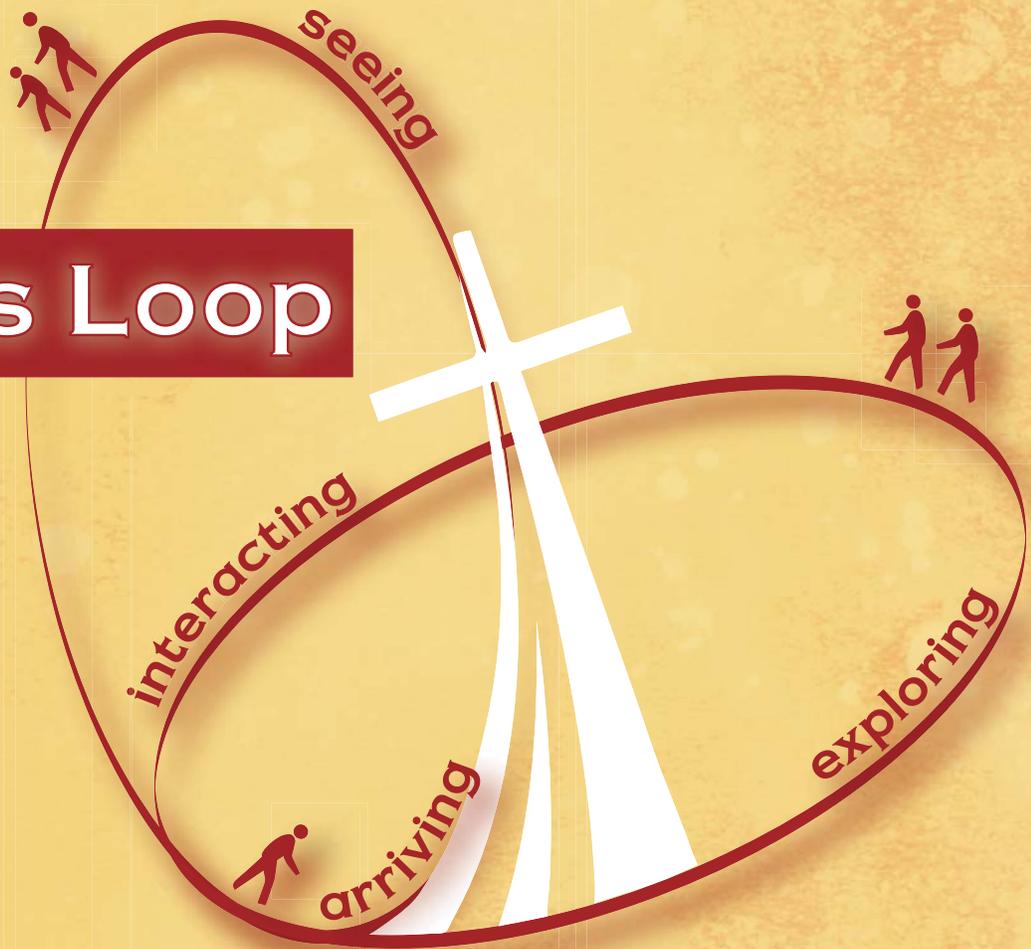
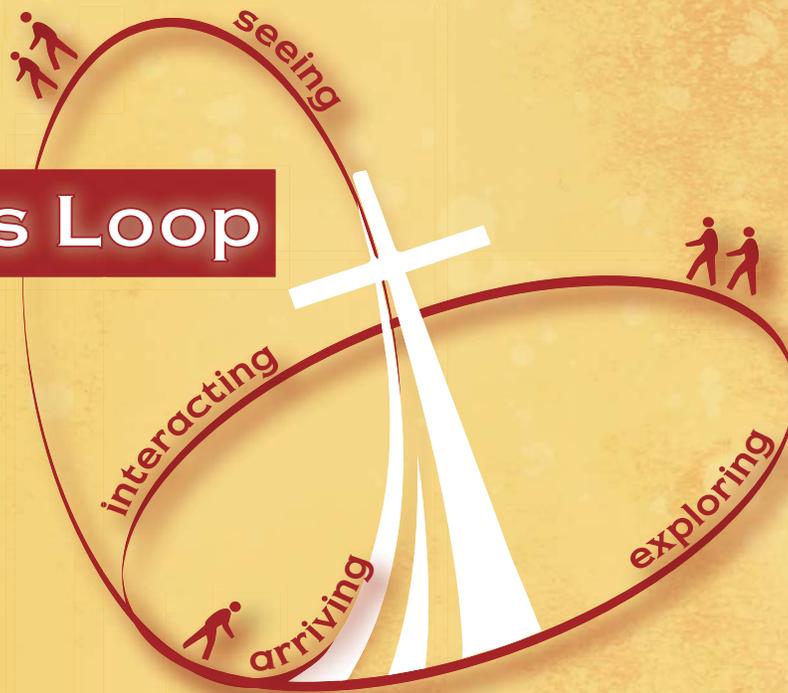


The Jesus Loop



Bible Study Lessons based on the sermon series *The Jesus Loop*
written by Pastor Paul DeVries

The Jesus Loop



Introduction

Have you noticed that when you go on vacation, especially when it is to an awesome and perhaps familiar spot, you tend to follow a discernable pattern? You arrive, you see, you explore, and you interact. If you are visiting a favorite national park, amusement park, or museum, you probably make a loop, visiting all the highlights, the must-see and must-do attractions. If you have some time you make a series of loops as you arrive and explore, both new vistas and old favorites. You interact with those around you and they influence what you see and what you do, perhaps pointing you to new spots or activities to see and explore. Our vacation loops include great places like the lakeshore, national parks, favorite camping sites, amusement parks, favorite family spots, etc. We are always looping through these great places and activities. It is this looping activity that will provide the dominant image for this Bible study.

Just like visiting a favorite vacation destination, our relationship with Jesus can be described as a loop, or series of endless loops. In our journey with Jesus we repeatedly loop through arrivals, insights, explorations, and interactions. I call this, the **Jesus Loop**.

As believers ...

We are always *arriving* at new points of contact and commitment with our Lord.

We are always *seeing* the highlights, catching something different than we did last time.

We are always *exploring* ever new depths of our relationship.

We are always *interacting* with our fellow believers growing with and through one another.

The five Bible studies contained in this booklet are each designed using a Scripture text that I am using throughout the fall in my preaching series entitled the **Jesus Loop**. They are written for use in small groups and are designed to be self-lead with the answers to the questions provided in the Scripture passage itself. At the beginning of each study there is a list of helpful background material that may give one insight into the lesson. A good study Bible will also be a valuable tool.

If you have any questions, please call or email.

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Lesson 1: Learning the Loop

Background Material

Pastor Paul DeVries' #2MinuteGospel, September 10, 2018 (Facebook)

Pastor Paul DeVries' sermon, *The Jesus Loop*, (09-09-18AM)

NIV Study Bible, Introduction and notes on Galatians 1:6-2:10

Introduction

I know some people who are true aficionados of Disney World. All things Disney all the time! From the theme parks to the cruises, from kids to grandkids, and from movie princesses to the new Star Wars sagas, Disney is the place for them. Over and over again these people return and loop through the theme parks, hotel venues, movies, and other destinations that Disney offers. Over and over again they arrive at Disney, see their favorite highlights, explore new venues, or dig deeper into areas not yet fully explored, and through it all they interact with their fellow Disney followers, soaking up every opportunity. Then they do it all over again. They are on the Disney loop. There are some “haters” of the Disney loop out there, but for those in love with Disney there is nothing better.

Much like the Disney loop, the Jesus Loop is for those who want to know Jesus and embrace him fully. In the ancient world, the Apostle Paul was one of the very first teachers and aficionados of the Jesus Loop. He, the other Apostles, and their fellow believers, arrived at the conviction that Jesus was Lord. They saw and celebrated the highlights of Christ's death for our sins and his resurrection for our lives. They explored the truth of being saved by grace through faith in Christ Jesus, knowing that God had made all this possible. They constantly interacted with one another to love, grow, and encourage one another in the goodness of the gospel. They were on the Jesus Loop. But, they too had to contend with some “haters.” In the book of Galatians, Paul reminds his readers that they do not want to get off track—they do not want to leave the loop—the gospel of Jesus alone provides the truth. Resist the haters. Stay on the loop!

Getting Started

1. In what ways could the Jesus Loop keep you vibrant and strong in the faith? What in your life competes with the Jesus Loop?

2. When in your life have you doubted, or tried a different approach to life, that didn't involve Jesus? How were you drawn back to Jesus?

1. Read verses 6-9. How did the Galatian people first come to know Jesus (see verse 8 especially)? What does the “grace of Christ” and the “gospel of Christ” have to do with it? Why are they deserting Jesus’ gospel now (the NIV Study Bible introduction to Galatians will be helpful here)? Does Paul think this is a good idea?

2. Read verses 13-16. How did Paul come to know Jesus? Given his background, previous traditions, and habits, why was this hard for him? How did you first come to know Jesus?

3. Paul and the Galatians had both arrived at faith: they believed the gospel of Christ. How are their arrivals different? How are they similar? Is simple arrival enough? Is continued movement along the Jesus Loop important?

4. Read verses 17-24. As Paul continues to describe his faith story, he keeps talking about how his faith is not dependent on human teaching, authority, or tradition. Why is this an important point to him? What does it mean to “preach the faith?” When you think of the highlights of the gospel, what comes to mind? Are they human highlights or divine highlights?

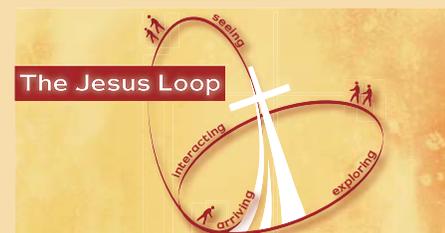
5. Read chapter 2, verses 1-5. In these verses, Paul explores the importance of grace and freedom, as opposed to the slavery of works and tradition. Why is it important to Paul to note that he didn’t need to have Titus circumcised? Specifically, are Christians saved because of outward actions/deeds/symbols, or by grace?

6. Read verses 6-10, (see Acts 15 for additional background). How does Paul interact with his fellow leaders? Are their fellowship and decisions based on rank, position, and status, or something else? How does this interaction with his fellow leaders help clarify the gospel and advance the spread of the faith? What positive interactions do you have with your fellow believers?

Wrapping Up

1. Why do think Paul tells the Galatian Christians some of his story? What is he hoping that they see? How do you see the Jesus Loop in Paul’s life?

2. How do you see the Jesus Loop in your life?



Lesson 2: Arriving

Background Material

Pastor Paul DeVries' #2MinuteGospel, September 17 & 24, 2018 (Facebook)

Pastor Paul DeVries' sermons, *Arriving* (09-16-18AM), *Arriving 2.0* (09-23-18AM)

Daily Devotionals (distributed in print weekly after the Sunday morning worship services)

Introduction

Have you ever seen those pictures taken near national park entrances? You know—the picture of the kids by the Yellowstone National Park sign, or the picture of a person smiling and pointing at the Sleeping Bear Dunes sign. These pictures serve as a reminder that we have been somewhere. They serve as markers for our memories of an entire trip. If we send a Snapchat, Instagram, or Facebook message, they let friends and families know where we are. They mark a destination.

But, of course, no one arrives at a destination by accident. One arrives at a destination because of its significance or attraction. Our arrival, and the pictures we take, signal something about our passion or desire. The mere fact that we arrived indicates some level of commitment on our part (we had to plan, finance, and make the journey). In fact, without commitment we really never arrive anywhere. We arrive because we have made a decision that arriving matters. So it is as we arrive at the Jesus Loop. You can't go on the loop unless you decide to arrive—to commit—to make a journey. All through Scripture we see faith, commitment, belief, and dedication. None of it happens without first arriving.

Getting Started

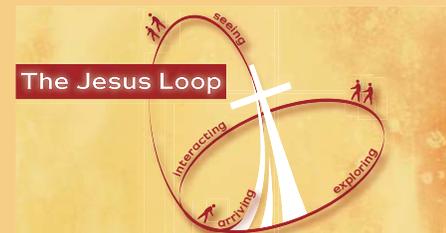
1. What's your favorite national park or amusement park? Did you take a picture by the sign? Why did you make the trip?

2. When did you first become acquainted with Jesus? Did someone introduce you or did you stumble upon him? When did you decide that Jesus was someone whom you should commit to?

1. Read verses 35-39. Does Andrew discover Jesus on his own? How do you think he arrives at the decision to follow Jesus? Why does Jesus ask Andrew and his friend what they want (isn't it obvious); and why do they respond by asking where he is staying? Jesus gives the invitation to "come and see." How does "coming and seeing" play an important role in arriving at faith?
2. Read verses 40-42. Does Simon Peter discover Jesus on his own? How do you think he arrives at his decision to follow Jesus? What role does Andrew play, and what ultimate role does Jesus play? Do you think Peter liked his new nickname? Was Peter already a "rock" just by arriving at Jesus, or was Jesus speaking prophetically about what was to come?
3. Read verse 43. Does Philip discover Jesus on his own? Have you ever heard Jesus invite you to follow him? Philip does follow Jesus—are you following Jesus and how do you know that you are truly on the Jesus Loop?
4. Read verses 44-46. Does Nathaniel discover Jesus on his own? In order to arrive at faith, Nathaniel has to overcome his doubt and cynicism—what's the first step (see verses 44-45)? What role does Philip play in this? What's the second step in Nathaniel's conversation (see verse 46)? Once again, Philip is key in this step. How so? What's the third step (see verses 47-48)? What ultimate role does Jesus play?
5. Read verses 49-50. How do we know that Nathaniel has arrived? How does Jesus encourage Nathaniel to stay on the Jesus Loop? Have you see any great things on the Loop?

Wrapping Up

1. When it comes to following Jesus, who are you most like? Andrew and Philip, in spreading the news to family and friends? Peter, a new man with a new name? Or Nathaniel, moving from doubt to belief?
2. Who told you about Jesus? Who invited you to come and see? How has Jesus himself convinced you? Are you satisfied with just arriving at faith in Jesus, or do you long to go further with him to see the things he speaks of in verses 50-51?



Lesson 3: Seeing the Highlights

Background Material

Pastor Paul DeVries' #2MinuteGospel, October 1 & October 8, 2018 (Facebook)

Pastor Paul DeVries' sermons, *Seeing the Highlights* (09-30-18AM), and *Highlights 2.0* (10-07-18AM)

Daily Devotionals (distributed in print weekly after the Sunday morning worship services)

Introduction

Just getting to the sign at the entrance of the park isn't really worth much unless you go inside and see the park! At the very least you need to hit the highlights. Can you imagine going to the Grand Canyon but never taking the time to see the actual canyon? When I was a kid my family once flew to India. We landed at the airport. We had arrived! The thing is, we never even got off the plane. It was just a weird 1970's "stop-n-go" for refueling. I have been to India, but not really.

If you have arrived at Jesus (you believe in him and have made a commitment to him), you might be tempted to think that you have arrived. That is, you may think that you are done. But, your arrival is just the beginning. You have to live your life in Jesus. You have to grow in him. At the very least, you need to come to understand his life, death, and resurrection on your behalf. On the Jesus Loop, no one has ever really arrived; instead, you just keep arriving over and over again, seeing the highlights again and again, and remembering all that has brought you to this spot.

Both the Old and New Testaments proclaim, celebrate, and remember certain key highlights of our faith, reminding us, as God's chosen people, that we need to see and see again the highlights of what God has done for us. If we do not continuously see, we become both blind and dumb to God's great truths. So, let's see the highlights!

Getting Started

1. What is your favorite Christian holiday (holy-day)? Why? In the church year (which follows the liturgical calendar), what is your favorite worship season? Speaking spiritually and biblically, why are these highlights for you?
2. Name your favorite vacation place that you find yourself returning to again and again? Why not someplace new—why do you keep returning?

Bible Study

Deuteronomy 8; I Corinthians 15:1-15

1. Read Deuteronomy 8:1-5. The focus in these verses is on God's people wandering in the wilderness for 40 years. Why did they wander? How did God provide for them? How does this serve as a highlight (or perhaps a lowlight) that God's people need to remember? What New Testament highlights/lowlights compare to the time of wilderness wanderings?

2. Read Deuteronomy 8:6-9. The focus of these verses is God's commandments and the promised land. How are the commandments and the promised land connected? That is, how do they go together? Do the commandments and promised land come before or after the people's deliverance/salvation?

3. Read Deuteronomy 8:10-19. The focus of these verses is the need to humbly remember God's deliverance from slavery in Egypt. What will happen if God's people forget? How does remembering help to strengthen our faith?

4. Read Deuteronomy 8:19-20. These verses serve as a warning of what happens if we reject God's salvation. Why would anyone turn away from God's deliverance? What is the result? Tragically, both the Old and New Testaments are filled with examples of people forgetting and turning away from God's salvation. Why are we, God's people both in the past and present, so susceptible to forgetfulness and rejection? How do we combat this?

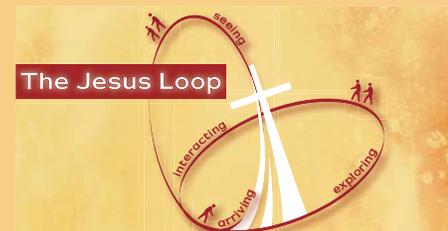
5. Read I Corinthians 15:1-8. These verses call our attention to the ultimate highlight of the death and resurrection of Jesus. Why do you think Paul considers this the "gospel" which must be preached and stood upon? That is, what makes this the gospel? Why did Jesus die for us, and what did his death achieve? What does his resurrection achieve? In our churches today, how do we remember, memorialize, sign, and seal the death and resurrection of Jesus in our lives?

6. Read I Corinthians 15:9-11. These verses remind us of the key highlight of grace. Why did Paul need grace? How did grace make him who he was as a believer and an Apostle? Why is grace so central to our faith? When and how did you come to know God's grace in your life? Grace, I hope, flows all through our Christian worship services, but what parts of worship in particular call us to see God's grace?

7. Read I Corinthians 15:12-15. These verses serve as a warning against denying the resurrection of the body. What is Paul's point here? How is it that Christians can come to deny such a central element of the faith? How do we make sure that we never lose sight of the resurrection?

Wrapping Up

What highlights of Christian faith have you seen and celebrated in your life? How do you make sure that you never lose sight of them? Are grace, confession, and salvation a one-time thing—*one and done*—or do we need to keep seeing and celebrating them in our lives? Why?



Lesson 4: Exploring

Background Material

Pastor Paul DeVries' #2MinuteGospel, October 22 & 29, 2018 (Facebook)

Pastor Paul DeVries' sermon, *Exploring* (10-21-18AM), and *Exploring 2.0* (10-28-18AM)

Daily DeVotionals (distributed in print weekly after the Sunday morning worship services)

Introduction

When you are traveling around on a national park loop, take a look at people's shoes. Some people are prepared for exploring, perhaps hiking, biking, or climbing up a mountainside. Others are just there to hit the highlights and move on. The shoes people wear tell us about their plans. If it is summer, you will see a lot of flip flops. You will also see a fair amount of fancy dress shoes. Numerous women will be wearing dresses and heels. I have seen guys wearing suits and ties. Clearly, some are there just for a quick and simple sightseeing tour. No harm in that, in fact, if you only have a few hours, a quick drive around a national park loop can be wonderful. But, most likely it will also leave you wanting more.

On our family trips out west, we would often arrive at a national park in the afternoon and take a quick, couple hour tour around the highlight loop of the park. Then, having seen a broad scope survey of what the park offered, we would return in subsequent days to explore the park in more depth. The national park loop always provided a wonderful sightseeing opportunity, but also, and especially, an opportunity for days spent exploring and enjoying in depth the greater wonders of the park.

When it comes to the Jesus Loop, some never seem to get past the sightseeing part of the loop. They arrive at faith, see the sights, worship and celebrate the birth and resurrection of Christ, and generally are pleased. They know God's grace and they count on it, but they never really explore the majesty of God, the depth of their gratitude for their salvation, or the necessity for their own growth in love and devotion to Jesus. In fact, some seem to think that the loop ends after one quick simple drive around. In reality, the loop continues and offers its deepest blessings for those who are willing to put on their hiking boots, invest some time, and dig deep into the richness of the gospel of Jesus Christ. So come on! Let's explore together.

Getting Started

1. Name a place or topic that you have enjoyed exploring? What was the draw for you? What was the reward for your exploration?

2. What keeps you from exploring a place or topic more deeply? What holds you back? What would you need to do to follow your desire?

Bible Study

Hebrews 5:7- 6:3

1. Read Hebrews 5:7. Was Jesus a dispassionate man, content to coast through life, confident of his own place in the redemptive plan (vs. 7)? When was the last time that you prayed like Jesus did in this passage?

2. Read Hebrews 5:8-9. How can one say that Jesus “learned obedience” and became “perfect” (vs. 8-9); wasn’t he already the “perfect” Son of God (vs.9)? Since we are saved by grace, why does verse 9 say that Jesus becomes “the source of salvation for all who obey him”? Isn’t that works righteousness? Given that even Jesus needed to learn and somehow grow in his perfection, what does that imply about me and you?

3. Read Hebrews 5:10. Who is Melchizedek and how is Jesus like him? Where would you look in Scripture to learn more about him and the connection that Jesus has with him?

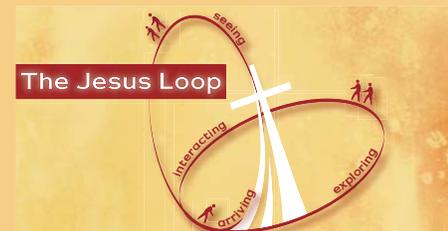
4. Read Hebrews 5:7-10 as a whole. Is all this easy for you to understand? Is all of Scripture easy to understand? So, why bother? Perhaps we could leave all this stuff to the professors and preachers among us. What do you think?

5. Read Hebrews 5:11-14. What is the author’s frustration in verses 11 and 12? What do you think made his original readers “slow to understand?” What makes you slow to understand? How long have you been on the Jesus Loop? Are you still on a milk and cookie diet, or are you eating solid food? What have you learned? Do you teach it to others? Should you?

6. Read Hebrews 6:1-3. What are some of the “elementary teachings” that the author wants “to leave?” But aren’t these things important? After all, what would our faith be without repentance, baptism, laying on of hands, resurrection, and eternal judgment? In what way are these things foundational? Since a foundation always implies a larger structure built upon it, how can we build upon the elementary foundation of our faith?

Wrapping Up

What exploring do you want to do in the faith? How will you do that?



Lesson 5: Interacting with Others

Background Material

Pastor Paul DeVries' #2MinuteGospel, *November 5 & 12, 2018* (Facebook)

Pastor Paul DeVries' sermon, *Interacting with Others* (11-04-18AM), and *Interacting 2.0* (11-11-18AM)

Daily DeVotionals (distributed in print weekly after the Sunday morning worship services)

Introduction

In the summer of 2013, our family visited Gettysburg. We arrived in the evening and took a brief look around the expansive battlefield to try to get the lay of the land. We had prepared for this trip. Dylan had just finished eighth grade where he had learned much about the battle. I had read numerous books on Gettysburg, complete with maps and charts. We set out the next morning, ready to explore in depth. We hit all the highlights (the round tops, the peach orchard, and, of course, the site of Pickett's fateful charge). Throughout the day we drove through the battlefield, stopping regularly, reading the many markers and observing countless monuments. We hiked and marched where soldiers had marched and died. We visited a museum, and spent time at the Visitor Center. It was a very full day. We felt that we understood the battle and had really gone in depth in our exploration of the park. But we had done it all alone—just our family—with no other people to meaningfully interact with. We didn't know what we were missing.

In the spring of 2018, Jenna, Diane, and I returned to Gettysburg. This time we were accompanied by dozens of interested students, three very capable and experienced teachers, and a few other parents and adults. The interaction of the group while we toured the battlefield was enlightening and interesting. In addition to the group interaction we were met by several experts, scholars, authors, and certified battlefield guides at key locations. They went into greater detail about everything from the lay of the land, to the politics, personalities, and battlefield strategy of the generals. We debated the strengths and weaknesses of various leaders, lay in the fields where dead soldiers had lain; we marched and then charged the very ground where Pickett's men had charged. We questioned our experienced and knowledgeable guides; we ate together, debriefed each day together, and laughed and cried together. In short, we constantly interacted with others while looping our way through the key spots on the battlefield again and again. What an experience!

Interacting with others is an essential part of real discovery, understanding, and growth. This is certainly true on the Jesus Loop. Much can be achieved and experienced just by oneself and Jesus. But the full riches of a relationship with Jesus are developed through our group experiences and activities.

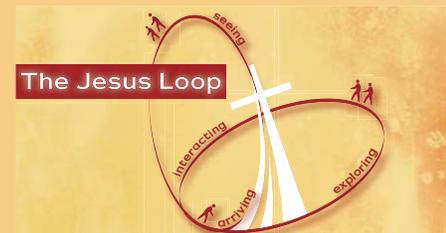
Getting Started

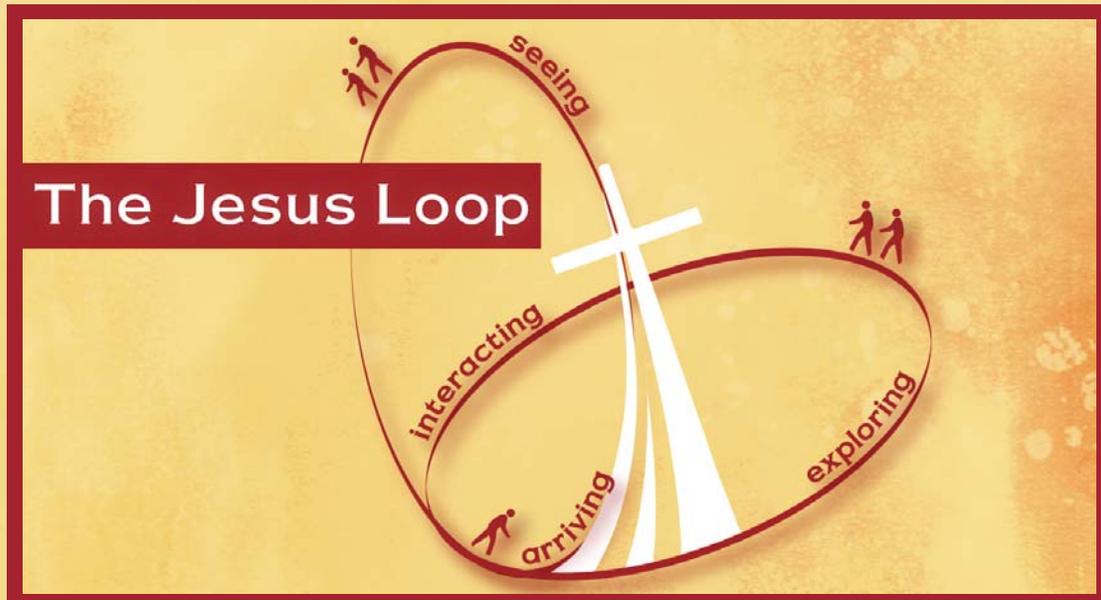
1. What are some key personal interactions with others that have made a difference in your Christian life?
2. Do you ever feel alone in your faith walk? Who in your circle of influence could you ask to travel the Jesus Loop with you? Are you part of a small group? A prayer team? Do you have a mentor? A spiritual director? Who helps you do the loop with Jesus?

1. Read I Kings 19:9-14. What is at the heart of Elijah's complaint? Can you understand why he might feel alone? How many people does Elijah say are with him in his zeal for the Lord? Have you ever thought that you were the only one left? How did you receive encouragement?
2. Read I Kings 19:15-18. How would you summarize the marching orders that God gives to Elijah? Does God want him to continue to work alone? After the two new kings, who will Elijah anoint and mentor? Do you think that this relationship helped Elijah, or was it just more work? In contrast to Elijah's proclaimed isolation, how many Israelites does God say have remained pure? What do we learn here?
3. In Genesis 2, God says that it is not good for man to be alone. Was it good for Elijah? Is it good for you?
4. Read Acts 2:42-43. These verses describe the earliest church, following Pentecost. To whom are the new believers devoted? Are they alone or together in their devotion? Was there something intrinsically great about the Apostles or was it mostly their own devotion to Jesus and their spirit-filled, inspired teaching that resulted in the people's devotion? What teachers or leaders are you devoted to? Why?
5. Read Acts 2:44-45. How do we see God's early Christian people interacting with one another? When have you been part of community like this? How does it make you feel and what does it accomplish for you? Do you think you can travel the Jesus Loop on your own? Why or why not?
6. Read Acts 2:46-47. What is the end result of all this positive interaction? How do the Christians feel about themselves and God? What do other people think of them? What does God do for them?

Wrapping Up

1. Think about your own experiences with your fellow believers. Where and when is there good interaction? What keeps you from greater interaction? What are you willing to change in order to be more engaged with other Christians?
2. Take a look at the Jesus Loop image on the front cover of this Bible study. Where have you been on the loop? Where do you need to spend more time? How are you going to do that?





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