

SET APART

A MONTH OF CONSECRATION

“The act of dedicating yourself to the service and worship of God; to make holy.”

Icebreaker Question: What was the most memorable part of the holidays this last year for you? What was the hardest part?

Worship:

10,000 Reasons | Matt Redman

How Great is Our God | Chris Tomlin

In Christ Alone | Keith and Kristyn Getty

Read: Philippians 3:7-14

1. Paul recognized some things in his life that were “rubbish” compared to knowing Christ. What are some things that we view as important but need to consider them as worthless and leave them behind?
2. What is one thing we can do to keep our eyes looking forward and run in such a way to win the prize for which God has called us?

Look back and look forward:

As we enter a new year, we encourage you to facilitate a discussion that helps your group reflect upon 2022 and seek the Lord for 2023. As someone once said, “We do not learn from experience; we learn from reflecting on experience.”

Read the questions below to the group (or make them available on printed cards for everyone to easily view.) Ask everyone to pick one or two from both categories. Give time for thinking and journaling then ask each person to pick one or two responses to share.

Reflect on 2022:

1. In which areas of your walk with Jesus do you feel you grew the most in 2022?
2. In which areas of your life has your growth disappointed or frustrated you?
3. Where did you see answered prayer in the past year?
4. What aspect of God's character did you receive greater revelation about in 2022?
5. What was the biggest time waster in your life this past year?
6. Create a phrase or statement that describes this past year for you.
7. What is one area in your life where you need to receive the grace of God?
8. Is there any relationship in your life where you need to extend forgiveness?

Look forward to 2023:

1. In which area of your spiritual life would you most like to grow?
2. What aspect of God's character do you want to receive greater revelation about?
3. What can you do to become more aware of God's presence this next year?
4. What audacious prayer do you most want answered?
5. Who do you want to love and serve better this next year?
6. Where can you step out and risk in faith this next year?
7. What is one change you could make this year that would help you walk in more peace?
8. Who is one person you would like to commit to pray for this year?

Pray:

Split into small groups at the end of your night to pray for one another. This is also a great opportunity to wait on the Lord for the others in your group and share any prophetic words you receive for them. Prophecy is meant to encourage the body – to instill courage in someone (1 Corinthians 14:3). As you share these words, think about how you can give others courage to walk out of disappointments from this past year and stir up hope and faith for what God is doing in each other's lives.

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As we talk about consecration this month and dropping our oars of self-direction and self-effort, we want to examine what it looks like to live in absolute surrender to Christ and to be led by Him. We'll take a look at John 15 where Jesus is teaching us how to live fully surrendered and connected to the Vine. We have also provided some excerpts from the book *Absolute Surrender* by Andrew Murray. You can just focus on John 15 or incorporate some of these excerpts to enhance your discussion. You can also print out this guide for your group to reflect on this upcoming week.

Icebreaker Question: Share something adventurous that you've done.

Worship:

Before worship, ask if anyone participated in this week's Consecration services and give them an opportunity to share their experience with the group.

Famous For (I Believe) | Tauren Wells, Jenn Johnson

I Surrender | Hillsong Worship

Worthy of It All | Onething, David Brymer

Read: John 15:1-8

Discussion:

1. Where are you striving in your life instead of living in a dependent vine-branch relationship with Jesus?

“What a simple thing it is to be a branch, the branch of a tree, or the branch of a vine! The branch grows out of the vine, or out of the tree, and there it lives and grows and, in due time, bears fruit. It has no responsibility except to receive sap and nourishment from the root and stem. And if only we knew, by the Holy Spirit, about our relationship to Jesus Christ, our work would be changed into the brightest and most heavenly thing on earth. Instead of there ever being soul-weariness or exhaustion, our work would be like a new experience, linking us to Jesus as nothing else can. For, is it not true that often our work comes between us and Jesus? What folly! The very work that He has to do in me, and I for Him, I take up in such a way that it separates me from Christ. Many a laborer in the vineyard has complained that he has too much work, and not enough time for close communion with Jesus. He complains that his usual work weakens his inclination for prayer, and that his many conversations with men darken the spiritual life. Sad thought, that the bearing of fruit should separate the branch from the vine! That must be because we have looked on our work as something other than the branch bearing fruit. May God deliver us from every false thought about the Christian life.”

2. What “oars” are you holding onto with God, in relationships, and/or in your vocation or assignment? These may seem like good things – good works – that you are doing, but you have been doing them in your own effort. What does it look like for you to bear fruit and not just good works?

“We all confess there is a great deal of work...and a great deal of earnest effort of every kind. But, there is not much manifestation of the power of God in it. What is wanting? The close connection between the worker and the heavenly Vine is lacking... Christ, the heavenly Vine, has power to provide the heavenly grapes. But “Ye are the branches,” and you cannot bear heavenly fruit unless you are in close connection with Jesus Christ. Do not confuse work and fruit. There may be a good deal of work for Christ that is not the fruit of the heavenly Vine. Do not seek for work only. Oh! Study this question of fruit-bearing. It means the very life, power, spirit, and love within the heart of the Son of God. It means the heavenly Vine Himself coming into your hearts and mine...

Stand in close connection with the heavenly Vine and say: “Lord Jesus, nothing less than the sap that flows through You, nothing less than the Spirit of Your divine life is what we ask. Lord Jesus, I pray, let Your Spirit flow through me in all my work for You.” I tell you again that the sap of the heavenly Vine is nothing but the Holy

Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the life of the heavenly Vine. What you must get from Christ is nothing less than a strong inflow of the Holy Spirit. You need it exceedingly, and you want nothing more than that. Remember that.

Do not expect Christ to give a bit of strength here, and a bit of blessing yonder, and a bit of help over there. As the vine does its work in giving its own peculiar sap to the branch, so expect Christ to give His own Holy Spirit into your heart. Then you will bear much fruit.”

3. When was the last time you expressed your full surrender to God - where you yielded your will to His and declared your absolute trust in Him? *Note to leaders: People may not feel comfortable sharing their personal journey with surrender, so share this as a leading question for the individual reflection and prayer time at the end.*

“What is meant by absolute surrender? It means that, as literally as Christ was given entirely to God, I am given up entirely to Christ. Is that too strong? Some think so. Some think that can never be. They cannot believe that just as entirely and absolutely as Christ gave up His life to do nothing but seek the Father’s pleasure, and depend on the Father absolutely and entirely, I am to do nothing but to seek the pleasure of Christ. But that is actually true. Christ Jesus came to breathe His own Spirit into us. He came to help us find our very highest happiness in living entirely for God, just as He did... I, who have been bought with the blood of Christ, have been bought to live every day with the one thought – How can I please my Master? Oh, we find the Christian life so difficult because we seek God’s blessing while we live in our own will. We desire to live the Christian life according to our own liking. We make our own plans and choose our own work. Then, we ask the Lord Jesus to come in and make sure that sin will not conquer us too much, and that we will not go too far wrong. We ask Him to come in and give us so much of His blessing. But our relationship to Jesus ought to be such that we are entirely as His disposal.

Every day we are to come to Him humbly...and say: ‘Lord is there anything in me that is not according to Your will, that has not been ordered by You, or that is not entirely given up to You?’ Oh, if we could wait patiently, I tell you what the result would be. A relationship between us and Christ would spring up. It would be so close and so tender that afterward we would be amazed at how we formerly could have lived with the idea: ‘I am surrendered to Christ.’ We would feel how distant our fellowship with Him had previously been. We would understand that He can, and does indeed, come and take actual possession of us, and give us unbroken fellowship all day. The branch calls us to absolute surrender.”

Reflection and Prayer:

Split into small groups at the end of your night to pray for one another. If you haven't done so throughout the discussion, take some time to individually to wait on the Lord and ask Him where you have gone your own way, where you are not connected to His will and way. You can use the prayers from the excerpts above:

"Lord is there anything in me that is not according to Your will, that has not been ordered by You, or that is not entirely given up to You?"

"Lord Jesus, nothing less than the sap that flows through You, nothing less than the Spirit of Your divine life is what we ask. Lord Jesus, I pray, let Your Spirit flow through me in all my work for You."

Respond to this question in your small groups and pray for one another.

1. What is Jesus inviting you to lay hold of as you let go of the unneeded things? What does He promise of Himself to you if we let Him reign in us?

"Christ Jesus said: "I am the Vine, ye are the branches." In other words: "I, the living One who have so completely given myself to you, am the Vine. You cannot trust me too much. I am the Almighty Worker, full of a divine life and power." You are the branches of the Lord Jesus Christ. If there is in your heart the consciousness that you are not a strong, healthy, fruit-bearing branch, not closely linked with Jesus, not living in Him as you should be—then listen to Him say: "I am the Vine, I will receive you, I will draw you to myself, I will bless you, I will strengthen you, I will fill you with my Spirit. I, the Vine, have taken you to be my branches, I have given myself utterly to you; children, give yourselves utterly to me. I have surrendered myself as God absolutely to you; I became man and died for you that I might be entirely yours. Come and surrender yourselves entirely to be mine."

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For 2023, we're sensing that God is calling us to renewed *Unity of the Spirit*. To be unified with the Spirit of God, and then with each other, it's imperative that we "drop our oars"—relinquishing our efforts and accomplishments that are made through our own strength and good works.

Icebreaker Question: What's one thing that brings you energy and joy?

Worship:

Promises | Maverick City Music

Come and Take Over | Antioch Music

O Lord, You're Beautiful | Chris Tomlin, Steffany Gretzinger

Read: Mark 6:45-52

Discussion:

1. Have someone restate the passage in their own words.
2. What questions come to mind as you read the passage again? Don't worry about answering these questions, simply have people express the questions this passage raises. (Ex. *Why was Jesus intending to pass by the disciples? Why did the disciples not gain any insight from the previous miracle, etc.*)
3. Have someone recap what happened immediately before the storm (the feeding of the 5,000). What did the disciples not learn or understand about this previous move of God that caused their hearts to be hardened? What do you think Jesus wanted them to see or learn?
4. The disciples were busy doing “ministry” with Jesus in the previous passage. But somehow, they missed what God was doing while they were serving the crowds. Are there areas of life or ministry where you tend to be self-reliant and carry unbelief about what Jesus wants to do for you and with you?
5. The disciples were straining at the oars during the storm and were stuck in the middle of the sea, unable to move forward. Are you straining at something in your life right now – doing all you know to do – but find yourself unable to gain ground? What would it look like for you to stop, drop your oars, and surrender to Jesus' leadership and direction?

Reflection and Prayer:

Split into small groups at the end of your night. Share one way you are going to respond to the invitation to drop your oars of self-reliance this week. Spend some time praying for one another.

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This week, we will continue to unpack Mark 6 and examine what we believe about the character of God. Do wrong views about God keep us from surrendering our lives to Him? Where may God be passing by in our own lives, but we miss Him in the storm?

Icebreaker Question: What emoji represents you today and why?

Worship:

Tremble | Mosaic MSC

How He Loves – Live | Jesus Culture, Kim Walker-Smith

When I Lock Eyes | Maverick City Music, UPPERROOM

Read: Mark 6:45-52 and Job 9:1-19 (Provided on the next page for you. Consider printing for your group.)

Discussion:

1. Summarize Job's view of God from this passage in Job 9.
2. Where do you think Job's view of God is right and where do you think his view of God has been distorted because of his trial? Job recognizes the wisdom and power of God but what does He think about God's character and the relationship God wants to have with him?
3. Compare Job's confession in verses 10-11 (*He performs wonders that cannot be fathomed...when he passes me, I cannot see him*) with the disciples' experience in Mark 6 (*witnessing miracles like the feeding of the 5,000 but almost missing Jesus when He passes by them*).
4. Where do you see yourself in these passages? Have you spoken words about God that echo Job's incorrect view of Him? Do you relate to the disciples, focused on the storm or recognizing where you may have your heart hardened?
5. Take a moment and ask everyone to wait in silence for God to speak to them. Ask God what He wants to show you about Himself or maybe a place where you have missed seeing God clearly because of the storm you are in. Take some time to confess (whether silently or aloud) any place of unbelief and express your faith and trust in God again.

Reflection and Prayer:

Split into small groups at the end of your night. Share any additional takeaways and spend some time praying for a breakthrough in any place of need.

Compare Job's view of God in Job 9 with the disciples' view of Jesus in Mark 6.

Job 9:1-19

1 Then Job replied:

2 “Indeed, I know that this is true.
But how can mere mortals prove their innocence before God?

3 Though they wished to dispute with him,
they could not answer him one time out of a thousand.

4 **His wisdom is profound, his power is vast.**
Who has resisted him and come out unscathed?

5 He moves mountains without their knowing it
and overturns them in his anger.

6 He shakes the earth from its place
and makes its pillars tremble.

7 He speaks to the sun and it does not shine;
he seals off the light of the stars.

8 He alone stretches out the heavens
and treads on the waves of the sea.

9 He is the Maker of the Bear and Orion,
the Pleiades and the constellations of the south.

10 **He performs wonders that cannot be fathomed,**
miracles that cannot be counted.

11 When he passes me, I cannot see him;
when he goes by, I cannot perceive him.

12 If he snatches away, who can stop him?
Who can say to him, ‘What are you doing?’

13 God does not restrain his anger;
even the cohorts of Rahab cowered at his feet.

14 “How then can I dispute with him?
How can I find words to argue with him?

15 Though I were innocent, I could not answer him;
I could only plead with my Judge for mercy.

16 **Even if I summoned him and he responded,**
I do not believe he would give me a hearing.

17 He would crush me with a storm
and multiply my wounds for no reason.

18 He would not let me catch my breath
but would overwhelm me with misery.

19 If it is a matter of strength, he is mighty!
And if it is a matter of justice, who can challenge him?

Mark 6:45-52

45 Immediately Jesus made his disciples get into the boat and go on ahead of him to Bethsaida, while he dismissed the crowd. **46** After leaving them, he went up on a mountainside to pray.

47 Later that night, the boat was in the middle of the lake, and he was alone on land. **48** He saw the disciples straining at the oars, because the wind was against them. Shortly before dawn he went out to them, walking on the lake. **He was about to pass by them,** **49** but when they saw him walking on the lake, they thought he was a ghost. They cried out, **50** because they all saw him and were terrified.

Immediately he spoke to them and said, “Take courage! It is I. Don’t be afraid.” **51** Then he climbed into the boat with them, and the wind died down. **They were completely amazed,** **52** for they had not understood about the loaves; their hearts were hardened.