

RIVER OAK MEASURES → “AM I...?”

OVERVIEW FOR LIFE GROUP LEADERS

In January 2018, Pastor Heath preached a 5-week sermon series explaining the church’s new mission statement – *Living every day captivated and changed by Jesus*. In the months that followed, he gradually rolled out some of the basics regarding all four sides of our church’s Vision Frame (Mission, Values, Strategy, and Measures). In September, we will focus on our Measures during a 4-week sermon series.

Our Measures describe what a follower of Jesus should look like at River Oak – the basics of what it means to be a disciple. We ask ourselves four questions as we evaluate our spiritual growth: (1) Am I following completely? (2) Am I changing continually? (3) Am I living generously? (4) Am I multiplying disciples?

As you prepare to lead your groups through this sermon-based Life Group discussion guide, we want you to understand our approach to the sermon series. We will introduce each of the four Measures that we use to gauge basic spiritual maturity by examining one of the great “I AM” statements of Jesus found in the book of John. While Scripture teaches us that growing in Christ necessitates self-examination and developing spiritual disciplines in our lives, our ultimate example is Jesus. He is our source, strength, teacher, and model. Our lives should *reflect* His life as we live every day captivated and changed by Him! So, we will address each measure (“Am I” question) by first considering who Jesus is and studying His example for us.

While we will introduce one of the measures each week, the focus of the sermon will be on Jesus and how He describes Himself. This means that there will simply not be enough time for Pastor Heath during his sermons or for you as Life Group leaders to fully cover all aspects of the Measures, particularly the subparts listed under each of the Measures (*see full listing on page 3*). Our objective is to introduce the Measures and provide you with the detailed questions and subparts to the questions so that you can use them as part of your more complete discipleship efforts throughout the next year. Our desire over the next 12-24 months is to see exponential growth in the number of people in our Life Groups and at River Oak who understand what it means to be a disciple and are living out the Measures more fully.

Please remember that the primary purpose of these sermon-based studies is to reflect on and study the passage that is preached on Sunday, introduce the Measure, and lead your group to practical application. The secondary purpose is to begin discussion of the four subparts to the Measure. You will not be able to fully teach or discuss all the subparts. You should continue to train those throughout the year.

RIVER OAK MEASURES → “AM I...?”

SERMON SERIES SCHEDULE

September 9 → Am I Following Completely?

I am the Bread of Life (John 6)

September 16 → Am I Changing Continually?

I am the Vine (John 15)

September 23 → Am I Living Generously?

I am the Good Shepherd (John 10)

September 30 → Am I Multiplying Disciples?

I am the Light of the World (John 8)

RIVER OAK CHURCH

MEASURES (MARK 1:17)

AM I FOLLOWING COMPLETELY? (*Galatians 2:20; Luke 9:23; Colossians 2:6-7*)

- Salvation: I have placed my faith and trust in Jesus alone as my personal Lord and Savior
- Baptism: I have been baptized as a public profession of my decision to follow Jesus
- Assurance: I understand assurance of salvation (1 John 5:11-13), forgiveness (1 John 1:9), victory over sin (1 Cor. 10:13), answered prayer (John 16:24), and guidance (Proverbs 3:5-6)
- Worship: I gather weekly with other believers to participate in corporate worship

AM I CHANGING CONTINUALLY? (*2 Corinthians 5:17; Romans 12:1-2; Galatians 5:22-23*)

- Grow: I am pursuing a deeper relationship with Jesus by praying and reading God's Word
- Connect: I connect in a Life Group to study God's Word and learn to live out my faith
- Partner: I engage in open and honest relationships with mature believers who support the development of my personal purity, integrity, and spiritual growth
- Mature: I reflect Jesus every day and exhibit the fruit of the Spirit as I interact with friends, family, and my community

AM I LIVING GENEROUSLY? (*Romans 12:3-8; 2 Corinthians 9:6-8; 1 Timothy 6:17-19*)

- Grace: I demonstrate a servant's heart and am characterized by extending grace to others
- Gifts: I am currently using my spiritual gifts to serve within our church and community
- Priorities: I align my priorities with biblical principles and invest increasing amounts of time, energy, and resources toward the cause of Christ
- Giving: I am progressing on a journey of financial generosity toward and then beyond biblical tithing to cheerful and generous giving for the expansion of God's kingdom

AM I MULTIPLYING DISCIPLES? (*Romans 1:16; Acts 1:8; Matthew 28:19-20*)

- Family: I am leading my family members in their spiritual formation
- Share: I share my personal testimony and have gospel conversations regularly
- Outreach: I am engaged in outreach efforts in my community, region, and beyond
- Disciple: I am making disciples who make disciples

RIVER OAK MEASURES → “AM I...?”

GROUP DISCUSSION GUIDE #1

AM I FOLLOWING COMPLETELY? (WEEK 1)

JOHN 6:22-35

9/9/2018

MAIN POINT

Jesus is the true bread from heaven that nourishes us eternally and spiritually. He satisfies the deep longing in our souls. We begin our journey as His disciples by placing our complete faith and trust in Him as our Savior. And we rely on Him for our future and satisfaction in this life and the life to come – not on “food” that perishes or spoils. Following completely begins with a relationship with Jesus, publicly professing Him as our Savior, worshipping with other believers, and trusting in His assurances.

INTRODUCTION

In this 4-week sermon series, we will introduce the four “Measures” that we use at River Oak to gauge basic spiritual maturity. To introduce each of the four measures, we will examine one of the great “I Am” statements of Jesus found in the book of John. While Scripture teaches us that growing in Christ necessitates self-examination and developing spiritual disciplines in our lives, our ultimate example is Jesus. He is our source, strength, teacher, and model. Our lives should reflect His life as we live every day captivated and changed by Him! We will address each metric by first considering who Jesus is and studying His gracious provision for us. This week we will start with Jesus’ statement, “*I am the bread of life*” from John 6:25-58, as we introduce our first Measure: *Am I following completely?*

As a reminder, River Oak’s Mission statement is: *Living every day captivated and changed by Jesus*. The four Measures that we use to examine if we are becoming all that Jesus has called us to be as His disciples are: (1) Am I following completely? (2) Am I changing continually? (3) Am I living generously? (4) Am I multiplying disciples?

Note to Group Leaders: Remember that the primary purpose of this Life Group study is to reflect on and study the passage that is preached on Sunday, introduce the first measure, and lead your group to practical application. The secondary purpose is to begin discussion of the four subparts to the measure. You will not be able to fully teach or discuss the subparts. You should continue to train those throughout the year.

OPENING QUESTIONS

Since this is your first meeting as a Life Group for Fall 2018, you may want to begin your discussion by having group members briefly introduce themselves and share why they decided to join or continue with your Life Group this year.

You may also want to briefly review River Oak's new mission statement and the four measures that we will be studying this month and ask for initial thoughts/questions.

Do you have a regular order when you go to Subway/Panera? (What kind of bread?)

How do you feel when you are extremely hungry and then finally get something to eat?

In what ways does our need for food and our delight in food lead us to consider our need for God and our delight in God?

Optional Opening Discussion: Begin with a discussion about “food wars” in our culture and how this debate shines light on the importance of food for human life.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Briefly skim/review John 6:1-15. What miracle had just taken place?

READ JOHN 6:22-35 (see also Exodus 16:1-5)

What attitudes and actions did the people exhibit toward Jesus and how were they like the Israelites in the Old Testament?

What are some reasons people might “follow” Jesus for what He can give them but not for who He is and what He offers spiritually? How does this view of following Jesus distort the biblical perspective?

What are some common things in which people seek satisfaction? What are examples of “bread” that perishes or spoils?

What is the “I Am” statement that Jesus makes? What do you think it means?

BRIEFLY READ/SKIM JOHN 6:35-58

What further insights does this passage provide about Jesus' provision for us?

How can participating in the Lord's Supper be a reminder for you of Jesus' provision?

AM I FOLLOWING COMPLETELY?

From Jesus' teaching about being the bread of life, what is our first step toward following Him completely?

What are some logical next steps?

Four Subparts to Measure #1 (see below) → The subparts listed below (salvation, baptism, worship, assurance) do not come directly from John 6 and the passage regarding the Bread of Life, but they are important aspects of *following completely*.

Discuss the subparts briefly and encourage group members to trust Jesus as Savior and follow Him in believer's baptism if they have not already (refer to Pastor Heath's sermon last week), worship with us *weekly*, and study and learn the 5 Assurances.

Challenge for your Life Group for Fall 2018: Study, understand, and memorize the 5 Assurances. The verses are a great source of hope, encouragement, and comfort, and they will provide you with a good tool for doing follow up as you disciple new believers.

AM I FOLLOWING COMPLETELY? (Galatians 2:20; Luke 9:23; Colossians 2:6-7)

- Salvation: I have placed my faith and trust in Jesus alone as my personal Lord and Savior
- Baptism: I have been baptized as a public profession of my decision to follow Jesus
- Worship: I gather weekly with other believers to participate in corporate worship
- Assurance: I understand assurance of salvation (1 John 5:11-13), forgiveness (1 John 1:9), victory over sin (1 Cor. 10:13), answered prayer (John 16:24), and guidance (Proverbs 3:5-6)

APPLICATION QUESTIONS:

What are some of the main truths that God wants you to take away from this study?

How do your thoughts/values need to adjust to align with these truths?

What is going to be the most difficult aspect of this study to personally apply?

What **specific actions** does God want you to take this week based on this study?

Will you learn and memorize the **5 Assurances** (see page 9) this fall?

COMMENTARY

The feeding of the 5,000 in John 6:1-15 is the one miracle other than the resurrection that is found in all four Gospels. It demonstrates that Jesus is the true supplier of human need, and it sets the stage for His testimony that He is the Bread of Life.

In John 6:22-23, we see the people trying to find Jesus. John 6:26 implies that the people were only seeking Him out to satisfy their appetites – for the physical or material benefits that He provided. Jesus then used the example of God’s provision of manna for Israel in the wilderness (Exodus 16:1-5). The Israelites had just escaped from slavery and suffering in Egypt. Instead of focusing on their freedom and thanking God for leading them out of Egypt, they were complaining about being hungry. God provided for them by sending a special food (honey-like wafers like modern-day rice cakes) from heaven in proportion to their exact needs. This “manna” showed up every morning. Just like the Israelites in the wilderness were not satisfied with their daily provisions, the Jews in Jesus’s day were not satisfied with one round of bread from Jesus. However, Jesus’ miraculous feeding of the 5,000 was meant to point the people to their need for true Bread from heaven – not physical bread that spoils but the Bread that lasts forever and gives eternal life – Jesus Himself.

In John 6:33-34, Jesus declares that He is the Bread from heaven who gives eternal life to those who believe. The work God requires of us is simply to believe in Christ, who has given His body and blood as a sacrifice for our salvation. The manna satisfied a hunger that the Israelites were experiencing, and Jesus’s presence and sacrifice for our sins was meant to satisfy the deep spiritual hunger of all people. “I am the bread of life” indicates that God provided Jesus to meet all our needs starting with salvation. Jesus also provides meaning, direction, and purpose for life. He nourishes us spiritually and satisfies the deep spiritual longing in our souls. We will not hunger (6:35) because our spiritual longing to know God will be satisfied! Just as physical bread provides nourishment, His bread gives true life to the world (6:33, 41, 48, 51). Jesus is not a one-time decision but a life of ongoing faith. We must follow Him completely! What we ought to learn from the ancient Israelites and from the Jews in Jesus’ day is that if we try to find our full satisfaction in the things of this life, we will miss out on the way that we can be truly satisfied. Jesus said the work of God is to believe in the One He has sent. Our toil and effort should not be spent in seeking to satisfy our hearts with lesser things. We should *live for more* by believing in the One who satisfies forever and glorifying Him with every aspect of our lives.

Jesus confounded the people's thinking by saying that He was the bread that they needed for life and by promising that whoever came to Him in faith would never be hungry again. He used the stark images of flesh and blood to communicate our need for salvation. "Eating" His body and "drinking" His blood is another way of saying that we trust in His death and we receive His life. He did not mean that they must literally eat His flesh and drink His blood. Flesh and blood here point to Christ as the crucified one and the source of life. Also, Jesus speaks of faith's appropriation of Himself as God's appointed sacrifice – not of any ritual requirement. Jesus becomes this spiritually satisfying "bread" by sacrificing His own physical body on the cross, and in that sense, He can say that this spiritual bread is my flesh. Jesus also clearly does not teach that receiving the Lord's Supper (sacrament/ordinance) is a requirement for eternal life. He emphasizes faith in response to testimony.

As the Holy Spirit works in our lives, our first step in following Christ is to place our faith and trust in Jesus as our personal Lord and Savior. The Bible then teaches that our first steps of obedience as Christians include publicly professing our decision to follow Jesus through believer's baptism and continuing in fellowship with other believers. We should also begin to grow in our walk with Christ and can measure our growth through learning and applying the many promises found in God's Word. A great place to start our journey is by memorizing and understanding the "5 Assurances" listed below.

AM I FOLLOWING COMPLETELY? (Galatians 2:20; Luke 9:23; Colossians 2:6-7)

- Salvation: I have placed my faith and trust in Jesus alone as my personal Lord and Savior
- Baptism: I have been baptized as a public profession of my decision to follow Jesus
- Worship: I gather weekly with other believers to participate in corporate worship
- Assurance: I understand assurance of salvation (1 John 5:11-13), forgiveness (1 John 1:9), victory over sin (1 Cor. 10:13), answered prayer (John 16:24), and guidance (Proverbs 3:5-6)

5 ASSURANCES

Assurance of Salvation → 1 John 5:11-12

Assurance of Forgiveness → 1 John 1:9

Assurance of Victory (over sin) → 1 Corinthians 10:13

Assurance of Answered Prayer → John 16:24

Assurance of Guidance → Proverbs 3:5-6

RIVER OAK MEASURES → “AM I...?”

GROUP DISCUSSION GUIDE #2

AM I CHANGING CONTINUALLY (WEEK 2)

JOHN 15:1-5

9/16/2018

MAIN POINT

Jesus used the illustration of a vine and branches to set forth the basis of Christian living. He identified Himself as the “true vine” and God the Father as the gardener or caretaker. The branches that bear fruit are genuine believers. Believers have no fruitfulness apart from their union and fellowship with Christ. Fruit represents the product of a godly life – a life that is continuously growing by remaining in the vine and being transformed by the renewing of the mind.

INTRODUCTION

In this 4-week sermon series, “Am I...?”, we are introducing the four “Measures” that we use at River Oak to gauge spiritual maturity, by examining one of the great “I Am” statements of Jesus found in the book of John. While Scripture teaches us that growing in Christ necessitates self-examination and developing spiritual disciplines in our lives, our ultimate example is Jesus. He is our source, strength, teacher, and model. Our lives should reflect His life as we live every day captivated and changed by Him! We will address each metric by first considering who Jesus is and studying His gracious provision for us. This week we will study Jesus’ statement, “*I am the true vine*” from John 15:1-5, as we introduce our second measure: *Am I changing continually?*

As a reminder, River Oak’s Mission statement is: *Living every day captivated and changed by Jesus*. The four Measures that we use to examine if we are becoming all that Jesus has called us to be as His disciples are: (1) Am I following completely? (2) Am I changing continually? (3) Am I living generously? (4) Am I multiplying disciples?

Note to Group Leaders: Remember that the primary purpose of this Life Group study is to reflect on and study the passage that is preached on Sunday, introduce the first measure, and lead your group to practical application. The secondary purpose is to begin discussion of the four subparts to the measure. You will not be able to fully teach or discuss the subparts. You should continue to train those throughout the year.

OPENING QUESTIONS

Why is it so easy to conform to the behavior of the world and hard to increase in obedience to God?

In what areas of life do you find it particularly difficult to fight conformity and obey God?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

READ JOHN 15:1-5

What image comes to mind when you think of the word “abide” (“remain”)? How would you define the word “abide” in the context of your relationship with Jesus?

What was Jesus referring to when He talked about spiritual fruit? (*see Galatians 5:22-24 & 2 Peter 1:5-8 for examples*)

What did Jesus mean by trimming or pruning the branches, and how does that relate to God’s actions toward believers? In what specific ways does God prune believers?

What one action must believers do to produce fruit (15:4)?

What does it mean to abide (or remain) in Jesus? What does it mean for Jesus to abide (or remain) in us?

Why are both abiding in Jesus and Jesus abiding in us necessary to produce fruit?

Do you really believe that you can do nothing without Christ? How do your thoughts and actions affirm this mentality?

READ 2 CORINTHIANS 5:17 and ROMANS 12:1-2

What did Paul plead for with his fellow believers? What is the basis of his plea?

What did Paul say to give up? What were they to give their bodies up for?

What does it look like practically to offer yourself as a living sacrifice every day?

Who is responsible for transformation? How is transformation accomplished?

MEASURE # 2 → AM I CHANGING CONTINUALLY?

From Jesus' teaching about the true vine (John 15:1-5) and Paul's teaching in 2 Corinthians 5:17 and Romans 12:1-2 about transformation and becoming new, consider Measure #2 and its four subparts listed below...

The subparts (grow, connect, partner, mature) are important aspects of *abiding or remaining in the vine* and *changing continually*...

Discuss the subparts briefly. How can we *GROW TOGETHER* through our Life Groups and specifically apply the principles we learned this week to be transformed more into the image of Jesus by abiding in Him and renewing our minds.

AM I CHANGING CONTINUALLY? (2 Cor. 5:17; Rom. 12:1-2; Gal. 5:22-23)

- Grow: I am pursuing a deeper relationship with Jesus by praying and reading God's Word
- Connect: I connect in a Life Group to study God's Word and learn to live out my faith
- Partner: I engage in open and honest relationships with mature believers who support the development of my personal purity, integrity, and spiritual growth
- Mature: I reflect Jesus every day and exhibit the fruit of the Spirit as I interact with friends, family, and my community

APPLICATION QUESTIONS:

What are some of the main truths that God wants you to take away from this study?

How do your thoughts/values need to adjust to align with these truths?

What is going to be the most difficult aspect of this study to personally apply?

What ***specific actions*** does God want you to take this week based on this study?

COMMENTARY

The vine was frequently used in the Old Testament as a symbol of Israel. Jesus used imagery that every Jew would understand. The Father owns the garden, Jesus is the true vine, and His followers are the branches.

In comparing believers to the branches on a vine, Jesus expected His disciples to bear fruit. The term fruit can relate to good works that Christ's followers perform. It can also designate the conversion of lost people who accept Christ through a believer's witness. One result of Christ's life flowing through Christians is that unsaved people come to believe in Him. Also, Peter and Paul wrote about fruit as character qualities that the Holy Spirit produces in believers. The fruit in this passage (John 15:1-5) seems to focus on spirit-generated behavior of believers.

Verse 2 continues the vine metaphor and describes the process of pruning, when dead branches are removed and the decaying parts are trimmed away. As Christians, we are represented by the branch that produces fruit but still requires pruning. This process of removing the dead parts occurs as God challenges us and disciplines us so that we can continue to grow (change continually) in Him. Pruning is a crucial process as it promotes spiritual health and strong faith.

Verses 4-5 state the critical importance of staying connected to the vine (living in obedience to Jesus and allowing Him to work through you). Jesus encouraged the disciples to remain in Him and to allow Him to remain in them. When people are saved, they are in Christ and Christ is in them. The Greek word translated abide or remain means "to dwell." Believers have spiritual life through living in Christ, and they produce spiritual fruit by abiding in Him. We can do nothing without Christ. Only with Him living and working in us can we produce fruit and make a difference in the world.

We act in obedience when we allow Jesus to not only live in us, but also help us break free from the bondage of sin. With those chains broken, Jesus works through us. Through obedience we display Him and His character to the world. Only by allowing Christ to have full control of our hearts can we have an impact for the kingdom of God.

Romans 12:1 notes the first effect of salvation is that believers are to present themselves to God. Such presentation (manifest through denying self and obeying Christ) pleases God as an act of worship. Paul pleaded with his fellow believers to give their bodies as "living sacrifices" to God. The reason Paul gave for this action was that God had done so much for them. Such language (offering their bodies as sacrifices) must have clashed immediately in the minds of the people. The common understanding was that only the first and best animals were fit to be offered as

sacrifices. The sacrifice Paul had in mind was radically different. Jesus had given Himself as the once-for-all sacrifice for sin on the cross. Believers were thus to live in light of Jesus' all-sufficient sacrifice, bringing glory to God. Paul further explained that living as a holy, pleasing sacrifice was a believer's spiritual act of worship. The phrase can be understood as meaning logical or reasonable ("reasonable service" in some translations). Because of God's gracious and merciful redemption, living as a sacrifice was the logical and pleasing way for Christians to serve God.

Romans 12:2 notes a second effect of salvation in the minds of believers as they seek transformation in how they think. Such renewed thinking inevitably will result in believers knowing and experiencing the will of God. Paul wanted the Roman believers to be transformed by God. God's will is that we would become new people who daily sacrifice our lives to follow His will. Living transformed comes from God and His *changing of our minds and hearts* from our old selves to new beings who give everything for Him (see *2 Corinthians 5:17*).

As Christians, we are to please God with our minds. The temptation is to go along with the dominant attitudes of society and adopt the prevailing cultural worldview characterized by self-worship. Paul urged his readers to reject worldliness and to be transformed by the renewing of the mind. The phrase "be transformed" in the Greek is a present passive imperative form. This form suggests three important truths. First, the present tense describes continuing action. Transformation of our thinking and attitudes is an ongoing, lifelong endeavor. Second, the passive voice indicates that the indwelling Spirit is the Source of our transformation. We can't transform ourselves but rather must be transformed. Third, however, is the truth suggested by the imperative that we must consciously place ourselves at the Spirit's disposal for transformation to happen. The Spirit will not transform us against our will.

The result of having our minds renewed is to grow in our ability to discern what is good, pleasing, and perfect will of God. The word translated "discern" literally means to prove by testing. Christian living is not about emptying the mind – but rather about thinking intelligently and logically in accordance with God's ways. God wants His people to know what pleases Him because by living according to His ways we will experience the most abundant life possible (John 10:10).

RIVER OAK MEASURES → “AM I...?”

GROUP DISCUSSION GUIDE #3

AM I LIVING GENEROUSLY (WEEK 3)

JOHN 10:11-18

9/23/2018

MAIN POINT

To live generously is God's calling for all of us. We must examine our priorities by considering the example of Jesus, our Good Shepherd, who *gave His life* for us. How are we using our time, talents, and treasure for His glory? What should our next steps be as we seek to excel on our journey of generosity?

INTRODUCTION

In the 4-week sermon series, “Am I...?”, we are introducing the four “Measures” that we use at River Oak to gauge spiritual maturity by examining the great “I Am” statements of Jesus found in the book of John. While Scripture teaches us that growing in Christ necessitates self-examination and developing spiritual disciplines, our ultimate example is Jesus. Our lives should reflect His life as we live every day captivated and changed by Him! We will address each measure by first considering who Jesus is and studying His gracious provision for us. This week we will study Jesus' statement, “*I am the Good Shepherd*” from John 10:11-18, as we introduce our third measure: *Am I living generously?*

As a reminder, River Oak's Mission statement is: *Living every day captivated and changed by Jesus*. The four Measures that we use to examine if we are becoming all that Jesus has called us to be as His disciples are: (1) Am I following completely? (2) Am I changing continually? (3) Am I living generously? (4) Am I multiplying disciples?

Note to Group Leaders: Remember that the primary purpose of this Life Group study is to reflect on and study the passage that is preached on Sunday, introduce the first measure, and lead your group to practical application. The secondary purpose is to begin discussion of the four subparts under each measure. You will not be able to fully teach or discuss the subparts. You should continue to train those throughout the year.

OPENING QUESTIONS

What stood out to you from Pastor Heath's sermon this week on the Good Shepherd that was particularly encouraging or challenging? Do you have any specific questions or concerns after the sermon about God's expectation that we live generously?

How is God a giver? What does it mean for us that God loves the world?

Considering Jesus' example, what do you think it means for us to live generously?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

READ JOHN 10:11-18

What contrast did Jesus draw between the true shepherd and the hireling (10:11-13)?

What's another characteristic of the good shepherd that Jesus manifested (10:14-15)?

For what "other" sheep did Jesus also show concern (10:16)?

What divine power did Jesus declare He possessed (10:17-18)? What does this tell us about His love for us? How does Jesus provide an example of generosity for us?

READ PSALM 100

What does Psalm 100 teach us about God's generosity and graciousness?

READ JOHN 3:16

How was God's love for us displayed? How does this demonstrate His generosity?

READ 2 CORINTHIANS 8:8-9 & PHILIPPIANS 2:5-8 (compare John 10:14-18)

How did Jesus demonstrate generosity toward us?

Note: We tend to evaluate generosity based on the absolute amounts given in time, talents, and treasures – but Jesus evaluated gifts based on the amount that was left! (briefly see and discuss Luke 21:1-4)

MEASURE #3 → AM I LIVING GENEROUSLY?

From Jesus' teaching about the Good Shepherd (John 10:11-18) and the other Scripture we discussed about generosity consider Measure #3 and its four subparts listed below...

The subparts (grace, gifts, priorities, and giving) are important aspects of living generously with our time, talents, and treasure.

Discuss the subparts briefly. What are some specific ways we can live more generously this week and apply the principles we learned from John 10:11-18 to better follow the example of Jesus, who loved us enough to "lay down His life" for us?

AM I LIVING GENEROUSLY? (Rom. 12:3-8; 2 Cor. 9:6-8; 1 Tim. 6:17-19)

- Grace: I demonstrate a servant's heart and am characterized by extending grace to others
- Gifts: I am currently using my spiritual gifts to serve within our church and community
- Priorities: I align my priorities with biblical principles and invest increasing amounts of time, energy, and resources toward the cause of Christ
- Giving: I am progressing on a journey of financial generosity toward and then beyond biblical tithing to cheerful and generous giving for the expansion of God's kingdom

APPLICATION QUESTIONS:

Do we think or act as if good things in our lives come from someone or something other than God (*see James 1:17-18*)? Explain.

Do we spend most of our time on our own pursuits, ambitions, and entertainment, or do we invest our lives in ministry to others? Explain.

In what *specific* ways can we follow the example (imitate) of our giving God this week?

COMMENTARY

In John 10, Jesus presented the parable of the true and false shepherds, teaching that He was the Good Shepherd who laid down His life for His sheep. Hirelings would betray the flock in time of peril because they did not own or truly care for the sheep. Jesus was comparing Himself to the Pharisees. The original grammatical construction helps us understand what Jesus was saying, "I am the shepherd, the good one." In other words, "I'm the good one - in contrast to all the bad ones." The Pharisees had

set themselves up as leaders, but Jesus was telling them and the people that that He alone is the true and good Shepherd (see *also 10:1-10*).

The Greek word for “good” that is used here is also instructive. There were two words that could have been used. One simply meant “morally good,” but here the word used meant, “beautiful, magnificent, lovely, excellent on all levels, preeminent.” One commentator paraphrased Jesus this way, “I am the shepherd, the good one, the one who is preeminently excellent, lovely, and beautiful.”

Jesus also teaches that the Good Shepherd knows us individually and is touched with the feeling of our infirmities (10:14-15). He knows us all by name. He knows the very house in which we live and the number of hairs on our heads. He has a deep mutual knowledge of us, like that of the Father and Son. Every person is as fully known to Jesus as if he or she were the only one for whom the Savior died. The distress and brokenness of each person touches His heart. He loves and cares for each one of us.

In John 10:16, Jesus is speaking about the Gentiles. They already “belong” to Christ, but they had not yet been brought to Him. Jews and Gentiles are united in one Christian community. This is a glimpse of the future worldwide scope of the church, because all God’s people have the same Shepherd.

Jesus voluntarily yielded His life for us – His sheep. Both the love and the plan of the Father are involved, as well as the authority of the Son. Christ obediently chose to die; otherwise, no one would have had the power to kill Him. The reference in 10:11 to the Good Shepherd who “lays down his life” for the sheep reminds us of David, who risked his life for his sheep (1 Samuel 17:34-37). But Jesus paid the ultimate price for us because He gave His life on the cross. He bore the sin of the world, endured its curse, and yielded up His life as a sacrificial payment for our sins (see *Isaiah 53:4-6*).

In Psalm 100, we see that the graciousness of God’s nature should spark praise. The psalmist described the expressions of God’s love in His creation of man, shepherding care, and in His goodness, lovingkindness, and faithfulness. “Lovingkindness” is one of the most common descriptions of what we find at the heart of God. It wraps together the ideas of covenant, love, faithfulness, commitment, and kindness. Psalm 100 assures us that these things are abundant in God – His supply is everlasting. His generosity toward us is on full display.

In the New Testament we see God’s generosity and graciousness in His revelation of Himself through Jesus. In John 3:16, we see that God’s love is for “the world,” and the nature of His love surpasses expectations. His love is not confined to divine feelings but was displayed in His great act of generosity – giving of His “only begotten Son.”

In addition to seeing the Father's willingness to give the Son for us, we find the character of generosity in Jesus Himself. In 2 Corinthians 8, Paul used Jesus' example as he sought to inspire the Corinthians to give for the offering for the Jerusalem church. Paul first appealed to the example of the churches in Macedonia, who gave out of their own poverty. Then in 8:9, he turned to the ultimate example of Jesus. Rather than acting to increase his own power at the expense of others, Jesus gave profoundly and completely for the benefit of others. Then in Philippians 2, Paul captured clearly and powerfully Christ's giving attitude, pushing beyond what we normally understand as *generous*. We see Jesus emptying Himself instead of grasping equality with God.

We tend to evaluate generosity based on the amount given. Jesus evaluated gifts on the amount that was left. The widow he commended in Luke 21:1-4 gave much less in absolute terms than the rich of her day, but the sacrifice of her gift is what Jesus focused on. Maybe Jesus saw a reflection of Himself in her giving. He did not give only a little of the excess of His heavenly holdings. He did not offer a percentage of what He had to cover the sins of humanity. He "emptied Himself." Jesus became flesh. He took the form of a slave. And His downward mobility did not end there, for He was obedient to the point of death on a cross. Jesus held nothing back as He gave Himself to complete and utter emptiness for you and me. He had nothing left to give. In Jesus, we find the clearest evidence of the essential nature of God's generosity.

In James, 1:17-18, we are reminded that God's nature as a giver is constant and sure. He is a giver of good things and "every perfect gift." God gives from beginning to the end, wholly and completely. Our challenge is to pattern our lives after His example. Life presents us with abundant opportunities to choose Jesus' path over a grasping one. Very basic things reveal our hearts. Do we spend most of our time on our own pursuits, ambitions, and entertainment, or do we invest our lives in ministry to others? Do we max everything we have for consumption and for our own needs and desires or do we give generously of our time, talents, and treasure? Are we living generously?"

RIVER OAK MEASURES → “AM I...?”

GROUP DISCUSSION GUIDE #4

AM I MULTIPLYING DISCIPLES (WEEK 4)

JOHN 8:12; MATTHEW 5:14-16

9/30/2018

MAIN POINT

Jesus is the light of the world. When we follow Him completely, we become so captivated by Him that we join ourselves to Him, allow ourselves to be changed continually by Him, and have Him as our source of light and life. There is a connection between light and life (see *John 1:4*). The life Jesus has, and the life He shares with those who follow him, gives them light. All life and spiritual illumination come from Him. The eyes of our hearts are opened, and divine light streams into our lives. When we follow Jesus completely, we reflect His light and become ambassadors to the world around us. We display Jesus' identity as the light of the world and fulfil our role as the light of the world by living out His commission to us to multiply disciples.

INTRODUCTION

In the 4-week sermon series, “Am I...?”, we are introducing the four “Measures” that we use at River Oak to gauge spiritual maturity by examining the great “I Am” statements of Jesus found in the book of John. While Scripture teaches us that growing in Christ necessitates self-examination and developing spiritual disciplines, our ultimate example is Jesus. Our lives should reflect His life. We will introduce our fourth measure (*Am I multiplying disciples?*) by studying what Jesus meant when He declared, “*I am the light of the world*” (John 8:12) and when He told His disciples, “*You are the light of the world*” (Matthew 5:14-16).

As a reminder, River Oak's Mission statement is: *Living every day captivated and changed by Jesus*. The four Measures that we use to examine if we are becoming all that Jesus has called us to be as His disciples are: (1) Am I following completely? (2) Am I changing continually? (3) Am I living generously? (4) Am I multiplying disciples?

OPENING QUESTIONS

What does the imagery of light cause you to think about?

Any initial impressions from Sunday's sermon on the significance of Jesus proclaiming that He is the light of the world and then declaring that we are the light of the world?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

READ JOHN 8:12-20 & MATTHEW 5:14-16

What does it mean for Jesus to be the *light* of the world (emphasize *light* when asking this question because we will focus on *the world* later in the study)?

Why is Jesus *qualified* to be the light of the world (see *John 8:14-19*)?

What darkness does Jesus dispel? What is Jesus rescuing us from and saving us to?

Why does John make such a strong connection between light and life (see *Jn 1:4-13*)?

What privilege does John promise to those who receive Jesus (see *Jn 1:12-13*)?

If Jesus is the light of the *world*, then what does that mean for someone who does not yet recognize Him as such?

What is the relationship between Jesus' identity as the light of the world and His describing Christians as the light of the world?

How might we more effectively reflect Jesus' identity as the light of the world and fulfill our role as the light of the world in our lives and community? Specific examples?

READ MATTHEW 28:19-20 & 2 TIMOTHY 2:2 (see also *Acts 1:8* and *Romans 1:16*)

MEASURE #4 → AM I MULTIPLYING DISCIPLES?

From Jesus' teaching about the light of the world and the verses listed above about multiplying disciples, consider Measure #4 and its four subparts listed below...

The subparts (family, share, outreach, and disciple) are important aspects of being light in a dark world and living out Jesus' commission to make disciples...

Discuss the subparts briefly. What are some *specific* ways that we can be light to our world and more effectively live out Jesus' command to multiply disciples *this week*?

AM I MULTIPLYING DISCIPLES? (*Romans 1:16; Acts 1:8; Matthew 28:19-20*)

- Family: I am leading my family members in their spiritual formation
- Share: I share my personal testimony and have gospel conversations regularly
- Outreach: I am engaged in outreach efforts in my community, region, and beyond
- Disciple: I am making disciples who make disciples

APPLICATION QUESTIONS:

How did this study motivate you to more consistently have gospel-conversations and live in a way that non-believers see your good works and glorify God?

What are some of the main truths that God wants you to take away from this study?

How do your thoughts/values/actions need to adjust to align with these truths?

What is going to be the most difficult aspect of this study to personally apply?

How can you more regularly live out our commission to multiply disciples?

COMMENTARY

In John 8 we see Jesus identify Himself as “the light of the world” in the context of the Feast of Tabernacles. When Jesus confirmed that He was the light of the world, He was explicitly expressing His deity and that He was the Messiah. The imagery of a person coming as the light of the world has roots in the Old Testament – the Servant of the Lord will come as a light to the nations (Is. 42:6, 49:6, 51:4).

The Feast of Tabernacles was one of the seven major feasts celebrated in Jerusalem each year. The feast celebrated how God guided Israel in the wilderness after they escaped from Egypt. During their journey, God guided Israel as a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night to give the people light (Ex. 13:21-22). As the people wandered through the dark wilderness, they were led toward the Promised land by the light of God.

Each night during the Feast of Tabernacles, the Jews remembered God's guidance by partaking in a candle lighting ceremony. The ceremony would take place in the Court of Women within the Temple, and candles would be lit in courtyards all over

Jerusalem. So at the close of each day, there was a dramatic lighting of the city to commemorate a crucial event in the redemptive history of Israel. Against this backdrop, Jesus says, “I am the light of the world.” What God did for Israel in leading them out of slavery, through the wilderness, and into the Promised Land, He does for the nations through Jesus, the light of the world. As we journey through this world, we do so as those who no longer walk in darkness, but as those who have been rescued from the dominion of darkness and brought into the kingdom of Christ (see Col. 1:13). Jesus’ kingdom is an everlasting kingdom of life and light.

Jesus’ identification as the “light of the world” is not only made against the backdrop of the Feast of Tabernacles but is also rooted in the Servant of the Lord imagery of Isaiah as well as Old Testament promises of the coming light of salvation. The Servant of the Lord’s ministry would be global in scope. His life and ministry would benefit not just Israel but all the nations of the world. The Jewish leadership expected a national messiah but not a global messiah. The salvation that Jesus provides as “the light of the world” extends to all nations.

One of the great concepts throughout the book of John is that life is Jesus’ gift to us, and that He is in fact, “the life” (14:6). In John 1:4, we see Jesus described as the “light” from whom comes all spiritual illumination. He is the “light of the world” who holds out wonderful hope for man (8:12). The stark contrast between light and darkness is a key theme throughout the book of John. God is light (1 John 1:5); Jesus is light; and Jesus’ followers reflect the light that comes from Him – they too are “the light of the world” (Matt. 5:14). Jesus is also the light from God that lights the way for eternal life and guides our paths through this life. He brings to this dark world true knowledge, moral purity, and the light that shows the very presence of God.

By telling us that we are also “the light of the world” Jesus is calling His disciples to mirror or reflect His identity to the world around us. We have kingdom life within us as a living testimony to those in the world who do not yet have the light. The world will see the light of the kingdom through the good works done by Jesus’ followers, resulting in the Father being glorified. We have the light shining through our lives if our actions reflect the nature of Christ – His love, compassion, and forgiveness. His light shines through our attitudes, words, and deeds, as well as the gospel-conversations that we have with people around us. When people see that our lives have been changed and hear that the change is because of Jesus and that they too can be rescued from their sin, brokenness, and separation from God, they are drawn to Jesus!