

[Thanks for checking out our sermon-based Study Guides! If you've never used our Study Guides before, you'll find some basic instructions below the discussion questions.]

LOSING OUR RELIGION

March 20, 2022

This Lent, as we journey toward Easter, we're walking through the events of what we call Holy Week, or Passion Week, the last week of Jesus's earthly life before his death on the cross—a week that changed the world. Each week in our sermon series, Changemaker, we're looking at how Jesus brought about change: How did he treat people? How did he take care of himself? What did he prioritize? How did he respond to conflict? And most importantly, how can the life and death of Jesus change us, and our approach to changing the world around us? So far we've learned that Jesus changed the way we think about leadership—a shift *from status to service*; and about power—*from powering up to stooping down*. This week, Jesus challenges us to change the way we think about *religion*.

GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Q – Pastor Bryan began the sermon this week with a question: How would you feel if someone described you as a “religious” person? Glad, uncomfortable, annoyed, or sad?

- Does anyone feel comfortable sharing how they would respond to that question, and why?
- Why do you think some people might feel uncomfortable or annoyed about being described as a religious person?

Q – Our primary text for this week is Matthew 21:12-17, often titled “Jesus at the Temple.” On this occasion, as Pastor Bryan explained, Jesus dramatically uncovers three characteristics of bad religion (hence the title of the sermon, “Losing Our Religion”). The first thing we learn is that “Bad religion substitutes religious activity for encountering God.”

- When you hear the phrase “bad religion,” what comes to mind?
- [Invite someone to read Matthew 21:12-15 out loud for the group.] In what ways were people substituting religious activity for encountering God?
- What are some of the ways that we can be tempted to substitute religious activity for encountering God? Why can this be so easy to do?
- Why does it make Jesus so upset to see this happening?

Q – Pastor Bryan concluded that portion of the sermon this way: “Participation doesn't always lead to transformation. . . . You can sit in a living room or a Zoom room with a group of people studying the Bible, without ever allowing what you read to actually convict you, or challenge you, or change you. The goal of any religious activity is to lead us into life-changing encounters with God who wants to speak to us, heal us, help us, and form us into the people He made us to be.”

- What elements need to be in place in order for our *participation* to lead to *transformation*?
- Are there any ways in which we as a group need to adjust in order to facilitate transformation?
- Are there any ways in which you as an individual need to adjust to facilitate transformation?



Q – The second characteristic of bad religion that Jesus uncovers is that “Bad religion values insiders more than outsiders.” [Invite someone to read Isaiah 56:1-7 out loud for the group.]

- What stands out to you about this passage?
- What do you think might have been on Jesus’s mind and heart as he quotes from this passage?
- Who might feel like an outsider in the church today?
- As we look at our practices as a church today, in what ways can we be more intentional about making space “for those who are still on the way, or who are wondering if they belong, or want to belong,” as Pastor Bryan put it?

Q – The overall message of the sermon was that “Jesus wants to change *anything* that’s keeping us or others from discovering life with God.”

- Why can the idea of change be so uncomfortable, or even scary?
- What are some of the things that are keeping *you* from growing deeper in your life with God? What might Jesus want to change in your life? Are there some familiar tables he wants to turn over?
- What about *the people around you*? Are there any attitudes and actions on your part that are keeping the people around you from fully experiencing life with God?
- And finally, what about *our church*? Are there some longstanding customs or assumptions about our life as a church that may need to change, in order for people who feel far from God to feel welcome here? What might be uncomfortable about this?

HOW TO USE THESE STUDY GUIDES

- Consider sending out the Scripture passage to your group members ahead of time.
- Begin each meeting with a short time of checking in with one another.
- You may want to begin the discussion by reading the Scripture passage together out loud, or by summarizing the passage if everyone has read it ahead of time.
- Don’t feel like you need to discuss every question included in the Study Guide. Pick one or two to start with, and see how the conversation flows.
- If your group meets over Zoom:
 - You may need to do more overt facilitating over Zoom than you would in person. Feel free to call on people to invite them to share.
 - Try to be sensitive to attention spans over Zoom—keep the meetings shorter than they would be in person.
- Be sure to set aside time for sharing prayer requests and praying together.

Group Leader Support: Please reach out to your Campus Pastor or your Coach if you have any questions about leading your group or concerns about your group dynamic. If you have questions about or feedback on the Study Guides, please reach out to Pastor Tim or Pastor Rachel from the Group Life team.

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