



Week 2 Small Group: Shadows: Glimpse of a Stairway!

OPENING PRAYER:

Lord, as we journey through this Lenten season, we pray that we see you more clearly and trust you more dearly. Open our eyes and heart to the message of the Scripture and the truth of Jesus' work on our behalf. AMEN.

STAYING CONNECTED TO LENT:

Since we are in the season of Lent, each group session will begin with a reading of a portion of the Passion History from the Gospel of Mark. The purpose is to use the season of Lent to journey with Jesus to the cross and the empty tomb. A few questions follow for a little discussion on this lesson (while not intended to take the whole session).

Mark 14:27-42 "You will all fall away," Jesus told them, "for it is written:

" 'I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered.'

28 But after I have risen, I will go ahead of you into Galilee."

29 Peter declared, "Even if all fall away, I will not."

30 "I tell you the truth," Jesus answered, "today—yes, tonight—before the rooster crows twice you yourself will disown me three times."

31 But Peter insisted emphatically, "Even if I have to die with you, I will never disown you." And all the others said the same.

32 They went to a place called Gethsemane, and Jesus said to his disciples, "Sit here while I pray." 33 He took Peter, James and John along with him, and he began to be deeply distressed and troubled. 34 "My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death," he said to them. "Stay here and keep watch."

35 Going a little farther, he fell to the ground and prayed that if possible the hour might pass from him.

36 "Abba, Father," he said, "everything is possible for you. Take this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will."

37 Then he returned to his disciples and found them sleeping. "Simon," he said to Peter, "are you asleep? Could you not keep watch for one hour? 38 Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the body is weak."

39 Once more he went away and prayed the same thing. 40 When he came back, he again found them sleeping, because their eyes were heavy. They did not know what to say to him.

41 Returning the third time, he said to them, "Are you still sleeping and resting? Enough! The hour has come. Look, the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. 42 Rise! Let us go! Here comes my betrayer!"

Questions for reflection:

What stands out in this section is the steadfastness of Jesus to the mission he was on and the challenge for Jesus' followers to maintain that same watchfulness and steadfastness. Discuss any of the following phrases as they relate to you and Jesus:

- "Yet not what I will, but what you will." (verse 36)
- "Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation." (verse 38)
- "The spirit is willing but the body is weak." (verse 38)

BREAKING THE ICE:

This week we focused on the picture of Jesus as a stairway between heaven and earth based on the dream that God showed to Jacob in Genesis 28.

- a. When do you use a ladder or stairway?

- b. Why do you think God chose to use the picture of a stairway with Jacob instead of just appearing and speaking to him?

WRESTLING WITH THE WORD: A Stairway: Connection to God!

Read Genesis 28:10-19

10 Jacob left Beersheba and set out for Haran. **11** When he reached a certain place, he stopped for the night because the sun had set. Taking one of the stones there, he put it under his head and lay down to sleep. **12** He had a dream in which he saw a stairway resting on the earth, with its top reaching to heaven, and the angels of God were ascending and descending on it. **13** There above it stood the LORD, and he said: "I am the LORD, the God of your father Abraham and the God of Isaac. I will give you and your descendants the land on which you are lying. **14** Your descendants will be like the dust of the earth, and you will spread out to the west and to the east, to the north and to the south. All peoples on earth will be blessed through you and your offspring. **15** I am with you and will watch over you wherever you go, and I will bring you back to this land. I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you."

16 When Jacob awoke from his sleep, he thought, "Surely the LORD is in this place, and I was not aware of it." **17** He was afraid and said, "How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God; this is the gate of heaven."

18 Early the next morning Jacob took the stone he had placed under his head and set it up as a pillar and poured oil on top of it. **19** He called that place Bethel, though the city used to be called Luz.

1. Jacob's dream includes the stairway with angels ascending and descending on it. Discuss what you know of angels as they are used in the Bible (see Hebrews 1:14; Psalm 91:9-13, Zechariah 1:18-19). What do you think God was trying to communicate to Jacob by showing his messengers ascending and descending from earth to heaven and heaven to earth?

2. Remember, Jacob is fleeing from his home because of the danger of Esau's anger. He is leaving the land that God had promised to his grandfather Abraham and had no family. Read again the promises the Lord makes to Jacob.
 - a. Which of the promises would have been most meaningful to you in this moment if you were Jacob?
 - b. Perhaps the promises of the land and many peoples were unique to Jacob, but God also promises to you his presence, protection, and power. What promise of God is most real for you right now?

3. Jacob makes a confession about himself, "The LORD was here and I was not aware of it." Perhaps we have had similar experiences that as we were going through a season or challenge of life did not feel like the Lord was present. Perhaps at some point in that season, the Lord made himself evident to you in a meaningful way. Can you think of a situation like this? (Or perhaps when you look back, you realize God had been there with you even though you didn't realize it. Can you think of a situation like this?)

WRESTLING WITH THE WORD: A Stairway: Seeking a pathway to God!

Read Genesis 11:1-4

11 Now the whole world had one language and a common speech. 2 As men moved eastward, they found a plain in Shinar and settled there.

3 They said to each other, "Come, let's make bricks and bake them thoroughly." They used brick instead of stone, and tar for mortar. 4 Then they said, "Come, let us build ourselves a city, with a tower that reaches to the heavens, so that we may make a name for ourselves and not be scattered over the face of the whole earth."

4. The people after the flood desired to make a tower that reached to the heavens. The purpose of the tower was to "make a name for ourselves." Perhaps we can see this as building a stairway of self-promotion. In our culture, we may use the phrase, "Climbing the corporate ladder." While self-betterment and advancement aren't necessarily sinful, what is the danger of the human ladders we build?

5. The people who build the tower wanted to "reach the heavens." Humanity, with its soul, has always had a desire to "reach the heavens." What ways do we or people around us seek to do to build a connection with the heavens (with God)?

6. The LORD was not happy with the efforts of the people to build a tower of self-promotion. He confused their languages and scattered people over the earth. What have been the results you've noticed in your life when you have built ladders for the purpose of self-promotion?

WRESTLING WITH THE WORD: A Stairway: Giving a pathway to God!

Read John 14:1-6

14 “Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me. **2** In my Father’s house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. **3** And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am. **4** You know the way to the place where I am going.”

5 Thomas said to him, “Lord, we don’t know where you are going, so how can we know the way?”

6 Jesus answered, “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.

7. A stairway bridges the gap between what is inaccessible on our own efforts and makes it accessible. Jesus is the perfect stairway who descends to this earth (Immanuel...God with us), and provides the gift of access to heaven. Jesus speaks with his disciples and assures them he has an “upstairs” room he is preparing for them and they know the way to get there. Jesus answer to Thomas’ question gives clarity to the way. What do you hear in Jesus’ response that counters the “many pathways to God” popular belief in today’s culture?

8. As you reflect on your knowledge of Jesus’ life and ministry, what qualifies him to make the stairway he provides the ONLY way to the Father? How would you use these verses and the picture of a stairway to have a discussion with someone who believes there are many paths to God?

NEXT STEPS:

1. Journal (or discussion) questions:
 - a. Reflect on the concept of a “stairway.” What insights about Jesus’ work for you does God reveal to you?
 - b. Where is God showing his presence in your life? How does the picture of the stairway assure you that the Lord is and willing to come from heaven to earth to be with you?

CLOSING PRAYER: (Invite all participates to share a prayer)

God of all, thank you for being willing not just to reveal yourself to Jacob in his dream, but to also come to this earth to be with us. On our own, we would not be able to span the gap between us and you. In your grace you have sent Jesus as the stairway which brings us access to heaven which was inaccessible by our own effort. Lead us to always realize your presence and promises as we go through each day of life. AMEN.