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COMMUNITY GROUPS

RIVERS CROSSING CHURCH
Community Group Discussion Guide
April 8-9, 2023
Easter at Rivers Crossing
Pastor Paul Taylor

GETTING TO KNOW YOU

1. Icebreaker Questions | Happy Easter!
 - What is your favorite Easter candy?
 - What Easter traditions have you established, whether individually or as a family?
 - Many of our favorite books and movies have sacrifice as their core theme (ex: Lord of the Rings). Do you have a favorite book or movie that fits this theme?
2. Easter Invitation Follow Up | Did anyone you invited join you for Easter services at Rivers Crossing? If so, what was that experience like? Did you get an opportunity to talk with them following the Easter service?

3. The Apostle Paul wrote that if Jesus was not raised from the dead, “then your faith is useless and you are still guilty of your sins” (1 Corinthians 15:17). Those are strong words! Read 1 Corinthians 15:12-19 and discuss the corresponding questions.

1 Corinthians 15:12-19 (NLT) – ¹²...since we preach that Christ rose from the dead, why are some of you saying there will be no resurrection of the dead? ¹³For if there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ has not been raised either. ¹⁴And if Christ has not been raised, then all our preaching is useless, and your faith is useless. ¹⁵And we apostles would all be lying about God—for we have said that God raised Christ from the grave. But that can't be true if there is no resurrection of the dead. ¹⁶And if there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ has not been raised. ¹⁷And if Christ has not been raised, then your faith is useless and you are still guilty of your sins. ¹⁸In that case, all who have died believing in Christ are lost! ¹⁹And if our hope in Christ is only for this life, we are more to be pitied than anyone in the world.

- a) Why is the resurrection of Jesus Christ so critical to the Christian faith?
- b) How often do you take time to reflect on Jesus' sacrifice that He made on our behalf on the cross? What part of Jesus' sacrifice resonates with you the most?
- c) Jesus' crucifixion on the cross was a gruesome death. What can Jesus' death on the cross teach us about the nature of sin and the depth of God's love for us?

DIVING DEEPER

4. When explaining the cross during his Easter sermon, Pastor Paul emphasized the *justice* of God and the extraordinary *sacrifice* of Jesus Christ. Read Romans 3:21-28 together and discuss the corresponding questions.

Romans 3:21-28 (NLT) – ²¹But now God has shown us a way to be made right with him without keeping the requirements of the law, as was promised in the writings of Moses and the prophets long ago. ²²We are made right with God by placing our faith in Jesus Christ. And this is true for everyone who believes, no matter who we are. ²³For everyone has sinned; we all fall short of God's glorious standard. ²⁴Yet God, in his grace, freely makes us right in his sight. He did this through Christ Jesus when he freed us from the

penalty for our sins. ²⁵For God presented Jesus as the sacrifice for sin. People are made right with God when they believe that Jesus sacrificed his life, shedding his blood. This sacrifice shows that God was being fair when he held back and did not punish those who sinned in times past, ²⁶for he was looking ahead and including them in what he would do in this present time. God did this to demonstrate his righteousness, for he himself is fair and just, and he makes sinners right in his sight when they believe in Jesus. ²⁷Can we boast, then, that we have done anything to be accepted by God? No, because our acquittal is not based on obeying the law. It is based on faith. ²⁸So we are made right with God through faith and not by obeying the law.

a) Where do you see both of these elements of the cross in this passage?

b) How are or can we be made right with God? Is it based on ourselves and what we can do? Or is it based on God and what He's done for us? Support your answer.

5. In the New Testament, those who have placed their faith in Jesus are described as being in a union with Jesus – both in His death and resurrection (i.e., new life). Read several passages that describe this union and discuss the corresponding questions.

Romans 6:5-12 (NLT) – ⁵Since we have been united with him in his death, we will also be raised to life as he was. ⁶We know that our old sinful selves were crucified with Christ so that sin might lose its power in our lives. We are no longer slaves to sin. ⁷For when we died with Christ we were set free from the power of sin. ⁸And since we died with Christ, we know we will also live with him. ⁹We are sure of this because Christ was raised from the dead, and he will never die again. Death no longer has any power over him. ¹⁰When he died, he died once to break the power of sin. But now that he lives, he lives for the glory of God. ¹¹So you also should consider yourselves to be dead to the power of sin and alive to God through Christ Jesus. ¹²Do not let sin control the way you live; do not give in to sinful desires.

Philippians 3:8-12 (NIV) – ⁸What is more, I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them garbage, that I may gain Christ ⁹and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God on the basis of faith. ¹⁰I want to know Christ—yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, ¹¹and so, somehow, attaining to the resurrection from the dead. ¹²Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already arrived at my goal, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me.

a) What stands out to you about our union with Jesus Christ from these passages? What do you think it means to “know the power of Christ’s resurrection and participation in his sufferings? (Philippians 3:10)

b) In responding to the question – How does Easter change us? – Pastor John Piper identified five effects of union with the risen Christ¹:

1. <https://www.desiringgod.org/interviews/how-does-easter-change-us>

1) We share in Christ's indestructible life and have new security and hope.

John 11:25 (NLT) – Jesus told her, “I am the resurrection and the life. Anyone who believes in me will live, even after dying.

1 Peter 1:3 (NIV) – Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,

2) We receive a new identity.

Colossians 3:3-4 (NIV) – ³For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. ⁴When Christ, who is your life, appears...you also will appear with him in glory.

3) We experience unceasing help, especially from the Holy Spirit.

John 14:16-18 (NIV) – ¹⁶And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever— ¹⁷the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him...But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you. ¹⁸I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you.

4) We acquire power to live righteously.

Romans 6:13 (NIV) – Do not offer any part of yourself to sin as an instrument of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer every part of yourself to him as an instrument of righteousness.

5) We can suffer well with our Savior (Philippians 3:10; see above)

Which of these effects resonate with you the most about how Jesus changed your life? Which of these can you “press on to take hold of” more?

TAKING IT HOME

6. Group Prayer Exercise | Read Isaiah 53:3-10 together. As you close out group, take time to express gratitude for Jesus' sacrifice on the cross and for all Easter means for those of us who trust in Jesus as our Lord and Savior. The extraordinary life isn't possible unless Jesus Christ resurrected from the grave. Pray too for those who, on Easter Weekend, committed their lives to Jesus.

You're also encouraged to share personal prayer requests and pray for one another.

Isaiah 53:3-10 (ESV) – ³He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief; and as one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not. ⁴Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. ⁵But he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed. ⁶All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—every one—to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all. ⁷He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he opened not his mouth. ⁸By oppression and judgment he was taken away; and as for his generation, who considered that he was cut off out of the land of the living, stricken for the transgression of my people? ⁹And they made his grave with the wicked and with a rich man in his death, although he had done no violence, and there was no deceit in his mouth. ¹⁰Yet it was the will of the Lord to crush him; he has put him to grief; when his soul makes an offering for guilt, he shall see his offspring; he shall prolong his days; the will of the Lord shall prosper in his hand.

PRAYER REQUESTS

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RIVERS CROSSING - THINGS TO KNOW

1. Man Day | Get ready for a day of fun as Rivers Crossing hosts Man Day: A one-day men's event with team-based challenges, awesome prizes, food, and community! Man Day is Saturday April 29th from 9am - 1:30pm at YMCA Camp Kern. Learn more and register at <https://riverscrossing.churchcenter.com/registrations/events/1660462>.
2. Preteen Extreme | Who is ready to Race to the Extraordinary this summer at Preteen Extreme? Sign your preteen up now for an experience they'll remember for a lifetime at Preteen Extreme on Saturday, June 17th at Camp Kern. They will conquer an obstacle course, seek out the cross, work together to canoe, aim at archery, grow in community with their small group, and much more! Learn more and register at <https://riverscrossing.churchcenter.com/registrations/events/1639769>
3. New Community Group Leaders | Interested in leading your own Community Group or have anyone you believe would make a great Community Group leader? If yes, we'd love the opportunity to connect with you or them and share more about our vision for groups at Rivers Crossing. We're always looking to create more space for people to experience and grow in the extraordinary life together!
New Group Leader Interest Form:
<https://riverscrossing.churchcenter.com/people/forms/414625>.
4. 2023 RC Students Summer Camp | Next summer (June 19-24, 2023), RC Students is going to Eagle Sky of the Ozarks for camp! We truly believe that Summer Camp is one of the best ways for your Junior High or High School student to get connected in RC Students. They'll build lasting bonds with other students and their leaders that will continue throughout the year. Most importantly, your student will have a week to focus on connecting with Jesus in a new way. Learn more and register below: <https://riverscrossing.churchcenter.com/registrations/events/1450605>