



—LAY
DOWN

&

TAKE
UP—

LENT 2019

SEEKING GREATER DEPENDENCE
— ON JESUS —

WHAT DO
YOU NEED TO

LAY
DOWN

IN ORDER TO

TAKE
UP **JESUS?**

As we enter the season of Lent, let's earnestly seek Jesus together. Lent should be a time of repentance—and the heart of repentance is putting God at the center of our lives.

In this study, we'll journey through six ways that we can lay down the weight of this world and in its place, take up the words of Jesus as He calls us toward life in Him.

Together, may we experience anew the overwhelming good news of the gospel found in Jesus.

Lay Down Worry



Take Up Daily Dependence



Read Matthew 6:25-34

- 1.** What do you worry about? How have your worries changed over the course of your life? Why do we worry?
- 2.** The most common commandment in the Bible is "Do not fear." Do not be anxious is really the same command. What sin are we committing when we are anxious or afraid? What do you think is at the core of our struggles with worry?
- 3.** What does it look like to seek His kingdom, practically speaking?

Do not put your hope in your own performance. Instead, put your heart's deepest trust in God and His grace. Every day remind yourself of His unconditional, covenantal love for you.

4. If someone were to follow you around for a week, would they sense that you trust in God's provision? How has this been (or not been) displayed in your life?

5. "Seek first the Kingdom of God" is the key to this text, and the key to dependence. Why is Jesus as your king more freeing than trying to be the king of your own life?

6. Jesus the King has a better way of life to offer you, the Kingdom offers a better vision of the good life, and the people of the Kingdom offer a deeper community. What would be a practical step in your life to move toward more fully participating in the Kingdom life?

7. Much of our anxiety is born out of displaced sense of belonging and security. Even though it creates anxiety and insecurity, why do we keep going back to seeking belonging and security (dependence) in the kingdom(s) of the world? What does it look like to depend on Jesus for identity, security, and belonging.

Prayer

Heavenly Father, we rest today in your loving arms. Through the gospel, we're clothed with your perfect righteousness, and we feast on an endless supply of your grace. We praise you for these gifts! Yet we confess our fears flare up and worries weigh us down. So, we run to you today, confident of your welcome and needful of your peace. Please help us with situations we'd love to control but can't, where we'd love to minimize pain, change situations, and determine outcomes. Holy Spirit, show us how to love well, without meddling and manipulating. Our greatest need isn't for relief, but for more of you. Teach us to seek first the Kingdom of God.

Amen.

Lay Down Judgment



Take Up Discernment



Read Matthew 7:1-6

- 1.** What bumper stickers create an internal reaction in you? What is the immediate judgment you have about that driver?
- 2.** In what other areas in your life do you instinctively judge others? What is at the root of that judgment? What is the emotion in your heart toward that person?
- 3.** "Do not judge." What does Jesus mean by this? What are some ways it has been misinterpreted?

4. What does it mean to take the plank out of your own eye? Why is it necessary?

"Something remarkable happens when you gain this sort of self-awareness and you allow grace to seep into the inkiest places in your soul: You begin to see clearly. Enhanced by an extra hit of grace, you gain perspective, and that allows you to use your newly clear vision to help instead of to judge. There is a world of difference when you are seeing clearly."

– Noel Jesse Heikken, *Wretched Saints*

5. How do these Scriptures help us understand what Jesus is trying to teach us about judging? (See Galatians 6:1-4, 1 Corinthians 5:12-13, John 7:24, 1 Corinthians 4:5.)
6. One of the best tips is "See yourself as the biggest sinner in the room." How does this mentality change how you respond when your coworker, friend, child, spouse, or roommate messes up?

7. Notice that Jesus says you are to take the speck out of your brother's eye . . . which means that you should help your brother deal with the sin in his life. Besides seeing yourself as the bigger sinner, what are some other principles that are helpful in coming alongside someone who is struggling with a specific sin?

8. Judgment is more about yourself than it is about the person you are judging. How does this perspective help point you toward discernment? How might this bring you into a deeper need for Jesus?

Prayer

Jesus, we confess that our hearts are often quick to judge and condemn. We acknowledge that we are too often blind to our own sin, react to the annoying things others do, and fail to take responsibility for our own shortcomings. Holy Spirit, reveal to us the log in our own eye. Soften our hearts and lead us to repentance. Turn our hearts so that we receive grace, and then in return freely give grace and love to those who are broken and enslaved to sin. May you take our weakness and brokenness, and redeem it so it becomes a conduit of living water that helps others experience the fullness of Christ's finished work on the cross.

Amen.

Lay Down Your Doubt

Take Up Reliance on God

Read Matthew 7:7-12

- 1.** Describe a time when you gave a really good gift to a family member or friend. What did it feel like giving that gift? What were some of the emotions involved?
- 2.** Discuss a time when you felt God providing for you. What were some of the ways you saw His hand at work in that situation?
- 3.** In our affluent culture, we can live in the delusion that we don't need God very much. Where do you see that in your own life? What gets in the way of you asking God for help or provision?

4. Why do you think believers in third-world countries often experience greater expressions of faith and joy in their walk with Jesus?

Read the parallel passage in Luke 11:1-13, then read this devotional from *Saving Grace* by Jack Miller:

Have you ever prayed for something and not gotten an answer? Perhaps you prayed for your wife, your husband, or your child to change, and still they haven't changed. Maybe things have even gotten worse. When you don't get what you ask God for, the questions come. What is going on when God seems to not hear our prayers? Doesn't Jesus say that we can ask, seek, knock, and receive? What kind of God is this who doesn't seem to know how to help? But Jesus says that the Father's best gift—what we need for every part of life—is the Holy Spirit. The first thing we need is the Holy Spirit, the last thing we need is the Holy Spirit, and what we need in the middle is the Holy Spirit. As you ask God to send the Spirit to control you, to cleanse you, to convict you, to be the bread that revitalizes you, to make you alive when you are discouraged, to give you words when you don't know what to say and what to pray, then you will notice that He has filled you with a spirit of love that begins to change your whole life.

5. What is it that you receive by asking, seeking, and knocking? The Holy Spirit! Why is the Holy Spirit a better gift than the answer we are usually looking for?

6. Satan tries the same lies on us that he used with Adam and Eve in the garden: that God isn't really good, that He is withholding the best from us, and that we are better off being dependent on ourselves. Where have you seen these lies show up in your life? How do we combat these lies?

7. No one loves you more than Jesus does. No one loves you better than Jesus does. Read Philippians 4:6-7. How does relying on Jesus give you peace and give you freedom from the burden of trying to control outcomes?

Prayer

Father, we confess that we tend to hedge our bets by trying to be rich toward God and rich on earth. Our fear, anxiety, and greed often reveal that we don't really believe you are a good Father. May you renew our hearts. Help us to believe that what we really need is not better circumstances but to know more deeply the love of Jesus

Amen.

Lay Down

What's Easy



Take Up What's

Life-Giving



Read Matthew 7:13-14

- 1.** When was a time that you followed "the crowd" and you wished you hadn't? What was the outcome?
- 2.** Who is Jesus warning in this section? Who is shut out of the kingdom?
- 3.** Notice Matthew 7:12. Most people think they are living the Golden Rule, and yet they are on the broad road. People on the broad way do good works to feel good about themselves and try to appease God. It is full of people trying to save themselves through self-righteousness. This is the path of most religions. What example have you seen from religions that teach you must perform in order to earn God's favor?

"Jesus has not called His followers to deny their neighbors, take up their comforts, and follow their dreams. He has called us to deny ourselves, take up our cross, and follow Him." – Scott Sauls

4. Why do people naturally avoid the narrow path? Why do we gravitate toward the broad path?

5. Why do you think our American culture increasingly is doing away with the idea of hell and promoting the ideas of pluralism (all roads lead to heaven)?

6. What is the narrow door? Why is it narrow? How do you enter through the narrow door? (See also Luke 13:21-30, John 10:9.)

7. What is necessary to receive the grace that Jesus offers? If grace is free, why do we struggle to receive it?

How are you righteous before God?

Only by true faith in Jesus Christ. Although my conscience accuses me that I have grievously sinned against all God's commandments, have never kept all of them, and am still inclined to all evil, yet God, without any merit of my own, out of mere grace, imputes to me the perfect satisfaction, righteousness, and holiness of Christ.

– *Heidelberg Catechism, Question 60*

8. Why do we resist dying to self-righteousness, self-reliance, and selfishness? What is the fruit of your life when you choose "self" at the center of your life?
9. When we follow Jesus and accept His gift of salvation, we are not guaranteed a life of ease. What is the life that Jesus offers?

Prayer

Jesus, we acknowledge that all of life is repentance and faith. We confess our natural tendency toward trying to earn our righteousness. We remember your promise that God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble. We confess with our mouths and believe in our heart that you are our Lord and Savior. We rejoice that you not only give to us this grace by faith, but you impute your righteousness to us so that we stand before the Father as holy and blameless, just as if we had always obeyed.

Amen.

Lay Down

Pretense



Take Up

Abiding



Read Matthew 7:15-23

- 1.** Share about a time when you've been totally fooled by someone or some product that made a promise it didn't keep.
- 2.** Who and what are the greatest influencers in your life? Who are the voices you listen to most? Why?
- 3.** How do you recognize a false teacher? What kind of things do false religious teachers promise?

4. Jesus often uses images of bad fruit and unhealthy vineyards to describe the religious Pharisees who sought to produce fruit by their own effort. Read John 15:1-8. What is the key to exhibiting good fruit in our life?

"The branch of the vine does not worry, and toil, and rush here to seek for sunshine, and there to find rain. No; it rests in union and communion with the vine; and at the right time, and in the right way, is the right fruit found on it. Let us so abide in the Lord Jesus."

– Hudson Taylor

5. How does greater dependence on Jesus lead to more fruit of the Spirit in our life? What does greater dependence on Jesus look like?

6. In this context, what do you think it means to be known by Jesus? What other Scripture would you use to back that up?

7. Read John 6:28-29. One work that pleases the Father is daily dependence on Jesus. (See also John 3:16-18) What does that look like? Why do we struggle to do so?

8. The Westminster Catechism reminds us that the chief end of mankind is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever. What would the fruit of your life look like if you lived this out? What is one practical step in learning to enjoy God more deeply?

Prayer

Father, we confess that we can fall prey to teachers and methods who promise us an easy life. We pray the Holy Spirit would give us clarity and discernment. May the Spirit give us a hunger for truth and life that is only found in you. Teach us to abide in Christ, depending on the work of Jesus for us, and believing this is the path to the abundant life.

Amen.

Lay Down Foolishness



Take Up Jesus



Read Matthew 7:24-29

1. Everyone builds their lives on something. Over the span of your life, what type of things have you tried to build your identity on? Where have you sought adequacy and acceptance? How has that worked for you?

**"Whatever your heart clings to and confides in,
that is really your God."** – Martin Luther

Martin Luther wrote that every sin is in some way a breaking of the first commandment (You shall have no other gods before Me). The first commandment is the call to keep God at the center of our life. An idol is

anything we believe we need, apart from God, to make us happy, satisfied, or fulfilled. In our sin nature, we tend to put ourselves at the center of our life, worshiping idols of our own making, and then expecting God to prop up our idols.

Sometimes our idols are obviously wrong. But sometimes they are good things that have become an inordinate desire. Answer the prompts below to help identify what our idols might be.

a) What do I fear?

b) What is it that I cannot live without?

c) If only _____ would happen, then I would be happy.

d) What preoccupies my mind?

2. As you consider these questions, what idols are prevalent in our culture and in your own life? (It might be helpful to know that Luther and Calvin both said that our hearts are idol factories, and there is never a time when we don't struggle with idols in our life.)

3. Difficult times often reveal deep truths to us. In what ways have trials or tribulations exposed the ways you've sought security in something other than Jesus?

4. The person of Jesus and the teachings of Jesus are inseparable for Matthew. How is Jesus our rock? Why is He a more stable identity for us than our idols?

5. What does it look like in your life (identity, relationships, choices, successes, failures, finances, work) when you are finding security in Jesus? What is the fruit of resting in Jesus?

6. There are verses throughout the Bible that tell us that how Jesus meets our core heart needs when we depend on Him. Look up the following verses—and add additional verses that come to mind. When you read these verses, how does your heart respond?

a) Love – 1 John 4:10, Romans 5:8

b) Acceptance – Romans 15:7, Romans 8:1

c) Security – John 10:28-29

d) Belonging – John 1:12, Galatians 4:6

e) Identity – 2 Corinthians 5:17

f) Purpose – 2 Corinthians 5:20

"What Matthew believes of greatest importance at the end is the impact of Jesus himself. Of main importance is not the content of the sermon but the one who gave it." – Frederick Dale

7. It becomes apparent in the Sermon on the Mount that it is impossible to obey the commands of Jesus without knowing the heart of Jesus Himself, and that to live the words Jesus offers us is an invitation to greater dependence and joy in Him. How do we come to know the heart of Jesus through His teaching in the Sermon on the Mount?

Prayer

Teach us, Heavenly Father, that when we plug our soul into something other than Jesus and expect to get life from it, we will see that it will only suck life out of us. Holy Spirit, help us to see the reality of our idols and find freedom from the delusional force and slavery of them. May we see the glory and grace of Jesus as so magnificent that we build our house on Him, the Rock, who will not disappoint.

Amen.

NOTES

**For helpful insight and answers to the questions
in this guide, visit cpconline.org/sermons.**

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