

Acts 1:6-8 NLT - 6 So when the apostles were with Jesus, they kept asking him, "Lord, has the time come for you to free Israel and restore our kingdom?" 7 He replied, "The Father alone has the authority to set those dates and times, and they are not for you to know. 8 But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you. And you will be my witnesses, telling people about me everywhere--in Jerusalem, throughout Judea, in Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

Responding to Jesus meant leaving behind the old expectations and comfortable existence of the past and stepping by faith into a new reality. The same is true of Jesus' call in our lives today.

As you start the New Year what do you desire to see change? Is it change that draws you closer to Jesus? What can you do to immerse yourself in the practices, teachings and love of Christ that will help get you there?

WRAP-UP

Our habits not only shape our daily routines, they are also an integral part of our faith. Sometimes we recognize them and sometimes they go unnoticed. But habits are driven by what we love and value. Jesus challenged His followers to value the eternal life He offered more than the material things they had been focused on. If our desire is truly to draw nearer to Jesus, we will align our habits and practices to reflect that. In answer to Jesus' question "Do you want to leave?" our answer, like the disciples', will be "Where else would we go?"

Memory Verse

*Simon Peter replied, "Lord, to whom would we go? You have the words that give eternal life."
- John 6:68 NLT*

PRAYER (20 MIN)

Ask your group to pray for you regarding one area where you can apply this study in your life: _____

Pray for your group members' needs: (see back for more space)

Challenge- Read C.S. Lewis The Great Divorce to see what can happen when we get too comfortable living outside the reality of Jesus.

"Habits of the Heart"

Noah Daniels

INTRODUCTION

Most of us think of the New Year as a time to make changes in our lives. The gym will be overflowing for a few weeks, then by mid-February the crowds will have thinned again. You might notice diet products go on sale this week too. We all have habits in our lives; some good, some not so good. Many of them go unnoticed by us because we simply repeat what we have done before. But what if some of those unnoticed habits are offending God? What if Jesus really wants to do something new in our lives? What will it take for us to break with our old expectations and practices and adopt the new?

Ice Breaker (Optional—8 min)

What do you do for the first 5 minutes you are awake in the morning?

STUDY QUESTIONS (45 MIN)

1. Habits: Seen and Unseen

Our habits can be good, bad or neutral.

Can you identify some of the good and bad habits you are aware of?

Psalm 139:23-24 NLT - 23 Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. 24 Point out anything in me that offends you, and lead me along the path of everlasting life.

Psalm 139 hints that there are things in our life we are not aware of that offend God. How do you feel about God pointing out and changing those things?

You probably have a pretty fixed pattern for your daily routine.

When you think of your typical day, what is the first point at which you interact with God?

Because we typically give no thought to our habits, our "good habits" like daily prayer, can slip from intentional to rote.

If you have a set prayer time and pattern, what is one way you might change it up so that you are more aware of God, and not allow yourself to simply repeat what you did yesterday? Is there a different time, place, order of prayer, or posture you might incorporate into your prayer time? What is one thing you can do differently that you feel would please God?

2. Offend the Mind, Reveal the Heart

Habits are an integral part of our faith. We operate based on what we love, value and hold dear. But that might not be what we think we love. God has a way of revealing what we really love by challenging what our logical mind might lead us to believe. For instance, when Naaman sought to be healed of leprosy, what had he expected?

2 Kings 5:11 NLT - 11 But Naaman became angry and stalked away. "I thought he would certainly come out to meet me!" he said. "I expected him to wave his hand over the leprosy and call on the name of the LORD his God and heal me!"

What offended Naaman about the way his healing came about?

Jesus didn't mind offending people to demonstrate what was truly important about being his disciple.

John 13:12-14 NLT - 12 After washing their feet, he put on his robe again and sat down and asked, "Do you understand what I was doing? 13 You call me 'Teacher' and 'Lord,' and you are right, because that's what I am. 14 And since I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you ought to wash each other's feet."

Jesus famously offended many in the following passage from the Gospel of John.

John 6:53, 58, 60-61, 66 NLT - 53 So Jesus said again, "I tell you the truth, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you cannot have eternal life within you. ... 58 I am the true bread that came down from heaven. Anyone who eats this bread will not die as your ancestors did (even though they ate the manna) but will live forever." ... 60 Many of his disciples said, "This is very hard to understand. How can anyone accept it?" 61 Jesus was aware that his disciples were complaining, so he said to them, "Does this offend you? ... 66 At this point many of his disciples turned away and deserted him."

Why do you think Jesus didn't offer a more acceptable explanation when He saw that many left Him because of this? What did this reveal about what they really found most important?

3. Not What I Expected

Those who don't believe in Jesus, and even some who do, find some of the teachings of Christianity offensive.

What are some teachings that you feel are most difficult for people to explain or accept about the Christian faith? How do you deal with your own unanswered questions of faith?

The book of John is designed to show us that Jesus was ushering in a New Creation. How do John 1:1& 14 introduce that concept?

John 1:1, 14 NLT - 1 In the beginning the Word already existed. The Word was with God, and the Word was God. ... 14 So the Word became human and made his home among us. He was full of unfailing love and faithfulness. And we have seen his glory, the glory of the Father's one and only Son.

The people rejected Jesus as Messiah because He wasn't what they were expecting.

Why had they come to Him according to John 6:15 and 26?

John 6:15, 26-27 NLT - 15 When Jesus saw that they were ready to force him to be their king, he slipped away into the hills by himself....26 Jesus replied, "I tell you the truth, you want to be with me because I fed you, not because you understood the miraculous signs. 27 But don't be so concerned about perishable things like food. Spend your energy seeking the eternal life that the Son of Man can give you. For God the Father has given me the seal of his approval."

What was it about the reality of Jesus that failed to meet the expectations they imagined for the Messiah? What were His disciples still seeking as He returned to heaven (Acts 1:6)?