

East Hill Church Sermon Discussion Guide:

Stay the Course: Lessons from Paul's Life

Speaker: Jan Brauer (Guest Speaker)

Date: October 13, 2024

Introduction:

In this powerful sermon, guest speaker Jan Brauer continued the "Citizens of Heaven" series by exploring the Apostle Paul's life and teachings. She emphasized how believers can stay true to their faith while living in challenging cultural contexts.

1. Knowing Who You Are:

Jan discussed the importance of understanding our identity in Christ and being thankful for God's mercy.

Discussion Questions:

1. How has your understanding of your identity in Christ changed over time?
2. In what ways can gratitude for God's mercy impact how we view ourselves and our circumstances?

Supporting Verses:

Romans 12:2-3 - "Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will. For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the faith God has distributed to each of you."

1 Timothy 1:12-16 - [Paraphrased] Paul expresses gratitude for God's mercy and grace despite his past as a persecutor.

Context and Reflection:

- Historical/Cultural Context: Paul was writing to believers living in a pagan culture, encouraging them to live distinctively.
- Theological Significance: These passages emphasize the importance of a renewed mind and a humble, grateful attitude in shaping our identity.
- Application: We should regularly reflect on our identity in Christ and God's mercy, allowing these truths to shape our self-perception and actions.

2. Knowing Whose Love and Acceptance Matter:

Jan emphasized the importance of finding our worth in God's love rather than seeking approval from others.

Discussion Questions:

1. How have you struggled with people-pleasing in your life?
2. What practical steps can you take to root your sense of worth more deeply in God's love?

Supporting Verses:

1 Thessalonians 2:4-6 - "On the contrary, we speak as those approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel. We are not trying to please people but God, who tests our hearts. You know we never used flattery, nor did we put on a mask to cover up greed—God is our witness. We were not looking for praise from people, not from you or anyone else, even though as apostles of Christ we could have asserted our authority."

Ephesians 3:16-19 - [Paraphrased] Paul's prayer for believers to be rooted and grounded in God's love.

Context and Reflection:

- Historical/Cultural Context: Early Christians faced pressure to conform to societal norms and seek approval from others.

- Theological Significance: These passages highlight the sufficiency of God's love and approval in contrast to human praise.
- Application: We should seek to please God rather than people, finding our security and worth in His unchanging love.

3. Knowing Your Course:

Jan discussed the importance of understanding and staying true to our unique calling and gifts.

Discussion Questions:

1. How have you discovered your unique gifts and calling in life?
2. What challenges have you faced in staying true to your "course" in life?

Supporting Verses:

Romans 15:20-21 - "It has always been my ambition to preach the gospel where Christ was not known, so that I would not be building on someone else's foundation. Rather, as it is written: 'Those who were not told about him will see, and those who have not heard will understand.'"

Romans 12:4-8 - [Paraphrased] Paul describes the diversity of gifts within the body of Christ.

Context and Reflection:

- Historical/Cultural Context: Paul was explaining his specific ministry focus and encouraging believers to use their diverse gifts.
- Theological Significance: These passages highlight the importance of understanding and fulfilling our unique roles in God's kingdom.
- Application: We should seek to discern and faithfully live out our specific callings, recognizing the diverse ways God works through His people.

Conclusion:

Jan Brauer's message reminded us that staying the course in our faith involves knowing our identity in Christ, finding our worth in God's love, and understanding our unique calling. By focusing on these aspects, we can navigate cultural challenges and live faithfully as citizens of heaven.

Reflection Questions:

1. In what areas of your life do you need to more fully embrace your identity in Christ?
2. How can you shift your focus from seeking human approval to resting in God's love this week?
3. What steps can you take to better understand and live out your unique calling in God's kingdom?

Prayer:

Heavenly Father, thank you for your mercy and love that define our true identity. Help us to find our worth in your unchanging acceptance rather than human approval. Guide us in understanding and faithfully living out the unique callings you've given each of us. May our lives reflect your love and truth as we navigate the challenges of our culture. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

References:

Primary Sources:

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Collaborative Contributions:

LLM Contributions: Based on a mixture of licensed data, data created by AI models, and publicly available data, synthesized for the study of the provided sermon notes and biblical passages.

LLM Training Data:

LLM Training Data. Includes a diverse range of texts (books, websites, and other publications) up to April 2024.