



Smyrna: The Suffering Church

Week 3 | September 24, 2023
Community Group Discussion Guide

ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Citizens Institute

Applications due October 1

Discipleship happens within the local church. We believe that no one should have to go outside of the local church to receive a theological education. In fact, for most people, going back to school or seminary just simply isn't an option.

The Citizens Institute exists to train and equip members in theology, doctrine, and practice to follow Jesus and lead in the local church.

The Citizens Institute offers three Core Modules to help our people internalize their faith and connect it practically to everyday life. Our Core Modules are for everyone, and we hope all Citizens members will go through them at some point.

This Spring we are kicking off the Institute with our first Core Module - Christian Practice. Spend 11 weeks from January - April, 2024 learning the ins and outs of how to follow Jesus in your everyday life.

[MORE INFO + REGISTRATION](#)

Family Vacation

November 10-12, Black Mountain, NC

Registration for this year's Family Vacation is now open! We value the chance to get away, retreat, rest, and spend time together as a church family, and we'd love for you to join us this year! On November 10-12, we are heading to the YMCA Blue Ridge Assembly in Black Mountain, NC. We will be staying in two cabins on the property, and will have a main meeting area for family style meals and sessions.

Family vacation is open to all Citizens Church members, members-in-progress (have taken membership class), and children of current members. The cost of the trip is \$100/adult and \$25/child. Scholarships are available if needed, but please talk to Dan about that sooner rather than later.

If you're planning to attend, please register ASAP. The earlier you register, the easier it is for us to plan for the weekend. You can register and get more details by clicking the graphic below.

[MORE INFO + REGISTRATION](#)

REVIEW THE MISSION

Take some time to review who various people are building relationships with and seeking to share the gospel with.

Pray for these individuals - that God would open their eyes to the good news of the gospel.

PRAYER + SCRIPTURE

Open with a brief word of prayer: “God, we thank you for this time together. We open our hearts to how you might want to meet with us. Allow us to hear your voice and experience your work among us. Come Holy Spirit.”

1-2 minutes of silent reflection.

Read *Revelation 2:8-11*

8 “And to the angel of the church in Smyrna write: ‘The words of the first and the last, who died and came to life.’⁹ “I know your tribulation and your poverty (but you are rich) and the slander of those who say that they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan. 10 Do not fear what you are about to suffer. Behold, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and for ten days you will have tribulation. Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life. 11 He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. The one who conquers will not be hurt by the second death.’

1-2 minutes of silent reflection.

Close with this short prayer: “. Lord, we pray that you would move and protect our brothers and sisters in Christ who are giving testimony of you while facing prosecution. We also pray that the faith of those throughout church history who have stood strong in the faith would be an example to us in Scripture to encourage us to do the same. Amen.

As you reflect on *Revelation 2:8-11*, what is the Holy Spirit showing or teaching you?

SERMON DISCUSSION

THE SUFFERING CHURCH

As we read in Revelation, the church in Smyrna had faced a lot of suffering because of their faith. Their neighbors and their government were ostracizing them, barring them from the markets and roles within the city, slandering them, and even torturing them because they would not forsake the Lord and bow to Roman emperors.

Even today, there are currently 360 million Christians across the globe who face imminent threats of persecution and hostility because they follow Jesus.

According to Open Doors, the #1 request from Christians in these parts of the world, more than our money or our sympathy is our prayers. That Christians in the West would open our eyes, remember those who are being mistreated who are a part of the body of Christ with us, stand shoulder to shoulder with them as the Scriptures call us to do, and to pray.

Let's spend some time in prayer together, remembering these brothers and sisters across the globe, praying for their protection, and that the Lord would use their ministry to lead people to Christ in these parts of the world.

ARE YOU WILLING TO SUFFER FOR JESUS?

There is a present warning to us within this letter to Smyrna and it is this: It is a dangerous deception to think we would be willing to die for Christ tomorrow, when we're not willing to live for Him today. Every day we face situations where we can choose to minimize or hide our faith instead of living for Christ.

We often can try to minimize our potential suffering instead of pressing into faithfulness when the opportunity involves:

- Relational cost - not wanting to seem awkward, misunderstood, or disagree with someone
- Financial cost - not wanting to reject upward mobility, a job, promotion, or responsibility
- Personal cost - not wanting to deny yourself of comforts to serve others

In which of these opportunities have you recently sought to avoid suffering instead of pressing into faithfulness to Jesus?

THE SUFFERING SERVANT

To say yes to Jesus is to say yes to suffering. You can't have Jesus and a suffering free life. It should cost you something to follow Jesus, and if it's not you have to ask why that is. After all, if Jesus Himself suffered, why wouldn't we expect the same? If Jesus Himself went to the cross on our behalf for our sin, for our guilt, to make us righteous, why wouldn't we expect a picking up of our cross?

Hebrews 12:3 – 3 says “Consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself, so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted.”

Here's the good news of the gospel:

- The one who calls us to suffer for Him, first suffered for us.
- The one who calls us to take up our cross first took up His.

How does the suffering sacrifice of Jesus for you, spur you on towards greater faithfulness to Him in the face of suffering?

Discuss some tangible ways in which you can press into faithfulness with a willingness to suffer, in order to serve the Lord and serve others.

SERIES PRACTICES

One of our key discipleship values as a church is that of practice. Moving forward, we are going to begin emphasizing various spiritual practices during each sermon series. These practices are meant to coincide with the theme of the series, and something we invite our church to practice as a part of their spiritual formation.

PRACTICE #1 - FASTING

In its most basic form, Biblical fasting is the intentional abstaining from food for a spiritual purpose. As Christians, we intentionally face the pain of hunger and lack to direct our hearts towards God.

For resources on fasting, check out:

- www.rhythmsandformation.com
- <https://citychurchknox.com/sermons/formation-v-fasting-rethinking-our-relationship-with-food>

For this series, we are encouraging individuals to fast from all food and non-water beverages from dinner Wednesday through dinner Thursday, as a means of focusing our attention on God and asking Him to deepen our love for Him. Although there is freedom to adjust this to fit your various circumstances or season.

PRACTICE #2 - WORSHIP THROUGH SONG

The second practice we are inviting our church family to participate in is that of worship through song. Singing is a great way to help connect what we believe in our minds to what we experience in our hearts.

To that end, our worship team has put together a playlist to help guide this practice for us, that you can sing along with in your car, in your home, on a run, or anywhere else that seems appropriate.

You can find the playlist here:



Take some time now before you close discussing plans for fasting and worship during the next 8 weeks as a group.

CLOSING PRAYER

Pray over what was shared in the discussion, for your group to be united in the gospel, and for help from the Holy Spirit to be shaped to be more like Jesus as we put God's ways into practice.