

CHRISTIAN CHARACTER:

A Study of Identity, Humility,
and Community

Participant Version



In Christ Alone

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!

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?

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

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

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

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?

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.

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.



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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

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



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?

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

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?***

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?***

How did Ruth show this kind of love and commitment to Naomi?
(See Ruth 1:16–18).

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)

What is Boaz’s role in Ruth’s life?

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



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 Hint: I know that my Redeemer lives! #foreshadow

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?**

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

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

Heb 10:24-25

Matt 18:20

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.



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

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?

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?

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?

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.

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



The Real Apostle Paul

@therealpaul

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

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

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?
- Does Mary focus on herself, or on God working in and through her? How does this shape Mary’s identity?
- Read Philippians 2:1–11 and 4:4–7. Compare the Magnificat and these verses. What do these passages suggest about humility?

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

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

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. #drophemic



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?

How about “cringeworthy?”

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?

Mic Drop

Cringeworthy

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.

Acts 2:1–41

Acts 5:12–16

Acts 10:34–48

Acts 12:1–11

A New Identity

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?*

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



The Real Apostle Paul

@therealpaul

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



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

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 _____.”

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.