



NO PEOPLE CAN LIVE IN THE WORLD OF GOD WHO LIVE FOR THEMSELVES, WHO CONSULT WITH THEIR OWN DESIRES IN MAKING LAWS, WHO ARE THEIR OWN LAST COURT OF APPEAL, THEIR OWN BEGINNING AND THEIR OWN END. **RICHARD NIEBUHR**

On the cross, Jesus not only communed with God but also was conscious of the people and the landscape around him. When Jesus saw his mother with John, he yoked them spiritually, saying, “Here is your son” and “Here is your mother.” And he asked forgiveness for those who killed him.

Even in death, Jesus saw beyond himself, to the needs of others. Seeing the world of God encourages us look beyond ourselves. As citizens, we can see many forces that prevent us from looking outward One in particular the authors have again and again drawn our attention to. Serene Jones described it as, “a distinctively new challenge to our priorities in communal life – the fevers of consumerism and consumption.”

Consumerism is not just a question of self-identity but of how we relate to others, and our ignorance of how our choices affect others. All too often, we fail to see each other. Yet a vision of God’s world demands that we do see each other in every choice we make.

SESSION OBJECTIVES: To ask if consumerism is reconcilable with civic and spiritual virtue. To contemplate a God-centered idea of well being that is not obsessed with protecting ourselves or enjoying comforts.

"I CAME THAT THEY MAY HAVE LIFE, AND HAVE IT ABUNDANTLY."
JOHN 10:10

WARM-UP

As a group, identify differences between what Jesus meant when he spoke about abundant life, and the kind of abundance our culture looks for and promises.

Take a minute on your own to make a list of things that bring you a sense of well-being. Are those things compatible with what Jesus means by “true abundance?”
 WHAT EXACTLY DOES IT MEAN TO BE AN AMERICAN OTHER THAN THE FACT THAT MOST OF US WERE BORN HERE? IS IT SIMPLY THAT WE DRINK COKE, WEAR LEVIS AND SHOP AT THE GAP, OR IS THERE MORE TO IT THAN THAT? **OLIVER THOMAS**

From Citizens to Ambassadors - Heidi Hadsell

1. Have someone read **LUKE 10:25-37**.
 How does the **act** of having mercy **create neighbors**?
2. Talk about the kinds of people your grandparents affected in their day-to-day existence 60 years ago. Compare them to the people affected by your day-to-day existence, taking into consideration technology and trade. Where do they live? How do you affect them?

Remembering Gary Hart's discussion of not just enjoying our rights, but living up to our responsibilities, discuss how interconnection with people across the globe affects our responsibilities.

3. **“The long history of Christian thought teaches us that, alas, safety and permanence are always illusory.”** (Heidi Hadsell) Name ways that our insistence for our own security reduces security for others.
4. Name ways people can participate in society **WITHOUT** buying things. HINT: Take on the perspective of someone from another culture that you know about!
5. What are ways that wealthier people can participate in communal life with the 30 million Americans below the poverty level?
6. With Hadsell's description of an ambassador in mind, draw or write a description of yourself as an ambassador. Share it with the group.

Name ways Jesus was acting as ambassador when he made Mary and John family. What was he bringing together?

“Our Generation” -Carl Dennis

1. Have someone read aloud the poem on page 25.
2. Share what you think Dennis means by “the happiness our founders encouraged us to pursue.” Do you agree with that idea of happiness? Why are those engaged in civil protest a minority?

Close your time in prayer, meditating on the life and death of Jesus in thankfulness.

GRANT US PERSPECTIVE, GOD. GIVE US EYES TO SEE YOU AND TO SEE OTHERS PROPERLY. TEACH US TO SEE LIFE NOT AS A GRATIFICATION OF OUR EARTHLY DESIRES, BUT OPEN US TO SEE AND LONG FOR TRUE ABUNDANCE. PLEASE USE US TO CHANGE THIS CONSUMERIST CULTURE AND TO RECOGNIZE THE HARM WE DO OTHERS IN TRYING TO PROTECT OURSELVES. TEACH US TO BE THANKFUL AND TO SHARE OUR THANKFULNESS.

3. True or False. “The American Dream conflicts with civil responsibility.” Defend your response.

Theologies of Democracy in a New Century -E.J. Dionne, Jr.

1. Consider Dionne's charge that loving democracy and Christianity can make us silent or blind to problems and faults. How do the comforts we enjoy change our civic and religious involvement?
2. Read **JAMES 4:1-3** aloud. Compare capitalism to warring based on our “wants.”
3. Name ways a broader view of American Christianity can help broaden other ideas. What can you do to challenge stereotypical ideas of American faith?
4. Share about a time when you were a minority. Did you speak up? Why or why not? Reflect on the importance of speaking up now.
5. Dionne notes several times that religion can both bring about community and divide people. List ways you have seen both occur. With a partner, come up with three principles you think are important to help religion be a reconciling force.

CLOSING REFLECTION: Read **COLOSSIANS 3:15-17**. Discuss how peace and thankfulness relate. With a partner discuss how you can be more thankful for what you have.