Practicing
the Way through
Service & Witness

INTRODUCTION

What gives Highrock its unique flavor? While most secret sauces are closely guarded, kept under lock and key, we want to share the recipe that shapes who we are with everyone! This fall, join us as we dive into our core values of curiosity, courage, and compassion. They're the key ingredients that make Highrock feel like Highrock, and the Biblical values that lead to a full life in Christ.

RESOURCE OVERVIEW

Here we provide space to take notes on the sermon and Scripture text and answer reflection questions that you can discuss with others. When considering the reflection questions, remember that the goal is not to have all the "right" answers—instead, let these questions serve as a starting point for curiosity in your conversation with God and others. See the Appendix of this guide for more resources and opportunities to engage with this study.

Please note this discussion guide is created before the series begins. Discussion questions are prepared before the sermons are written and based on the theme and text for the week. Thank you for your understanding that the topic and focus of the sermon as the pastor writes it may differ from what is written in the discussion questions.

APPENDIX (located at the end of the discussion guide)

Offers a deeper dive into the topic as well as resources for Bible study, leading small groups, and links for further support.

- Additional Resources
- Online Bibles
- Prayer Tools
- "Icebreaker" Questions
- Tips for Guiding Conversations
- General Resources for Individual Support

SERMON SCHEDULE & SCRIPTURE READING

**Subject to change at the discretion of the pastors.*

Sermon	Topics
Week 1	Uncomfortable Love: Mark 10:17-23
Week 2	Hiding in Plain Sight: Matthew 6:1-16, 16-18
Week 3:	Availability: Mark 5:21-43
Week 4	Kinship: Genesis 4:2b-9, Matthew 12:46-50
Week 5	Begin with Love: 1 Peter 3:15-16

WEEKLY FORMAT

SERMON DISCUSSION

(PRE-WORK) REFLECT: Listen to the sermon, read weekly selections/view video links (if provided), read scripture passages (used in the sermon), and answer reflection questions. (30-40 mins)

RELATE: Discuss reflection questions with your small group. (50 mins)

PRAY: Use the suggested prayer prompt to conclude your time (5–10 mins)

CONVERSATION COVENANT

We hope all small group discussions are lively and enriching, but sometimes tough topics will be discussed. The Conversation Covenant* is an agreement to hold respect and grace toward all participants within a small group, no matter the conversation. Please adhere to the Conversation Covenant or consider creating one that fits your context.

*Adapted from https://conversational-leadership.net/conversation-covenant/

I pledge:

To act in good faith, with curiosity. *I will assume the best about my conversation partners when entering into our groups. I will give the benefit of the doubt, recognizing that they may know something I don't.*

To show respect. *I will show respect. I will be polite and give due regard to the feelings and traditions of others. I understand that I do not have to agree with someone to show them respect.*

To speak the truth. *I won't use rhetorical tricks to try to win an argument. I will speak what I genuinely believe is the nuanced truth.*

To aim to discover the truth. *I will not enter into a conversation with the purpose of changing the mind of anyone to my way of thinking.*

To focus on what we can change. *I will focus on what we can do differently in the future since we cannot change what we did in the past.*

To take responsibility for the conversation. *I will take responsibility for the quality of the conversation and the abidance of the rules both in principle and in spirit.*

To follow the covenant even when others fail to do so. *I will abide by the rules regardless of whether another person breaks them.*

To respect the confidentiality of the group. *I will not share the stories of group members verbally or in written form (including on social media and online outlets).*

To lighten up and approach the conversation in good humor. *I recognize that humor is a hallmark of a constructive, generative conversation and take the conversation in good humor.*

PREPARE

The following questions are jumping-off points for personal reflection. Engage with them to awaken your awareness of themes in this sermon series. Pay attention to the questions that stand out to you and look back on them throughout the series to see how God might be speaking to you.

CONSIDER

- What is the current role of service in your faith life? Are you content with it? Do you see room for growth? Whether you're feeling content, eager to take another step, or are in a different place, take some time in prayer to thank God for the gift of service. Remember God's service towards us. And close your prayer by asking God to make you open to hearing God's voice, and a willingness to serve God with your whole life.

WEEK 1 Uncomfortable Love

Mark 10:17-23

(PRE-WORK) REFLECT | Before your small group gathering, complete the following and reflect on the discussion questions. These will be the basis for your small group time.

- ☐ Listen to the Sermon on Highrock's YouTube channel and note any reactions you had – curiosities, concerns, or delights
- ☐ Read Mark 10:17-23

RELATE | Use these questions as a launching point for your small group conversation or personal reflection.

1. What from the sermon or reading has brought up new questions or interesting points you would like to discuss?
2. Reflecting on the Scripture passage: Do you see any of the following aspects in this passage, perhaps in ways you haven't noticed in reading or hearing this passage before: of love, invitation, challenge, refusal, surprise? Discuss them with your group.
3. The Golden rule is well known within and outside of faith communities: Do to others as you would have them do to you. How did this sermon add any new perspectives on the importance as well as the need to be discerning about this rule?
4. As Pastor Dave discussed, love is both "our brand" as Christians but it can also be very difficult to know how to love, or what love looks like in different situations. How do you see this complexity when it comes to understanding or applying love in your life and the world around you?
5. While it can be difficult to know what love looks like in any given situation, what do you think it can look like to *discern* a love that seeks out what's best for others (the Titanium rule) and yourself?
    - Try a discussion with your group where you might come up with helpful questions to ask yourself about to help come closer to understanding what applying God's love for others might look like. For example, consider how love can look different in different situations. How do you begin with love? When is it appropriate to challenge? What do you do when it's not clear what to do?
    - If possible, are there one or two people in the group who would be willing to share about a situation where it's difficult to see what love looks like. Without simply trying to solve that dilemma, discuss what it might look like to love well in that situation.

PRAY (drawn from the Scripture reading prayer used at service) |

Loving God, as we come to Your Word, as we begin this new sermon series and learn to follow Jesus by practicing the way, prepare our hearts to hear Your voice, open our minds to understand, and our hearts to receive. By Your Spirit, give us wisdom to respond to Your truth, courage to move when obedience becomes costly, and grace to trust Your leading. Shape us through Your Word, that we may become more like Jesus. Through Christ our Lord, Amen.

Scripture: Mark 10:17-23

17 But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, 18 so that it will not be obvious to others that you are fasting, but only to your Father, who is unseen; and your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.

[17] As Jesus started on his way, a man ran up to him and fell on his knees before him. "Good teacher," he asked, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?"

[18] "Why do you call me good?" Jesus answered. "No one is good—except God alone. [19] You know the commandments: 'You shall not murder, you shall not commit adultery, you shall not steal, you shall not give false testimony, you shall not defraud, honor your father and mother.'"

[20] "Teacher," he declared, "all these I have kept since I was a boy."

[21] Jesus looked at him and loved him. "One thing you lack," he said. "Go, sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me."

[22] At this the man's face fell. He went away sad, because he had great wealth.

[23] Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, "How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God!"

WEEK 2 Hiding In Plain Sight

Matthew 6:1-6, 16-18

(PRE-WORK) REFLECT | Before your small group gathering, complete the following and reflect on the discussion questions. These will be the basis for your small group time.

- ☐ Listen to the Sermon on Highrock's YouTube channel and note any reactions you had – curiosities, concerns, or delights
- ☐ Read Matthew 6:1-6, 16-18

RELATE | Use these questions as a launching point for your small group conversation or personal reflection.

1. What from the sermon or reading has brought up new questions or interesting points you would like to discuss?
2. Read the Scripture passage together, and also consider Pastor John's observation in the sermon that Jesus often withdrew to quiet places. Why do you think this was meaningful for Jesus? What surprises or challenges you about this practice of Jesus?
3. While we all enjoy being noticed or recognized for doing something good (this is normal!), how would you say you do when something you do intentionally goes unnoticed?
4. How can you connect this question to your own life right now: Who are you serving? Consider the spiritual meaning of it.
5. Pastor John shared how Jesus's teaching opens us up to receiving affirmation from where it matters most: from God. While recognizing, again, that wanting to be affirmed (by others) is normal, take a moment to reflect on where you might be looking for excessive or unhealthy affirmation from others in your life. How might practicing a hidden act of service or devotion to God help you to begin addressing this?

   It may not work to discuss this as a group. Rather, talk about how you might hope and even ask God to meet you in a practice like this at a general level. Together, reflect on what you would ask God for.
6. Write down (use your phone if you don't have paper): What's one hidden act of service you can do this week, with a plan to "tell nobody," as John noted. Pay attention to what happens when you do this. As you notice what happens inside you, pray to God: "Thank you that you see me, that you love me, that your grace is enough for me. You are the God who sees."

PRAY |

Thank you that you see me, that you love me, that your grace is enough for me. You are the God who sees.

Scripture: Matthew 6:1-6, 16-18

1 "Be careful not to practice your righteousness in front of others to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven.

2 "So when you give to the needy, do not announce it with trumpets, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and on the streets, to be honored by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. 3 But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, 4 so that your giving may be in secret. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.

5 “And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. 6 But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you....

WEEK 3 Availability

Mark 5:21-43

(PRE-WORK) REFLECT | Before your small group gathering, complete the following and reflect on the discussion questions. These will be the basis for your small group time.

- ☐ Listen to the Sermon on Highrock's YouTube channel and note any reactions you had – curiosities, concerns, or delights
- ☐ Read Mark 5:21-43

RELATE | Use these questions as a launching point for your small group conversation or personal reflection.

1. What from the sermon or reading has brought up new questions or interesting points you would like to discuss?
2. Read the Scripture passage together, and highlight some of the parts that don't make immediate sense (at least, at first), paying close attention to how Jesus responds to people in ways we might not expect. What do you see? This can serve as a basis (something to draw from) for the discussion on availability and interruption.
3. How well would you say you do with being interrupted? Do you know someone who, as strange as it may sound, is good at being interrupted? How do you see that person valuing others?
4. A) Think about the woman's courage in coming to touch the cloak of Jesus. Jesus receives her. How does this help you reflect on a dynamic, interruption-filled relationship with God?

   B) Consider if there's a friendship or relationship in your life where an act like this might help you be more available to someone else, and vice versa, and where service or mutual support might follow.. Does something come to mind?
5. In the example with the Princeton Seminary students from the sermon, Pastor Richard noted our availability to others depends a lot on how much time we have (Are we in a rush? vs. Do we have some margin?). Discuss this example with your group. Does it speak to you in some way? Do you find it challenging, motivating, or something else?
6. As Pastor Richard mentioned, in certain contexts, the words "don't be afraid, just believe" (Mark 5:36) can be hard to hear. What difference, though, does it make when they come from a most trustworthy source? Is there a way they speak to you right now? Consider closing your time with a prayer, asking God for wisdom and knowledge about how to be interruptible and be the interruption. Perhaps share where you see yourself trying to work on these things before praying.

PRAY (adapted from the prayer for illumination used in service) |

Holy God, as we have listened for Your Word, continue to open the eyes of our hearts and minds to see what we might otherwise overlook. By Your Spirit, help us to hear Your voice and understand what You are teaching us. Shape us through Your Word, that we may become more like Jesus. Through Christ our Lord, Amen.

Scripture: Mark 5:21-43

21 When Jesus had again crossed over by boat to the other side of the lake, a large crowd gathered around him while he was by the lake.
22 Then one of the synagogue leaders, named Jairus, came, and when he saw Jesus, he fell at his feet. 23 He pleaded earnestly with him,
"My little daughter is dying. Please come and put your hands on her so that she will be healed and live." 24 So Jesus went with him.

A large crowd followed and pressed around him. 25 And a woman was there who had been subject to bleeding for twelve years. 26 She had suffered a great deal under the care of many doctors and had spent all she had, yet instead of getting better she grew worse. 27

When she heard about Jesus, she came up behind him in the crowd and touched his cloak, 28 because she thought, “If I just touch his clothes, I will be healed.” 29 Immediately her bleeding stopped and she felt in her body that she was freed from her suffering.

30 At once Jesus realized that power had gone out from him. He turned around in the crowd and asked, “Who touched my clothes?”

31 “You see the people crowding against you,” his disciples answered, “and yet you can ask, ‘Who touched me?’ ”

32 But Jesus kept looking around to see who had done it. 33 Then the woman, knowing what had happened to her, came and fell at his feet and, trembling with fear, told him the whole truth. 34 He said to her, “Daughter, your faith has healed you. Go in peace and be freed from your suffering.”

35 While Jesus was still speaking, some people came from the house of Jairus, the synagogue leader. “Your daughter is dead,” they said. “Why bother the teacher anymore?”

36 Overhearing what they said, Jesus told him, “Don’t be afraid; just believe.”

37 He did not let anyone follow him except Peter, James and John the brother of James. 38 When they came to the home of the synagogue leader, Jesus saw a commotion, with people crying and wailing loudly. 39 He went in and said to them, “Why all this commotion and wailing? The child is not dead but asleep.” 40 But they laughed at him.

After he put them all out, he took the child’s father and mother and the disciples who were with him, and went in where the child was. 41 He took her by the hand and said to her, “Talitha koum!” (which means “Little girl, I say to you, get up!”). 42 Immediately the girl stood up and began to walk around (she was twelve years old). At this they were completely astonished. 43 He gave strict orders not to let anyone know about this, and told them to give her something to eat.

WEEK 4: Kinship

Genesis 4:2b-9, Matthew 12:46-50

(PRE-WORK) REFLECT | Before your small group gathering, complete the following and reflect on the discussion questions. These will be the basis for your small group time.

- ☐ Listen to the Sermon on Highrock's YouTube channel and note any reactions you had – curiosities, concerns, or delights
- ☐ Read Genesis 4:2b-9, Matthew 12:46-50

RELATE | Use these questions as a launching point for your small group conversation or personal reflection.

1. What from the sermon or reading has brought up new questions or interesting points you would like to discuss?
2. After reading the Scripture passage together: Where do you see family dysfunction in Genesis 4? What seems to be behind this? In Matthew 12, what is Jesus's vision of family (kinship)? Share how this might challenge, surprise and/or encourage you.
3. "Family." What are your first impressions or feelings when you hear this word? What comes to mind for you?

   Before going onto question 4, Pastor Taylor drew on Paul's short letter to Philemon in this sermon. Take a moment to ask, what are the main details of this story (so we can be on the same page), and invite members to share some of the highlights. (If helpful, your group might consider reading this short letter together.)
4. How does Paul demonstrate kinship or a desire for it in the following: in what he says about Onesimus, what he says to Philemon, and/or how he describes his own involvement (and willingness to sacrifice) in this situation?
5. Pastor Taylor discussed both the real and challenging call of being community as family, but also the wisdom we need about how/when to relate to others. What thoughts did this raise for you? What did you find helpful in something P. Taylor shared?
6. *Koinonia*, the greek word for fellowship. This a kind of Christian community where we share one another's joys and burdens.

   Have you experienced something like this before in a faith community? Imagine one way – the more specific, the better – you would appreciate being welcomed in a community. What does that look like? Can you see a way where you might also welcome someone else with this kind of intentionality or specificity?

PRAY (from the prayer of confession used in service) |

Teach us to welcome others with humility, to share one another's burdens, and to love beyond what is easy. Through Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen..

Scripture: Genesis 4:2b-9 & Matthew 12:46-50

Genesis 4:

2 Now Abel kept flocks, and Cain worked the soil. 3 In the course of time Cain brought some of the fruits of the soil as an offering to the Lord. 4 And Abel also brought an offering—fat portions from some of the firstborn of his flock. The Lord looked with favor on Abel and his offering, 5 but on Cain and his offering he did not look with favor. So Cain was very angry, and his face was downcast.

6 Then the Lord said to Cain, "Why are you angry? Why is your face downcast? 7 If you do what is right, will you not be accepted? But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must rule over it."

8 Now Cain said to his brother Abel, "Let's go out to the field." While they were in the field, Cain attacked his brother Abel and killed him.

[9] Then the Lord said to Cain, “Where is your brother Abel?”

“I don’t know,” he replied. “Am I my brother’s keeper?”

Matthew 12:

[46] While Jesus was still talking to the crowd, his mother and brothers stood outside, wanting to speak to him. [47] Someone told him, “Your mother and brothers are standing outside, wanting to speak to you.”

[48] He replied to him, “Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?” [49] Pointing to his disciples, he said, “Here are my mother and my brothers. [50] For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother.”

WEEK 5 Begin With Love

1 Peter 3:15-16

(PRE-WORK) REFLECT | Before your small group gathering, complete the following and reflect on the discussion questions. These will be the basis for your small group time.

- ☐ Listen to the Sermon on Highrock's YouTube channel and note any reactions you had – curiosities, concerns, or delights
- ☐ Read 1 Peter 3:15-16

RELATE | Use these questions as a launching point for your small group conversation or personal reflection.

1. What from the sermon or reading has brought up new questions or interesting points you would like to discuss?
2. This is a short passage, but as a group, what are the key elements in it? Take a moment for this, really looking at the different features of this passage that seem important. Bring these observations (the different parts of the passage) into your discussion.
3. Have you ever found yourself in a situation where someone was less interested in you and more interested in getting something from you? What was that like? Are you aware of ever doing this to another person yourself? How do you think they felt?
4. We are beginning a series about witness or sharing faith. Going back to this last question, have you seen or experienced anything like this in situations where people were sharing their faith? What was that like?

   Have you seen someone share their faith in a way you appreciate? How have these experiences shaped what ideas like evangelism or witness mean to you?
5. "Begin with love." This is the key idea of this sermon. In Pastor John's sermon, what are some of the basic parts of it? What comes to mind for you?
6. One challenge to being a witness is that over time many Christians have fewer meaningful relationships with people who don't share their faith. Do you resonate with that? John offered some action steps: intentional prayer (a prayer walk) for neighbors and friends, or making an intentional connection (coffee, a meal) with a friend or co-worker, where you can listen to someone else's story.

   Being intentional is key here. As a group take some time to discuss this and think about an action step for you (like the ones above, or something else). Close with prayer, recognizing God's grace is present, and helps us in our needs.

PRAY (drawn from the Scripture reading prayer used at service) |

Loving God, open our eyes to the people around us and help us to speak with gentleness and respect. Teach us to listen with curiosity, to respond with compassion, and to share our hope with courage. Through Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.

Scripture: 1 Peter 3:15-16

[15] But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect, [16] keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander

APPENDIX

Below are resources to look into if you are interested in diving deeper into some of the topics covered in this series. If you need resources that more specifically address your own experience, demographic, or faith journey, please reach out to a Highrock pastor or to smallgroups@highrock.org and we will be happy to help!

ONLINE BIBLES

- Blue Letter Bible
- Bible Gateway

PRAYER TOOLS

- The Prayer of Examen: Tracking Our Moods
- Breath Prayer/Prayer of the Heart
- Divine/Fixed Hour Prayer
- SoulCare guide to Imaginative Prayer Spiritual Practice
- Imaginative Prayer/Ignatian Contemplation
- SoulCare guide to Recall & Paraphrase Spiritual Practice
- Lament
- Laughter and Prayer
- Palms Up, Palms Down
- Pray a Psalm in a Nature Setting
- Praying with your Body
- Welcoming Prayer

"ICEBREAKER" QUESTIONS

- What was a small win from your week?
- Share a High/Low from your day or week.
- On a scale of 1-10, how are you doing coming into this meeting?
- If you were to describe yourself as a weather forecast today, what would you be? Example: sunny, partly cloudy, rainy with a chance of snow, etc.
- What song would be the theme track for the day you had?

GENERAL RESOURCES FOR INDIVIDUAL SUPPORT

- Spiritual Practices
- Mental Health Resources
- Parenting & Kids—Understanding each other through Milestones

TIPS FOR GUIDING CONVERSATION

- Allow everyone space to share. It's ok to ask what people are thinking even if they don't volunteer to share right away. But always give people the option to decline to share. Example: "Hey, Fred, you've been a little quiet and I'm curious to know what you think. Would you like to share anything?"

- Remember there aren't necessarily "right" answers. Encourage participants to simply be curious about what came up for them or others without the pressure of feeling like they "should" have thought or felt anything in particular. Example: Instead of asking "What is this story supposed to be communicating?" ask "What did you notice?"

- Embrace the differences. Affirm that different people can come to different conclusions regarding the same thing. Example: "Interestingly, the text reminded Susie of ABC, while it reminded José of XYZ. Both can be present and true."

- Adapt to suit your group's needs. Sometimes conversation is free-flowing and sometimes it's easier to move through discussion questions one at a time. Do what feels suitable for your group, but don't feel pressured to answer/discuss every single question.
- Encourage curiosity by modeling curiosity. Asking someone "Tell me more about XYZ" can be a really simple but effective tool to go deeper in conversation.
- Don't be afraid of silence. It's natural to want to fill silences or pauses in a conversation. But don't be afraid to sit in silence with your group members. Sometimes thoughts just need time to percolate, so don't feel like you have to rush to another question if no one shares immediately.
- Refer back to the Conversation Covenant. This is the posture that we as Highrock hold as we gather in groups. When the conversation gets tough, you can always refer back to the Conversation Covenant to remind the group that everyone has agreed to abide by this covenant in small group meetings.