



Values and Practices with College Students

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“How do you know what your values are?” A student wrote this question during an evening UKirk Q&A for myself (the Associate Pastor/Campus Minister) and my colleague (Church Educator) to respond to. Knowing that this question could not be answered in the span of 10 minutes, we instead created a 5-week series that examined not only what core values for one might be, but also our ideas of what the practice of these values might look like. The study is based on Colossians 3:1-15, as we felt the popular vv.12-15 provided a starting point of identifying values. The suggestion is to have the first week be an introduction to values, practices, and Colossians, and to then examine 2 values each week as presented in vv. 12-15: compassion and kindness, humility and meekness, patience and forgiveness, and harmony and peace. Something that helped in our discussion was presenting students with the more literal Greek translation of these words – don’t worry, you don’t need to know Greek, we’re only providing the definition. We found that the present-day understanding of the word and the original context oftentimes offered a better understanding of the English word we use today and informed how that value might be practiced.

Week 1: Introduction and Exploration of Colossians 3:1-15

For the first week, you are setting up an introduction. Spend time talking about what values are, why do we or don’t we need them, and how values are determined by individuals and groups. For discussion, spend time in Colossians 3:1-15, understanding the context, naming questions and observations and talking about how the passage informs an understanding of values. I would like to offer up the literal Greek translations of “earthly” things, as their English counterparts tend to have a more sexualized bend to them. *Fornication*: demeaning sexual intercourse, which, among new converts, was still indulged in outside of the covenant of marriage. *Impurity*: a moral sense of living recklessly and wastefully. *Passion*: an envious, volatile, depraved desire of lust out of need for power and control. *Evil Desire*: a craving or longing for what is forbidden. *Greed*: the desire to have more; covetousness; avarice. Understanding these original meanings helps to provide a space for understanding the values that come in vv. 12-15. As you close, take time to see how the Greek and English translations differ or are similar and what values and practices look like in the overarching passage.

Consistency of questions is what helped to form the bookends of the remaining weeks. Taking the time to flesh out each word individually at the beginning and moving into how the values interact with each other made for a smooth flow. Here were the weekly introductory and closing questions posed to students:

Introductory: What is (value)? How would you define (value)? How is (value) talked about today? What are the similarities and differences between (value 1) and (value 2)? Why do you think (value 1) and (value 2) might be considered as values?

Closing: Considering the scripture and Greek, how do these values work together? What do you think the practice of (value) entails?

With this framework for opening and closing, the central component is the discussion and examination of the Greek words and how they are used in other passages to provide further understanding.

Week 2: The Values and Practices of Compassion and Kindness

Compassion in its original Greek means mercy or pity; the literal definition meaning “the bowels in which compassion resides” (as the bowels were considered the inmost part of a person). Pity in Greek is not an act of

looking down on someone but is a recognition and mourning of the inequality of a relationship that is not mutual or right. Scripture passages that use this word are Luke 6:36, Romans 9:14-16, and James 5:9-11.

Kindness in the original Greek means benignity, tolerance toward others, or an act of kindness. Scripture passages that also use this word are Luke 6:35, Romans 3:11-12, and 1 Peter 2:1-3.

Week 3: The Values of Humility and Meekness

Humility in Greek means having a deep sense of one's (mortal) littleness; lowliness of mind. Humility is a "not" word—to not be exalting, to not be determining, to not be inflated. To be humble is to recognize your reliance upon God and not upon yourself or others. Scripture passages that use this word are Philippians 2:3-11 and Colossians 2:16-23.

Meekness in Greek means gentleness or mildness. The root word literally means "action; force; power held with reserve." Meekness is perhaps better defined then as an awareness of one's power and not using that power for harm or ill will; meekness is an action, not an attitude. Scripture passages that use this word are Matthew 11:25-30 and Galatians 6:1-2.

Week 4: The Values of Patience and Forgiveness

Patience in Greek is a compound word of both distance and passion, or perhaps a better word to use is constancy. Scripture passages that also use this word are Ephesians 4:1-3 and James 8:8-10.

The root word for *forgiveness* in the Greek is "*charis*"—the Greek word for grace. The suffix that is attached to this Greek word is "to extend." Forgiveness then is an extension of grace, to show oneself to be gracious. Scripture passages that use this word are Acts 27:21-25, Romans 8:31-32, and Ephesians 4:31-32.

Week 5: The Values of Harmony and Peace

Harmony in Greek means both the completion of a step, as well as the essentials of a next step; it is both the fulfillment and completion and the continuation. Scripture passages that also use this word are Matthew 19:20-21 and John 5:36.

There are two Greek words for *peace* – one that is translated from the Hebrew (and closest to the Hebrew word *shalom*), and one that is from the Hellenistic era—it is important to note this as both are used in the New Testament. The word for peace used in this passage is the Hebrew-to-Greek translation, and means not simply a rightness of relationship, but the internal states and external relationships that bring wholeness. Scripture passages that also use this word are Romans 14:17-29 and Ephesians 2:14-16. (In some of these passages, wholeness relates to Christ or salvation.)

If time allows, or perhaps if there is an additional meeting built into the series, create a space for students to process all that they have heard, learned, and taken away. A healthy disclaimer to reiterate throughout the series is the reminder that all the values being examined are not a checklist or to-do list that we are expected to perfect. Rather, God has revealed these values to us, and so as humans, we try to practice these values in our day to day living, some coming easier and some more challenging. Values also have the capacity to shift over time as we are always changing and shifting in our own lives. Remind students that the study is meant to give them a starting point in empowering them to know what their values are, and how they want these values to build an identity and a life that is true to them.

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