



Group Discussion Guide

After their exodus from Egypt and 40 years in the wilderness, the Israelites were finally about to enter the Promised Land. However, out of all those who originally left Egypt, only two would live to see the land they had journeyed so far to find. Even Moses did not make it, dying just before they crossed the Jordan River.

While only two of the original group completed the journey, we still see this story as one of the greatest promises kept in scripture. That fact tells us something about how God sees success. It also tells us something about how we should measure the future success of our faith journey. In so doing, we just might discover a new Promised Land for both ourselves and Middletown Christian.

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February 6, 2022: A Promise Kept?

Key Scriptures: Exodus 3:7-8, Deuteronomy 34

The church is changing, and everyone knows it. We wonder what the future will look like and some of us worry it will not be to our liking. But what if the future God has in store for the church is even better than what we know now? What if there is a Promised Land just waiting to be found, if only we are willing to go? Would you be willing to make the effort if you knew that, like Moses, you would not experience the success?

Discussion Questions:

1. What do you think about the fact that out of all the Israelites who escaped Egypt only two people from that original group made it into the Promised Land and Moses was not one of them?
2. Despite the above reality, the story of the Exodus is one of our faith's greatest stories about God's promises being kept. Why do you think that is the case?
3. The story of the Exodus is one of great generational sacrifice. The ones who were enslaved and who braved the wilderness did so in order that their descendants would benefit. What does that say about the way we are supposed to live our lives of faith?
4. While being part of Middletown Christian Church is a blessing we get to experience now, we are also called to build an even stronger church for those who come after us. What kinds of sacrifices might we need to make for that to happen? How do we balance the desire for our personal needs to be met, while making room for needs beyond our own?

February 13, 2022: Unthinkable!

Key Scriptures: Deuteronomy 7:6, Acts 10 – 11:18

Scriptures Regarding Gentiles: Deuteronomy 7:3-6, 1 Thessalonians 4:5, Acts 10:28, Ephesians 2:11-12, Deuteronomy 7:1-3, Joshua 6:16-20; Esther 8:11

This message tells the story of one of the most important events to take place in scripture and in the history of our faith. Without this story, the Christian church may not exist today, but it remains unfamiliar to many Christians.

Join us for a message from scripture that has the power to shape the future of our church, if we will let it.

Discussion Questions:

1. When you hear the phrase, "God's Chosen People," what comes to mind?
2. As part of their understanding of being chosen, the Israelite people saw non-Jewish people in largely negative ways. The passages regarding Gentiles that are listed above demonstrate some of those attitudes. What is your response to reading them?
3. How does Acts 10:15 shape our understanding of the above passages?
4. At one time it was unthinkable that non-Jewish people could be baptized, but the Spirit led them to a new understanding. What are other examples of beliefs/practices that once seemed unthinkable but that have become acceptable in our faith?
5. What do you think about such changes? How do we know when the Spirit is moving us to embrace new beliefs/practices?

February 20, 2022: Disputable Matters

Key Scriptures: Romans 14, Romans 10:9

Several years ago, a survey of people ages 16-29 showed that 87% of them viewed Christians as judgmental. 85% viewed Christians as hypocritical. Those stats offer an explanation of why the upcoming generation is leaving the church, never to return.

At the same time, 82% of those polled said that Christianity teaches good values and principles. They were not rejecting Christianity; they were rejecting Christians.

This sermon explores how we might better handle some of the disputable matters that lead Christians to appear judgmental and hypocritical. Doing so will lead us to a future promised land for the church in ways that might get us there sooner than we think.

Discussion Questions:

1. The survey quoted in today's sermon comes from research done by The Barna Group. In it, people ages 16-29 gave the following answers when asked to describe their perception of the Christian church (respondents were not regular church goers): 91% anti-homosexual, 87% judgmental, 85% hypocritical, 78% old fashioned, 75% too involved in politics. How does it feel to read those responses? Are they fair?

2. The same survey also yielded the following responses about the Christian Church: 82% said we teach same basic ideas as other religions, 76% said we have good values and principles, 71% said we are friendly, 55% said Christianity is a faith they respect. How does it feel to read those responses? Are they fair?

3. In that survey, the most frequently made unprompted comment was, "Christianity in today's society no longer looks like Jesus." That comment indicates that many people outside the church aren't rejecting faith, they are rejecting the behaviors of those who claim to be faithful. In what ways do you agree/disagree with that?

4. One of the top negative perceptions of Christians is that we are judgmental which, in fairness, some Christians are. Read Romans 14:1 – 13. What does this passage say about judging people for living differently than you do?

5. Middletown Christian Church strives to be welcoming place for all people. In so doing, we have members who believe differently from one another – sometimes passionately. We hold to the belief that if we are honoring God and following Christ, we are all equal members of the body. In what ways is that challenging to you? In what ways is it hopeful?

February 27, 2022: Unthinkable!

Key Scripture: 1 Samuel 17

David and Goliath is one of the most familiar stories from scriptures, often used as a metaphor for overcoming tremendous obstacles. But what if our understanding of this story is wrong?

In his book, "David and Goliath," Malcolm Gladwell offers a new interpretation of this ancient story that may forever change the way you interpret this story and what it means for our lives and for the church.

Discussion Questions:

1. The heart of this message focuses on a new interpretation of the story about David and Goliath. How did that interpretation differ from what you've heard before? Does it feel plausible?
2. As part of his interpretation, Malcolm Gladwell argues that David was never an underdog. Instead, he was an innovator who changed the rules of the game to maximize his strengths to overcome the challenge he faced. When it comes to the challenges the church faces for a successful future, what are some innovative ways that we can build on our strengths?
3. While traditions can be a great thing, sometimes they can get in the way of progress. When it comes to the church, how do we balance the power of traditions with the need to innovate so that we can move forward?
4. If you were to describe a future "Promised Land" for Middletown Christian Church, what would it look like? How do we get there?