these verses challenge our speech and conduct toward those with which we disagree?

Taking It Home (Putting this into action):

We invite you to view Curtis Chang's 12 minute video from the After Party series titled "The Big Shift" at the following link: [1-3 The Big Shift \(VIDEO 12:00\) - Redeeming Babel](#)

In this series Curtis Chang invites us as Christians to consider a shift within our dialogue from the **what** of politics: our ideology, party and policy to the **how** of politics: our spiritual values, relationships and relational practices.

Have each member share one take away from the Small Group's learning and discussion time.

Please Practice Ministry Time



Week Four, Faith Under Pressure

How to Use This Guide: You and your small group are encouraged to listen to the weekend message. It is not required for this guide to be helpful. This guide will complement, but not compete OR complete what was communicated in the weekend message.

Brief Intro/Teaching for Your Group:

Brian Zahnd in his book, **When Everything is on Fire...Faith Forged From the Ashes** reminds us:

"If in our long journey of faith we reach a place where the system of belief we have inherited, crafted, and held on to come into question because we now see it as naïve, contradictory, bigoted, or maybe just plain false, we may fear that we will lose Jesus altogether. This is a disturbing thought. If for the sake of moral and intellectual integrity we are forced to reject what is ugly and incoherent in a Christian theology, don't we also have to move beyond Jesus? Isn't Jesus so inseparably bound to Christianity that to profoundly rethink Christianity is to risk losing Jesus? In answering this question, we need to make a critical distinction between three separate entities: Jesus Christ, the Church and Christianity. Christ is the Word of God-the eternal Logos assuming human flesh in Jesus of Nazareth. The Church is the gathered community of the baptized who confess that Jesus is Lord and believe that Jesus is the truth of God revealed in human life. Christianity is the religion of beliefs and practices about Jesus Christ developed by the church.

To put it as succinctly as possible, Christ is God, the church is a community, and Christianity is a religion. Recognizing that Christianity is a religion helps temper the tendency toward reckless all or nothing claims. We should not claim that Christianity is the ultimate truth. Rather, Christianity claims that Jesus Christ is the ultimate truth. Of course, Jesus Christ has to be interpreted and this is the project of the church over time. The conclusions of the church regarding Christ are what we find in Christianity."

Big Idea for Discussion: Our faith cannot move beyond Jesus Christ

Let's pray and invite God into our discussion.

My Story (Help us get to know one another):

When have you been challenged to see a past event in your life with a completely new perspective because of your eyes being opened up to a new revelation?

Digging Deeper (Exploring the big idea in and through God's Word):

Taking turns at reading portions read Luke 24:13-53 in its entirety.

What do you make of the fact that two travelers begin the story with their backs to Jerusalem and ends with them returning to Jerusalem?

What are ways that Luke brings us as a listener of the story to focus more fully on the person of Jesus as it unfolds?

What must it have been like to have Jesus "open up" the Scriptures?

What leads to the two travelers "eyes being opened"?

How does Jesus "open the minds" of the disciples?

What do you find surprising about Jesus in this encounter with the two travelers?

Taking It Home (Putting this into action):

These two on the road to Emmaus had an experience of Jesus presence that brought great joy to themselves and the disciples proclaiming "It's true." Jesus identifies the disciples as "witnesses" in verse 48. We are called by Jesus to be "witnesses" to our direct experiences of God, and "witness" to the presence of Jesus comfort and counsel to us. We are to "witness" to the power of the Holy Spirit's gifts and presence in us and through us. Too often we think of witnessing as the activity of sharing our faith with an unbeliever with hopes to convince them to believe.

Witnessing to our experience of Jesus presence opening Scripture, our eyes and our minds is just as much mystical as it is a rational exercise. We are a great help to one another not "lose" Jesus when we bear witness of our experience God, Jesus and the Holy Spirit.

Share with one another how you have experienced God intervene in your life?

Share with one another how your experience of Jesus' presence has brought comfort or counsel?

Share with one another how the Holy Spirit's presence has been a gift to you and others?

Please Practice Ministry Time



Week Five, Finances Under Pressure

How to Use This Guide: You and your small group are encouraged to listen to the weekend message. It is not required for this guide to be helpful. This guide will complement, but not compete OR complete what was communicated in the weekend message.

Brief Intro/Teaching for Your Group:

In an ultimate sense, all things belong to God. We are entrusted with treasures on earth by God. Our responsibility is stewardship that has a long view of eternity. When we relate to created things as our treasure, we lose all perspective of God's glory of entrusting us with good gifts. We exchange the Creator for the created and misplace where our hearts are designed to trust and find our worth. *Psalm 24:1 "The earth is the Lord's and everything in it, and all who live in it."*

We are always more valuable than our possessions, in need or abundance. God cares for our every need as our heavenly Father. God's grace and generosity toward us is always an expression of love as His children. We are not to value our possessions over people or worse, allow materialism to define other's worth. In fact we are to reflect the value of one another as God's children by sharing generously with one another. *Deuteronomy 15:10 "Give generously to the poor and do so without a grudging heart; then because of this the Lord your God will bless you in all your work and in everything you put your hand to."*

Biblical Stewardship is cultivating the resources in our care for the glory of God and the good of others. *1 Corinthians 10:31 "So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God."* *Matthew 25:22-23* "The servant with the two thousand showed how he also had doubled his master's investment. His master commended him: 'Good work! You did your job well. From now on be my partner.'"

Big Idea for Discussion: Financial worry can be reversed when we seek Jesus Kingdom, living within His love and provision for each day.

Let's pray and invite God into our discussion.

My Story (Help us get to know one another):

Share with one another an example of thanks for God providing for your finances

Digging Deeper (Exploring the big idea in and through God's Word):

Read Matthew 6:25-34.

In verses 25-27, Jesus uses an argument of greater to less...If God has gifted us with life, will God not also entrust us with that which supports life? If God cares for birds, will God not also care for us?

What can we learn from the birds according to Jesus?

What is the implication about storing up for a future that is out of our control?

What gain comes from worry according to Jesus?

In verses 28-30, Jesus continues his argument of greater to less, turning his attention to time- temporal versus eternal.

What can we learn from the grass and lilies of the field according to Jesus?

What is the implication of short-lived flower's beauty compared to our eternal beauty?

Jesus introduces that this is a matter of faith...our being clothed for eternity. What is Jesus challenging us to trust in?

In verse 32, what is Jesus asking us to run toward that is different than what those who do not believe in God run after?

Taking It Home (Putting this into action):

In verses 33-34, Jesus pushes aside worry in our lives with two actions:

1. Seeking first his kingdom and righteousness
2. Living within God's provision and care one day at a time

Jesus is asking us to make decisions about loving and trusting in His Kingdom within each and every day.

Share both needs and thanks for provision for this day with one another in prayer.

Please Practice Ministry Time



Week Six, Family Under Pressure

How to Use This Guide: You and your small group are encouraged to listen to the weekend message. It is not required for this guide to be helpful. This guide will complement, but not compete OR complete what was communicated in the weekend message.

Brief Intro/Teaching for Your Group:

Our relationships are inter-connected emotionally for good and for bad- “Emotions often are patterns that became established early in one’s personal history, and these patterns may or may not be relevant to the present. For example, a person who was reared by a father who beat him or her after raising his voice may be triggered into extremely intense life and death emotions whenever he or she is around people who raise their voices. Although this reaction is inappropriate to adult life when no abuse or threat is present, the pattern became part of the emotional repertoire of the nervous system early on” Roberta Gilbert

Our families are not immune to Anxiety of this world- It is important to recognize that anxiety within our society transfers into our family systems through our interconnected relationships as a unit. It is important to discern as individuals within our family unit are we experiencing acute or chronic anxiety. Acute is a result of a real threat in real time to our person or persons. Chronic is more like background noise of how we have responded to threats in our past. (The quote above is an example of both acute and chronic).

Our families can be a tremendous gift of becoming non-anxious- We can learn to discern how to not pass along our anxiety to one another through responding on the basis of our beliefs. This action is called differentiation-when we learn to manage or experience of anxiety without passing it along through our family system. The safety of healthy family and friends is a great place to externalize our anxiety. We gain integrity in our relationships when we respond to one another with love and forgiveness. *(These concepts are simplified from Bowen’s Family System Theory)*

Big Idea for Discussion: Our families can become a safe-haven from the pressure of this world

Let’s pray and invite God into our discussion.

My Story (Help us get to know one another):

As a group name the pressures of this world that families face today that feel different than past generations?

Digging Deeper (Exploring the big idea in and through God’s Word):

Read Philippians 4:4-13.

The Apostle Paul shares that the way to confront our anxious hearts is through prayer, prayer and more prayer!

What do you make of Paul telling us that the Lord is near in v.5?

How many different postures and types of praying does Paul describe in v.6?

What do you make of Paul promising that prayer will guard both our head and heart?

In verses 8-9 what is the relationship between thoughts and actions that Paul encourages to bring peace?

In verses 10-13 Paul describes learning to be content in all circumstances how do you think his prayers impacted his realization “ I can do all this through him who give me strength.”?

Taking It Home (Putting this into action): We invite you to lead a time of personal silent prayer and reflection with one another.

1. Acknowledge your worry or anxiousness of heart to one another
2. Get present to the impact of your worry on your mind and heart
3. Offer your heart and mind to be guarded by the peace of Christ
4. Prayerfully commit to rejoicing, thanking and resting in Christ strength

Share with one another your experience of praying about your worry/anxiety

Please Practice Ministry Time