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LEADER'S GUIDE

For discussion following the sermon on January 4, 2009

Debate

What happens when truths are diminished because of willful misunderstanding? What happens when brilliant light penetrates an unbelieving heart, but quickly dissipates into familiar darkness? Why do the piercing words of Jesus convict, yet for some, do not convince? In one of the darkest passages of the Gospel of John, Jesus directly confronts the religious leaders. When challenged with the truth of the Gospel, unbelievers must wrestle with:

- Their culpability and inability to believe
- The sufficiency of Jesus

The religious leaders thought that they had it together. They studied the scriptures, they understood their heritage, and they followed Abraham. They were brilliant men who were anything but helpless. Yet in statement after statement, Jesus exposed their inability to understand God apart from himself. The light of the world came to pierce their darkness, but their intentional blindness would keep them in the dark. The prophecy they knew so well stood before them, but they refused to see Jesus as the fulfillment of that prophecy.

It is impossible to follow God and dismiss Jesus. He is the great "I AM". No further evidence or testimony is needed. Later on in John, Jesus said that he is "the way, the truth, the light, and that no one comes to the Father except through him"¹. Those who reject these claims will never know God, never live in the light, and never experience eternal life.

Unbelievers must begin with the acknowledgment of their helplessness. Even though, on their own, they are blind and unable to see, God may work in them to believe. And that “belief” is defined as following Jesus; then we will hold to his teaching (v.31), love him (v. 42), belong to him (v. 47), and keep his Word (v. 57). Discipleship will cost us everything, but we gain the great joy of *knowing* Jesus, along with the hope of eternal life!

¹John 14:6

Leader's Guide

Personal Preparation

As you consider the darkness where you once lived and the light in your life you now enjoy, take time to worship God for enabling you to see and to respond to Jesus.

Group Preparation

This week's passage is for the unregenerate. The words of Jesus are sharp and penetrating. He told the people that they did not know God (v. 19), that they would die in their sins (v.24), and that their father was the devil (v.44). These are difficult and offensive statements for those who are perishing. As your group discusses people in their lives who reject the claims of Christ, be mindful of the tension that exists in Jesus. While he is loving, gracious, kind and benevolent, Jesus is also light and truth, presenting juxtaposed realities that may tempt us to distance ourselves from him. We must resist this temptation. To follow Jesus means that we choose to believe in his perfect character, and to trust in all that he says and does.

Discussion Questions

1. If you lived in darkness, and light penetrated the darkness, yet you chose to remain in the shadows, would you be accountable for remaining in darkness?
2. Like the Pharisees, many religious people who live in darkness think they are actually living in the light. How do you tell them they are perishing without offending them?

3. Jesus presented the truth of his authenticity. With what words in this text does Jesus describe his divinity? What further “proof” did the religious leaders demand? How did Jesus respond?
4. As you engage unbelievers in spiritual conversations, what “proof” of Jesus do they often demand? How do you respond?
5. In the post-modern, pluralistic philosophy of the day, to claim only one way to anything is often rejected. We are a culture who values multiple choices. In what ways can you disarm these values as you speak with others regarding the centrality of Jesus?
6. In practical terms, what does it mean to follow Jesus?
7. Following Jesus includes our willingness to share the Gospel, and that means that we will engage in potentially offensive conversations. We may be despised and rejected, just as Jesus was. How can you prepare for this kind of rejection? Is there anything you can do to mitigate the relational difficulties this causes?
8. Prayer is our greatest resource because God must invade the minds and hearts of unbelievers before they can trust Jesus. Who are you praying for? How then do you pray?
9. In spiritual community, how can we gain strength from one another for the difficulties that we face in sharing the Gospel? In what ways can we intentionally support each other?