

Small Groups

SERMON-BASED STUDY GUIDE

Ordinary Time – Week 1 – *How to Have a Healthy Theological Debate*

June 25, 2023 – Aaron Bjorklund

This sermon series is based on passages from the Revised Common Lectionary, shared by thousands of churches across the globe. We join with them in pondering these scriptures and the lessons they teach. For more information and access to the rest of the lectionary passages, use the link under "Additional Resources."

Group leaders: Be sure everyone has paper and something to write with for today's discussion. You may also want to print a copy of the scripture page for each group member.

DIGGING IN:

What we believe shapes how we live. So theological ideas are important. But people tend to get emotionally charged about their beliefs. So charged that throughout history beliefs have caused arguments, broken relationships, and even wars! This affects church communities, friends, families, and beyond!

1. What is a theological issue that you have seen people be in conflict over? Why do you think that issue created conflict among believers?
2. Write a list of specific beliefs about which *you* feel emotionally charged. Silently ponder the list and consider *why* you feel so much emotion about each particular belief. Then share with the group some of the "why." (*Leaders: Be sure to avoid moving into heated discussion of these topics! Simply seek to listen to the "why" behind each person's emotion about the belief.*)

MAKING IT REAL:

Read aloud three of the passages from this week's lectionary. Jeremiah 20:7-13, Mt 10:24-39, and Psalm 69:7-10. (These are printed out on the last page of this study guide). These are challenging passages! As you read:

- Underline phrases that describe the passion of the speaker for the truth they are proclaiming.
- Circle phrases that indicate the author's solution or response to the conflict created by speaking the truth.

1. Based on these three passages, what are appropriate responses when truth that we speak is met with pushback and rejection?

2. How do those responses differ from your and others' usual responses?
3. Write down a list of truths that you believe are worth fighting for with the kind of passion described in these scriptures. While we all feel strongly about many things, what truth is worth being denounced, scorned, ridiculed, or disowned for? After everyone has written down their thoughts, share them with the group.
4. Some beliefs may not be as central and crucial as the ones that came up in the last question. And yet they may still be worth debating. Write a list of theological and/or church practice beliefs that you think fall into this category. Share your list (without discussion, just list topics).
5. Read the following synopsis of what Aaron shared about how we approach debate on these controversial but not central topics.
 - God carries the weight of vindication so you don't have to. (The debate is about God's heart and God's way, so let God carry its weight).
 - Give the emotional intensity around your beliefs to God, so that you can have a calm conversation about the issue. Relinquish the energy in the presence of God.
 - The *cross* is the posture of God toward His enemies.
 - Quote from Dallas Willard: "One of the hardest things in the world is to be right and not hurt other people with it."
5. Read Philippians 2:3-8. How might this scripture affect the way you discuss controversial issues with other believers?
6. What is the Holy Spirit saying to you through Aaron's sermon and this study? Write it down. (Aaron & Alex have asked all of us to make note of what the Spirit is speaking to us through this series. There will be an opportunity in a few weeks to share some of what He has been saying to us).

PRAYER IDEAS

Guide your group through this silent imaginative prayer process (continues on next page):

- Take a minute to be quiet, take some deep breaths, think of coming into God's presence.

- Consider the beliefs that you hold strong opinions or charged emotions about. Imagine wrapping those beliefs up in a package.
- Hold the package in your hands. Look at it. Feel the weight. Consider what it is worth – Is it worth fighting for? Is it worth damaged relationships? Worth rejection and scorn?
- If the answer is NO, then lift the “package” and hand it to Jesus, letting go of the weight, and trusting Him to carry it. Ask Him to help you embrace humility and to have meaningful conversations about the issue without hurting others or yourself.
- If the answer is YES, then pray, asking God to “be with you like a mighty warrior” as you stand for the truth He has called you to speak. Then lift the “package” and hand it to Jesus. Let Him carry the weight. Ask Him what posture He wants you to have as you speak His truth to others.
- Thank Jesus for carrying the weight of the issues that matter to you.
- Take a deep breath. Amen.

WANT TO DIG A LITTLE DEEPER?

(No additional study ideas for this week)

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

South Fellowship Daily. (This daily devotional is exploring the lectionary passages throughout the series).

Explore online or subscribe to get it in your email.

<https://southfellowship.org/daily-devotionals/>

Red Couch Theology Podcast

If you or group members have questions around parts of the sermon that are not included in the discussion guide, it’s always helpful to listen to *Red Couch Theology*, where Alex and Aaron talk about the sermon and answer questions that come in from people in the congregation. <https://guysdrinkingtea.podbean.com/>

Jeremiah 20:7-13

You deceived me, LORD, and I was deceived; you overpowered me and prevailed.

I am ridiculed all day long; everyone mocks me.

⁸ Whenever I speak, I cry out

proclaiming violence and destruction

So the word of the LORD has brought me

insult and reproach all day long.

⁹ But if I say, "I will not mention his word or speak anymore in his name,"

his word is in my heart like a fire,

a fire shut up in my bones.

I am weary of holding it in; indeed, I cannot.

¹⁰ I hear many whispering, "Terror on every side!

Denounce him! Let's denounce him!"

All my friends are waiting for me to slip, saying,

"Perhaps he will be deceived; then we will

prevail over him and take our revenge on him."

¹¹ But the LORD is with me like a mighty warrior;

so my persecutors will stumble and not prevail.

They will fail and be thoroughly disgraced; their

dishonor will never be forgotten.

¹² LORD Almighty, you who examine the

righteous and probe the heart and mind,

let me see your vengeance on them,

for to you I have committed my cause.

¹³ Sing to the LORD! Give praise to the LORD!

He rescues the life of the needy

from the hands of the wicked.

Psalms 69: 7-15

For I endure scorn for your sake,

and shame covers my face.

⁸ I am a foreigner to my own family,

a stranger to my own mother's children;

⁹ for zeal for your house consumes me, and the

insults of those who insult you fall on me.

¹⁰ When I weep and fast, I must endure scorn;

¹¹ when I put on sackcloth,

people make sport of me.

¹² Those who sit at the gate mock me,

and I am the song of the drunkards.

¹³ But I pray to you, LORD, in the time of your favor; in

your great love, O God,

answer me with your sure salvation.

¹⁴ Rescue me from the mire,

do not let me sink;

deliver me from those who hate me,

from the deep waters.

¹⁵ Do not let the floodwaters engulf me

or the depths swallow me up

or the pit close its mouth over me.

Matthew 10:24-39

²⁴ "The student is not above the teacher, nor a

servant above his master.²⁵ It is enough for

students to be like their teachers, and servants

like their masters. If the head of the house has

been called Beelzebul, how much more the

members of his household!

²⁶ "So do not be afraid of them, for there is

nothing concealed that will not be disclosed,

or hidden that will not be made known.²⁷ What

I tell you in the dark, speak in the daylight; what

is whispered in your ear, proclaim from the

roofs.²⁸ Do not be afraid of those who kill the

body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid

of the One who can destroy both soul and

body in hell.²⁹ Are not two sparrows sold for a

penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the

ground outside your Father's care.³⁰ And even

the very hairs of your head are all

numbered.³¹ So don't be afraid; you are worth

more than many sparrows.

³² "Whoever acknowledges me before others, I

will also acknowledge before my Father in

heaven.³³ But whoever disowns me before

others, I will disown before my Father in

heaven.

³⁴ "Do not suppose that I have come to bring

peace to the earth. I did not come to bring

peace, but a sword.³⁵ For I have come to turn

"a man against his father,

a daughter against her mother,

a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law—

³⁶ a man's enemies will be the members of his

own household.'

³⁷ "Anyone who loves their father or mother

more than me is not worthy of me; anyone

who loves their son or daughter more than me

is not worthy of me.³⁸ Whoever does not take

up their cross and follow me is not worthy of

me.³⁹ Whoever finds their life will lose it, and

whoever loses their life for my sake will find it.