

EXPLORE



GROUP DISCUSSION GUIDE

Mile City

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EXPLORE



CONTENTS

Letter from Travis Whittaker	4
Session 1: INTRODUCTION	5
Session 2: JUSTIFICATION	9
Session 3: SANCTIFICATION	17
Session 4: TRINITY	25
Session 5: SCRIPTURE	33
Session 6: PRAYER	41
Session 7: DISCIPLESHIP	49
Session 8: EVANGELISM	57

I couldn't be more thrilled that you have decided to embark on this journey. There are many things we can explore in this life, but one thing that I have discovered is that nothing could be more important than exploring your faith. God created you, He is pursuing you, and He wants a real relationship with you. 'Explore' is designed to be a guide and compass to help you navigate your questions, your concerns and your doubts. Remember there is no wrong question and you have permission to wrestle with God, just in case you felt like you needed it. My prayer is that this Explore material will help give you the confidence to begin your faith, to strengthen your faith, and to live out your faith.



Travis Whittaker

1



INTRODUCTION

1

PART 1 INTRODUCTION

Life is filled with different roads and possible directions for us to take. Sometimes it can leave us at a standstill, not knowing which path to take—whether relationally, professionally, emotionally, or even spiritually. Exploring faith can become overwhelming or intimidating. In some cases, as we grow older and face new challenges in life, the faith we grew up with can seem outdated or out of touch. Faith that seemed solid in our childhood might seem soft in our adulthood. It can be easy to simply give up and stop exploring faith. However, inside all of us is a deep curiosity that seeks more to this life.

The unknown of something bigger and better keeps us wanting to discover more. We all have a void that we constantly try to fill—whether we want to admit it or not. So is there a God that

exists who can fill that void? If so, what does that look like? How does one even begin to interact with such an idea?

Explore is a group designed to be a safe place to get your questions answered when it comes to faith, Christianity, and the Bible. Whether you are curious about faith, just beginning your faith journey, or it's been a while since you've engaged with faith, we are so glad you have interest in exploring more. God is crazy about you and wants a real relationship with you. He wants you to wrestle with your tough questions and be honest about your doubts. But be ready; when you begin to explore and move toward God, He is faithful to move toward you. (See Jas. 4:8.) Are you ready for that? Let's start exploring!

COMMUNITY GROUP

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

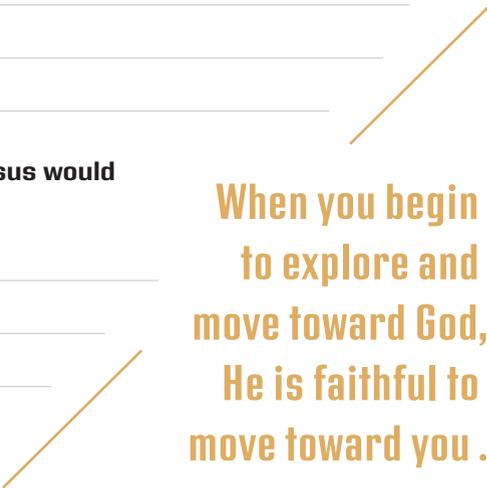
1. What has your faith journey been like up to this point?

2. How has your view of God changed over the years?

3. What do you hope to get out of Explore?

4. What is one question you hope to have answered along this journey?

5. What kind of relationship with Jesus would you like to have?



When you begin to explore and move toward God, He is faithful to move toward you .

1 HOMEWORK BEFORE NEXT WEEK

1. Read Week 2 and be prepared to discuss with your group.
2. Watch the Justification video at milecity.com/explore
3. Pray for the other members in your group.

WEEK ONE TAKE AWAYS

When you begin to explore
and move toward God, He is
faithful to move toward you.

You can be as close to God
as you choose to be.

God is constantly pursuing us
and trying to get our attention.



2

JUSTIFICATION

2

PART 1 SECONDS MATTER

Time is an important consideration when you're exploring and it's important in day-to-day life—seconds matter. For better or worse, life can change dramatically in a single second.

The more you explore, the more you will see that humankind is beautifully diverse. God has created us all in His image but with a wide range of nationalities, personalities, backgrounds, and skill sets. No two of us are completely alike. But the Bible teaches that one thing all people have in common is our need for forgiveness.

The apostle Paul wrote, “for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus” (Rom. 3:23-24).

The reality that all of us have a sin problem that separates us from God sounds like bad news—and it is. But the good news of the gospel is that God has not abandoned us in our sin. He has provided a way through the person of Jesus Christ for us to be forgiven for our sins and reconciled to Him.

When we approach Jesus in search of forgiveness, we don't have to worry that our quest is a lifetime pursuit—it happens in an instant. God's forgiveness doesn't work by the hour but by the second, and in a second we can be forgiven of our sins.

When we believe in Jesus—His life, His teachings, His authority, His divinity, His sacrificial death on the cross, and His resurrection—God gives us righteousness. (See Rom. 3:22.) Jesus secures our justification—and it happens in an instant. Only in Christ can we be justified before God.

COMMUNITY GROUP

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- 1. Have you experienced a triumph or tragedy that happened in an instant and shifted or altered your life?**

- 2. Travis discussed the reality that we all have a sin problem that must be addressed. Why is time of the essence?**

- 3. Why is it necessary for us to recognize we have a sin problem and need God's forgiveness?**

- 4. When did God's forgiveness touch your life? Or what is keeping you from allowing God's forgiveness to touch your life right now?**

- 5. What role does God play in our salvation? What role do we play?**

**God's forgiveness
doesn't work by the hour
but by the second.**

2

PART 2

WHAT IS JUSTIFICATION?

Coming to terms with the reality that we have a sin problem that separates us from God—and there’s nothing we can do to fix it—can feel overwhelming. But just because we don’t have the means to reconcile ourselves to God doesn’t mean our situation is hopeless—far from it. In His grace, God has provided a way for us to be reconciled to Him. Jesus has the power to deal with our sin problem.

In Matthew 8:1-4, a man suffering from leprosy approached Jesus and asked Him for healing. In biblical times, victims of leprosy were outcasts from cities, towns, and interaction with others because of the contagiousness of their disease. It was believed that touching a leper would make one “unclean.”

Yet, something about Jesus drew the suffering man to Him. The leper said, “Lord, if you will, you can make me clean” (Matt 8:2). Jesus responded to the man, “I will: be clean.” And immediately his leprosy was cleansed” (Matt. 8:3).

Lepers had to go through an extensive process to be declared clean, but just one touch from Jesus declared this leper clean. Rather than Jesus becoming unclean, the leper was cleansed by Jesus’ touch.

In the same way, when we approach Jesus and ask Him to deal with our sin problem—He does. Jesus not only has the power to cure a skin disease, but Jesus also has the power to cleanse our sin disease. He is the only One capable of dealing with our sin and reconciling us to the Father. God is at work in our world, acting not only to heal and restore our physical selves but our spiritual selves as well.

JUSTIFICATION

To instantly be made
right in the eyes of God.

COMMUNITY GROUP

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What evidence do you see that Jesus is approachable and willing to deal with our “untouchables”?

2. Travis said, “All of us need to be infected with the power of Jesus to make us clean.” What do you think he meant by that?

3. In the simplest terms, how would you define justification?

4. What role does faith play in being justified before God?

5. Who do you know that needs to hear about the love and compassion of Christ?

2

PART 3

JESUS IS WILLING

Travis raised the question, “Do we actually believe Jesus has the ability to solve our trials?” This is a crucial question because it reveals what we actually believe about God—and that is the foundation of our faith.

One of the primary ways we come to know Christ and get a better understanding of His identity, His power, and His character is by reading the Scriptures. As you read the gospels, you’ll see that one aspect that set Jesus apart was His ability to heal those with diseases of all kinds. Though Jesus often healed the physical ailments of people who came to Him, His willingness to do so points to an even greater aspect of

God’s ability to restore and heal. He is working to restore our whole selves to Him, including our hearts, minds, and souls. Jesus, the healer, doesn’t just heal physically; He aims to heal us from the true disease of sin and death that afflicts us all.

While our salvation is a free gift of God’s grace, God does require us to have faith in Christ’s ability to save us from our sin problem. Ephesians 2:8-9 says, “For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.” Jesus is willing to save us from our sins, but we must believe He can.

SESSION TWO

APPLICATION

- 1. Do you recognize you have a sin problem that has separated you from God? How do you respond to this?**
- 2. Have you approached Jesus about your sin problem? What is Jesus able to do that you cannot?**
- 3. Do you believe Jesus has the ability and is willing to solve your trials? Ask Him.**

Jesus not only has
the power to cure a
SKIN disease ...
Jesus also has the
power to cure our
SIN disease.



HOMework **BEFORE NEXT WEEK**

- 1. Read Week 3 and be prepared to discuss with your group.**
- 2. Watch the Sanctification video at milecity.com/explore**
- 3. Pray for the other members in your group.**

WEEK TWO **TAKE AWAYS**

**We all have a sin problem
that separates us from God.**

**Jesus is the only One who can
take away our sin problem.**

**Justification means to be
made right in the eyes of God.**



3



SANCTIFICATION

3

PART 1 WHAT IS SANCTIFICATION?

If you've ever spent time exploring the woods, then you're familiar with the scents that come with the outdoors; rivers, lakes, campfires, and even an occasional skunk. These are all familiar smells we associate with the wilderness.

In last week's session, we discussed that we all have a sin problem. (See Rom. 3:23.) And guess what? Like the outdoors, sin comes with its own scent. Sin stinks and reeks of decay. But the good news is that we don't have to continue reeking of sin. Sanctification brings its own fresh aroma.

The apostle Paul wrote, "For we are the aroma of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing, to one a fragrance from death, to the other a fragrance from life to life" (2 Cor. 2:15-16).

Travis pointed out that the moment you are justified is the moment you are put on the path to sanctification. Remember, our justification can only be found through a relationship with Jesus Christ. Justification means to instantly be made right in the eyes of God.

Sanctification is the application of justification. It's the ongoing journey of being set apart, being made holy, and becoming more like Jesus.

Justification happens in an instant. Sanctification is a process that lasts a lifetime. Thankfully, God has provided pathways to sanctification that we will unpack this week. It's not a journey we have to figure out by ourselves, and we don't make the trip alone.

COMMUNITY GROUP

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. In the simplest terms, how would you describe what sanctification means? How does it differ from justification?

2. Why is it a red flag if you've been a believer for a long time and not grown to be more like Jesus?

3. Travis pointed out that justification happens in an instant, but sanctification is an ongoing journey. Why do you think sanctification is a lifelong process?

4. Can you name ways you've grown and matured in your faith since becoming a believer? If so, what are they?

5. What roadblocks have you experienced on your path to sanctification? What's the best way to deal with the setbacks?

**Sanctification is ...
the ongoing journey
of being set apart
... becoming more
like Jesus.**

3

PART 2

PATTERNS ON THE PATH

As we set out on the pathway to sanctification, we don't go blindly. God has given us a pattern to follow and tools that keep us moving in the right direction. Paul wrote, "Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God" (Eph. 5:1-2).

On the path to sanctification, God has given us His Holy Spirit, who lives inside all believers and guides us. (See John 14:17.) He has given us His Word that is a lamp to our path and teaches us how to live. (See Ps. 119:105.) He's also given us traveling companions—our brothers and sisters in Christ—who make up His church. God has given us the resources we need to flourish in our faith.

To be sure, all believers stumble, and we will have to fight sin all the days of our lives here on earth. That doesn't mean you're not making progress—it simply means you're human. We will experience pressures on the path to sanctification. Travis said, "Jesus freed us from the penalty of sin but not from the pressures of sin." But as believers, we don't give in to the pressures of sin. (See Rom. 6:1-4.)

If you find that you aren't growing in your relationship with Christ or you've stopped maturing in your faith, then there's a good chance you've stopped relying on the tools God has given you to grow. It's never too late to start moving again on the path and rely on the patterns He has given you to move forward.

**Jesus freed us from
the penalty of
sin, but not from the
pressure of sin.**

COMMUNITY GROUP

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- 1. What makes it so difficult for you to imitate the patterns God has provided? What tools might you be neglecting in your life?**

- 2. Read Romans 12:1–2. Why is it easy to conform to the ways of the world instead of being transformed by God’s ways?**

- 3. Are there any areas where you feel like you’re taking advantage of God’s grace? Are there any parts of God’s ways that you reject or are hard for you to believe?**

- 4. God has given us His Holy Spirit, the Scriptures, and other believers to help us grow. How do you rely on each of these in your daily life?**

- 5. How would you describe your sanctification journey at this stage of your life? What changes would you like to see?**

PART 3

PROGRESS ON THE PATH

God welcomes us into His kingdom based on His grace, not our merit. He invites us into a relationship, and as we abide in Christ, our fruit is the evidence of our salvation, not the other way around.

Jesus said, “Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing” (John 15:4-5).

We don’t become more like Jesus by being good people or trying to do good things. We become more like Jesus

by spending time with Him—abiding in Him—and bearing fruit out of that relationship. It’s not our works that define our faith, but our faith that defines our works.

As you continue on the path of sanctification, you can move forward with confidence. Travis said, “Once you are justified, you are put on the path of sanctification; that path is secured. If you doubt, the better question is: Were you ever put on the path in the first place? Only you can know.” Remember, the Father wants to build you, but the enemy wants to guilt you. The key to sanctification is continuing to abide in Christ and follow the patterns God gave us to grow.

SESSION THREE

APPLICATION

- 1. God always establishes a relationship before He requires rules or works. How does that change your view of God?**
- 2. Do you ever doubt your salvation? Do you ever feel like you have been put off the path? Read John 10:27–29. How do these verses speak to that?**
- 3. How has the fragrance of Christ poured from your life lately? What progress have you seen?**

It's not our **WORKS**
that define our faith,
but our **FAITH** that
defines our works.



HOMWORK

BEFORE NEXT WEEK

1. Read Week 4 and be prepared to discuss with your group.
2. Watch the Trinity video at milecity.com/explore
3. Pray for the other members in your group.

WEEK THREE TAKE AWAYS

Sanctification is the ongoing journey of being set apart, being made holy, and becoming more like Jesus.

The moment you are justified is the moment you are set on the path to sanctification.

God gives us patterns to follow on our pathway to sanctification.

4

TRINITY

4

PART 1 THE MYSTERY OF THE TRINITY

If you explore for any length of time, you will find things that carry a degree of mystery. We see tangible evidence of the sun, moon, and stars, and yet most of us can't say we fully understand how they remain in place. In the Christian faith, the Trinity is a topic that carries a degree of mystery—and yet, there is so much we can know for certain about the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit. In fact, a foundational understanding of the Trinity is a key element in growing in our relationship with God and walking out our Christian faith. Just because we may not be able to wrap our minds around it all, doesn't mean we can't enjoy an ever-increasing measure of understanding.

Travis defined the Trinity this way: the single being of God existing equally in three distinct persons—the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. He pointed out that if you look for the word “Trinity” in your Bible, you won't find it but that doesn't mean the Trinity isn't there. On the contrary, you will see evidence of the Trinity as early as Genesis (see 1:26) and throughout all of Scripture.

Understanding the Trinity helps us see God's work in our lives: God the Father is our Creator, God the Son is our Redeemer, and God the Spirit is our Sanctifier. To put it another way, the Father appoints us unto salvation, the Son accomplishes salvation, and the Spirit applies salvation. There are three Persons in the one true and living God, and they are the same in substance. They are equal in power and glory. While it's true that the Trinity carries a degree of mystery, we can't let the mystery prevent us from believing.

COMMUNITY GROUP

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Has science caused you to struggle with your faith in the past or in the present? If so, how?

2. How would you explain the Trinity to someone?

3. Travis said, "God's mysteries don't diminish the evidence of His existence. God's mysteries are what make Him God." What do you think he meant by that?

4. What is a mystery of God that you wish you could fully comprehend?

5. Are you comfortable with mystery? Why or why not?

God's mysteries don't diminish the evidence of His existence. God's mysteries are what make Him God.

PART 2

WHAT IS THE TRINITY?

In this week's video session, Travis defined the Trinity as the single being of God existing equally in three distinct persons—the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. There are three Persons in the one true and living God, and they are the same in substance. They are equal in power and glory. While the Trinity is a mystery and impossible for us to fully comprehend, we do know what is necessary for us to properly relate to this Triune God. The following seven statements may prove helpful.

- ▶ God is one.
- ▶ The Father is God.
- ▶ The Son is God.
- ▶ The Spirit is God.
- ▶ The Father is not the Son.
- ▶ The Son is not the Spirit.
- ▶ The Spirit is not the Father.

The mystery of the Trinity—the Triune God, a single Being existing in three equal parts—is difficult to comprehend. But why is this so important? Travis pointed out, “If there was no Trinity, there would be no salvation because there would be no one capable of acting as a mediator between God and man.”

You've probably heard the popular saying, “All paths lead to God.” The trouble with that statement is that it's not true. There is only one path to God and it is through our Mediator, Jesus Christ. Jesus said, “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me” (John 14:6).

TRINITY

The single being of
God existing equally in
three distinct persons—
Father, Son, and Spirit.

COMMUNITY GROUP

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What about the Trinity is difficult for you to grasp? Why?

2. If there was no Trinity, how would that change the Christian faith?

3. What Person of the Trinity is easiest for you to neglect in your life? Why?

4. In what areas do you struggle to understand the Trinity?

5. Why do you think the idea of only one way to God makes people uncomfortable? How does it do the opposite instead?

PART 3

FATHER, SON, & HOLY SPIRIT

In the opening verses of the Bible we discover God as Creator. (See Gen. 1:1.) It is the first way God has revealed Himself to us. Everything that exists was made by God. All people know God exists because His work is evident in the things He has made. (See Rom. 1:20.) Even non-believers know something true about God through the world they see around them.

John 1 teaches the Son was present at creation and Genesis 1 confirms the Spirit was there, too. Because God is Creator, He is in control of everything He has made.

The apostle Paul wrote, “There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call—one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all” (Eph. 4:4-6).

To say God is one means He is unified in His being, and it also means He is radically in control. He has no rivals. He is unchallenged in His supremacy. He is not intimidated by anyone or anything because He controls all things. When we are facing uncertainty, we have a God who is certain of the outcome and is with us.

SESSION FOUR

APPLICATION

- 1. Practically speaking, how can you acknowledge and be in relationship with the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit on a daily basis?**
- 2. What new insights have you learned about the Trinity that you could share with others?**
- 3. How does the Trinity speak to you about the need for community?**
- 4. What aspect of the Trinity do you relate to the most?**

**“The first gulp from
the glass of natural
sciences will turn you
into an atheist, but at
the bottom of the glass
GOD is waiting for you.”**

WERNER HEISENBERG

HOMEWORK **BEFORE NEXT WEEK**

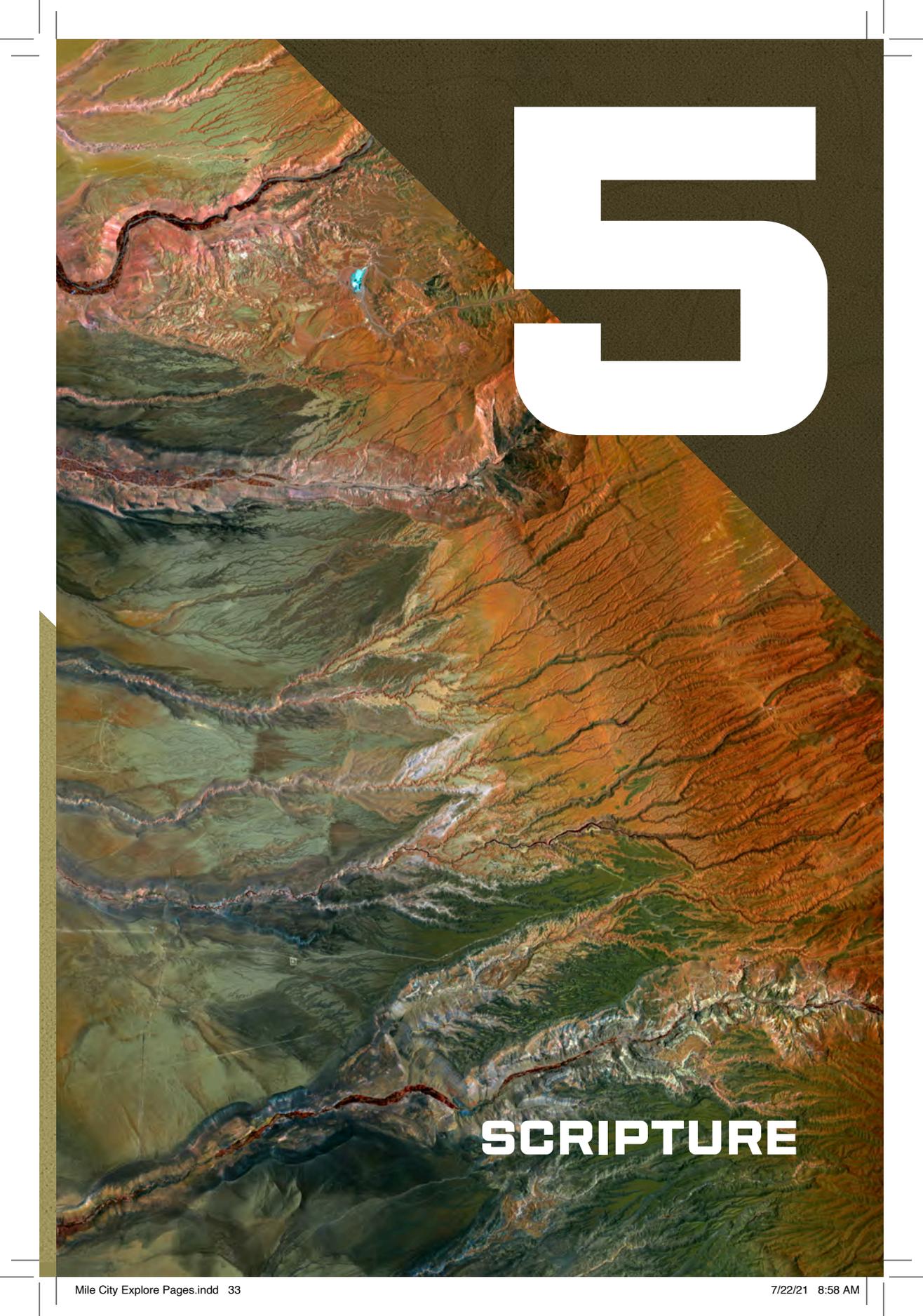
- 1. Read Week 5 and be prepared to discuss with your group.**
- 2. Watch the Scripture video at milecity.com/explore**
- 3. Pray for the other members in your group.**

WEEK FOUR **TAKE AWAYS**

The Trinity is defined as the single Being of God existing in three distinct Persons—Father, Son, & Holy Spirit.

God’s mysteries don’t diminish the evidence of His existence. God’s mysteries are what make Him God.

Even though there are mysteries surrounding the Trinity, we can experience an ever-increasing understanding of the Triune God.

An aerial topographic map of a mountainous region, showing various ridges, valleys, and river systems. The terrain is color-coded by elevation, with greens and blues for lower elevations and oranges and browns for higher elevations. A large, white, stylized number '5' is overlaid on the right side of the map, set against a dark, semi-transparent background.

5

SCRIPTURE

5

PART 1 WHY IS SCRIPTURE TRUTH?

When taking a journey to explore, it's wise to take a map to guide you. In the Christian faith, the Bible is our map. It not only guides us on how to live, but it also teaches us about God's character, our history, and where we fit into God's story.

In this week's video session, Travis unpacked how the Bible is a unique book in a number of ways. It was written in three languages—Hebrew, Greek, and Aramaic—on three continents—Asia, Africa, and Europe. And it was written by forty authors over a 1500-year time span. Christians believe the Bible to be the inspired Word of God and the Bible itself declares that it is: "All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work" (2 Tim. 3:16-17).

As you read the Bible, you'll see how the authors' personalities come out in their writing and you'll pick up distinctions in how they communicated. But as Travis pointed out, "God is the Author, while using humans to record His words. It is God Himself who was behind it all."

We also know with confidence that the Bible is the inerrant Word of God. Keep in mind that the Bible was hand-copied and there were trivial mistakes and textual errors made by scribes, but scholars have found that the few minor translational errors do not shift or change any major theological concepts. The modern-day texts we read are reliable and true. Reading the Scriptures is the primary way we will grow in our understanding of God, His character, and where and how we fit into His plan for His kingdom.

COMMUNITY GROUP

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What comes to mind when you think about the Bible?

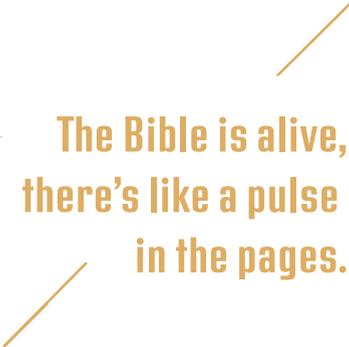
2. Is it easy or difficult for you to believe the Bible is the inspired, inerrant Word of God? Explain

3. Read Hebrews 4:12. What stands out to you about this passage? What does it reveal to you about the Bible?

4. Travis asked, “Why should we stand on the anchor of the Bible?” What is your response to that question?

5. What obstacles most often keep you from reading the Bible?

6. In what areas would you like to grow in your understanding of Scripture?



**The Bible is alive,
there's like a pulse
in the pages.**

PART 2

FIVE REASONS FOR SCRIPTURE

If you're setting out on a trip, you need to feel confident that you can trust your map. In the same way, Christians need to feel sure the Bible is trustworthy. For our faith to be strong, we must know why we believe the things we do and we must be confident in our sources. Travis unpacked five pieces of evidence that point to the trustworthy nature of Scripture.

- Archeology declares it.
- Science declares it.
- History declares it.
- Prophecy declares it.
- Jesus declares it.

We are wise to examine the evidence from all five of these sources and decide what we believe about Scripture. When asked by a scribe what the most

important commandment was Jesus responded, "And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and will all your mind and with all your strength.' The second is this: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no greater commandment than these" (Mark 12:30-31).

Notice Jesus said we are to love God with our "mind." Our intellect should be part of what we bring to our faith. It's necessary for us to examine the reasons we believe what we do. The Christian faith holds fast under the toughest questions and closest examinations. To feel confident in our faith, we must be convinced of Scripture's trustworthiness.

Travis said, "Don't let your doubts about Scripture keep you from exploring your faith." All of us have questions and from time to time we might even doubt. But that doesn't mean we should stop searching for answers. The Bible can hold up under our questions, doubts, and even scrutiny. The deeper we dig, the more we'll find and the greater our faith will be.

**Don't let your doubts
about Scripture keep you
from exploring your faith.**

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Of these five reasons, which one increases your confidence in God's Word? Which one do you struggle with the most and why?

2. Give an example of how the Bible has recently been a helpful map/guide for an area in your life?

3. Read 2 Timothy 3:16. What does this passage reveal to us about Scripture?

4. Travis said, "Don't let your doubts about Scripture keep you from exploring your faith." Do you have doubts about Scripture? If so, what are they? Are they preventing you from going deeper in your faith?

5. The greatest evidence of God's Word can be found in us. Be the evidence! What are some practical ways we can be the evidence of God's Word this week?

PART 3

PUTTING IT TOGETHER

In the Bible we have a perfect treasury of God's thoughts. We don't have to wonder what God is like because He has disclosed everything we need to know about Him in the Scriptures. The Bible is the supreme rule for faith and practice in the church. When we spend time in God's Word we hear God speaking directly to us, telling us who He is, what He is like, and what is necessary to live a life that is full and pleasing to Him.

Hebrews 4:12 says, "For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the

division of soul and spirit, of joints and marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart."

The Bible is a two-edged sword that wounds and heals. It reveals what is wrong with us and how to fix it through the hope of Christ. Only the Bible sees our soul clearly and diagnoses our deepest needs. All of our hearts and minds are clear before the counsel of God in the Scriptures. When we turn to the Bible, we have a living and active Word that shapes our lives. As Travis said, the Bible is a book that has a pulse in the pages.

SESSION FIVE

APPLICATION

- 1. What role do the Scriptures play in your daily life?**
- 2. How can you make Bible reading a part of your daily rhythm?**
- 3. What steps can you take to get active in biblical community?**

**Archeology declares it.
Science declares it.
History declares it.
Prophecy declares it.
JESUS DECLARES IT.**



HOMework

BEFORE NEXT WEEK

1. Read Week 6 and be prepared to discuss with your group.
2. Watch the Prayer video at milecity.com/explore
3. Pray for the other members in your group.

WEEK FIVE

TAKE AWAYS

Don't let your doubts about Scripture
keep you from exploring your faith.

Scripture is trustworthy.

Archeology declares it. Science declares
it. History declares it. Prophecy
declares it. Jesus declares it.

5



PRAYER

6

PART 1 WHAT TO SAY WHEN YOU PRAY

We live in an era where we have the world at our fingertips. Modern technology provides us the ability to communicate with people across the globe in a way that would've been unthinkable in previous generations. And to a large degree, we take this for granted. Think about how frustrating it is when we lose an internet connection. Our ability to be in constant connection is something we've learned to expect.

One of the key things we do to connect with God is pray. But if we are honest, sometimes it just feels like it is not working, or we get frustrated and we just want to throw it out the window like a phone that isn't working. Or maybe we are so overwhelmed by the idea of prayer that we don't take time to learn how it works. We have an unlimited connection source to communicate with God, but we might not know what to say.

If you've experienced any of these feelings, you are not alone—even Jesus' closest friends felt the same way. In fact, they simply asked Jesus to teach them how to pray. But before Jesus taught them how to pray, He taught them first how not to pray.

Jesus said, "And when you pray, you must not be like the hypocrites. For they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, that they may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward" (Matt. 6:5).

Jesus taught that He wants us to be real in prayer. He's not interested in eloquence—He wants us to be authentic and pour our heart out to Him. Our prayers are meant to communicate with God, not to impress others.

COMMUNITY GROUP

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Do you have a time and place to meet with God? If not, where and when could that be?

2. In this season of life, how would you describe your prayer life? What improvements would you like to see?

3. What are your most common obstacles in prayer?

4. Have you experienced a time when you know God answered your prayers? If so, what happened?

5. Why is prayer important?

God doesn't need us to impress Him. He just wants us to press into Him.

PART 2

THE LORD'S PRAYER: THE FIRST HALF

When Jesus' disciples asked Him to teach them how to pray, Jesus responded with the Lord's Prayer, which begins, "Our Father in heaven ..." (Matt. 6:9). As we begin in prayer, it's important that we remember who we are talking to. Travis said, "God is not just a far-off personal force. God is a close-up personal Father."

The word "Father" stirs up a different emotion in all of us. For some, the word "Father" is comforting and describes someone who is loving and trustworthy. But if you had (or have) a poor relationship with your earthly father, the term can stir up negative emotions. Regardless of the relationship you had with your Dad, you can relate to your heavenly Father as the Dad you always wanted, plus so much more.

And because God is worthy of our adoration and praise, we open prayer with worship. Jesus instructed us to say, "hallowed be your name" (Matt. 6:9). This is the time to brag on God—for who He is and what He has done. We worship God because He is worthy; it also serves to remind us of how good, righteous, and powerful He is. God deserves our worship, and we need to worship. Because He is completely trustworthy we can pray the words, "your kingdom come" and "your will be done" (Matt. 6:10). In doing so, we are both asking God to come soon and aligning our will with God's will. As you pray, keep in mind the Lord's Prayer is not intended to be a memorized speech, but a guide as we learn to approach God in prayer with authenticity.

**God is not just a far-off
personal force. God is a
close-up personal Father.**

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What emotions does it stir up when you refer to God as “Father”?

2. Travis said, “God is not the reflection of your earthly father. He is the perfection of your earthly father.” Describe what that means to you.

3. Is it easier for you to identify with God as a far-off powerful force or an up-close personal Father? Why?

4. Adoration, praise, and worship are all components of prayer. What comes to mind when you are moved to praise God?

5. What does it mean when we ask for God’s will to be done?

PART 3

THE LORD'S PRAYER: THE SECOND HALF

The first half of the Lord's Prayer focuses on God, while the second half emphasizes our requests and petitions. We have permission to bring all kinds of requests before God—no matter how big or small. Doing so shows we depend on Him in every aspect of life. Jesus taught His followers to say, "Give us this day our daily bread" (Matt. 6:11). This is the time when we ask God to meet our needs. We have full permission to bring our needs to God and the Bible encourages us over and over to ask God for what we need. Travis pointed out that God may not give you exactly what you want, but He will always give you exactly what you need.

As we pray, we should also clear the air with God by confessing our sins and asking for His strength to forgive those who have sinned against us. (See Matt. 6:12.) God is faithful to forgive us of our sins, but we are required to ask for forgiveness. (See 1 John 1:9.) It's best to keep a clean slate by confessing our sins quickly and often.

And lastly, the Lord's Prayer asks to be led from temptation and delivered from evil. (See Matt. 6:13.) This is what it looks like to pray on the offense. We know temptation and evil are always lurking. Jesus taught His followers to pray that they would be spared from its destruction.

SESSION SIX

APPLICATION

- 1. "A prayerless person is a powerless person." What steps can you take to be a person of prayer?**
- 2. What provision do you need to ask for? What sins do you need to confess?**
- 3. As a challenge this week, use the Lord's Prayer as your guide to daily prayer.**

A PRAYERLESS person
is a **POWERLESS** person.

HOMWORK

BEFORE NEXT WEEK

1. Read Week 7 and be prepared to discuss with your group.
2. Watch the Discipleship video at milecity.com/explore
3. Pray for the other members in your group.

WEEK SIX

TAKE AWAYS

God doesn't need us to impress Him. He wants us to press into Him. He wants us to be real with Him.

God is not a far-off impersonal force, but an up-close and personal Father.

The Lord's Prayer is intended to be used as a model, not as a memorized speech.



7

DISCIPLESHIP

7

PART 1 GOING DEEPER

If you've ever participated in underwater exploration, you know there's a goal of going "deeper." The idea is that the further you explore the depths of the ocean, the more you will see and learn. To continue to experience new things, you have to explore places you've never been before.

In the same way, the Christian faith calls you to go "deeper." There's an expectation of growth and maturation as you follow Jesus. So, what does it look like to "go deeper" in our faith? Travis pointed out, "Going deeper is more than just getting intellectual."

To be clear, we do want to continue to grow in knowledge and wisdom. But "going deeper" in our faith shouldn't just be about growing in intellect. The more we grow in intellect the more our spiritual lives should grow. In other words, as we grow in knowledge, we should grow in our love for God. This

should also improve our relationships because knowing more about the Scriptures will motivate us to be more relational as we grow in our love for other people. Growing in our intellect should even impact our emotional lives as we have a better understanding of our strengths and weaknesses and how it relates to who we are as children of God. And as our intellect grows, our faith should be more applicable as we learn to put it into action.

Practically speaking, what does it look like to go deeper? Travis said, "Getting deeper is looking more like Jesus." This may sound overly simple, but in reality, it's a lifetime pursuit. As we learned in previous lessons, our justification takes place in an instant, but the process of sanctification—becoming more and more like Jesus—happens over a lifetime.

COMMUNITY GROUP

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- 1. Share about an underwater exploration experience you have had. What could you see in the depths that you couldn't see at surface level? How is this an analogy for our faith?**

- 2. Practically speaking, what would it look like for you to go deeper in your faith?**

- 3. What prevents you from going deeper in your faith? What are your most common obstacles?**

- 4. Describe what it would mean to look more and more like Jesus.**

- 5. Why is becoming like Jesus a lifetime pursuit?**

**Getting deeper
is looking more
like Jesus.**

PART 2

HOW DO I BECOME A DISCIPLE?

The last thing Jesus said to His disciples before being taken up at the ascension was, “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age” (Matt. 28:19-20).

So this begs the question, “How do I live as a disciple of Jesus Christ?” Travis pointed out three key areas that move us toward discipleship. The first is development. Development can be defined as surrounding ourselves with other people who will help us grow in Christlikeness. (See Prov. 27:17.) We need to be surrounded by people who are further along in their faith that can teach and mentor us. That’s one of the reasons it’s so important for us

to commit to being active members of biblical community in our local church. We simply won’t grow into the people God wants us to be without being surrounded by other believers.

The next key to being a disciple of Christ is “discipline.” Travis defined discipline as “To go after God’s way instead of the world’s way.” (See Eph. 2:2.) Be sure not to confuse discipline with legalism. Legalism is something you feel forced to do while discipline means to commit to something you feel drawn to do. To grow in our faith, we must be drawn with the desire to commit to the process.

Lastly, we need more “devotion” in our lives—meaning we make an effort to spend time in Scripture and prayer. (See Heb. 5:12-14.) If we want this to be a reality, we’ll have to reject apathy. Keep in mind, we’ll never drift toward discipleship—it must be intentional.

**Being a disciple means
being a follower of a
teacher and imitating
the way they live.**

COMMUNITY GROUP

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- 1. Travis said, “Going deeper is more than just getting intellectual. Going deeper is looking more like Jesus.” How have you seen this to be true in your own life or in other areas of life?**

- 2. What things keep you from allowing people (the church) to invest into your life?**

- 3. Travis defined legalism as something you feel forced to do and discipline as committing to something you feel drawn to do. Can you name an area where this is true in your life?**

- 4. What issues prevent you from committing to going deeper in your faith? What in your life right now keeps you from going God's way?**

PART 3

NEXT STEPS

Whether you are just starting out and wading into shallow water or are ready to dive into the deep end, it's important to think about next steps. Being a disciple of Christ doesn't happen by chance; it takes intentionality. In the same way an athlete trains to compete, a Christian trains as a disciple.

Paul instructed Timothy to train himself in godliness. (See 1 Tim. 4:7-10.) Paul stated that godliness “holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come” (v. 8). The word Paul used for “train” described an athlete’s strenuous, rigorous, workouts. Paul used the present tense, indicating that staying in shape was to be Timothy’s constant pursuit. Picture an athlete giving every ounce of effort and energy to train for a

future contest—so, too, are God’s people to work hard at spiritual development. Clearly, one’s maturing in godliness calls for hard work, whereas our initial salvation was a gift from God. We must apply all our energy to sustain spiritual growth by pursuing God’s purposes.

Spiritual disciplines are practices and habits that are to be incorporated into the daily life of the Christ-follower. Some examples include Bible intake (reading, meditating on, and memorizing Scripture), prayer, worship, evangelism, service, stewardship, and silence and solitude. These disciplines form the foundation for how we train in godliness, because through them, we learn more about God and we invite the Holy Spirit to work in and through us.

SESSION SEVEN

APPLICATION

- 1. What spiritual disciplines do you need to embrace to go deeper as a disciple?**
- 2. What steps can you take to commit to the local church and being a part of biblical community?**
- 3. Who could you help grow to be more like Jesus? What next steps will you take with them?**

**A disciple of Jesus Christ
is an individual who has
surrendered his or her
life to Him and strives to
GO DEEPER in imitating
His ways. The closer you
get to Him the more
you look like Him.**

HOMework

BEFORE NEXT WEEK

1. Read Week 8 and be prepared to discuss with your group.
2. Watch the Evangelism video at milecity.com/explore
3. Pray for the other members in your group.

WEEK SEVEN

TAKE AWAYS

Going deeper in your faith means looking more and more like Jesus.

Being a disciple means being a follower of a teacher and imitating the way they lived.

A disciple of Jesus Christ is an individual who has surrendered his or her life to Him and strives to go deeper in imitating His ways. The closer you get to Him the more you look like Him.

8

EVANGELISM

8

PART 1 EXPLORE: WHAT IS EVANGELISM?

Sometimes when we are exploring, it's easy to lose our way. It's a scary feeling to be on a hike in the woods and realize you're no longer sure of which direction you're moving. It's easier than we realize to get off-track.

The same is true when we are exploring other areas of life. We can lose our bearings in relationships, situations at work, or with our family. And we can lose our bearings when it comes to evangelism. In the simplest terms, evangelism means to share your story and tell how your life is different because of your relationship with Jesus. But when you start to share with others, you might feel a tension and wonder, "Am I sharing too much or not enough. Do I seem fanatical? Are they going to cancel me?" Sometimes sharing our faith feels awkward. Maybe that's how you feel, and if you do, you are not alone. So, how do we navigate sharing our

faith? Evangelism is important enough for us to press through the tension and awkwardness to talk to others about Jesus. Travis said, "The moment you receive Jesus is the moment you are required to share Jesus with others." When you read the Gospels, you'll notice time and again that when people have an authentic encounter with Jesus, their natural response is to tell others.

God could've chosen any method He wanted to get the message of the gospel to the world—and He chose His people. The apostle Paul asked, "How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, 'How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!'" (Rom. 10:14-15).

COMMUNITY GROUP

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. The gospel is the good news of Jesus. Explain the first time you heard the gospel and/or when you believed in the gospel.

2. Who were the key people God used to share the gospel with you?

3. Read Romans 1:16–17. What keeps you or has kept you from sharing the power of the gospel with others?

4. Travis discussed that it's common to feel some tension and awkwardness when sharing your faith. What has your experience been like?

5. How can you address the obstacles that keep you from sharing your faith?

**The moment
you receive Jesus
is the moment
you are required
to share Jesus.**



PART 2

ASK, ADMIRE, ADMIT

You might be wondering what it looks like on a practical level to share the gospel. You'll want to avoid giving a presentation and instead engage in a genuine conversation. People can sense when you are authentically interested in them and care. Keep in mind that prayer is a key component in effectively sharing the gospel. In this week's video session, Travis talked about the three A's: Ask, Admire, and Admit. Of course, this should be used as a guide and not a script. The goal is to have a natural conversation. But to help guide the conversation, it's wise to begin with "Ask." This simply means getting to know them. Jesus modeled this in the Gospels—He asked over 300 questions as He communicated with people. Ask about who they are and what they do,

their opinions about current events, and get a pulse on what is important to them. There's a good chance you'll find common ground. At some point, you can turn the conversation to the topic of faith and ask where they stand.

The next guide point is to "Admire." That simply means to respect the person's belief, even if you don't agree with them. For instance, when Paul was surrounded by people who were worshiping foreign gods, he didn't attack their beliefs but pointed out that religion was obviously important to them. (See Acts 17:22-23.)

The last guide point is to "Admit." Be sure to get permission by asking, "Do you mind if I share what I believe with you?" At that point, it's time to share the gospel and why your life is different because of Jesus.

**Talk to God about
people before you talk
to people about God.**

COMMUNITY GROUP

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. **Travis talked about the three A's: Ask, Admire, Admit. Which of the three A's would you say has been or would be difficult for you to practice when sharing the gospel?**

2. **Share an example of the last time you tried sharing the gospel? How did it go?**

3. **Even if people don't embrace the gospel, you've still succeeded in sharing your faith. How does this reality affect your views about telling your story?**

4. **What is the most intimidating factor for you when it comes to sharing the gospel?**

5. **Who do you know that needs to hear about Jesus? How might you start praying for that person?**

PART 3

SHARING THE GOSPEL

God created us to be with Him.

Our sins have separated us from God

Sins cannot be erased by good deeds.

Paying the price for our sin, Jesus died and rose again.

Everyone who believes in Him will have eternal life.

Life with Jesus starts now and lasts forever.

We've talked about the importance of sharing our faith. We need to share the truth of Jesus in the Mile City. Let us spend some time memorizing the G.O.S.P.E.L. acronym (*created by Greg Stier, Dare2Share.org*). Partner up with someone and quiz each other on it. After you share the gospel information, it's time to share your transformation story of how God got ahold of your life. Your story is powerful because it is unique to you.

God wants us to be gardeners of His harvest, but the end result is not up to us. Paul wrote, "For when one says,

'I follow Paul,' and another, 'I follow Apollos,' are you not being merely human? What then is Apollos? What is Paul? Servants through whom you believed, as the Lord assigned to each. I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth. So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth" (1 Cor 3:4-7). Remember, we are responsible for sharing our faith but the outcome is dependent on God. So push through the fear, push through the doubt, push through the awkwardness, and be ready to share your story and God's story to those around you.

SESSION EIGHT

APPLICATION

- 1. Read 1 Corinthians 3:4–7. How does this passage take the pressure off?**
- 2. Who will you begin asking God for the opportunity to share the gospel with over the next month?**
- 3. What steps can you take to connect with this person?**

**Share your story when you
share GOD'S STORY.**



HOMework **THIS WEEK**

1. What did God teach you on this journey?
2. In what ways have you been changed?
3. On page 62, you shared the name of someone you need to share the gospel with. Spend time praying for this person's heart and for opportunities to have a gospel conversation with them.
4. Now that you have completed Explore, what is your next move? How will you continue in your faith journey?

WEEK EIGHT **TAKE AWAYS**

The moment you receive Jesus
is the moment you are
required to share Jesus.

Talk to God about people before
you talk to people about God.

Share your story when
you share God's story.