

## Discipleship Groups — Level 6 WEEK 2

### Heart Check: CHARACTER

Welcome to the second week of this round of discipleship small groups! These six weeks are designed around the concept that we are given in 2 Corinthians 13:5, which says, “Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves.” We are testing ourselves for several reasons. Principle among these reasons is that one day we will have to give an account of our lives before God. It is easy to think, “well, I’m not as bad as other people I know. God must be pleased with me.” But God will not measure your life according to the standard of someone else; He will measure it according to the standard of His Word and, as Ephesians 4:13 says, “...the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.”

So, we examine and test ourselves NOW before we meet Jesus face-to-face. Testing ourselves now gives us time to make the necessary corrections in our lives and allows the Holy Spirit to transform us into what we cannot make ourselves to be. We cannot make ourselves holy. Jesus did that on the cross by taking away our sins, and now the Holy Spirit lives inside us to change in us everything that sin destroyed and perverted. When we decide to follow Jesus, there is the expectation of a change of character in our lives. God loves us just as we are, but He loves us so much that He is not going to leave us as we are. There are many things we consider natural to us and “regular” in the world around us. We hear of corporate greed and government corruption, and we say, “just like always.” We hear of violence, human trafficking, wars, and other ugly things in the world, and though we may hate those things, they have become so common place that we almost grow desensitized to them.

On a more personal level, those who have grown up around violence and abuse view them as merely daily occurrences and “that’s just life.” But even those who have not grown up around such things will often think that is very “normal” to them and to the world around them—because it is what they have known. Things like lying. Even though we are told it is wrong, and most would believe it to be wrong, they have still made it a habit in some way or another and believe that they are okay in doing it for whatever reason they have in their mind.

Things like anger and bitterness and unforgiveness. We hear songs like “It’s too late to apologize,” which insinuates that forgiveness is now off the table. We blow up in anger with other people, especially the people who are closest to us, and it is a normal

occurrence. We fight with our spouse and that is considered normal. We steal little things here and there, things we deem insignificant, like take a grape or two out of a bag at the grocery store, or sneak into another movie theater after your movie has ended, and that's acceptable.

The concept of wives running the household and domineering their husbands is beyond normal in our culture, it is accepted and celebrated! We live with rampant depression and anxiety that rob us of peace and joy, and we have somehow learned to accept them as a normalcy of life. All we need to do is see a therapist who will prescribe us to take a few pills. Don't you find it odd just how many commercials you see for medicines? Apparently, it is BIG Business. Someone is profiting off a culture of sickness...and this is normal.

Dressing promiscuously, living with your partner before marriage, sleeping around, and the pornography of adult content, and "fans only" is normal. Horror movies and the demonic fear they inspire is normal.

So, Sickness is normal. Despair is normal. Anger is normal. Lying and stealing are normal. Fighting is normal. War is normal. Hatred and unforgiveness are normal. Abuse is normal. Homosexuality and abortion are normal. Teenagers rebelling against their parents is normal. Sexual promiscuity is normal. Demonic oppression and fear are normal. Domineering others is normal. Selfishness and pride are normal. They have become so normal to us, that most times we don't even realize how sick we really are, and even after we have become Christians, how deeply these things have been rooted in our character and our way of being and thinking.

**LISTEN! NONE OF THESE THINGS ARE NORMAL.** In fact, these things are completely abnormal to the way in which we were created by God to live. It's that we have all grown up in a world that is sick with sin, we have grown up around people infected with sin, and we ourselves have been infected by sin. All of the things mentioned are normal to sin—they are not normal to God.

Yet, when we come to Jesus Christ and we truly make Him our King and the Commander of our lives, He begins to change all these things in us. 2 Peter 1:3-4 says, "His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence, by which he has granted to us his precious and very great promises, so that through them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire."

Galatians 5:19-23 continues to develop this idea of what kind of character—or fruit—is coming out of our lives, “Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control...”

As we examine ourselves, we need to ask ourselves some questions:

1. Am I still the same angry person?
2. Do I try and justify my sins?
3. Do I hold on still to my favorite sins, or am I even attempting to leave them?
4. Do I bring joy and peace to my home, or is my home in turmoil?
5. Do my words, my tone of voice, my nagging, my disconnectedness, my rage destroying my home?

Listen, if in thinking about that last question you are immediately thinking of your spouse and saying it is their fault, rest assured, you are more of the problem than you realize. I am not saying that to condemn you, but I’ve been a pastor long enough to recognize that pattern of thinking. Again, that is not a condemnation but an invitation to self examination.

6. Another question: Do I think I am always right and, in my heart, look down on other people?

These are all character issues that the Holy Spirit wants to deal with in our lives so that we look less like the abnormality of this sinful world, and more like the normalcy of the beauty of Christ Jesus. There is NO SUCH THING as following Jesus and not being transformed by Jesus in every aspect of our lives!

Take the next several moments with your small group and discuss these things and test yourselves and the genuineness of your faith and commitment to Jesus and the ongoing work of His transformation of your character. God bless you! We will see you next week!