

Living in a Crazy World Small Group Guide

Warm-up Question: (Choose one, make up your own, or skip this part all together, depending upon the nature of your group.)

1. When you were young, what did you imagine you would be when you grew up?
2. Would you rather be given, each January, a new car to drive for the year at no additional charge beyond insurance and regular maintenance, or having an all-expense-paid two week vacation anywhere in the world every year?

Read the following passage: Luke 6:20-36.

In this passage, Jesus is preparing his disciples for the persecution he knows they will experience. Those who go against the grain of the world's values and practices are not likely to experience the world's riches, comforts, and applause. But Jesus assures his disciples that although they may not be rich in the world's eyes, they have the infinitely greater treasure of the kingdom of God. Because we don't typically experience anything near the sort of persecution that those following Jesus in the first century experienced, we can forget that the kingdom to which we belong is not of this world. Instead of defining the successful and blessed life as one which pleases God and lives for his purposes, we can find ourselves living for the same worldly goals as those who don't follow Jesus. We may, unintentionally, embrace the crazy ways of a crazy world. But Jesus teaches us to 1) value the kingdom of God above all other kingdoms; 2) to live for the greater reward offered to us in the next life; 3) to engage the difficult people in our lives with the love modeled by Christ himself.

Questions for Discussion (Choose several that are relevant for your group):

1. Given their knowledge of the persecution they would likely face, why do you think so many people in the first century chose to follow Jesus anyway? How do you think you would respond if you were told to either renounce faith in Jesus Christ or face life in prison? Do you ever keep your Christian faith private in order to avoid uncomfortable conversations, rejection, or some other mild form of "persecution"? What can we do to overcome this "fear of man"?
2. Jesus told his disciples, "Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God." Contrast what it might mean to have the life, power, status, joy, and reward of God's kingdom with the parallel benefits of some "worldly" kingdom. Although a full experience of God's kingdom awaits the future, how can we have a more conscious experience of God's kingdom in the present?
3. Explain how two people could have the same job and live in the same neighborhood with roughly equivalent standards of living and yet be focused on two completely different kingdoms.

4. Read 2 Corinthians 4:16-18. What is your understanding of what the next life will be like for those who wholeheartedly follow Jesus? What about for those who do not follow Jesus? Are there any views of the next life that you regularly encounter that you think are mistaken? Explain. How often do you think about the next life? Why might thinking about the next life be important for living appropriately in the present?
5. If we wholeheartedly follow Jesus, do you think it is possible to avoid having enemies in this life? Explain. (See Luke 6:26.)
6. Scholar Darrell Bock offers these reflections on loving our enemies and turning the other cheek.

...love involves not defending one's rights and accepting wrongs committed against one by being willing to forgive, with the additional proviso that one is willing to turn around a second time and still offer help—even if that means being abused yet again. Love is available, vulnerable, and subject to repeated abuse. Offering the other cheek is not so much an active pursuit as it is a natural exposure when one reaches out to those who have contempt. Revenge is excluded, while doing good to the hostile is commanded. In the context of persecution, offering the cheek means continuing to minister at the risk of further persecution, as Paul does in Acts 14 and 16.

Darrell Bock, *Luke*

How do we love our enemies, as Darrell Bock describes above, without enabling their dysfunctional behavior, submitting ourselves to pointless abuse, or giving the impression that evil and abusive acts are no big deal? Do you think Jesus or the apostle Paul enabled wickedness or dysfunction when they loved their enemies? Explain.

7. Do you think you are loving the difficult people around you well? Explain.
8. What is one way you can begin to put into practice Jesus' teachings in Luke 6:20-36?

Pray