



## First Focus

### On Revolution

Completely  
turned around

*Revolution is an important concept in understanding the mind of Christ and the disciples' role in bringing the Kingdom of God to earth. It is from the Latin word 'revolutio' which means "a turn around."*

Revolution is the organizational, systematic, communal brother to repentance. To get to the gospel purity of the idea we have do our best to unlearn our current contextual understanding of what a revolution entails (war, anger, blame, etc.). The amazing thing is that Jesus' revolution is a revolution of revolutions. In other words, Jesus' embodiment of peace and His release of power to create and fuel a revolutionary movement on earth was and is completely unique to Christ.

I repent of idolatry, but also we revolt against it as well. **A revolution is a dynamic movement of people which grows from an ideology and leads a "from the ground up" change in social order.** Jesus' message is greatly directed towards the sin of the system, not simply individualistic sin. Revolution is the way repentance meets peaceful action and seeks justice in the world and community we live in.

Here are four markers of a revolution that significantly mark the way of Christ in scripture: (1) The work is towards the reign of a new kingdom (2) He calls us to a grassroots communal subversive effort. (3) It is embodied and fueled by specific values and message. (4) Its goal is to turn around social order.

**"Repent for the kingdom of God is here"** is one connected thought. We must repent to participate in this revolution. There is a new system in place. It is a system that is not of political power, military strength, dividing into sects, scapegoating blame or financial greed. It is a system of an absorbing love which dies for its enemies and releases its position to communicate the heart of God.

To follow Christ is to learn to be subversive through love. Subversive means to overturn or overthrow from the foundation. Another definition is to be ruined by an undermining of morals, allegiance, or faith. What morals does evil embrace? What allegiance does sin take ahold? What does evil place its faith in? Christ's love is a love that ruins evil from its foundation. Our love should understand that its goal is to crack the very foundation of evil. We are to embrace a peace that rescues with love. This is the picture of Christ on the cross. It is where the ultimate evil shows ultimate love and turned everything around!

5th Edition

April / May 2017

### On Being Available

For those of us who believe in the power of community, we understand the power of being present and available in lives of people. Think about how great it felt to have someone show up at your games, concerts, ceremonies when you were a kid. Remember, however that being present is more than just showing up. It's allowing your inner circle to have a front row seat to how God is working in your life thus making the words you share have flesh and bones. Here are some tips that will help us be present and available in people's lives:

**(1) Aim for a good mix of their special occasions and your everyday life.** What I mean by that is to show up at big moments in their lives (e.g., school activities, birthday parties, church etc.), but don't underestimate an opportunity to invite them into your normal life. Letting people see your authentic faith in action in day to day life is good. Keep inviting them in!

**(2) Know that you are being watched and heard.** Know they are walking away with something. They are developing a picture of what it means to be disciple of Christ. Everyone needs that experience with someone who doesn't give up on them. Christ has never has nor will give up on us. Model that type of faith in other people.

**(3) You will never know the full impact of your efforts.** Have confidence in this truth. *Seeds* are a biblical metaphor in multiple of places throughout scripture for a reason. There will be some great moments everyone will remember. Then there will be those moments that only other people treasure. They choose what they are and often they are ones you were unaware of. Perhaps it gets back to you, but chances are, it won't. Just be thankful that God allowed you an opportunity to share in their story; at the end of that day, that is awesome.

# On Lent

*Lent means literally “40 days.” It is the 40 day period marked off in the Christian liturgical calendar (Catholic and Protestant) preceding Easter Sunday. The oversimplified purpose of Lent is a time of repentance. But to go further, the heart of Lent is to embrace just as Jesus did the resolve, patience, and discipline needed on His way to the cross.*

The goal is not head knowledge but heart formation. Lent is a time to consider our easy, conventional compromises and see again about discipline, obedience, and a glad identity.

**Lent is a time of renewal** as well as repentance. We are to focus our hearts to embrace a Kingdom of God mentality that rejects our cultural values of the power structures of consumerism, individualism, violence and affluence. We all could use a time of great departure from the greedy, anxious, anti-neighbor nature of our economy. It should be a great departure from our exclusionary politics that fears the other.

**Lent should be a great departure** from self-indulgent consumerism that devours the Lord's creation. And then on Resurrection Sunday, we have an arrival in a new place, a new world because it is a gift to be simple, it is a

gift to be free; it is a gift to come down where we ought to be. Often times our usual way of being in the society is full of anxiety, of being pressed and hurried and worried, and that in turn leads to a stance of defensiveness and fear and a determination to keep what we have.

**Jesus' journey to the cross was the exact opposite.** He taught that tomorrow would take care of itself and to pray for our daily bread. Trusting in him is our alternative to anxiety. Going to the cross required Him to completely trust the Father. We must follow. People of faith are always on the road after brief stops, departing safe places, running risks, and hoping for well-being on the journey to love people and pursue justice.

To do this we cannot be sidetracked by collecting snowballs for the future. Forty days of lent is not an arbitrary length, it is traced back to

the 40 days of Jesus' temptation in the desert. **Therefore, lent is meant to be a time for learning how to listen to the voices of promise and seduction and decide how to judge them, to hear better the true voice of assurance and be able to notice quickly the seductive voice of unfaith.** Scripture gives us great assurance that the God calling us is also going along the journey with us. This is a God who disrupts our lives with an invitation. (Follow me!)

Let us make this time coming into Easter a time where we know we walk into the future on terms other than our own, the terms of the kingdom of God. The good news of God's love and God's healing and God's justice cannot be kept just for us and people like us. Let's process His path to Jerusalem so that on that morning we can run with an extra step to see an empty tomb.

## On The Cross

In scripture, the cross is not simply an instrument of the death of Jesus Christ. It brings about key ideas of following Christ and proclaiming the gospel. This does not mean that it should be viewed isolated from the life, death, resurrection, and ascension of Christ, but **our baptismal identity is incomplete without its gleanings.** In the New Testament, the death of Jesus becomes a paradigm for the Christian life. The would-be follower must be prepared to take up the cross of Jesus.

Let's allow the cross to remind us and adjust us to see the gospel with 1st century eyes. **The cross was the ultimate execution of public disgrace for the powers of our world.** Thus the message of the cross is that true shame and honor are rightly pronounced from a divine kingdom and not a worldly system or culture. This is consistent from the Sermon on the Mount to the young donkey Christ rides in

on to the His questioning in front of Pilate and Herod. This leads Paul to pronounce that God uses the foolish to confound the wise. This **public disgrace** brings to reality the extent of expected obedience placed upon the believer. Faith is not intellectual attainment but a spiritual reality. Paul uses the cross for emphasis, not just to the point of death, but an extended public humiliating painful death. The **public disgrace** of the cross teaches that the death of our expectations brings us to a place of a clear slate where we have nothing to lose.

The cross destroys our insistence of a tribal Messiah. In other words, we do not have a savior who only saves people like ourselves. The cross in its original context was **a stumbling block** for those not completely broken from their need of God. The cross was **a stumbling block** because it represented completely different values than systems of power had embraced.

The cross is a message of inclusive unity that God had revealed himself completely accessible to everyone, even a robber beside Christ on the cross. The cross is the moment where God made himself vulnerable that His love is willing to absorb for the sake of humanity. **How far is God willing to love? The cross is an invitation to ponder this mystery.**

The cross focuses us on how the ministry and passion of Christ reveals the heart of God through **personal suffering.** What kind of God suffers with His people? He uses the darkest evils for good, but at the same time mourns and experiences life with us. The cross shows that there are no dark places that are out of reach for His light. If God's light can shine on this moment, there is no such thing as a hopeless moment. The cross is not that we never forget our sin and shame, but that we know that **suffering** well produces His perfect pure beauty to the glory of the Father.



# On Prayer

## Formation by the Spirit

The primary focus of prayer should be that we are to **formed** from participating in it. It is not a way to gain power or utilize it to shape our world in the manner to which we desire. Prayer is a releasing of ourselves in order to be molded.

We must be careful not to try to manipulate God through prayer. Selfish people pray selfish prayers. Angry people pray anger prayers. However, the most dangerous is probably that unaware people pray oblivious prayers. Imagine all the horrible things people have done believing God asked them to do it. The problem is that we all are on some level selfish. **What we would desire in prayer is that selfish people would pray unselfish prayers and be changed by such an experience to become an unselfish people.** This is impossible without a submission to the Holy Spirit, which requires an **emptying out of ourselves** in such a way that models Christ. This soul-searching task is not often at the top of our to-do list. Here are three requirements that we have to test in order that prayer is achieving its fullest and utmost potential. **(1) Prayer has to be a place to be conformed. (2) Prayer has to be a place to be authentic. (3) Prayer has to be a place to listen.**

As you pray, and life circumstances arise that you

are processing through prayer, think of these three present participles in its relationship to your circumstances: affirming, denying, and reconciling. What am I affirming? What should I be affirming?

Prayer has to be a place for us to be changed. So these questions are rational, emotional, and spiritual (as in examining faith). Prayer is where the human heart can be its freest as it processes, we must remember that we have a commitment to follow Christ and His ways no matter where they lead. In other words, prayer can do more damage than good if we are not **conformed** to the revelation of God found in Christ.

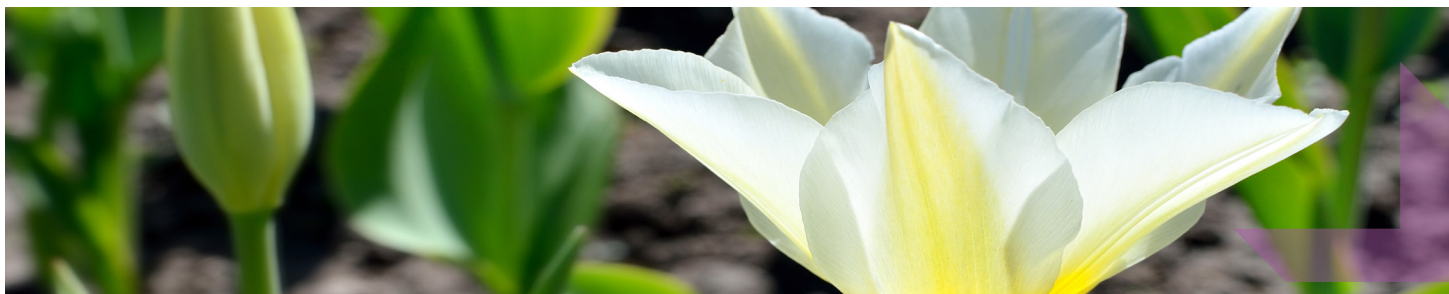
Be aware of what you are affirming and what you should affirm. If you are unable to affirm what you know you should, that is not the end. Our God specializes in supporting our inability. Pray for the Holy Spirit to give you that affirmation. **The biggest mistake at this point is to be unaware of our great and ultimate need for Him to show us exactly who we are.**

This leads us to acknowledge that prayer has to be a place to be **authentic**. What am I denying? Where has my ego and pride played loosely with the truth? How have I denied myself and embraced the death of my entitled rights? Life requires death. This place of prayer is full of our

most difficult work. It is a very dynamic arena. We can easily let go of something and then pick it up again and continue to carry the burden. This is when journaling can help, but also confessing to another trustworthy believer. God does some of His greatest work when we are our most vulnerable.

It may seem against our intuition, but the key is that prayer has to be a place to **listen**. God is alive, dynamic, and responsive, but also subtle and patient. **Listening** is best when we have removed all of our formulaic efforts and all of our agendas (good or bad). This seems simple but it is extremely difficult. Clear your thoughts and wait patiently for God to make Himself known to you in a manner that is uniquely Him. These special moments of prayer conforms us to be more and more purely like Christ. Charles Wesley characterizes prayer as *"carefully listening while God talks to us, as actively tuning out other noises in our lives in order to attend the whispers of (God's) grace."*

In other words, God does not speak through explicit words, but in movements of awareness in our hearts as we are stirred by God's love and then led with joy at God's presence. As the Lord is revealed to us in this way, we are changed so that our love, our *'speech'* (vocal prayer) becomes an *"echo to (God's) voice"* in the world.





# Conversation Starters

## On Revolution

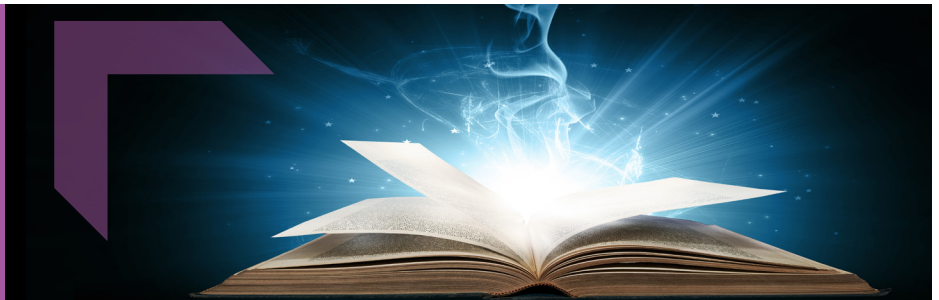
1. What are some ways we can understand the gospel and the kingdom of God that removes its **revolutionary** nature?
2. What are some **key values** that we must be careful not to distort in order to be true to original ideology of Christ's revolution?
3. How would you explain the relationship between love and power (e.g. societal, political, positional)?
4. Explain Jesus' words "The first shall be last and the last shall be first" in terms of a society's power structure instead of in terms of an individual's responsibility. Think of what we need to **be** instead of what we need to **do**.

## On Lent

1. How can we make sure that our religious beliefs are more than an intellectual exercise but are reflected and actualized in the way we live every day?
2. Have you ever had a season where you felt like you were in the desert being tempted by the Accuser himself?
3. Are you able to identify the counterfeit voice of God when it is subtly different than the true voice of God? What disciplines do you use to train yourself?

"And he sent messengers ahead of him, who went and entered a village of the Samaritans, to make preparations for him. But the people did not receive him, because *his face was set toward Jerusalem.*"

Luke 9:52-53 ESV



## On The Cross

1. If someone asked you, "what is the central message of Christianity," what would you say?
2. In what ways does the message of Christ crucified prevent people from boasting in the presence of God?
3. Why do you think the cross is offensive to people?
4. In what ways does the cross encourage you as you face your personal suffering in life?

## On Being Available

1. On a scale from 1 to 10, how much do you believe that you **value the power of community**?
2. On a scale from 1 to 10, how open and vulnerable are you with people in your everyday life? What is one thing you could do to move up one number in order to be a more Godly influence?
3. Can you name some important people to you that you are thankful they were open and available to you? What is it that makes you thankful for them?
4. Describe an experience with someone where another person made you feel like they were not going to give up on you.

## On Prayer

1. How would you rank yourself as a listener to the words of others? Why or why not?
2. Why do you think we tend to think of prayer as only explicit talking to God?
3. Encourage each other to reflect on moment by moment opportunities to listen closely for God's redeeming presence in the world, through people, and in our own thoughts and transformed desires.