

John 8:12 Sermon-Based Discussion Guide

Purpose of Discussion: To help us learn how to better experience Jesus as “the light of the world” in our lives.

Sermon Refresher:

As we study through John, if our hearts aren’t drawn to Jesus, we have missed the most important thing. When Jesus tells us that he is the “light of the world,” he wants to communicate several significant promises to us:

1. In this world, Jesus is with you.
2. In this world, Jesus guides you.
3. In this world, Jesus is our moral compass.

Icebreaker: Have you ever gotten really lost? What happened? How did you feel?

Discussion

1. Looking back at the sermon refresher, we see the three different promises that Jesus makes to us when he says that he is the “light of the world.” Which one impressed you most and why?
2. If Jesus promises to always be with us, why is it that we don’t experience and feel his presence more?
3. Every Christian goes through times when it is hard to feel God’s presence. Many of the Psalms record this experience (e.g. Psalm 6:3; 13:1; 89:46). How might God use these periods in our lives?
4. In 1948, pastor A.W. Tozer wrote a book called “The Pursuit of God” in order to stir Christians to pursue a close relationship with God. Let’s do something a little different. Let’s read what Tozer wrote about pursuing and experiencing the presence of God. Let’s go around and take turns reading one paragraph each. If something sticks out to you, maybe underline it so we can discuss.

“If God is present at every point in space, if we cannot go where he is not, cannot even conceive of a place where he is not, why then has not that presence become the one universally celebrated fact of the world? The patriarch Jacob, ‘in the waste howling wilderness,’ gave the answer to that question. He saw a vision of God and cried out in wonder, ‘Surely the Lord is in this place; and I

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knew it not” (Genesis 28:16). Jacob has never been for one small division of a moment outside the circle of that all-pervading presence. But he knew it not. That was just trouble, and it is ours. Men do not know that God is here. What a difference it would make if they knew. . . .

The presence and the manifestation of the presence are not the same. There can be the one without the other. God is here when we are fully unaware of it. He is manifested only when and as we are aware of his presence. On our part, there must be surrender to the Spirit of God, for his work is to show us the Father and the Son. If we cooperate with him in loving obedience, God will manifest himself to us, and that manifestation will be the difference between a nominal Christian life and a life radiant with the light in his face. . . .

Receptivity [to the presence of God] is not a single thing; rather, it is a compound, a blending of several elements within the soul. It is an affinity for, a bent toward, a sympathetic response to, a desire to have. From this it may be gathered that it can be present in degrees, that we may have little or more, depending upon the individual. It may be increased by exercise or destroyed by neglect. It is not a sovereign and irresistible force which comes upon us as a seizure from above. It is a gift of God, indeed, but one which must be recognized and cultivated as any other gift if we are to realize the purpose for which It was given. . . .

Failure to see this is the cause of this very serious breakdown in modern evangelicalism. The idea of cultivation and exercise, so dear to the saints of old, has now no place in our total religious picture. It is too slow, too common. We now demand glamour and fast flowing dramatic action. A generation of Christians reared among pushbuttons and automatic machines is impatient of slower and less direct methods of reaching their goals. We have been trying to supply machine-age methods to our relations with God. We read our chapter, have our short devotions and rush away, hoping to make up for our deep inward bankruptcy by attending another gospel meeting or listening to another thrilling story told by a religious adventurer lately returned from afar. . . .

But what he will do for the plain man or woman who seeks his face I believe I do know and can tell others. Let any man turn to God in earnest, let Him begin to exercise himself unto godliness, let him seek to develop his powers of spiritual receptivity by trust and obedience and humility, and the results will exceed anything he may have hoped . . .

Let us say it again: the universal presence is a fact. God is here. The whole universe is alive with his life. . . . And always he is trying to get our attention to reveal himself to us, are you doing what we to communicate with us. We have within us the ability to know him we will respond to his overtures. In this recall pursuing God. We will know him and increasing degree as are receptive he becomes more perfect by faith in love and practice.”

- *The Pursuit of God* by A.W. Tozer

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5. Tozer says there is a difference between the “presence of God” and the “manifestation” of that presence. What’s the difference? Why is it important to remember that?
6. What can we learn from Tozer about how to experience the presence of God more in our lives?
7. How is that challenging for us? What changes would you need to make to pursue God like this?
8. What encouragement does Tozer offer in our pursuit of God?

Digging Deeper (optional):

One of the main ways that we can develop spiritual receptivity is to learn to practice meditation on God’s Word. Meditation is the practice of taking one or two verses of scripture or one or two truths about God and slowing down to really ponder them. Read how meditation helped missionary George Mueller experience God’s presence.

“Formerly, when I arose, I began to pray as soon as possible...But what was the result? I often...suffered much from wandering thoughts... I scarcely ever suffer in this way now... I began to meditate on the New Testament from the beginning, early in the morning... searching, as it were, every verse to get a blessing out of it... not for preaching [to others], but for obtaining food for my soul. After a few moments my soul is *led* to confession, thanksgiving, or intercession.” – George Mueller

9. How do you relate to Mueller’s experience? How could his discovery about meditation help you?
 - Note: for more on the practice of meditating on scripture, see Tim Keller’s great book “Prayer.”

Sharing and Prayer Time

In the sermon, Keith said that as the light of the world, Jesus exposes the darkness in our lives. He does this not to condemn or shame us but to show us our need for him and to rescue us from sin’s dark destruction. One quote that stuck out was: “Sin thrives on secrecy. It thrives in darkness. When we come into the light, we meet Jesus.” We need to learn to bring our sin into Jesus’ light for forgiveness, healing, and transformation.

Obviously, in small groups, this takes time and the development of trust. Let’s take a small baby step toward that today by each sharing just one area of personal spiritual struggle. Not your deepest, darkest sin, just an area of spiritual struggle that you would feel comfortable sharing and

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receiving prayer for. Sometimes it's hard to think of something you might share. Look at the list below for some ideas:

- Impatience and anger with kids
- Trouble trusting God with a decision
- Worry or fear
- Dry or bored spiritual life
- Fear of sharing Christ
- People-pleasing
- Bitterness toward someone
- Keeping priorities in order

End by praying for each other or having the leader pray for everyone.

Passage for next Sunday

John 8:39-59