

LifeGroup Notes - Leader's Guide

John 3:22-36

Allegiances. We all have them. They can come in the form of loyalty as to a political party ideology or family. Allegiances can also take the shape of faithfulness as in marriage or a career path. Allegiances might be about association or adherence to a cause, institution, doctrine or individual that we particularly admire. In John 3:22-36 we are confronted with a clash of allegiances. Disciples allegiant to John (the Baptizer) are jealous of Jesus and his disciples' ministry. John the Baptizer's answer to this envy was probably not what his disciples expected: "He (Jesus) must become greater; I must become less" (3:30). What God reveals to us in these verses is that sometimes our allegiances, as good as they might seem, need to be rethought and reordered in light of Jesus. This is no small issue. As Kevin clearly pointed out on Sunday:

Allegiance is a challenge in the church, it has been from the very beginning. 1 Corinthians 1:10-17 tells that in Corinth there were groups forming around the various preachers: Paul, Apollos and Cephas. Division was occurring in the church. There is a basic human dimension to discipleship that challenges individual Christians and the institution of the church alike. It is not generous, it is not open and expansive, it is not focused on the gospel message - rather it is vested in the person or the institution or the program - and the value that we as Christians gain from being associated with it. Allegiance moves away from person or institution to whom it is given and it becomes focused on the one who offers the allegiance and what they get out of it, how it benefits them to be associated with that person or institution.

Any allegiance that conflicts or competes with full allegiance to Jesus needs to be addressed if we are to experience the life that only King Jesus can offer (cf 3:36).

Warming Up

1. It's surprising to think of just how many things we are "dyed in the wool" for.
 - a. Google and discuss the definition (no this isn't a Paul-ism).
 - b. What are you "dyed in the wool" over? Or, what would you say you are extremely opinionated about?
 - c. Do you have an allegiance that has changed over time? (I.e.: sports team, political party, social club, tradition you practice).
 - d. Has allegiance to something ever been a benefit or a cost to you?

Context

Read John 3:22-26 in a couple different versions (maybe NLT, NIV, & ESV, most Bible apps should have them).

A few things of note:

- John is the only Gospel to contain this account of John the Baptist and Jesus ministering at the same time.
 - Jesus himself was not doing the baptizing but his disciples were (cf 4:2).
 - Jesus himself was baptized by John the Baptizer (Mt 3:3-17; Mk 1:9-11; Lk 3:21-23a) before the events of 3:22-36.
2. What is the real issue that John's disciples have with Jesus baptizing in verse 26? How does this compare to when John the Baptizer speaks in John 3:30?
- a. **Leaders Note:** At its root the issue isn't theological (for ex: is Jesus baptizing for the right reasons?) or even practical (for ex: are Jesus' disciples doing it the right way?). They are simply jealous over the numbers of followers! "Everyone is going to him!" You can even feel the sting of their jealousy in their exaggeration: "everyone is going to him!"
3. Remember, John the Baptist was sent by God to point people to Jesus. Following John was not, in itself, a bad thing; but it became a form of unhealthy allegiance and competition for some of his followers.
- a. Referring to the passage discuss how we can distinguish between a good and bad allegiance?
 - b. Read and discuss this quote from Pastor Paul: *Unhealthy allegiances will always cause us to be less gracious, honouring and respectful of others, especially those who aren't in our clique. Unhealthy allegiances are rooted in pride (competition and one-upmanship) not in the humility of Christ.*
 - c. Read Philippians 2:5-8 (pay special attention to v8) and Romans 12:9-18. These verses are all about clothing ourselves with the same humility that marked Jesus. How can we encourage one another as a LifeGroup (and church) to live in humility and peace?
 - d. How do we know when a good allegiance has gone bad (as in the case of John the Baptist's disciples)? Can you think of any examples?
 - i. **Leader Note:** According to John (the writer) the disciples of John (the baptizer) don't even call Jesus by name - "one you testified about." It's unlikely they didn't know Jesus' name. Unhealthy competition always causes us to demean or belittle those we are jealous of - "they're rich but I bet they're unhappy."
 - ii. **Leader Note:** This section may turn into a political conversation. Don't be afraid of that! However, be sure to guide the conversation. Make sure it stays honouring of everyone. We are all created in the image of God. It is possible to disagree but still speak with grace and truth.

Read 3:27-36.

4. In what ways is Jesus superior to John the Baptizer?
- a. **Leader's Note:** John himself tells us the difference! Look again at v.31-34. Jesus is from above, from Heaven; John is from below, from earth. Jesus testifies about heavenly

things, He is sent from God, He speaks the words of God, He is filled without limit by the Spirit of God. Jesus alone bears a divine nature and carries God's authority. What distinguishes Jesus from John and any other teacher, preacher or prophet is that Jesus is truly and fully God. It is on account of who Jesus is that we pledge our allegiance to Him.

Driving It Home

5. In what ways is Jesus superior to all of our Allegiances? If you need help discussing this, consider one of the questions below.
 - a. Pick one of the following:
 - i. What are your sports allegiances? The Montreal Canadians or the Raptors? How is Jesus superior?
 1. **Leaders Note:** This one may be a little corny, because for most Christians it is a no brainer that Jesus is greater than their sports allegiances. But our behaviour often does not follow this thinking. There is a benefit to putting it out there and discussing how much greater Christ is than our sports teams.
 - ii. What are your denominational allegiances? Baptist, Brethren? How is Jesus superior?
 - iii. What are your political allegiances? How is Jesus superior?
 - b. Can you think of more subtle allegiances that occur in our life? What are they, how would you describe them, and how is Jesus superior?
 - c. **Next Level:** Be sure to take some time with the Holy Spirit and pray through this. Ask the Spirit to show you not only unhealthy allegiances, but also places where you need to align yourself more closely with Jesus.
6. **Reread John 3: 25-30.** What clues does the text give us for dealing with faulty loyalties or misplaced allegiances?
 - a. **Leader Note:** *“He must increase, I must decrease.”* Allegiances and loyalties become deadly idols when we cling to them for our own personal benefit. For example: families. Am I loyal to my family for what I can get from them (inheritance, reputation, etc)? It is interesting to note that John the Baptizer’s words about decreasing were really prophetic in a way he might not have realized. John would soon be imprisoned and beheaded! Consider how this factor fits into the whole picture of John’s humble approach to God’s will and his allegiance to fulfilling his role.
7. What does a life of allegiance to Jesus look like in the day-to-day?
 - a. **Leaders Note:** Try to get beyond simply “pray,” “read the Bible,” and “go to church” type answers. See if your group can think of passages that speak of the importance of perseverance. Following Jesus is not a matter of momentary passion but of life long

faithful perseverance (allegiance) especially when the road is rough. Some ideas of passages: Hebrews 10:19-25; 12:1-3; James 1:2-4; Revelation 3:10.

8. Read 2 Corinthians 10:12.
 - a. Next Level: Work as a group to memorize this verse by next week.
 - b. What is it about our human nature that compels us to outperform others in most areas of life?
 - c. What areas of life (i.e. finances, career, marriage) do you find yourself most susceptible to comparison, competition and jealousy?
 - d. What are some of the negative results in a church family that can come from being competitive and comparing?

Prayer

Open up to John 3:31-36, reread it, and keep it open for your prayer time. Pray inspired by the passage. For example you might pray “God thank you that you are truthful above all else” (v31) or “Lord help us to continue to receive you into our lives Jesus” (v33).