

THE WAY

Ohana Group Discussion Questions:

- What are those lions, tigers, and bears that challenge you?
- How do these affect your home, work, school, and church life? Your relationship with God?
- How do you safeguard yourself from being a "none"?
- How do these distractions and diversions keep us from God's plan over our lives?
- How has the Lord been training you to combat those predators?
- What action steps will you take to strengthen your relationship with Jesus?

Hey pathfinders! Today we continue on our journey!

Recall:

Week 1: We received our destination and discussed why God's way is The Way;

Week 2: We did our preparation (P. Mark) - we prepared our heart and mind.

Week 3: We gathered the tools we will need for the journey (P. Glenn)

So, we're ready to go. Wait!

Now, we realize some of us may be totally new to this journey or a "little ways" down the path, while others of us have been on the journey for a time now. We also realize some of us may be just stepping onto the path. One thing we can all agree on, no matter what point we are at, we ALL want to finish the journey well - which means we stay on "the way". Nope, I didn't say get in the way, but stay "on the way", the right path.

Now, how many of us know, that as much as we want to finish the journey well, there are those things that well, for lack of better, want to .. TAKE .. YOU ... OUT! You know, those lions, tigers and bears. SAY WHAT? Yo, yo ... you gotta beware - of those lions, tigers, and bears. Yo, you gotta beware of those lions, tigers, and bears. Yo, you gotta beware (you say) of those lions, tigers, and bears (Woot! Woot! ... I say, Jesus, you say SAVES - Kaylie and Debbie, HOPE class - that was for you).

So, today, we discuss how NOT to stray from the way. Hmm. Stray from the way? You mean like QUIT? YES, QUIT!

See there are these folks called "the NONES," nope not the nuns with habits, but the N-O-N-E-S (NONES) and they are folks who at one time were affiliated with faith (some were even church going - in fact, the majority were church going), who choose no longer to be affiliated with any religion. NONE at all. Some questioned their faith and couldn't find the answers. Others were disappointed in some way, shape or form. So, I guess the true question is, "How do I safeguard myself from becoming a NONE?"

THE WAY

Well, God in His infinite wisdom gives us insight on this. Through the apostle PETER, He tells us ... 1 Peter 4:12, NIV

"Dear friends, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal that has come on you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you."

In other words, Peter is saying, "Don't be surprised at those things that will come after you, those hard times, those challenges in your walk. Rather, be prepared because there are lions, tigers and bears, OH my! But take heart because these are not bad things, in fact, you may find yourself the better for them.

SO, I recall my very first horseback ride - We were out Mokuleia side. We were there on a trail and the horses were trained to stay on the path, one following the other. I was the very last person. It was great, we had been instructed, had what we needed, and mounted our horses. We were on our way! In the beginning I was focused on the person in front of me, thinking as long as we follow we are good. A little way down, the scenery was great. It was exciting. Until, it happened. The person in front of the person in front of me thought it'd be cool to check out what was, in the brush. He got distracted and directed his horse to move off the path. His horse being smarter than we were at that point, stopped, which in turn caused the horse the boy in front of me was on to stop, which meant, I stopped. My heart began to beat out of my chest as we saw the rest of the group in the distance and disappear through the trees. We knew we were in trouble, but none of us cried out because we didn't want to get in trouble. There we sat stuck off the path.

I learned three valuable lessons that day. 1) don't follow a knucklehead ... just kidding. Don't follow just any body (you need to follow the right guide because there are some who may not be the right guide for you - we'll call them the Lions); 2) in order to succeed and finish well, beware of the distractions and diversions on the path - we'll call them the Tigers; and 3) Know who you are so you can get help and not get attacked by the Bears!

So, let's take a closer look at these lions, tigers and bears.

Every journey needs a good guide one who genuinely cares about you, and will well, take you closer to Jesus. But how many of us know there are guides who may not have your best interest or even Jesus in mind? They are not bad people. They just don't have good theology. Many of these come in the forms of pseudo-faiths or philosophies like post-modernism, relativism, universalism and new age. Many of these will take base concepts from faith, from Christianity and tweak them ever so to cause question or doubt, and a believer could begin to question his/her faith.

THE WAY

Now, don't hear what I am not saying. It is okay to question, and believers, should question what they are told and what we receive. But, what I am saying is there are systems of belief that purposely work toward undermining absolutes so that everything becomes relative based on the eye of the beholder. Imagine not having a firm foundation to build a building, but rather a sway bridge based on an individual's opinion or collective culture. In other words, to have your beliefs based on nothing but personal opinion ... And folks also once thought the world was flat, based on popular opinion. Beware of those false guides. Matthew warns us to 15 *"Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves. Beware of those false guides."*

Then, there are tigers ... those distractions and diversions. Those things that we don't always expect, purposefully set, to steer us off the path God has us on. Like traps they sit to ensnare unknowing believers and take us in a completely different direction. Unsuspected problems, addiction, infidelity, job change, pandemics, even church ministry. Being aware of the distractions and diversions is critical for our success and hey, our survival. A distraction, Webster says, is "the drawing away of the mind from one point or course to another or others." Anything that takes our eyes off the path, off the goal, off Jesus.

A diversion will do the same but is much more aggressive. It is an intentional assault. A diversion is a military term for the act of drawing attention and force from the point so that an attack can be made. The distractions and diversions are tactics the enemy will use to lure us from God's path, so that he may take full advantage in his attack.

And he is a cagey one. So, we've got to be on guard because while we are looking for the dangers, he will send a TIGER disguised as a cute little kitty or something that looks wonderful. I recall a conversation where a friend had gotten a job offer that seemed on the surface "too good to pass up." As we all celebrated, she wisely said, I've not taken it yet, I am praying, because how any of us know not everything that looks good is of God. What are those things that may be a distraction or diversion, that look good, but may not be God? She prayed and interestingly did NOT take the position but, another co-worker did. As she had so wisely seen, the position was not as wonderful as it first seemed and interestingly the position was made obsolete in less than a year.

Which leads us to those bears. Bears are those things that will attack in the midst of the distractions and diversions. You know, those internal struggles we all face (orphan spirit, unworthiness, fear, entitlement, unforgiveness, anger, hurt, bitterness & resentment, I can go on, and on. Those things that bare on us and tire us out over time. Some refer to them as hang-ups. Many are emotion-based. Whatever those hang-ups might be they will result in a sense of worthlessness, helplessness, hopelessness, aimlessness. The crazy thing is they are the result of our belief in the lies of the enemy that he will weave at our lowest points. Points of disappointment, loneliness, frustration, shame. Those lions and tigers that we may have fallen victim too and yes, we bare the scars.

THE WAY

Which brings me back to the NONES. Many said the number one reason they became a NONE is because they were disappointed with organized religion. See it is not JESUS they are disappointed in, not GOD, not CHRISTIANITY. What disappointed them, challenged them, and caused them to fall away was, the people.

The very ones who help to sharpen us and we them. The people amidst the situations of doing church, amidst the challenge of doing life on life, are the very ones who disappointed them. WOW! So, how do we safeguard ourselves from QUITTING and taking on the title of a NONE? Because I bet every single one of those NONES if asked will tell you they were justified with all the reasons to QUIT. I also just bet many of them and us who may have considered quitting are still wounded.

So how do we safeguard ourselves? And if we are a NONE how do we make our way back? HOW DO WE MAINTAIN WHAT GOD IS CALLING US TO MAINTAIN. OUR JOBS, OUR HOMES, OUR RELATIONSHIPS, OUR FAITH IN JESUS?

First, Love God, love people. Then, Trust God and love people.

I was recently, playing with my grandbaby and it occurred to me how messy we people are. We're a hot mess. Turn to your neighbor and say, "You're a Hot Mess." We need help. She is beautiful and wonderful but like all babies there was stuff coming out of everywhere. Then I looked at my teenagers, and I looked at my husband and myself and oh ... I'm kidding but the truth is WE NEED HELP.

The help that comes from GOD and people. We need both. We need GOD as our good guide. We need a good crew to help us stay on the path. So we love them both. But not equally, because we TRUST GOD and love people. Too often we TRUST PEOPLE and love GOD. We place so much on them to make us happy, to satisfy our needs, to give us kudos, and make us feel good, without realizing it, we make them ... GOD. And that is much too tall an order to put on anyone. .

Then, when they disappoint us, everything comes crashing on us like a two-ton boulder and we get taken out.

1) So we've got to Intentionally, PLACE GOD IN HIS PROPER PLACE. ISN'T IT CRAZY HOW Reverence of God is a fleeting thing in these days. Place God on High and folks flee. Place an iphone or the like on high and everyone celebrates. WHO PLACES HIM THERE? WE DO. YOU AND I get to make the decision where to place Him. Remember he is not Lord until you make him that. For some of us we've got to re-place him as Lord because we have replaced him with other things. Not intentionally but, subtly a little here and there. Who might be sitting in His throne in your life? Your kids, your significant other, status, money, whatever.

THE WAY

2) WORK on YOUR Identity - intentionally.

Part of that is examining your thought life. It's been said either your will rule your thoughts or your thoughts will rule you.

Colossians 3:1-4 says it like this, *"Since, then you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God."*

An action step is to examine what are those thoughts that culturally you have been taught to think about yourself, others, your relationships. Think of the hurts, habits and hang ups that have been acquired along your journey, and ask, what do each of them look like through God's eyes? Then, get with a solid fellow believer and discuss these and work on embracing the truths that God has given you. Knowing who you are as a believer, not prideful or boasting on yourself but truthfully who God sees you as and embracing His forgiveness at the cross not just in your head but in every cell is important to be victorious in the battle.

Remember the Israelites, even though they were given deliverance from slavery in Egypt. They still lived as slaves. That generation who could not get past their old or former ways of thinking, of doing things, of habits not only ended up traveling a wilderness for 40 years on a journey that should have taken 11 days but never entering the promised land.

Their problem was their faith in God and surrendering their flesh so that God was God, rather than placing themselves as God. So that when things got tough, they lacked the fortitude to continue. Then, they held were holding on to these identities that were imposed on them, so much so they believed them and stuck like GORILLA GLUE they could not shed. In fact, many wanted to return to the former living calling that a better place. God or Moses didn't cause them to fall out as many might have thought, they caused themselves to fall out because their identity as God's chosen was not set and their faith was wavering.

I'm not saying anyone is perfect at this but, I can say what makes the difference in survival from one person to another and seeing the promises of God in their lives is their identity and faith in God. When we know where our identity is found and we embrace it, we will have not only the peace of God but be empowered to holdfast in even the most difficult of times.

Pastor Wayne Cordeiro shares an experience where he would spend months preparing for the Molokai Hoe. The Hoe is an outrigger canoe race between the islands of Molokai and Oahu, it is approximately 41 miles and takes somewhere for the fastest canoes between 8-9 hours. Individuals train rigorously for months leading up to the race, running, lifting weights, and working as a team. He goes on to explain during the race the first few hours are great, it is when you hit the 5th and 6th hours that it is most grueling.

THE WAY



Throughout the race there are relief boats that run alongside the canoe so if something happens or a team member needs to, he or she can come off the canoe and a relief person will switch in. He recalls a time when at the 5th hour he made a decision to paddle three more strokes and call it quits. He was going to be done. It was at the moment of paddling those three strokes that he heard God say, this is the moment you have trained for. Not during the entry point of the race, but rather, this moment when you want to call it quits. When you are most done. Pastor Wayne held fast that day and finished well.

Just like with Pastor Wayne, if you are at the 5th or 6th hour, God is saying this is what you have trained for so, hold fast and finish well. I am here and the victory is not long away. So don't give up or give in, but rather hold fast, so you can echo the words of Paul who wrote,

"I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith." (2 Tim, 4:7).