July 5, 2020

To Know Jesus: Part 1

RENEWED Series

Philippians 3:1-21

Pastor Jeff Petersen

Before I get started this morning, I just need your help with one little thing. You've all seen doorbell cams, or people on their cell phones capturing images of shady characters doing sketchy things. But I have to tell you, there's been some sketchy things happening around here. But we've caught an image of a shady character, and I need your help. I'm just wondering if anybody here might know this person? So, if we put up that picture of this man, does anybody know that shady character? Raise your hand if you do here in the auditorium. Anybody who knows, put your hand up really high. I want to see. Man, this is the kind of message when I wish we could all be together, because if you're watching it at home, I'll bet almost everybody at home is also raising their hand saying, "Yeah, I know that guy." Well, he's not a shady character, and thankfully, there isn't any sketchy things that have been going on. But I share that as an illustration, because every one of us would say that we know Bryan Clark…or do we?

You know, it's easy to be a part of a church in which someone stands up in front of us and we know who they are. And no question, there are so many people who know of Bryan Clark. It's a good thing he's not a shady character because he couldn't get away with anything, wherever he goes in Lincoln. But there are also so many of us who come here week after week and year after year, and we would unequivocally say we know Bryan because he stands up here week in and week out, and he shares with us, not only the Word of God, he shares his heart and his life as well. There's no question many know of Bryan. There's no question that many of us know so much about Bryan. But you know, it's interesting. I'll bet there are many, many people who've been a part of this church for many years who have never actually spent even one hour alone, just one-on-one with Bryan. Now that's okay, in that context, and in the context of this large church, but what if it's the same in our relationship with Jesus?

We're in the middle of a new series in which the directional team is seeking to unpack a renewed vision for Lincoln Berean. Now, I want to say that our mission is not changing. The mission of Lincoln Berean Church is: "To glorify God by seeking to present every person complete in Christ." That doesn't change. But as a directional team, we felt it would be good to have a new vision statement that gives us a renewed focus on how that personally ought to impact each of our lives and stories. So here it is. Our vision statement is: "Coming together to know Jesus, become more like Him, and help others to do the same." Over the last two weeks Josh and then Ryan unpacked the importance of *coming together*. This morning and next week we now turn to talking about one of those three primary reasons of why we come together, and that is *to know Jesus.* And it brings us back to our illustration from Bryan. Because the reality is that all around us are people who know of Jesus. And so many of us who come here week after week or watch online, have been a part of this church for year after year after year. And without a doubt, we know so much about Jesus. I'm so glad to be a part of a church where we learn about Him every single week. But the question I want to ask us this morning is, "Do we really, personally, know Him, and are we in a process of growing closer to Him in personal relationship?

Let's talk about that as we look at Philippians, Chapter 3. If you have a Bible with you this morning, turn with me to the book of Philippians, and we're going to start right into chapter 3. Philippians is an extraordinary book, and part of what makes it extraordinary is the context and the theme. You see,

Paul wrote Philippians while he was literally in a Roman prison. So, what would your perspective be if you were sitting in prison writing a letter to a church that you loved? Well, the theme of the book of Philippians is *joy*. That's what makes it truly extraordinary. And in chapter one, Paul talks about the joy of serving Christ. In chapter two, his focus shifts to the joy of being like Christ. This morning, we want to focus on chapter three in which he talks about the joy of *knowing Christ*. Philippians chapter 3 verse 1:

> **Finally, my brethren, rejoice in the Lord. To write the same things *again* is no trouble to me, and it is a safeguard for you. Beware of the dogs, beware of the evil workers, beware of the false circumcision; for we are the *true* circumcision, who worship in the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh,**
>
> (*NASB, Philippians 3:1-3)

Paul is warning this church that he loves, about the Judaizers. This was the group of people who were insistent on the practices of circumcision and adhering to Judaism. And Paul is warning them and reminding the Philippians that God in Christ has done something completely new. That because of the death, the burial and the resurrection of Jesus, we no longer are limited to a circumcision of the body, but there actually can be a circumcision of the heart, where God gives us a new heart, where the Spirit of God literally comes to indwell us, and to live out the life of Christ through us. And as a result, we are able, in the power of the Spirit, to worship—to truly worship—and to bring glory to God. Paul wants them and us to remember one very important thing this morning, and that is to **put no confidence in the flesh**. And Paul goes on to share a bit of his own story just to illustrate why that matters. He says in verse 4:

> **…although I myself might have confidence even in the flesh. If anyone else has a mind to put confidence in the flesh, I far more: circumcised the eighth day, of the nation of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the Law, a Pharisee; as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to the righteousness which is in the Law, found blameless.** (Vs. 4-6)

Paul wants to make it clear to the church at Philippi that if anyone could put confidence in the flesh, it's him, because he has an impeccable *religious* resume. He has spent his entire life, up to that point, building a religious resume of being instructed and being zealous for the things of God. But a funny thing happens on the road to Damascus. Paul was literally going to Damascus with authority from the very council that had put Jesus to death, and he was going with authority to persecute the church. And there on the road to Damascus, he encountered Jesus. And when Jesus came to him, Jesus manifested Himself in His glory, and the light was so bright that it literally blinded Paul. He couldn't see a thing. And then Jesus called out to him, using his old name. Jesus said, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?" And have you ever really thought of the significance of Paul's response…the first words that he ever spoke to Jesus? Paul says, "Who are you, Lord?" This man with an impeccable religious resume, this man who had given his entire life to be zealous for God, didn't really know God at all. In the first time that he actually comes into a personal encounter with God, his first words are, "Who are you?"

You know, it's really possible to know about God and not know God. It's possible to spend our lives building a religious resume having confidence in the flesh, but still not know Him in a real and personal way. You know, when we talk about this idea of confidence in the flesh, we don't typically think in our context today. "Well, I'm trusting in my works in order to earn salvation." Most of us in this context, understand that we can do nothing in and of ourselves to earn our salvation. The problem sometimes comes in our sanctification. So, we trust Jesus on Sunday and for salvation, but what

about the rest of the time? The issue of having *confidence in the flesh* essentially means what you are trusting in for life. Essentially, what is playing the role of God for you? Are you trusting in Jesus, or are you trusting in yourself? Is your confidence rooted and grounded in yourself and your human effort, or is it actually rooted and grounded in Christ and what He can and will do through you when your confidence is in Him?

You know, I was a lot like Paul as a young man. I was seeking to build a resume. Mine was not a religious resume, but it was still a means of me trying to have the confidence in myself that came from human effort. And I was a self-confident, arrogant, young man. I believed that by building a resume of success, I could find a life. I had given myself fully to it and had done pretty well. By the time I graduated from college, I was personally known by and interacted regularly with, the governor of our state and many of the leaders of our state. I had personally had lunches or dinners with ambassadors to the United States from several different foreign countries. I had had box seats at the Husker games. I'd even been named an admiral in the Great Navy of the State of Nebraska. I had built a resume, and on the outside, through my human efforts, everything looked really good. But God, in His mercy and grace, was beginning to show me that if my foundation was built on the flesh—on human effort—it was a faulty foundation. And while everything looked good on the outside, on the inside, things were beginning to crumble. This was until I came to understand something that Paul too came to discover, and that he tells about beginning in verse 7:

> **But whatever things were gain to me, those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ. More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish so that I may gain Christ, and may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from *the* Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith,** (Vs. 7-9)

What a statement that Paul makes! He says that even though he had this impeccable, religious resume, even though he had done all of these things, even though no one had the basis of having confidence in the flesh like him, he says, *"Whatever I had, I count it loss in comparison to Jesus."* Not that those things were all bad. We can do many, many good things in the flesh. But Paul is making a statement of contrast. He says, "No matter the good that you do, whatever that resume looks like, it is so small compared to the greatness of knowing Christ—that it actually appears as a loss." In fact, he would say, "He counts **all things to be a loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus, our Lord."** What a statement…what a statement! Knowing Jesus is of such surpassing greatness, that anything else we could have, anything else that we could do, might as well be a pile of trash in comparison.

So, here's my question. "Do you believe that?" Now I believe that most of us here really believe in the great value of Jesus. I don't think we're just pretending when we come together to sing like we just did and to worship on a Sunday morning. We believe that our God is a great God, and we love to come together to sing His praises. And we believe that only He can save us from our sin. But I guess the question I'm asking is, "Is that the operating system of our lives? Or is there a difference between what we sing and say about salvation on Sunday, and how we actually live to try to find life on Tuesday?" Paul says that *Jesus is of surpassing value compared to all things,* no matter whatever we could have, or whatever we could do.

So, let's take it a step further, and let me dare to ask a question that we don't dare to ask in church much. So, "What's so great about Jesus?" Honestly, I think many of us may actually wonder that. I mean, we understand we're thankful for what He did on the cross. We're thankful for the ticket to

heaven that He gave as He saved us…washed us…redeemed us. But as we go through our lives day in and day out, I think some of us genuinely wonder what's so great about Jesus…about knowing Jesus?

Let me put it to you this way. How much would you want a relationship with a person who knew you completely? I mean, not only everything that you ever did, or had done, or ever will do, but even your very thoughts—every thought that you've ever had? He knew all of them—the good, the bad, and the ugly—but never even for one moment, did He contemplate leaving you or forsaking you? Instead: Someone who would actually love you perfectly, and I mean not even one time misunderstanding you, or harming you, or turning against you? Someone who is the wisest person who has ever lived, who would actually be your personal counselor to help you navigate through all the difficulties and the struggles of life? Someone who is actually the epitome of both strength and gentleness—never weak, never unable, never incapable, never overwhelmed, and yet never cruel, never overly demanding, never unsafe—rather the most kind and patient person in the entire world—and who actually possessed the power to change any circumstance? Loves you so much that He actually, typically, would use that power and those difficult circumstances instead to change you, helping you to actually become a different kind of person—the kind of person who is becoming more and more like Him? If you could actually have a relationship with someone like that, how much would you want it?

That is Jesus! That is what Paul is talking about. That is the surpassing value of Christ. That is **the surpassing value of knowing Christ,** which makes everything else we could ever have, want, or do, seem like a pile of trash in comparison. That's what Paul is talking about. It's what Jesus is offering, what He desires for each one of us.

How? How do we have that kind of relationship with Christ? Well, it starts with the first of the practices I would encourage us to think about this morning, to help us grow closer to Christ. And that is *allowing God to strip us of self—to take away our self-confidence*—and to begin to replace it with Christ-confidence—to literally rebuild the entire foundation of our life on something, on some One that is solid and trustworthy—a far better God than us. If we will but choose to live by our own human effort, trying to make our life happen in our own strength—in essence, being our own god—we will never be able to walk in nearness to Jesus, because confidence in the flesh and trusting in self is antithetical to confidence in Christ and trusting in Him. If you want to grow closer in your relationship with Christ, you must allow Him to begin to strip away the self-confidence, and give you a new confidence, found only in Him.

The second thing that we must do, the second practice that we can cultivate to grow closer to Christ, is that we *must partner well with Him as He forges intimacy with us.* You know, when I was a younger believer, Philippians 3:10 was kind of frustrating for me, because it was *almost* the perfect verse. You know what I mean? You know how, when you're a young Christian, you're looking for those perfect verses. You kind of search through your Bible, and you want to find this one verse so you can pull it out of context and grab it and use it to, to pump you up on a regular basis. Right? Well, I can remember doing this, looking for verses that talked about the greatness of knowing Christ and oh, man, what better than Philippians 3:10? You know, you start out in verse seven, and it's almost like this thing is building as a crescendo as Paul talks about this **surpassing greatness of knowing Christ**, as he talks about **all things being counted as lost**, as he talks about **being in Christ**. And then he gets to verse 10. And he says: "*I want to know Christ and the power of His resurrection*." And oh, why can't there be a period right there? Or even an exclamation point? It would have been a perfect verse. But it's not what it says,

…that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death; in order that I may attain to the resurrection from the dead. (Vs. 10-11)

Why **suffering**s? Why the talk of suffering? Even in the context of knowing Christ, I think there are two things that we have to realize. First of all, that the cycle of what it means to be a Christian is identification with the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. That's what we symbolize in baptism. When you go under the water and you come back out, that's what we remember in the elements of communion. But it's not just for salvation. It's also true in our growth, in our transformation.

In Luke 9:23, we're told that, "*We are to daily take up our cross,"* which means identifying with the death of Christ, which means dying to self. If we want to be in charge of our life, if we want to be our own God, if we want to trust in us, it is impossible for us to experience intimacy with Christ. We must be willing to be stripped of self, and we must be willing to partner well with God as He forges intimacy. And the hard truth that He's been teaching me now for decades, is that the deepest intimacy is often forged in the hardest fire.

You know, I have friends who went through a multi-year medical struggle. It was devastating for them. And this friend, as I talked to him about that, and all of the difficult diseases he faced with this health concern that was so out of his control, he said, "You know, there's been one real blessing in all of this." I said, "What's that?" He said, "My wife and I are closer than we have ever been in our lives." Why? Because intimacy was forged in that fire. As they came together and walked through that trial, they began to experience something completely different. The same can be true in our relationship with Christ.

As a naive, young Christian, I actually believed that God would spare me from suffering. I thought if I sought Him enough, and I trusted Him enough, man, he was gonna make my life great! I just had the wrong definition of great. I thought great meant pain free and problem free. But guess what? It hasn't happened. At least, not yet. The truth is we all struggle. We all face difficulty; we all suffer…Christian, non-Christian, everyone. We live in a broken, hurting, fallen world. God does not promise that He will rescue us from every bit of pain and suffering. He promises that He will walk with us in all of it.

One of the ways that I cultivate intimacy in my relationship with Christ is through the practice of journaling—writing in my journal. In my latest iteration I typed in my journal, there are over a thousand pages, and it is—much of it—God and I having it out about the difficulties, the struggles and the challenges of life. Most of the time God didn't change those circumstances. But over time, something did happen through that process. I grew closer and closer and closer to Him, and I can honestly tell you something that I wouldn't have been able to tell you decades ago. I can stand up here and tell you in all honesty that there is nothing and there is no one in all of this world that I want more than Jesus. I'm so thankful for what He's doing in calling me to a love relationship with Himself.

Maybe you're in a different place. Maybe you're still trusting in yourself. Maybe you're looking to a whole lot of other things to give you life. Maybe you've done some things that make you feel like it would be really impossible to have the kind of relationship with Jesus that I described earlier. Can I be really clear? There is not a single person in this room, there is not a single person watching this online, who is too late to have the kind of a relationship with Christ that we talked about. There's not a single person who is disqualified from the opportunity to have that kind of relationship with our

Savior. I don't care what you've done. But some of you will not allow the past to be in the past. Instead, you continue to hold it and cause it to keep you from moving toward Christ. And that's why I'm so thankful that Paul gives us the next practice that we can cultivate in order to grow closer to Christ. Beginning in verse 12, he says:

> **Not that I have already obtained *it* or have already become perfect, but I press on so that I may lay hold of that for which also I was laid hold of by Christ Jesus. Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of *it* yet; but one thing I do: forgetting what *lies* behind and reaching forward to what *lies* ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.** (Vs.12-14)

I don't know where you've been. I don't know what you've done. Jesus does, and He paid for it on the cross, and that's why this identification with His death and His burial and His resurrection is so important for all of us. And it's such an important ongoing process for all of us to take those things in us that we know are so displeasing to God, to take them to the cross, to appropriate His forgiveness, and then to once again experience the power of His resurrection being lived in and through us as we seek Him**, forgetting what lies behind and straining toward what lies ahead.**

We need to keep a forward orientation—moving toward Jesus. That's the third practice we can cultivate to grow closer to Him: *Keep a forward orientation…moving toward Jesus.* None of us can change yesterday, but all of us have a decision about today, and what we decide about today will most definitely affect tomorrow. Will we keep a forward orientation no matter what, continuing to come back to Him, to move toward Him? If we will, we'll grow closer to Christ. There are just a couple more that he shares with us that I'll hit on quickly. Verse 15:

> **Let us therefore, as many as are perfect, have this attitude; and if in anything you have a different attitude, God will reveal that also to you; however, let us keep living by that same *standard* to which we have attained. Brethren, join in following my example, and observe those who walk according to the pattern you have in us. For many, of whom I often told you, and now tell you even weeping, *that they are* enemies of the cross of Christ, whose end is destruction, whose god is *their* appetite, and *whose* glory is in their shame, who set their minds on earthly things.** (Vs. 15-19)

Who do you follow? In this day and age of social media, that's probably a good literal question to ask. Who on social media do you follow? But I mean it far more broadly. Who do you listen to? Who influences you? Who is setting the agenda for your mind? Who is setting the context for your hearts? Whoever you are listening to, whoever you are following, will shape your decisions. They'll shape your actions. They'll shape your directions, and we must realize, as Paul is telling us, that there are many who live as **enemies of the cross of Christ.** This is a fallen and broken world, and many are not living to grow closer to Christ. In fact, it is exactly the opposite. Many are not making God their appetites, which means whatever I lust for, whatever I hunger for, whatever I want, that is what I will do. Whatever appetite I have, whatever gratification I desire, I will live for that. Doing so keeps us from being intimate with Christ. We live in a day and age where many are literally glorying in things that ought to be a source of shame. That's how broken our world is. And the reason for all of those things is that many are living with their mind set on what? On earthly things. So, who are you following? Are you listening to and being shaped by those whose minds are set on earthly things? Well, what is it Paul said? He says, "*Follow my example*." He literally told the church at Philippi, *"Look at my life and follow it."*

Paul's not here with us right now, but I'll tell you what. There are people right here among us, who know Jesus, who love Him, who know Him intimately, who seek Him continually, and who experience something very different. Even in the midst of this broken and fallen world, follow them; find them. *Find someone who truly knows Jesus and follow their example*. That's the fourth practice that we can cultivate to grow closer to Christ. And the fifth comes right on the heels in verse 20:

> **For our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ; who will transform the body of our humble state into conformity with the body of His glory, by the exertion of the power that He has even to subject all things to Himself.** (Vs. 20-21)

A lot of words, but great promises! See, we're in Christ; *we're citizens of heaven*. And Jesus literally promises that He will transform us from lowliness into **His glory**. And He literally promises that He will bring all things in this fallen and broken world *under subjection to Himself*. He will make all things new. He will make all things right in His way—not ours—in His time—according to His plan. Our part is to cultivate certain hope that is rooted only in the truth of Christ.

You know, my four sons are all men now. I've been talking to one of them this year; he's been going through some difficult things. He's faced a number of circumstances that have been really personally hard for him. And on a number of occasions, I haven't had answers. He's asked me, "Well, why is God allowing this?" Or, "What's happening?" I don't know the answer. But I have been able to look at him, look him in the eye and say, "I do unequivocally know two things: and that is because you are in Christ, your future is certain, and your future is glorious. Those are the promises of God."

And therefore, if we want to grow closer to Christ, we must *cultivate the certain hope, the only true hope which is found in Jesus,* in the God of the Bible, what He tells us about His plan for us and His plan for the world. There are all kinds of people who know of Jesus. Many, many, many people in this wonderful church who know so much about Jesus. Is that enough for you? Or do you want to know Christ? Not just on a Sunday to proclaim His goodness, but on a Tuesday, to trust not in yourself and your ability to make life, but to trust in Him and His ability to give life, hope, peace and joy, even in the midst of a fallen and broken world.

As we walk through Paul's passage, I find five practices that can help us grow closer with Christ:

Number 1: Allow God to strip you of self and your self-confidence and build your confidence on Him and Him alone.
Number 2: Partner with God, forging intimacy with Him, even when it's through the fire.
Number 3: Keep a forward orientation. Keep moving toward Jesus.
Number 4: Follow the example of someone who truly knows Him, and
Number 5: Cultivate the only true and certain hope which is found in Christ.

I don't know if I've talked to anybody of late who hasn't said that this has been a hard year. It's been difficult. It's difficult for all of us, and it touches all of us in different ways. But we are in the midst of difficult circumstances in our world. Whether from a big picture, it's from disease or division, it's painful. It's difficult. That doesn't even count the things that are just going on in your own heart, your own family, your own little world.

I have often thought over the past few months, about Psalm 73. In Psalm 73, the psalmist is extremely discouraged because he is looking at the world and he is looking at life and he's saying, "God, it doesn't make sense, and it seems that You aren't even here. Where are You, God? Why are You allowing the world to be like this?" It feels as though he's lived his life in vain. The righteous seem

to suffer while the wicked seem to flourish and prosper. Everything seems confused and upside down, and he's literally on the verge of completely throwing away his faith. And then by the grace of God, he enters into the presence of God. And when he sees God, it changes everything. He sees who God is, and he sees the truth of what God has planned, and his perspective is flipped completely upside down.

Whether or not we walk in nearness to Christ will completely change our lives. Our perspective, our hope, our joy won't be determined by whatever happens out there. It will be determined by how much we seek Him right in here. The psalmist at the end of Psalm 73 has such a perspective change that by verses 25 and 26 he boldly says this, as recorded in the NIV:

> **Whom have I in heaven but you?**
> **And earth has nothing I desire besides you.**
> **My flesh and my heart may fail,**
> **but God is the strength of my heart**
> **and my portion forever.**

May those words also be true for each of us.

> *Jesus thank You, that You are truly good. And thank You, God, that You desire relationship with us. We're not here week in and week out just to know about you, Lord. We want to be a people who are coming to know You more intimately, more deeply. Oh, God, teach each one of us what steps we need to take to cultivate a closer relationship with Christ, for Your glory and our good. In Jesus' name, Amen.*

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RENEWED // WEEK 3

Online Connect Groups Questions

Know Jesus: Part 1 // Philippians 3:1-21 // July 5, 2020

Introduction

Welcome to the third week of RENEWED: a series outlining our vision to **come together to know Jesus, be more like Him and help others do the same**.

On Sunday, Jeff began to unpack what it means to move from knowing some things about Jesus to truly knowing Him in a personal way. *As you're getting better acquainted in your group, consider how this group experience is having an impact on the rest of your life. You might begin to notice some measurable ways you see your relationship with Jesus deepening.*

Getting to Know Each Other *(Suggested time: 30 min)*

Begin your group time by learning more about each other. Open up and have some fun!

1) Share one thing you love to do that you get to do nearly every day.

2) What's your favorite local restaurant and the meal you most enjoy eating there?

3) What are moments or experiences that helped you feel close to God in the past week? When have you felt distant from Him?

Getting Started

Begin to transition into group discussion.

1) Hosts can pray to open the group or ask someone else to lead out *(pro tip: ask them ahead of time)*. Here are a few potential prayer items:
    a. For the Spirit of God to lead you in truth
    b. For openness to what you're learning together
    c. For friendships to deepen and grow
2) Invite someone else (or a couple of people) to read Philippians 3:1-21 to the group.

Study Questions *(Suggested time: 40 min)*

Please complete these questions before your group meets.

1) In verses 1-6, Paul doesn't mince words as he warns and encourages these believers in Philippi. This strong language shows his passion for knowing Jesus as a person, not just following a religion or a cause.

    a. Circle the status that best describes how closely you relate to Jesus today:

    Distant Observing Uncertain Friendly Close Friend

    b. Are you satisfied in your relationship with Jesus or is something missing? Explain.

2) In Philippians 3:7-8, Paul reflects on how he moved from knowing things about Jesus to truly having a relationship with the *risen* Lord. Jeff described this as a "stripping of self" in order to become more like Jesus.

    a. Think of an overwhelming challenge you've faced that left you at the end of your own resources. Whether you asked for help or not, what did you receive from God during that time?

    b. What kinds of things did God seem to be holding back from you?

    c. How did that impact your relationship with Jesus?

3) Read 1 Peter 1: 3-9, paying special attention to the way our faith is tested.

    a. In your own words, write the correlation you see between the suffering we endure and the closeness it produces in our relationship with Jesus.

b. If you're willing, share some of the ways suffering has been a benefit in your life.

4) In Philippians 3:12-15, Paul highlights action — both God's action through Jesus and his own action of pressing on — then calls us to follow his example. This action of living in persistent hope is certainly challenged in our culture, but we're not in this alone!

   a. What are one or two steps you can take this week to help you choose hope when you're tempted to despair? *(bonus points: keep it simple and practical)*

   b. This week, make time to check in and encourage each other. Next time, plan to report back on how your steps spurred your relationship with Jesus and each other. *Press on, friends!*

Prayer *(Suggested time: 10 min)*

Take a few moments to prepare a prayer request. What did the discussion cause you to notice about your own relationship with Jesus?

A significant part of "coming together" is being open and honest with our lives. Sitting in a group of people for prayer may be new or it may be familiar to you. Whether or not you choose to verbalize your prayer, everyone is a participant in sharing this time before God together.