

LISTENING TO THE SKEPTIC

May the God of endurance and encouragement grant you to live in such harmony with one another, in accord with Christ Jesus, that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore welcome one another as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God.

- Romans 15:6-7 (ESV)

Who are we? Who are we as followers of Jesus? Who are we as part of a church? Attendance at church is declining across our country, *and* at Clay Church. People are asking, out loud and with their actions, what value the church has in today's world. People outside of the church see judgment, hypocrisy, and political posturing, and want nothing to do with those values. But is this who we are? The answer is "NO!" So let's answer the question, for ourselves and for the skeptics. Who are we?

In Your Back Pocket

OCT 3

WE ARE A MESS (CENTERED IN CHRIST)

Romans 3:21-26

“Hypocrites.” This word is heard again and again in conversations with those skeptical of the church today. Do we put up a front for the world that implies we have it all figured out? Because if we’re honest, we know we’re all a mess in some parts of our lives. We don’t come to worship because we have it all together. We come to worship because we know that we can’t be who God created us to be without the love and grace of Jesus.

We acknowledge that we are a mess, and that we need Jesus.

We center our lives in Jesus in all things. Period.

OCT 4-9

Monday

Read Romans 1:14-17. In your own words, what is the gospel?

Tuesday

Read 1 John 1:5-10. Why do we sometimes feel we have to hide our messes or faults when we’re with church people?

Wednesday

Read Romans 3:9-20. In what ways are we aware of our sin?
In what ways are we unaware?

Thursday

Read Romans 3:21-26. How can our sinfulness be a factor that unifies us, instead of dividing us?

Friday

Read Romans 15:1-13. As the church in Rome struggles with identity, what does Paul encourage?

Saturday

Read Colossians 2:6-8. How can you keep your life centered in Christ in all things?

CIRCLE Study Questions:

1. In the sermon, Pastor Brian suggested that instead of dismissing the views of skeptics or first trying to prove them wrong, we should treat those views as a mirror and reflect on how we appear as a church to others. What do you think the church (universal) sees in that mirror today? What do you think Clay Church sees in the mirror?

2. We know the church in Rome was struggling with a sense of shared identity. What do you hear Paul saying to them in chapter 3?

3. How can being honest and naming the messes of our lives lead to deeper and more invitational faith?

FaithFit Challenge: Practice a centering prayer. Take five minutes each morning, and as you concentrate on your breathing, breathe in while softly saying “Lord Jesus, my Savior”, and then breathe out while saying or thinking, “Have mercy on me a sinner.” Repeat and allow the prayer to travel with you through your day.

In Your Back Pocket

OCT 10

WE ARE ONE BODY (FAMILY)

1 Corinthians 12:12-26

For many today, the church has become a consumer good. "As long as a church matches my likes and dislikes, I'm good, but as soon as I'm not happy or satisfied, I'll trade it in for a newer model." This is not the church introduced by Jesus. For Jesus, and for the early followers who spread the Gospel, church is a family, the body of Christ. We are sons and daughters of God, brothers and sisters in Christ, all a part of the body of Christ. And when relationships are strained and trials come, Jesus invites us to a way of reconciliation, forgiveness, and restoration as the family of God.

Relationships matter to us. We empower each other, are accountable to each other, have fun together, and love each other.

OCT 11-16

Monday	Read Matthew 12:46-50. What does it mean to be a part of God's family?
Tuesday	Read Acts 2:42-47. What values define a church family?
Wednesday	Read 1 Corinthians 12:12-20. How are unity and diversity both essential parts of God's family?
Thursday	Read 1 Corinthians 12:21-26. How does the behavior of the church family toward one another reflect, or not reflect, the love of God?
Friday	Read Matthew 5:21-24. How does Jesus encourage the family of God to deal with disagreement or conflict?
Saturday	Read Hebrews 10:19-25. Why does meeting together matter in the life of the church family?

CIRCLE Study Questions:

1. How has the church been like a family to you? How has it not?
2. What is the value of having a church family?
3. In the message, Pastor Brian said the family of Jesus is anchored in relationships and defined by love. What does this mean to you for how we live as the church today?
4. What should we commit to and expect from our church family?

FaithFit Challenge: Send a note of encouragement to someone in your church family.

In Your Back Pocket

OCT 17

WE ARE RADICAL LOVERS (SERVANTS)

Matthew 20:20-28

As Jesus' followers were requesting places of influence and power, he said to them, "Whoever wants to be great among you must be your servant." While the world categorizes people, we, followers of Jesus, love unconditionally. Where the world casts people aside, we, followers of Jesus, include everyone. Where the world values position and prestige, we, followers of Jesus, value servanthood. Our way is radical.

We serve others in ways that seem radical to the rest of the world.

We give generously and love extravagantly, just as Jesus gave his life in love for us.

OCT 18-23

Monday

Read Matthew 5:1-12.

Do the teachings of Jesus seem radical to you? Why or why not?

Tuesday

Read Matthew 5:38-48.

Which teachings of Jesus do you find most challenging or difficult?

Wednesday

Read Matthew 20:20-28. What is the definition of "greatness" in our culture versus "greatness" in the teachings of Jesus?

Thursday

Read James 2:1-17. How are the poor among us dishonored and disfavored today, and how do we, as the church, respond?

Friday

Read James 5:1-6. What is the difference between the culture in which we live and the gospel of Jesus Christ?

Saturday

Read 1 Corinthians 13:4-7. How are you living out the radical love Jesus calls us to share? Where do you fall short?

CIRCLE Study Questions:

1. In the message, Pastor Brian said we often want the way of Jesus to fit into our current lifestyle, instead of letting it challenge us and our current ways. What teaching of Jesus do you find most challenging?
2. What are the most glaring differences between the way of Jesus and what our culture values and pursues?
3. Where do you see the church following in the radical way of Jesus, and where do we give in to cultural values or norms?
4. What would the world look like if followers of Jesus truly lived radical lives of service?

FaithFit Challenge: This week, read the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5:1-7:29. As you read, make a list of the teachings of Jesus most challenging to our culture today, and the teachings of Jesus most challenging to you personally.

In Your Back Pocket

OCT 24

WE ARE LESS THAN PERFECT (REAL)

Philippians 2:1-11

Those who don't believe in Jesus or are skeptical of the church will share how they see church people as sitting in judgment of non-believers or sinners, wanting to impose their beliefs, or their way, on others. This was not the way of Jesus. When Paul wrote to the church in Philippi, thanking them for their faithfulness, he didn't encourage them to feel exalted because of their belief in Jesus. He encouraged them to be humble, to put the needs of others first, to serve as Jesus served.

We are vulnerable, humble, honest, and live with integrity. We invite others to know the love of Jesus as we have come to experience it in our own imperfection.

OCT 25-30

Monday	Read Matthew 7:1-5. What does the Bible say about judging one another?
Tuesday	Read James 4:11-12. In what area of life do you find it easy to pass judgment on others?
Wednesday	Read John 8:1-11. What is the difference between judgment and lovingly correcting someone?
Thursday	Read Matthew 23:1-12. Why is humility an important value in our Christian faith?
Friday	Read Matthew 23:13-32. What hypocrisy and judgement of others do you think Jesus would call out among the people of God today?
Saturday	Read Philippians 2:1-11. Why can it be hard to be humble and vulnerable in the world today?

CIRCLE Study Questions:

1. Share a time in your life when you felt unfairly judged or belittled by someone else.
2. What is humility? According to the Bible, what does a humble life look like?
3. Pastor Brian said in his message, "Humility is staying in relationship with those who see differently because sharing the love of Jesus is more important than being right." Do you agree? Why or why not?
4. With the Bible as a guide, how do we lovingly guide our world toward the way of Jesus?

FaithFit Challenge: This week, reflect on how you make judgments of people, often without thinking about them. Keep a journal of snap judgments you make. Keep a notepad and think through judgments you made during the day before bed, or use a note function on your phone or computer and jot notes during your day.

In Your Back Pocket

OCT 31

WE ARE ALL-IN (FEARLESS)

2 Corinthians 6:3-13

As Jesus faced the cross, he could have walked away. He didn't. He gave his life for humanity, for us. When Paul and his followers began to be persecuted for trying to share the news of Jesus, they could have walked away. They didn't. Instead, they were "all-in" no matter the challenges. Are we showing the world and our children a love in Christ that is worth our total life commitment?

We are all-in. We dream big, take risks, and are not afraid to fail in being the church for the world.

NOV 1-6

Monday	Read Luke 9:21-27. What do you think Jesus means when he says that "anyone who wants to save their life will lose it"?
Tuesday	Read Luke 9:57-62. What most often stands in the way of being "all-in" to follow Jesus?
Wednesday	Read Luke 10:1-17. What do you think the followers of Jesus were feeling when Jesus sent them out on their own?
Thursday	Read Luke 18:18-30. What does a life "all-in" for Jesus look like?
Friday	Read Luke 19:1-10. How do our finances and our generosity reflect our commitment to follow Jesus?
Saturday	Read 2 Corinthians 6:3-13. What sacrifices do we sometimes make to follow Jesus?

CIRCLE Study Questions:

1. Share a time in life when you were "all-in" for something – a team, a job, a project.
2. What does it mean to you to be "all-in" for Jesus?
3. What holds us back from being "all-in" for Jesus?
4. Pastor Brian shared that "all-in" is an invitation from Jesus that remains on the table. Jesus doesn't promise that accepting will lead to an easy path, but promises life transforming experiences and eternal blessing for all who trust, give, and follow. What would it look like in your life right now to accept the invitation and be "all-in"?

FaithFit Challenge: Pray over the "All-In" invitation Card. Mark those steps you would like to take in your relationship with Jesus.