

CHRISTIAN CHARACTER:

A Study of Identity, Humility,
and Community



In Christ Alone

Leader Version

Christian Character *Series Summary*

This Bible study is meant to prepare youth and adults attending the 2016 LCMS Youth Gathering to explore the concepts of identity, humility, and community in Christ alone. To do this, four biblical characters have been chosen as case studies. The goal is to help the reader understand their own life in Christ by considering these examples. May the Lord guide and bless your study!

Leader Comment: The leader should begin with the following series of questions to spark discussion. Don't be afraid to get into some serious stuff here.... Some kids will have some real, serious issues that are very legitimate. Encourage discussion.

Joseph, the Son of Jacob: A Study of Humility



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Living humbly before the Lord and others involves suffering for doing good. #humility #InChristAlone



The Real Apostle Paul

@therealpaul

For it has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ you should not only believe in him but also suffer for his sake. #InChristAlone

Getting Started

Check your last day of tweets/posts/texts. How many of them were complaining about something that happened to you? If you're willing, describe the nature of your disappointment and what you were feeling when you sent that text.

Sometimes our complaints aren't justified. Sometimes we get upset over little matters and need to get over it. At other times, our complaints are legitimate. Can you think of a time you've been legitimately wronged by someone close to you? Or a time you've been cheated out of something important to you?

Learning Humility

The last 20 or so chapters of Genesis are devoted, in one way or another, to the story of Joseph, the son of Jacob. There are many important episodes in his story, but in this study we're going to focus on how he learned humility. His life didn't go as he planned. He was wronged by people close to him. Yet God was with him--and that makes all the difference in the world.

Joseph was the 11th of twelve sons born to Jacob, the son of Isaac, the son of Abraham. That makes Joseph the great-grandson of the great "Father Abraham." Despite being the 11th son, Joseph was his father's favorite. Remember his famous "robe of many colors" (Gen. 37:3)? As you might expect, Joseph's older brothers didn't appreciate their dad's favoritism toward him. To say the least, Joseph's relationship with his brothers was a little strained. Finally, the brothers had enough.

Read Genesis 37:4–34

Joseph -- betrayed by his family, forced to live as a servant in a foreign country -- works himself into a position of relative authority, only to lose it all again after being wrongfully sent to prison. Still, he does not lose faithfulness, and was not done making comebacks. While in prison, Joseph doesn't let his anger, bitterness or sense of entitlement consume him. In fact, he even seeks to help others (Gen. 40:7). So here, God does what God does best. He works good through suffering. Joseph correctly interprets the dreams of some servants of Pharaoh, and then Pharaoh has a few strange dreams himself: dreams of skinny cows eating fat cows after a swim in the Nile, gangly ears of corn enveloping plump ones... Crazy stuff! Pharaoh is confused. Just then, Pharaoh gets word of a prisoner who can interpret dreams. Let's pick up the story:

Read Gen 41:25–41

God was going to send plenty and famine, but *through* Joseph's suffering, He put Joseph in a position to interpret the message of Pharaoh's dreams and save millions of lives! In fact, Joseph even saves his brothers' lives! He could have gotten revenge. The famine had spread up to Canaan, and Joseph's brothers traveled to Egypt to purchase some food. Joseph could have truly gotten back at his brothers; they were in the palm of his hand. Instead, Joseph arranges for the entire family to survive.



The Real Apostle Paul

@therealpaul

Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ. #encouragement #sanctification #InChristAlone



The Real Apostle Paul

@therealpaul

Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. #NYG2016 #loveyoursibsInChristAlone

In the end, God preserved the family of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob through Joseph and his suffering. This was important because it was through this family that God saved all people in His Son Jesus. In the midst of this suffering, Joseph probably wondered how God could allow these things to happen to him. But as it was with Jesus, Joseph's suffering ended up bringing blessings to multitudes.

Read Phil 1:27–29.

What is the connection between Joseph's life and these verses?

Allow participants to consider their own connections. The next few questions will draw out specific connections.

What does Paul say about those who believe in Jesus (verse 29)?

To follow Jesus is also to suffer for His sake. This is not the same as suffering simply because we live in a sinful world. Rather, it refers to suffering for living IN CHRIST ALONE as we serve others.

What does it mean to "suffer for Jesus' sake"?

It does not mean suffering for doing evil. (Compare 1 Peter 4:12-16.) To suffer for Jesus' sake is to suffer for doing good. Ask kids to think of examples. Examples could include suffering by serving others, suffering for standing up for the truth, or enduring persecution for confessing faith in Jesus.

How should we respond to suffering for being Christian (verse 27)?

Paul calls us to live a life worthy of the Gospel. This means that when (not if) we suffer, we should follow the example of Joseph, and ultimately Jesus, which is characterized by a willingness to repay evil with good. This doesn't make us any better in God's sight, of course.

****Be aware that some youth may be suffering in ways you are not aware of. This study is not suggesting that they should silently endure abuse or mistreatment. Invite the youth to speak with you (or a pastor or other youth leader) privately if they need help dealing with suffering.*

Joseph lived most of his life faithful to God despite the suffering he endured. Does living a life faithful to God mean God owes us a reward?

In the end, Joseph gained much in being elevated to Prime Minister of Egypt. This was to accomplish God's plan of salvation for His people – it was to setup the Exodus and the true giving of the Promised Land. It was not to reward Joseph; nor should we conclude that living faithfully as Joseph did means we can expect God to reward us in this life. If God had never allowed Joseph to rise out of his life of misery, God would not have owed Joseph anything for his faithful life.

Our "reward" has already been won by Christ. It is resurrection on the last day when he returns. It is the promise that He has made us His own, and we shall live under Him in everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness (SC 2nd Article of the Creed) and that he will raise us and all the dead on the last day and give eternal life to us and all believers in Christ (SC 3rd Article of Creed).

The Christian life involves suffering. This isn't a sign of God leaving us, however. Indeed, God promises to be with us in our suffering--as He was with Joseph. That's what we see when we look at the cross. We see a God who suffers for us and with us. As we suffer for doing good, we learn from Joseph who repaid evil with kindness. You may not be in a position to save the world, but by God's grace and through the work of His Spirit in you, you can learn humility and positively influence those around you. In a way, this is saving the world, for it offers a glimpse of the sacrificial love of God in Christ.



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Hold on! Our Messiah, Jesus Christ was a Son of Joseph. Is there a connection? #foreshadow



The Real Apostle Paul

@therealpaul

I can do all things through him who strengthens me. #NYG2016 #endureinchristalone

Read Phil 4:10–13.

How could Paul endure all things?

How could Joseph endure all things?

How can you endure all things?

Closing prayer

Dear Heavenly Father, I rejoice greatly that You have revived Your concern for me. Please help me to be content in any situation -- whether brought low, lifted up, in hunger, or in need. Please give me the strength to live out my faith in all things and in all situations. Through Jesus Christ, our Lord, Amen.

Ruth, the Daughter-in-Law: A Study of Community



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To live IN CHRIST ALONE is to live in a unique and selfless community. #notalone #InChristAlone

This book is only four chapters long, so you should be able to read it in one sitting. Depending on how familiar your group is with reading the Scriptures, you might choose a paraphrased version of the Bible for this exercise, such as The Message.



The Real Apostle Paul

@therealpaul

I thank my God in all my remembrance of you... because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now. #NYG2016 #liveincommunity

Getting Started

“What’s in a name?” A guy named Shakespeare asked that question in his famous play, *Romeo and Juliet*. Do you know the meaning of your name?

You might invite the youth to look up the meaning of their names on their phones. Simply search “name meaning” and it pops up quickly.

Often times in the Bible, names and their meaning carry significance. In the course of this study, we will focus on Ruth. Google it.

Ruth means “Companion, friend”.

It is impossible to be a friend when you are alone. Friendship requires community, and community requires a certain kind of behavior in relation to other people. Keep this in mind as you read Ruth’s story...

Read the book of Ruth.

All of the Old Testament is pointing us to the coming of Jesus Christ. In a literal pointing to Jesus, we discover that Ruth is the great grandmother of David, who is part of Jesus’ family tree. (See Matthew’s genealogy in Matthew 1:5.) This reminds us that the community Jesus creates is a different kind of community.

Let’s begin by thinking about the various communities Ruth was a part of in this story. ***How many communities or relationships can be identified in the book of Ruth?***

Family, marriage, Moabites, Israelites, field hands

Ruth was from Moab, but early in her story, when her husband dies, she chooses to stay with her mother-in-law instead of returning to her original community. She chose to go with Naomi to a foreign community instead of returning to that which was familiar. ***Has there been a time in your life when you had to walk away from the familiar and venture into the unknown?***

Invite the youth to share their experiences. You might ask: Has your family moved? Have you ever changed schools? What is scary about it? What is exciting about it?

How did Ruth show this kind of love and commitment to Naomi?

(See Ruth 1:16–18).

She promised to stay with her and be a permanent part of her community. For an elderly widow like Naomi, this was a great blessing.

Finding Community

Imagine the school cafeteria. You are standing with your tray gazing around the room looking for a friendly face and an empty seat, but all of the tables seem full and no one is making eye contact with you. As you weigh your options and try to act casual, a waving hand catches your eye. Someone has room for you and wants you to join them. Relief washes over you.

Who was the friendly face that makes room for Ruth at his table in Bethlehem?

(See Ruth 2:8–9)

Boaz

What is Boaz’s role in Ruth’s life?

He was her “redeemer.”



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 Hint: I know that my Redeemer lives! #foreshadow



The Real Apostle Paul
 @therealpaul
 It was kind of you to share in my trouble. #NYG2016 #sharethejoy #sharetheburden



The Real Apostle Paul
 @therealpaul
 If there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit...make my joy complete by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord. #NYG2016 #community #worktogether

Redeemer is a technical term. Does anyone know what a “redeemer” was in those days?

- He must be near of kin (Leviticus 25:48, 25:25; Ruth 3:12–13).
- He must be able to redeem. This means he must be free of any calamity or need of redemption himself. (Ruth 4:4–6).
- He must be willing to redeem (Ruth 4:6ff).
- Redemption was completed when the price was completely paid (Leviticus 25:27; Ruth 4:7–11).

Does Boaz’s role as redeemer remind you of anyone?

Like Boaz was for Ruth, Jesus is our Redeemer. Go back through the four points needed to be a redeemer. **How does Jesus meet the qualifications to redeem us?**

- He must be near of kin: The redeemer being near of kin shows us how important it is for our redemption that Jesus took on our flesh – becoming human just like us – “the firstborn of all creation” (Col 1:15).
- He must be able to redeem: The redeemer being able to redeem “free of all calamity or need of redemption” is shows us how important it is that Jesus was himself was without sin and so was able to bear our sin (2 Cor 5:21).
- He must be willing to redeem: That Jesus was willing to redeem is found in places like Luke 22:42, Phil 2:6-8, and Heb 2:12.
- Redemption was completed when the price was completely paid: In Christ’s work, our redemption is complete (John 19:30). Thanks be to God!

Through what means does Jesus use to redeem us (Titus 3:4–7)?

Through Christ’s death and resurrection, Jesus redeems us, taking the price for our sins upon Himself and restoring us to right relationship with the Father. In Baptism, we are made new in Christ, renewed in the Spirit and received as heirs.

Not only does Jesus redeem us, but He brings us into a community of baptized and redeemed believers.

Our living out of this Baptismal life is centered in the reception of Christ’s gifts through God’s Word and Sacraments among the community of Christians. Indeed the term “fellowship” when used in Acts (such as Acts 2:42) is speaking of the coming together of Christ’s disciples to hear the Word read and preached, receive the Lord’s Supper (the breaking of the bread) and pray together.

As Christians, our community is nothing if it is not rooted in and centered upon these things Christ has given us. Our witness to others is empty if it is not pouring out of our regularly receiving His gifts and hearing His Word in community with other believers in Christ. Because of Jesus, in this community, we care for one another and love one another sacrificially.

Community Today

We are part of a lot of different communities today. Our crews, teams, and clubs are many. We are also part of the church. The church is a unique community. We didn’t choose to be part of it. Our Redeemer chose us and made us part of this community. Read the following passages and identify what make this community unlike any other.

1 Corinthians 12:12–27

Through baptism, we are members of one body. Each of us, though different, are important to the body. We suffer together and rejoice together.

Heb 10:24–25

This community continues to meet together, encouraging one another and spurring one another along to good deeds.

Matt 18:20

God promises to be among his people as they gather together.

At the beginning of this study we noticed that the name Ruth means “companion” or “friend.” Think of someone in your congregation--perhaps in the cafeteria--or someone in your neighborhood who needs a friend. Spend a few moments thinking about how you can invite them into community with you.

Prayer: Dear Heavenly Father, Thank You for making us in our Baptism a part of a genuine and eternal community--the body of Christ. Through Your Spirit enable me to be a positive member of my congregation. Use me to bring more into this community, and give me the heart to suffer with those who suffer and rejoice with those who rejoice. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

Mary, the Mother of Jesus: A Study of Humility



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It's not about me! Or you! God calls us to a life of humble service. #InChristAlone #noselfpromos



The Real Apostle Paul

@therealpaul

He did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. #NYG2016 #humility



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Seen any good betrothal movies recently? Who is the latest star to get betrothed? #whatisbetrothed #josephputaringonit



The Real Apostle Paul

@therealpaul

Put others' interests above your own...do all things without grumbling...#NYG2016 #humility

Introduction

Open your phones and look at your (or your friend's) last 5 posts on Twitter. Or check out your current Snapchat Story. Describe what you see. Is it self-promotion? Or do these posts promote the accomplishments of others?

The youth may need some help unpacking the phrase "self-promotion." Ask the youth how many selfies they've taken in the last week/month.

Do you have a favorite football player who has a signature touchdown celebration? What about a favorite artist that has a signature dance move? Do you have a favorite Youtuber with a signature way of asking new viewers to subscribe to their channel? How do you see famous people promoting themselves? Are these things intentional?

In what ways are you tempted to engage in a little self-promotion?

This is an open-ended question that doesn't have to be answered at this point. If youth don't have an immediate response, just leave this question hanging and move on.

Humility in Action

Mary is a fairly well-known figure in the Bible. It's possible that some of you have heard her story so many times that you may miss the depth, or even scandal, of her story. That's right, *scandal!* To get the scandal, let's see what everyone knows about this teenage girl named Mary.

What do you know about Mary?

Have the students share what they know and remember about Mary.

Read Luke 1:26–38.

Mary was, by our standards today, a very young fiancée (probably 14-16 years old). The Scriptures say she was "betrothed" to Joseph. Betrothed meant engaged, but in a stronger sense than we mean it today. It was as if she was almost married, simply awaiting the ceremony. As Joseph made final preparations, she was looking forward to their marriage becoming official.

However, during this time of waiting, the unthinkable happens! Mary gets pregnant, but not because of anything she did. As the angel said, God was doing something miraculous. He had chosen her to carry His Son! Here she was, a teenager, betrothed, and now pregnant! She could honestly say she didn't do anything wrong, but would others buy it?

Today teen pregnancies are relatively common, and at times even celebrated through reality TV shows. (Have you seen the latest episode of "Teen Mom" or "16 and Pregnant"?) In Mary's day, it would have been another story. Mary would have faced serious consequences. Joseph could have canceled their engagement, sentencing her to life as an outcast. Or worse, he could have brought charges of adultery against her which would lead to death.

Optional video segment: You could watch part of the movie called The Nativity Story (2006) for a recent rendition of Mary's dilemma. The pertinent scene is from 41:10-46:30.

Try to put yourself in Mary's shoes.

- Have you ever felt isolated from your family? From your friends?
- How many of you know a teenager who has been pregnant? What sort of pressures does she face from friends and family?
- Mary's wasn't an "unplanned" pregnancy, for God had been planning it for a long time. Still, her friends and family didn't know this. How did Mary respond to this potential isolating development? (See Luke 1:38.)
- How does Mary's response demonstrate humility?



The Real Apostle Paul

@therealpaul

Rejoice in the LORD always; again I say, Rejoice! #NYG2016 #joyinhumility



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God calls us to "shine as lights in the world." (Phil. 2:15) That's big-time, too! #InChristAlone #bigtimeroleforeveryone

How does Mary's humility compare to the humility of Christ (Philippians 2:8)?

Humility accepts the roles we are given. Humility accepts things from God, even though we don't understand them. Humility is obedience.

Humility in Song

It didn't take long for Mary to realize her "assignment" was an amazing task. She was chosen by God to be the mother of the Messiah! Are you kidding me? People have been waiting for the Messiah forever!

Faced with such a big and important task, don't you think Mary would have been tempted to engage in a little self-promotion, to take at least a little bit of credit for being chosen by God? If all of this happened today -- couldn't you just imagine the temptation to snap all your friends, or tweet out, "ICYMI...I'm carrying the Messiah! Just sayin." Or the Instagram post? "Here's me and Gabriel. #selfieswithangels".

But that's not Mary. Mary turns the attention towards God. Check out Mary's full response to the role God gave her in **Luke 1:46-55**. Read this song, which is known as "The Magnificat."

- What is your first reaction upon reading the Magnificat?
Notice the emphasis on gratitude
- Does Mary focus on herself, or on God working in and through her? How does this shape Mary's identity?
She focuses on what God has done, and what God is doing. She finds her identity in his gracious working.
- Read Philippians 2:1-11 and 4:4-7. Compare the Magnificat and these verses. What do these passages suggest about humility?
Christ hymn: Humility is obedience, thankfulness in all things. Magnificat: Humility is obedience and gratitude.

How does living with gratitude lead to a life shaped by humility?

Gratitude to God for his blessings reminds us that everything we have is a gift. This humbles us because we can't take credit for anything!

How is a life of humility (as we see in Mary and Jesus) different than today's encouragement to promote yourself?

Allow the youth to reflect on this and share their thoughts.



The Real Apostle Paul

@therealpaul

Jesus humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. #NYG2016 #humility

Humility is not something we can just do, but is given us by God. Our identity is ours only as a gift. We are not humble so as to receive a reward, but we are to be humble because we are called to be, recognizing that in our sin we cannot attain to anything of God (see SC 3rd Article of the Creed with explanation).

Prayer: Dear Heavenly Father. Please grant us the humility to rejoice in all circumstances, to put the interests of others above our own, and above all, to obey Your word. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Peter, the Disciple: A Study of Identity



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Our True identity is found IN CHRIST ALONE. #identity #InChristAlone



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I once dropped a Mike.
Literally. My little brother is named Mike. I dropped him. #dropthemc



The Real Apostle Paul
@therealpaul
To Live is Christ! #NYG2016 #identity



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A new identity in Baptism!
Renewed at Confirmation!
#InChristAlone #neweachday

Introduction

Have you ever heard of a “mic drop”? What is it? *According to Urban Dictionary, a “mic drop” happens when a performer intentionally throws the microphone on the ground after an awesome performance.*

Ask the youth to recall any mic drop moments that they’ve witnessed or been a part of—possibly even ones that the youth group as a whole has witnessed.

How about “cringeworthy?”

Urban Dictionary describes this as an experience that makes one cringe. It is an awkward, embarrassing, or obnoxious behavior that is often immediately regrettable. Ask the youth if they can think of any well-known examples.

An Identity Crisis

In this Bible study, we’re going to think about a disciple who had some memorable “mic drop” moments. He also did some things that would definitely qualify as “cringeworthy.” We’re talking about the disciple named Peter.

What do you know about Peter?

As a group brainstorm instances in Peter’s life from the Gospels. Depending on the biblical knowledge of the youth in your group, you may need to look up the suggested passages.

Mic Drop

Matt 14:28-29 (Peter walks on water)

Matt 16:16-18 (Peter confesses Christ)

Luke 22:33 (Peter promises to die for Jesus)

Cringeworthy

Matt 14:30 (Peter sinks in the water)

Matt 16:23 (Jesus calls Peter “satan”)

Luke 22:54 (Peter denies Jesus 3 times)

In the Gospels, Peter’s life was like a rollercoaster. He goes back and forth from “mic drop” to “cringeworthy” over and over again—sometimes within a few seconds! But things change in the book of Acts. There are less “cringeworthy” moments and more “mic drops.” Look up the following passages and identify the “mic drop” in Peter’s life. *Depending on how many youth you have, and how much time you have for this study, you might divide your youth into four groups and assign one passage to each group. Or, you might select two of these passages to read together.*

Acts 2:1–41

Peter’s powerful sermon on Pentecost and the baptism of 3000.

Acts 5:12–16

Peter healed many who were sick and possessed.

Acts 10:34–48

Peter’s preaching led to baptism and faith.

Acts 12:1–11

Peter is rescued from prison.

A New Identity



The Real Apostle Paul

@therealpaul

I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. #Christsurpassesall #InChristAlone

There's no mistake that things in Peter's life were different after the resurrection. **Read John 21:15–19.** *How did Jesus, after rising from the dead, bring about a change in Peter's life? While the text doesn't say this explicitly, many theologians believe that Jesus asked Peter if he loved Him three times as a way of forgiving Peter for denying Him three times.*

At the end of this text (John 20:19), Jesus calls Peter to follow Him again, which affirms Jesus' plan to use Peter as His witness.

See also the incredibly personal word of Jesus in Mark 16:7: "But go, tell his disciples AND PETER that he is going before you to Galilee..." Jesus knew what He was saying and Peter would remember that powerful detail. Peter had denied his Lord, but His Lord wanted him back.



The Real Apostle Paul

@therealpaul

For it has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ you should not only believe in him but also suffer for his sake. #sufferforfaith #InChristAlone

From that point forward, Peter was a force of consistency. He wasn't perfect, of course. No one is on this side of Jesus' return! But Peter went forth as a bold preacher and confident witness. His "mic drop" moments in Acts were only the result of God working through His Word, which freed Peter to devote his life to proclaiming the Gospel of Christ crucified. Through his preaching, he helps people see that nothing—even the good things of this life—are more important than knowing and believing in Jesus.

Unlike performers who drop the mic today, Peter's new identity didn't lead him to a life of fame and fortune. He didn't seek to draw attention to himself and impress others. In fact, historians believe that, in the end, Peter ended up being crucified for his faith.

An Identity Crisis in Your Life?

As baptized and forgiven Christians, we are a lot like Peter. We've had (and continue to have) plenty of "cringeworthy" moments as Christians. We've been awkward and embarrassed, not to mention sinful and unclean. Still, the risen Christ has come to us as well. He has forgiven us and renewed us, and now He leads us to be His witnesses.

Finish this sentence: "As a baptized and forgiven believer in Jesus Christ, I am now _____."

Allow the youth to finish this sentence in their own words. Good options include:

free from guilt and sin

fully alive

sent to serve others

It's important to notice that, when Christ changes our identity, He doesn't remove us from the world or take us out of our specific context. We are still students, siblings, athletes, citizens, and we still have our own style and strengths and specific situations. But our lives are new and renewed in Christ!

Closing Prayer

Dear Heavenly Father, Help us to find our identity in our Messiah, in Christ. Though our lives are filled with amazing blessings and worthy pursuits, help us to realize that, in comparison, they are all loss compared to the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.



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Jesus makes you *more* you, not less you. Chew on that! #trueidentity #InChristAlone