



LIFE AT THE CENTER

Ron Pickell

Life at the Center—Participant's Guide

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Journey...Life at the Center

(Studies in Ephesians)

I once read, “find your center, and let the rest of the world spin around you,” which sounds really good and like something we might hear on campus. But what if your center isn’t all that great or a bit orbital? Of course that would place us at the center of our own universe which can’t possibly be true. Still, living a well centered life makes a whole lot of sense, but centered on what or whom?

The Apostle Paul talked about living a centered life in his letter to the house church in Ephesus. Here’s how he put it:

“He (Jesus) is in charge of it all, has the final word on everything. At the center of all this, Christ rules the church. The church, you see, is not peripheral to the world; the world is peripheral to the church. The church is Christ’s body, in which he speaks and acts, by which he fills everything with his presence.” Ephesians 1:22, 23 (Message Bible)

According to this, Jesus is the center of everything. From that center and with the church as His body He is filling the world with His presence. In Jesus we find our own center in the beautiful tapestry of the church—God’s new community!

This may be a difficult picture to visualize since the church is filled with broken people and has received such bad press. It has become virtually impossible for many to see any reflection of Jesus in His church as the bumper sticker reads, “God save me from Your followers!” Still, the people that Jesus called to join Him in His mission are the centrifugal force of God’s new world order and His agency for reshaping and transforming the world!

We might say that this letter to the church in Ephesus was Paul’s ecclesiology or theology of the church similar to

his soteriology or theology of salvation in his letters to the *Romans* and *Galatians*. It appears that *Ephesians* was intended like many of the apostles' letters to circulate among the house churches with these subtle differences. *Ephesians* was not addressed to anyone in particular—just *To the Ephesians*. It contains no personal counsels and reads more general in nature than most of his other letters, making it appear more like a generic letter about the church and its mission.

Read from this perspective, Paul and even more importantly Jesus have an extremely high view of the church. It is central to God's mission and the agency through which He is transforming the world. It is God's new society!

Karl Marx and Frederick Engels wrote about a new man and a new society in the *Communist Manifesto* pamphlet of 1848. The new society that they envisioned was a classless society following the revolution, and the new man would emerge as a result of the great economic revolution. Jesus, however, 1,800 years earlier had already birthed a new community called the *ekklesia*—*called out ones*.

Kirk or modern day "church" is the facility that Gaelic believers much later worshipped in across Northern Europe. The term "church" stuck, but what Jesus created was much more than a building. It was a living, breathing activated community of people called out from the world and into God's kingdom. This new phenomena was God's community—shaped by the fellowship of Jesus through the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit.

What does the community of Jesus look like and how was it to make a difference in the world? We get snapshot pictures of it throughout the New Testament Epistles, but the view from our modern balcony into the earliest framework is found right here in the letter to the Ephesians.

It may still be difficult to consider the church we know today as members of Christ's body, but what if we were to reimagine the church as the entity that Jesus referred to in His teachings? What if the church Paul is describing here is not so much the institution it has become—towering expensive architectural structures, deeply divided denominations of bureaucracy that produce church members that act more like the goats in Jesus' parable than the sheep who cared and ministered to the people that Jesus gave His life for?

What if the church at the center with Jesus is defined more like the one in Acts 4 who "listened to the apostles teaching, ate together daily, worshiped and prayed together,

shared their surplus of food and wealth with others in need and who the Holy Spirit was adding to their numbers daily”? What if it looked more like the other church in Acts 13, the Antioch church that was known for its “Spirit filled members and its passion to reach outsiders including them in God’s mission—the church where so much of the mission of Jesus was being carried out that the church members were being called Christians by the outsiders they were ministering to”?

These churches were filled with people living close to Jesus and following in the ministry of God’s Spirit. These churches were living life at the center because they were defined by Christ, the head of a body that looked and behaved like Him. The world becomes peripheral to the church when the church is living at the center where Jesus is Lord!

It’s one thing to search for an image of the church from the early followers of Jesus, but where can we find examples of this radical new society today? When we stop to consider the simple expressions of following Jesus as a spirit-led community, surprisingly small campus fellowships can feel more like the church that Paul had in mind than the forms of church we are accustomed to. What if instead of going to church we are the church as we live our faith together regardless of the space or circumstances surrounding us? What if the church wasn’t a building? What if the church is exactly what Jesus created it to be—His *ecclesia*—those called out of the world into God’s new kingdom?

Living a God-centered life on campus is living in community with Jesus at the center with the powerful life of Jesus flowing through His body and out onto the campus. This is exactly the kind of church Paul had in mind. Let’s listen to what he had to say about a life centered in God reaching the campus and changing the world!

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Breaking
Down
Journey

Journey was created for larger weekly on or off campus meetings in a teaching format and small group discussion. The beginning story or illustration introduces the topic of study.



- **Journey Together** helps ease participants into the topic through ice-breaker related questions.



- **Road Map** is the main passage for discussion followed by questions that help draw out the topic. If you are leading *Journey*, feel free to depart from these as needed and come up with your own questions, while staying on track with the main direction of the study laid out in the leader’s guide.



- **My Story** has been prepared as a continuation of the larger group meetings for smaller groups that meet during the week to check in with one another and reflect on how God is using *Journey* in their daily life. We recommend these groups be flexible in terms of location and meeting time. Also, the number of questions is limited in the *My Story* section, allowing for more personal interactions and life application.

Getting
the most
out of
Journey

Here's what you're going to need for *Life at the Center*:

- Good soil—an open and receptive heart
- Working the soil—Determination and diligence
- Hunger and thirst—Desire to follow God as He leads
- We also strongly advise reading the entire book of Ephesians since *Journey* only zeros in on selected episodes. Use this study guide for your group reading/discussion. The important thing is to really lean into what we can learn from Paul's letter to the Ephesians. In fact, set it aside if it's getting in the way of hearing his story. Remember, God and His ways are the real study, not *Journey*!

Best Practices: The five S's of hearing and discerning God's voice

- **Seek:** Pray for God to open up the passage for you. Is there a promise for you to claim, a sin to confess, a word for you to follow, an insight to share?
- **Soak:** Read the passage each day and write down any observations, thoughts, questions, connections, or anything God speaks to you about the passage.
- **Seal:** Seal God's word to you deep within your heart by taking some time to meditate on the most important truth to you this week. Ask God to open the deeper recesses of your heart to teach you what you need most for your life this week.
- **Script:** Journal or write if even a few lines, noting the ways that God spoke to you from the passage, your meditation, or our group time together. This will help you keep better track of God's voice and the way He is speaking through scripture.
- **Share:** Share with someone what you are learning from your time with God in *Journey*. As you share what you are learning, it will help drive God's word home to you even more and you will notice how God will use what He has revealed to you to bless others.

Journey
Covenant

I want to follow Jesus in the noble purpose He has for me. I want to participate in *Journey* to enhance my own relationship with God this year. I will commit to doing the weekly assignments and small group meetings.

Signature _____

My best times of availability are

Morning: _____

Evening: _____

Email address: _____

Cell phone: _____

Blessed and Highly Favored

John Leis, Campus Ministry Director,
Washington Conference

One of my favorite stories comes from *The Herald of Gospel Liberty* (1910) in an article titled “*The Most Remarkable Incident.*” A ship captain recounts meeting George Müller while navigating dense fog. Exhausted after 22 hours on the bridge, he felt a tap on his shoulder.

“Captain,” Müller said, “*I must be in Quebec by Saturday afternoon.*” It was Wednesday. The captain dismissed it as impossible. Müller calmly replied, “*If your ship can’t take me, God will provide another way. I have never missed an engagement in 57 years.*”

Müller suggested they pray. Skeptical, the captain followed him to the chart room. Müller prayed simply: “*Lord, if it is Your will, remove the fog in five minutes.*” As the captain prepared to pray, Müller stopped him. “*You don’t believe He will, and I believe He already has. There’s no need to pray further.*”

Müller then said, “*Captain, I have known my Lord for 47 years, and He has never failed me. Open the door.*” The captain obeyed—and the fog had vanished.

We serve a God who not only owns the cattle on a thousand hills and calms storms with a word but pours heaven out for us!



1. Which do you think people talk about more—being lucky, being blessed, or being favored? Why do you think that is?

2. When you hear the word “chosen” what comes to mind? How does that word make you feel?



Read Ephesians 1:1–14

1. According to Paul in Ephesians 1:1–14, what blessings have we received “in Christ”? How do these blessings reveal that we are truly “blessed and highly favored”?

2. Verse 4 says that believers were chosen “in him before the foundation of the world.” What does this tell us about God’s plan and His view of us?

3. In verse 6, Paul says we are “accepted in the Beloved.” What does that phrase reveal about our value and relationship with God through Christ?

4. How does knowing that you have been chosen, redeemed, and sealed by God (vv. 4, 7, 13) influence how you live each day?

5. Do you find it easy or difficult to view yourself as “blessed and highly favored”? Why do you think that is?

6. According to verse 13, what must take place before someone is “sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise”? What does it mean to be sealed, and how does this connect with Revelation 7:4-9 and God’s mark upon His people?



1. How has God been using *Journey* in your life this week?

2. Have you ever intentionally set aside time to reflect on and accept the spiritual gifts Jesus has given you? What was that experience like, or what do you think it could look like?

3. In Psalm 81:10, God invites us to 'open [our] mouth wide' so He can fill it. What would it look like for you to truly accept and live out this promise in your life today?

[illegible]

Eyes to See

Samson Sembega, MDiv, Pastor and Campus Minister, University of Tulsa, Oklahoma

Have you ever had a moment when you suddenly understood something that was unclear before? Maybe you struggled with a math problem until one day, it just clicked. That moment of realization is like what Paul prays for in Ephesians 1:15-23. He asks God to give believers wisdom and revelation so they can truly know Him.

Author and disability rights advocate Helen Keller lost her vision and hearing abilities after an illness at 19 months. She lived in darkness until her teacher, Anne Sullivan, made a simple yet life-changing breakthrough: running water over Helen's hands while spelling "water" into her palm. In that moment, something clicked. Helen realized that everything had a name. That moment of understanding opened the door to an entirely new world for Helen. In a similar way, Paul prays that believers' spiritual eyes would be opened so they can truly grasp God's power and hope.



1. Have you ever had a moment where something suddenly made sense to you? What was it like?

2. If you had to explain the concept of "seeing with your heart" to someone, how would you describe it?



Read Ephesians 1:15–23

1. What does Paul pray for the believers in this passage?

2. Why do you think Paul focuses on wisdom, revelation, and the eyes of their hearts being enlightened?

3. How does understanding God's power change the way we live?

4. Paul emphasizes hope, inheritance, and power. Which of these stands out most to you, and why?

5. In verse 22 and 23 Paul emphasizes that God is filling the universe through the church – His body. What is your relationship to church and what role does it play in your life?



1. How has God been using Journey in your life this week on campus?

2. What areas of your life do you need to see with new eyes?

3. How can you actively seek God's wisdom and revelation in your daily life?

[illegible]

Recreated to Work With God

Nelson Silva, DMin, ACF/YA Director,
Kentucky Tennessee Conference

An experienced Christian once told me, *“I haven’t sinned in weeks.”* She was troubled by fellow believers grieving their ongoing sinfulness. Could it really be possible to live without sin every day?

At first, I found the idea absurd. But as I listened, I recalled my own past. Decades ago, as a business student at a secular university, I prided myself on my “sinless” life. While classmates drank beer between classes, I studied or exercised. When a sociology professor assigned a movie report on *Ghost*, I wrestled with its spiritist themes. Seeking advice, I was relieved when an alternative assignment was offered. I saw these choices as proof of my holiness—God would always provide a way out.

My most defining moment came at an outdoor gym, where a classmate noticed my clean speech and respectful attitude. That conversation led me to share Christ with him. Recently, I reunited with Ivan in Caracas, Venezuela—30 years later—and had the privilege of praying for him.

For years, I believed my victories over sin validated my faith. My friend’s claim—*“I haven’t sinned in weeks”*—was something I, too, had once thought. But Scripture offers a different perspective. Paul reminds us in Ephesians that we were *“dead in our transgressions”* and *“by nature deserving of wrath.”* Romans 3:23 states, *“All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,”* while John warns, *“If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves”* (1 John 1:8). Even Paul, a pillar of faith, called himself *“the chief of sinners”* (1 Timothy 1:15).

So how do we reconcile these truths? Can we truly live without sin? Or does acknowledging our need for grace lead us to deeper faith?



1. Share a time when you experienced a moral dilemma. What made it so pressing at the time? If faced with the same situation today, would your decision change?

2. Share a time when you were surprised to know that people noticed your behavior.



Read Ephesians 2:1–10

1. Paul begins this section with describing us as dead in our sins, but moves us to resurrection and life in Christ. How would you describe yourself as raised from death to new life and seated with God in heavenly places?

2. Take a minute to evaluate your upbringing, church, campus, and even your own theology. How do you struggle with accepting the free gift of God's grace? How can that mindset change?

3. What is the connection between grace, faith, and human effort in the salvation process?

4. How do you work with God? (Read Ephesians 2:10, 1 Peter 4:11, and 1 Corinthians 10:31).

5. Jews and Gentiles were at odds in the early church. Jewish Christians believed that gentile converts had to embrace Judaism. Later on, in Ephesians, Paul calls it a wall! Is there a similar wall of separation on your campus, church, or society today? What role are you, your ACF chapter, or your church playing in building or tearing down this wall?

6. How do you see your current studies preparing you to fulfill God's recreation (grace) in you? Read 1 Corinthians 12: 4-7.

7. How are you seeking clarity on your future career and God's desire to bless the world through you?

8. How can this group pray for you?



1. How has God been using Journey in your life this week?

2. Have you ever felt morally superior to others? Share with the group if you are comfortable.

3. What was it like to live as God's handiwork on campus this week?

Picturing God's New Society

Stephen Erich, MA, Campus Minister,
Greater New York Conference

We met on the first Friday of every month; college students and young adults from across New York City. We came together to hear each other sing, to recite poetry, and to tell stories along a spiritual theme. It was usually delightful, or funny, or touching. But sometimes it wasn't.

In fact, we often made each other feel uncomfortable. We were a mixed group. We met at a Seventh-day Adventist Church uptown, but participants included Christians from other traditions, as well as Buddhists, Jews, Muslims, and nonreligious people. Everyone had time at the mic to speak on their terms. And everyone listened, even when it got awkward, or offensive, or weird. Plenty of weird.

Some had never spoken in a church before, and admitted that they never thought they would tell their story in a church. Others didn't realize the event was intended to engage in faith until halfway through their comedy set, when their jokes weren't hitting the way they expected. And some got to practice expressing their spirituality in a pluralistic setting, without assuming everyone agreed with them.

If there are just two things I learned from my time with this experimental group in New York, it's this: 1) unity is not uniformity, but rather commitment to each other, and 2) peace is not always comfortable.

This week, we read Paul's vision for reconciliation through Christ. Reconciliation of Jews and Gentiles, of hostile groups, of foreigners and strangers, even of two *humanities*. And how? Not because of creed. Not because of ethnicity. Simply because of the person of Jesus Christ. Reconciliation on this basis is stable like a cornerstone, and messy like a

construction site—or like any small group of diverse students trying to be honest with each other.

That year we crushed the inspection. Several days later the XO (the second highest ranked officer) came to speak with me. He said, “Word on the street is you’re the man responsible for the MAA’s passing inspection.” “No sir,” I replied. “I just motivated the men, they’re the ones that did the work.”



1. Have you been close friends with someone very different from you?

2. What is one thing a close friend does that you just cannot understand – and yet you love them anyway?



Read Ephesians 2:11–22

1. What is the person of Christ being contrasted against in these verses?

2. “He himself is our peace” (v. 14). What does it mean for a person to *be* peace?

3. How is peace based on Christ different from other kinds of peace?

4. Bodies and buildings are two metaphors used in this passage. What can we learn from them about peace and reconciliation?

5. Where does commitment show up in these verses?

6. What are the consequences of Christ's work on our behalf?



1. Can you remember a time when choosing peace prompted social discomfort?

2. What challenges are you facing as a Christian on campus?

3. Have you committed to a group of people (even if they're a little different than you)?

[illegible]

Unlikely Evangelists

Natasha Richards, MDiv student and Campus Ministry Liaison, Andrews University

I am sitting in the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary at Andrews University. By the time you read this, I would have just graduated with my Master's in Divinity and, during that time, also accomplished my Bachelor's. If you had told me 10 years ago that this would be my journey, I would have thought you were crazy. But as I look back, I realize that God has been preparing me for such a time as this.

Revelation is the mystery unveiled to our hearts by God. Much like the Apostle Paul, who once persecuted Christians, I too see myself as an unlikely evangelist. Someone who, by the world's standards, may not have been the obvious choice to carry the gospel forward. Yet, God's wisdom confounds human understanding, and He often chooses the most unlikely candidates to do His work.

The book of Ephesians offers profound insights into God's plan for salvation, the unity of believers, and the role we each play in His kingdom. Through this study, we'll explore how God uses us—flawed, imperfect, and unlikely—as vessels of His grace and truth.



1. Share a moment in your life when you felt unqualified or unlikely to succeed in something. How did God guide you through that experience?

2. Think of a modern-day “unlikely evangelist” (e.g. someone from a challenging background who now inspires others). Share what makes their story impactful.



Read Ephesians 3:1–13

1. Paul’s Perspective: Paul, once a persecutor of Christians, now calls himself a servant of the gospel. Reflect on his transformation and the humility in his words (v. 8).

2. God’s Mystery: Paul speaks of the mystery of Christ revealed to the gentiles (v. 6). What is the mystery and how does it reflect God’s inclusive plan for salvation?

3. Empowerment by Grace: Paul acknowledges that it is only by God’s grace that he is able to preach the unsearchable riches of Christ (v. 7–8). How does grace empower us to step into roles we feel unqualified for?

4. Reflection on Calling: Like Paul, have you ever felt called to a role or task that seemed beyond your abilities? How did you respond?

5. Identifying Gifts: Ephesians 3:7 reminds us that God equips us through His Spirit. What unique gifts or talents has God given you to share the gospel?

6. Overcoming Barriers: Paul faced imprisonment and opposition but remained steadfast. What challenges or fears hold you back from sharing your faith, and how can you overcome them?

7. Unity in Christ: Paul emphasizes that the mystery of the gospel brings unity between Jews and Gentiles. How can we foster unity in our communities today?



1. How has God been using Journey in your life this week?

2. What is God teaching you and how is He using you to bring good news to your campus?

3. What does the manifold wisdom of God look like on your campus?

[illegible]

Established in Love

Joshua Guerrero, Public Campus Ministry
Coordinator, University of Wisconsin

This past winter, I was walking through the airport looking for something to eat. Airport food is expensive! I stopped at a smoothie shop and saw one option with a good amount of protein. After the staff finished making the smoothie, I went to pay, but the lady responded, "You're good to go!" I was confused that maybe she didn't realize that I hadn't paid and again told her what happened. She just responded with the same words and a smile. I walked away realizing how blessed I had been and didn't deserve it.

In the same way, mercy is what every human desperately seeks. What happens when we realize that we're broken, that there seems to be no one to turn to? We find that we can have a friend in our Creator and there is One that is ready and willing to restore us.



1. When you think of being rich, what picture comes to your mind?

2. Who was someone in your life that showed you undeserved favor and forgiveness?



Read Ephesians 3:14–21

1. Where should our identity be rooted? (See v. 14 and 15.)

2. What are we named after and how does that determine our value?

3. What are some of the riches that Jesus is longing to give to us?

4. Why do we need to ask God to grant us these riches?

5. Why is the concept of putting faith in something a necessary part of receiving and experiencing life?

6. Why is being rooted and grounded in love more valuable than knowledge?

7. How can the church be a place of refuge where we can experience God's redemptive love?

8. What are some riches you need in your life right now?



1. How has God been using *Journey* in your life this week?

2. What aspects of faith and mercy have gotten you thinking this week?

3. How has God's love and forgiveness impacted you this week?

United in Christ

Chris May, Director and Campus Minister
Advent House, University of Tennessee,
Knoxville

Before I became a campus minister I was an ACF student at the University of Massachusetts Amherst. One of the events our ministry did was church on campus. Three times a month our students would lead worship on campus and for the fourth Sabbath we would visit our local church and run the service for them. This tradition started long before I arrived and our reasoning was that our local church was far away, making it difficult for us to convince our non-Adventist friends to join us there. Since we couldn't bring them to church we brought the church to them. We also wanted to stay connected to the local church ourselves and made an effort to visit and minister to them each month.

While it was an amazing experience being able to worship with a group of all students, it also meant there was no room for pew warmers, for there was always work to be done. As a freshman you would be asked to do the opening or closing prayer or possibly the announcements. As a sophomore you'd be asked to give the scripture reading, introduce the time for tithes and offerings, or lead out in the praise and prayer request portions of the service. By the time you were a junior it was time for you to preach. The seniors would mentor the others and run the service similarly to how the elders would in a church—making sure the next generation would be ready to take their place after graduation.

It was at this time in my life that I learned how to do ministry on a scale that was bigger than anything I could accomplish on my own. We did fundraisers on campus to sponsor

our fellow students on mission trips and ran Bible studies on Friday nights, all while being full-time students in college.



1. Describe a time when working on a team was better than working as an individual.

2. When in your life have you felt like you were right where God wanted you to be?



Read Ephesians 4:1–16.

1. In verse 1, Paul urges us to walk worthy of our calling. What is your personal calling?

2. In verses 8 and 11 Paul says God has given gifts to all people, calling some to be apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and/or teachers. Everyone has a role to play. Which do you most identify with and why? (See more spiritual skills described by Paul in 1 Corinthians 27–28.)

3. What does it mean to be in the body of Christ? (See Ephesians 1:22-23.)

4. Paul says in chapter 4 verse 12 that God gives these skills “for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ.” Reflecting on your answer to question 4, in what ways are you using your skills to be a benefit to your church community?

5. Looking back on Paul’s writings in this section, how do we grow in all things while being in the church?

6. Why is it so important that we speak the truth in love?

7. Is it ok to be a follower of Jesus and remain separate from the body of Christ? Why or why not?

“So encourage each other and build each other up, just as you are already doing.” (1 Thessalonians 5:11)



1. How has God been using journey in your life this week on campus?

2. What challenges are you facing as a Christian on campus?

3. How can this group best pray for you?

Lighting the World

Darrel Lindensmith, MA Religion,
MS Psychology, Pastor, and Campus Minister
at North Dakota State University

The Psychoanalytic Carl Jung wrote: "Everyone carries a shadow, and the less it is embodied in the individual's conscious life, the blacker and denser it is. But if it is repressed and isolated from consciousness, it never gets corrected and is liable to burst forth suddenly in a moment of unawareness."

"The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?" Jeremiah 17:9

Ephesians 4 reminds believers of our tendency to drift back into sin, before we are aware of it.



1. Have you done something or said something, and then you wondered, "Where did that come from?" or "Why did I say that?"

2. Where are you when you do your best thinking?



Read Ephesians 4:17–32

1. Paul “insists on it,” that the believers “must no longer live as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their thinking.” What is futility?

2. In v. 22 Paul admonishes the Ephesians to “Put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires.” Describe a time when you were in denial about something and came to see it clearly. How did you become aware of it? Did someone tell you?

3. What does Paul mean in v. 25 that we “must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to each other”?

4. How does becoming “callous to every kind of impurity” in v. 19 apply to life on campus?

5. What is the relationship between anger and forgiveness?

6. As you consider Paul’s list of things that need to change as a follower of Christ, what areas do you struggle with the most? How can your brothers and sisters in ACF help you grow and overcome any of these?



-
1. How has God been using *Journey* in your life this week on campus?

2. How is God using you to bring light to your campus this week?

3. What area are you most in need of prayer?

[illegible]

Imitating God

Lindsay M. Syeh, PhD, LMHC, NCC, MFT, MDiv

The Viral Challenge — Who Are You Becoming?

It started as a joke. A group of college friends decided to take on a viral social media challenge—imitating their favorite celebrities. They mimicked their fashion, speech, and even their mannerisms. At first it was fun, but then it got serious. One friend, Jake, started dressing and talking like his favorite influencer so much that he lost his own personality. He spent hours perfecting the right look, rehearsing catchy phrases, and curating his feed to match the latest trends.

One evening, his mentor noticed the change and asked him, *“Who are you really?”* That question lingered in Jake’s mind. He had spent so much time imitating someone else that he forgot who he truly was.

This struggle isn’t new. Young men and women around the world often shape their identity based on cultural pressures, trends, or the expectations of those around them. But the real question is: Who are we imitating?



1. Who was someone you looked up to as a kid—and did you ever try to imitate them? What did that look like?

2. What's a trend (fashion, music, social media challenge, etc.) that you followed in high school or college that now makes you cringe or laugh?



Read Ephesians 5:1–20

1. What does it mean to be an imitator of God in your daily life?

2. What are some cultural trends that make it difficult to walk in God's light?

3. Paul warns against foolish talk and impurity (v. 4). How does our speech reflect our walk with God?

4. Verse 10 says to "find out what pleases the Lord." How can you actively seek God's will?

5. What are practical ways to walk in love on your campus or in your community?

6. Paul contrasts light and darkness. What areas of your life need to be surrendered to Christ's light?

7. How does gratitude (v. 20) shape the way we interact with God and others?

8. How does being "filled with the Spirit" (v. 18) help us live differently from the world?



1. How has God been using Journey in your life this week on campus?

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Relationships Transformed

Lindsay M. Syeh, PhD, LMHC, NCC, MFT, MDiv

The Group Project Struggle

No one likes group projects. Sarah sighed as she opened the message thread – another argument about who was doing what. Every time, it was the same issue: One person refused to contribute, another took over, and someone else avoided responsibility altogether.

Sarah was frustrated. It wasn't that the project was hard; it was that no one wanted to listen to each other. Everyone wanted control, but no one wanted to submit. *"If we all just worked together instead of trying to be in charge, this would be easier,"* she thought.



1. If your life was a group project, what role would you typically play – and why?

2. What's one thing you've learned about love or friendship that changed how you approach relationships?



Read Ephesians 5:21–6:9

1. What does it mean to “submit to one another out of reverence for Christ” (5:21)?

2. How does Paul’s teaching on relationships challenge cultural views on power and independence?

3. What does Christ-like love in a relationship look like? How is it different from the world’s definition?

4. How does seeing marriage as a reflection of Christ and the church (5:32) shape our understanding of love?

5. Why do you think Paul emphasizes both honor and responsibility in parent-child relationships?

6. How can students honor their parents while still growing in independence?

7. Paul tells workers to serve as if working for the Lord (6:7). How can this mindset change the way we approach school, jobs, and responsibilities?

8. How do we navigate power dynamics in relationships in a Christ-honoring way?



1. How has God been using Journey in your life this week on campus?

2. In what ways do you struggle with pride or control in relationships? How have you practiced humility this week?

3. How have you been able to apply the principle of serving others in your relationships this week?

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The Battle Belongs to the Lord

Akehil Johnson, Adventist Christian Fellowship

Neema Urassa discovered that her end-of-year exam was scheduled on the Sabbath (Saturday)—a day she reserved for rest and worship. Determined to honor her faith, Neema and her friend Chantal approached university officials to request a rescheduling. The university denied their request, citing a missed January deadline for religious exemptions—information Neema hadn't been aware of.

Undeterred, Neema obtained a letter of support from her pastor and met with the head of the civil engineering department. He suggested she attend the exam, sign her name, and leave, which might allow for a retake. Neema declined, believing this would still violate her Sabbath observance. The department head then gave an ultimatum that she retake the course the following year for \$3,600. This financial burden was unfeasible, especially without support from her non-Sabbath-observing parents.

With limited options, Neema made one last appeal. Days later, she received an unexpected email granting her permission to take the exam several months later alongside students who had previously failed, without additional requirements or fees.

Neema took Paul's counsel and stood firm, which led to a resolution that honored both her faith in God and her academic commitments. Let's dive deeper to understand how God fights our battles when He's the center of our lives.



1. What's a time in your life when you felt like you were in a battle—emotionally, mentally, and/or spiritually? How did that battle end for you?

2. How do people typically fight their battles in life (e.g., stress, anxiety, struggles with temptation)?



Read Ephesians 6:10–18

1. What does Paul mean when he says to “be strong in the Lord and in His mighty power”?

2. Why do you think Paul emphasizes standing firm rather than fighting back?

3. Paul says our struggle is “not against flesh and blood.” What does this mean for how we handle conflicts in our daily lives?

4. How can we trust God's victory when we don't know how things will play out in our personal struggles?

5. Why might people hesitate to put on the full armor of God? What could happen if we refuse to step into the fight?

6. Choose one piece of the armor of God. What does it symbolize to you and how can it be applied on campus practically?

7. How does God equip and strengthen those who feel unqualified or afraid?

"The Lord will fight for you, and you shall hold your peace." Exodus 14:14



1. How has God been using Journey in your life this week on campus?

2. What's one practical way you can remind yourself this week that the battle belongs to the Lord?

3. How can you encourage someone this week to stand firm for God, even if they don't know what the outcome will be?

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Benediction

Sarah Leis, Campus Minister University of Washington, Seattle, Student Counseling Department

Viktor Frankl was an Austrian neurologist, psychiatrist, and Holocaust survivor. In the 1940's Frankl was a successful physician, but during World War II he and his family were deported to Nazi concentration camps. During this time Frankl lost his parents, brother, and pregnant wife, all who perished in the camps. Frankl himself was imprisoned for three years where he endured horrific conditions, forced labor, starvation, and the constant threat of death. Despite the immense suffering, Frankl observed that some people were able to find meaning even amidst the horror.

After WWII Frankl was released from Auschwitz and returned to his work at the hospital where he developed a new form of therapy called logotherapy. It was built on one simple but profound idea: the primary drive in life is not pleasure or power, but meaning. Frankl saw firsthand how people who had a sense of purpose, even in the darkest of circumstances, were more likely to survive. He wrote, *"Those who have a 'why' to live can bear almost any 'how.'"*

We see this illustrated in Paul's life. In Ephesians Paul is writing from prison, but he's not asking for comfort or rescue. Instead, he's asking for boldness to keep proclaiming the gospel. Paul found meaning not by avoiding suffering, but by anchoring his life in something greater—Jesus. He saw himself as an "ambassador in chains," a man on a mission, even when locked away. His circumstances didn't define his purpose; Christ did. Like Frankl said, we're all searching for a "why," a reason to get up in the morning and keep going. But meaning isn't something we have to invent. Jesus gives it to us. Through Him, our identity is secure, our mission is clear, and even our pain has purpose.



1. If Paul had access to social media in prison, what hashtag do you think he'd use to share his message?

2. If you were an "ambassador" for something silly (like pizza or naps), what would it be and why?



Read Ephesians 6:19-24

1. Why do you think Paul, writing from prison, doesn't ask for rescue or relief, but instead asks for boldness? What does that reveal about his mindset and purpose?

2. In your own words, what does it mean to be "an ambassador in chains"? Can you think of modern examples—people living with purpose in tough circumstances?

3. Viktor Frankl said, "Those who have a 'why' to live can bear almost any 'how.'" How does Paul's "why" show up in this passage?

4. Verse 21 introduces Tychicus as someone sent to encourage others. How does that reflect the importance of community in our faith journey?

5. Frankl believed meaning couldn't be invented—it had to be discovered. How does Paul's prayer reflect a discovered purpose, not a self-created one?

6. In verse 23-24, Paul ends with words of peace, love, faith, and grace. How can those things give meaning to everyday life?



1. How has God been using *Journey* in your life this week?

2. Paul had Tychicus to help carry the message and encourage others (v.21-22). Who are the "Tychicus" people in your life—those who support your walk with Jesus?

3. What do you think it means to live on campus with a sense of mission today, like Paul did—even when life doesn't go as planned?

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What if your center isn't all that great or a bit orbital?

Someone once wrote, “find your center, and let the rest of the world spin around you,” which sounds really good and like something we might hear on campus. But what if your center isn't all that great or a bit orbital? Of course that would place us at the center of our own universe which can't possibly be true. Still, living a well centered life makes a whole lot of sense, but centered on what or whom?

According to Ephesians, Jesus is the center of everything. From that center and with the church as His body He is filling the world with His presence. In Jesus we find our own center in the beautiful tapestry of the church—God's new community!