Small Group Guide

The Hope We Have | Walk the Walk, Talk the Talk

BEFORE YOU BEGIN

Open your time together in prayer, asking the Holy Spirit to open your hearts to what God wants to speak to your group through this passage and discussion.

KEY PASSAGES

- John 13 -- Jesus commands his disciples to love one another as he has loved them, saying this love will be the defining mark of his followers
- John 15 -- Jesus describes himself as the vine and his followers as branches, teaching that apart from him, no fruit can be produced
- Galatians 5 -- Paul lists the fruit of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control
- Matthew 5 -- Jesus describes the character of kingdom citizens in the Beatitudes
- 1 Peter 3:15 -- Followers of Jesus are called to honour Christ as Lord, be ready to share the reason for their hope, and do so with gentleness and respect
- Romans 10 -- Paul explains that people cannot call on the name of Jesus without first hearing, and they cannot hear without someone sharing the good news

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SERMON RECAP

Pastor Milissa opened with a personal story about a moment in her early faith journey when her words about Jesus did not match the way she was living -- and a friend called her out on it. That honest moment became a launching point for the sermon's central theme: our actions speak louder than our words when it comes to representing Jesus.

She then shared findings from a landmark Canadian study on faith, revealing both an extraordinary opportunity and a sobering challenge. While 86% of Canadians are asking big life questions and 61% of non-Christians are open to *respectful conversations* about faith,

64% of Canadians view Christians as judgmental -- a stark contrast to the 76% who view Jesus himself as loving. The gap between how Canadians perceive Jesus and how they perceive his followers is the central problem the sermon addresses.

The solution, Pastor Milissa argued, is not a better evangelism strategy. It is abiding. When followers of Jesus remain connected to him -- the vine -- his fruit grows naturally in their lives. That fruit becomes their witness before they ever open their mouths. And from that place of integrity, they are prepared to share the hope they have with gentleness and respect.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Opening

1. Have you ever had a moment, like Pastor Milissa's bar story, where your words about Jesus and your actions were clearly out of step? What did that experience teach you?
2. Before hearing this sermon, how would you have described the reputation of Christians in Canada or in your own community? Does the study data surprise you, or does it confirm what you already sensed?

Going Deeper

3. The study found that 76% of Canadians view Jesus as loving, while 64% view Christians as judgmental. Why do you think people are able to separate Jesus from his followers? What does that tell us about Jesus, and what does it tell us about us?
4. Pastor Milissa said that John 13 is not primarily about how we love people outside the church -- it is about how we love one another inside the church. Why do you think Jesus starts there? How does the way Christians treat each other affect the witness of the church to the outside world?
5. In John 15, Jesus says that apart from him, we can do nothing. What does it actually look like in your daily life to remain connected to the vine? What pulls you away from that connection? How might you grow in this regard?
6. Pastor Milissa described the difference between “nominal” and “engaged faith”, and she asked whether Jesus would define our current level of engagement as truly remaining in his love. How would you honestly answer that question for yourself?

7. 1 Peter 3:15 says to share the hope we have with gentleness and respect. The Canadian study found that 61% of non-Christians are open to respectful conversations about faith. Why do you think the manner of the conversation matters so much? Can you think of a time when the tone of a faith conversation either opened or closed a door?

Personal Reflection

8. Pastor Milissa identified three types of people who might be in the room: “engaged Christians” who need boldness, “nominal Christians” who need to re-engage, and “non-Christians” who are exploring. Which of those descriptions resonates most honestly with where you are right now?
9. Romans 10:14 reminds us that people cannot hear without someone sharing the good news. When you think about the people in your life who do not yet know Jesus, what feels like the biggest barrier to having an honest, respectful conversation with them?
10. The sermon ended with the image of Pastor Milissa reconnecting with old friends at the front of a church in Kamloops, BC -- people she had once stumbled in front of spiritually, now walking faithfully with Jesus. What does that story stir in you about God's patience and his ability to redeem our mistakes?

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- The reputation gap between Jesus and his followers is real, but it is not insurmountable. Canadians have largely gotten Jesus right -- they see him as loving. Our call is to close the gap by actually looking like him.
- Abiding in Jesus is not an optional background activity. It is the source of everything. Fruit does not grow from effort alone; it grows from connection to the vine.
- Evangelism is not primarily a program or a technique. It begins with the transformation of our own lives and the integrity of our own character.
- Canada is in an unusual moment of spiritual openness. The window is real, but windows do not stay open indefinitely.
- We are each sent. Sharing the hope we have is not reserved for pastors or Christian leaders. Every follower of Jesus has relationships and influence that no one else has.
- Our job is to remain in Jesus, love well, and share Jesus with gentleness and respect. The results belong to him.

PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS

This Week, Choose One

1. **Audit the gap.** Take an honest look at one area of your life where your walk and your talk are not aligned. Bring it to Jesus in prayer and ask him to help you close that gap.
2. **Pray by name.** Write down the names of two or three people in your life who do not yet know Jesus. Commit to praying for them specifically this week, asking God to show you where he is already at work in their lives.
3. **Deepen your abiding.** Identify one concrete practice -- daily prayer, Scripture reading, journaling, or silence -- that you will add or return to this week as a way of remaining in Jesus.
4. **Have the conversation.** If there is someone in your life who has been asking big questions, take a step toward a respectful, honest conversation. You do not need to have all the answers. Start by simply listening.
5. **Invite someone.** Next week's sermon will focus practically on how to share the good news in conversation. Bring someone with you who might benefit from hearing it.

CLOSING PRAYER

Close your time by praying together using the categories below. You may pray silently or out loud as a group.

- **Confession** -- Where have we been judgmental, divisive, or inconsistent in our walk with Jesus?
- **Surrender** -- Ask the Holy Spirit to graft you more firmly onto the vine.
- **Intercession** -- Pray by name for people in your lives who are asking big questions.
- **Boldness** -- Ask for the courage to share the hope you have with gentleness and respect.