

AN INVITATION TO A JOURNEY



SMALL GROUP GUIDE



HOW DID IT GO? (10 MINUTES)

Did you...

- ask yourself what you're anxious about? and what you're truly seeking?
- ask God for peace in your situation at the same time every day for the remainder of the week?
- read the article attached to the study guide again this week, asking the Lord how he wants this reality that *The Kingdom of God is in the here and now (already but not yet)* to transform any daily rhythms, relationships, etc. you currently have...and then begin letting the Spirit transform your life in these rhythms or relationships?
 - Share with your group what this transformation has looked like thus far.

Scripture Passages

Colossians 3:16-17 Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God. 17 And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

John 4:19-24 "Sir," the woman said, "I can see that you are a prophet. 20 Our ancestors worshiped on this mountain, but you Jews claim that the place where we must worship is in Jerusalem." 21 "Woman," Jesus replied, "believe me, a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. 22 You Samaritans worship what you do not know; we worship what we do know, for salvation is from the Jews. 23 But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship him. 24 God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth."

HEAD (15-20 MINUTES)

Read aloud the passages for this week.

1. Today's text from John 4 is part of Jesus' encounter with the Samaritan woman at Jacob's well. This woman tries to engage Jesus in a debate over which is the better place to worship God: "this mountain" (referring to Mt. Gerizim where the Samaritans worshiped) or Jerusalem (where the Jews worshiped and the location of the temple). What does Jesus' answer reveal about how worship and access to God will soon change? [Read Matthew 27:51 and this article to understand the significance of the curtain being torn: <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/veil-torn-jesus-cross/>]
2. In response to her question, what does Jesus tell the Samaritan woman about how true worshipers will worship the Father?

NOVEMBER 14

SERMON TITLE:

Worship as
Discipleship

SCRIPTURE:

Colossians 3:16-17
John 4:19-24

► Head

Observe the text and the author's main points.

HEART (15-20 MINUTES)

1. What do you think Jesus means by worshiping “in spirit and in truth”?
2. Dallas Willard, in his book *The Spirit of the Disciplines*, divides Christian disciplines into two broad categories - disciplines of abstinence (fasting, chastity) and disciplines of engagement (that actually require one to do something.) He explicitly includes worship as a discipline of engagement. Do you think he is correct in his categorization of worship? Do you ever worship alone?
3. Often God’s people gather in His church expecting to be enlightened and entertained - in other words, to be the passive audience. Is there anything in our texts this week, or in other biblical texts describing worship (e.g., Isaiah 6:1-8 or Rev 4:6-11), suggesting that we are the audience? Who is the audience - or should be?

HANDS (10 MINUTES)

Reaching Upward: Growing in Your Relationship with God

- As a group, pray about your posture and attitude in worship, and specifically that you might be, in Dallas Willard’s words, “met by God himself.”
- In *The Spirit of the Disciplines*, Willard says, “In worship, we engage ourselves with, dwell upon, and express the greatness, beauty, and goodness of God. ... We do this alone as well as in union with God’s people (emphasis added.)” This week design a worship service in which you are the only worshiper. What elements would you include in private worship?
- We are accustomed to worshipping corporately, but worshipping alone may be a new idea. Practice the spiritual discipline of worship where you and God are the only ones present.

Reaching Outward: Investing in Your Neighbors

Studies have consistently shown that the most common reason given when people are asked why they decided to visit a church is that someone invited them.

- We are no longer separated from God by a curtain; instead, we have complete access to Him at all times. Is there someone with whom you have wanted to discuss or share this hope, but you have been uncertain where to begin? Invite that person to come with you to church. Before you reach out, pray that God will give him or her a receptive heart.
- Invite friends to join you for some of the special events during the approaching Thanksgiving, Advent, and Christmas season. Though we can worship alone, Christ died for His church and is honored when we meet together.

Reaching Beyond

- Any other way God is stirring you to put this passage into practice?

➤ Heart

Envision how the text—when applied—might transform your inner life in terms of your thoughts, attitudes, and behaviors.

➤ Hands

Apply the text by moving from inward reflection to outward action looking for practical ways to live the text out in our lives to serve others.

➤ Neighbor

Anyone in your life—whether a friend, colleague, family member, classmate, or literal neighbor—to whom you can show God’s love.

¹Willard, Dallas. *The Spirit of the Disciplines*. San Francisco, Harper Collins,1991 (177-188.)

²Ibid (178.)

³Ibid (177.)



SMALL GROUP READING

Curtain Torn in Two: What Did the Tearing of the Veil Accomplish?

APRIL 2, 2021 | GREG LANIER

In *The Lord of the Rings*, the Doors of Durin bar entrance into Moria under the Misty Mountains. In *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*, a mysterious wardrobe grants or prevents entrance into Narnia. And in *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*, a three-headed giant dog named Fluffy blocks entry to the underground chambers. A key feature of these stories is a barrier between you and where you need to be.

In the story of Israel, the most vivid instance of this theme was the finely woven curtain hanging at the heart of the house of worship, separating the Holy Place from the Most Holy Place (or Holy of Holies). Priests were allowed to minister in the Holy Place regularly, but only once a year could the high priest pass through the inner curtain into the immediate presence of God (e.g., Ex. 26:33–35; Lev. 16:2). The curtain, in effect, perpetually guarded the entrance to the holiest holy place.

There were two exceptions.

First, in a stunning vision of the future, the book of Revelation describes how, when Christ's eternal kingdom comes, the heavenly temple will stand open (Rev. 11:15). The ark of the covenant—God's throne in the Most Holy Place before being lost after the Babylonian conquest of 586 BC—will be seen by all (Rev. 11:19). No curtain blocks the way.

But there is also a foretaste of this climactic scene on the day of Jesus's crucifixion.

What Happened in the Temple?

A series of events took place as Jesus breathed his last. There was darkness over the earth; an earthquake struck; tombs of dead saints were opened; Jesus cried out. And “the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom” (Matt. 27:51; cf. Mark 15:38; Luke 23:45).

Though other curtains (Greek, *katapetasma*) adorned the temple, the evangelists likely refer to the curtain at the entrance of the Most Holy Place, given their use of the definite article to specify it. It was the most significant curtain—holding immense symbolic value in early Judaism (see Josephus, *War* 5.212; Philo, *Life of Moses* 1.88)—and would automatically come to mind for any Jewish or Christian reader as “the curtain” (see Heb. 9:2–3).

Amid a tumult of apocalyptic events, this curtain “was torn” (passive voice) from “top to bottom,” with both details hinting at God's direct intervention from heaven. He tears the curtain that guards his presence.

But why? It's a puzzling detail at first glance.

What Did the Tearing Accomplish?

1. Judgment on the Temple System

First, the tearing of this all-important curtain is part of a sequence signaling that the Jerusalem temple was losing its place as the heart of worship. Jesus declared that the house of God was forsaken (Luke 13:33). He ransacked the temple because its bustling, commercial, and corrupt religiosity had turned a “house of prayer” into a “den of robbers” (Mark 11:15–17). And he foretold its impending destruction with tragic clarity (Luke 19:41–44; Matt. 24:15–28)—which came to pass in AD 70.

History was repeating itself.

Previously Israel's bankrupt religion led to God's glory being escorted out of the temple by the cherubim, upon the temple's destruction by Babylon (Ezek. 11:22–23). Likewise the tearing of the curtain, apparently embroidered with cherubim, signified that Israel's temple had again grown stagnant and would be undone (see Tertullian, *Against Marcion*, 4.42).

The curtain was a kind of metaphor for what truly blocked entrance to God's presence in Jesus's day, and in ours: the empty externalism of going through the motions. The tearing of the curtain, then, was a prophetic symbol that the earthly temple approached its expiration date.

In a stroke of divine irony, the only likely observers of the curtain-tearing would have been priests tending to the evening sacrifices in the Holy Place. They witnessed the undoing of their vocation as the man they rejected was sacrificed outside the city.

2. New Access to the Father in Christ

The overturning of the old-covenant infrastructure prepares for a new era. The torn curtain reveals that all believers have fresh, unparalleled access to God.

We glimpse this wonderful reality in the apostle's explanation of Jesus's ominous words against the Jerusalem temple: "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up" (John 2:19). The religious leaders push back, for it took 46 years to build Herod's temple (John 2:20). But John comments, "He was speaking about the temple of his body" (John 2:21). Jesus himself is the new temple—the new Most Holy Place—with no curtain barring us from intimacy with him.

Another angle emerges in Paul's description of the church as the new temple (1 Cor. 3:16; Eph. 2:21). The curtain at the heart of the Jerusalem temple was part of a chain of barriers to entry, each of which Jesus removed.

The outer *court of Gentiles* was nullified by Jesus's drawing all nations by faith. The *court of women* was nullified by Jesus's making male, female, Jew, and Greek equal heirs of God (Gal. 3:28). And the *priestly courts* were nullified by his consecrating all Christians as a holy priesthood (1 Pet. 2:9). Throughout his ministry, Jesus demolished barriers symbolized in the temple apparatus. The inner curtain was simply the last.

The living God now indwells not a physical structure but the church of men and women from all walks of life, united to Christ who offers unhindered access to divine blessing.

3. Christ's Entrance into the Heavens

Though most scholars stop here, I'd venture another tentative possibility about the tearing of the curtain, taking a cue from the "curtain" in Hebrews (the only other New Testament references).

Hebrews sketches how the true Most Holy Place is in heaven. The earthly one is but a copy of the real thing (Heb. 9:24). Against this backdrop, Hebrews presents Christ's work:

- He shed his blood on earth (Heb. 13:12).
- He rose again and ascended to heaven (Heb. 4:14).
- He entered the heavenly sanctuary to present his self-offering before God (Heb. 9:23; 10:12–14).
- In doing so, he penetrated the heavenly "inner place behind the curtain" (Heb. 6:19–20).

In fact, Hebrews says that his own flesh, torn on earth below, opened a "new and living way" through the curtain into the heavenly holy places (Heb. 10:19–20).

Stepping back, then, the mysterious heaven-earth parallelism for the temple as a whole may also apply to the curtain. On Good Friday, the tearing of the earthly temple's curtain as Jesus died was a copy of a heavenly reality—when Jesus went

through the curtain above to present his blood in the heavenly sanctuary.

The earthly veil is torn; the heavenly veil is opened. Our anchor holds within the veil (Heb. 6:19).

All Access

So we circle back to Revelation. The heavenly temple, the Jerusalem above, is the destiny of God's people, encompassing all creation (Rev. 21:2–3). Our king and priest, Jesus, has already entered as our forerunner. The temple of the Triune God is God (Rev. 21:22). The temple stands open for all because it is all.

By faith, nothing blocks its access anymore.