



context:

line by line:

application:

Out But In, In But Out

4.14.2013

Study Questions

Use these questions in your community group time to dig deeper and discover how you can apply today's message to everyday life.

INTRODUCTION

Author Anne Rice (*Called Out of Darkness: A Spiritual Confession*) has a powerful personal story. She grew up in the church, but left it as a young adult. In her fifties, she rejected her decades-long atheism and returned to church...for ten years. And then she made this announcement on her Facebook page:

Today I quit being a Christian. I'm out. I remain committed to Christ as always but not to being "Christian" or to being part of Christianity. It's simply impossible for me to "belong" to this quarrelsome, hostile, disputatious, and deservedly infamous group.

Let's be honest, that isn't exactly surprising. How is it that people like Anne sometimes feel driven from Christianity? Why are there Christians arguing with non-believers and fellow Christians alike? Is this really what Jesus intended for his disciples?

WEEKLY READING

In fact, Jesus tells us how his disciples should behave. He says, "*Love one another.*" By the end of the first century, the apostle John was the last of Jesus' original twelve disciples still alive. He was an old man who'd witnessed great tragedy. Many of his friends had been killed for their faith. In the last years of his life, John wrote the letter we know as 1 John to young followers of Jesus. It's his final reminder to them of what it means to be a disciple of Jesus: **Read together: 1 John 4:7-21**

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What is your reaction to Anne Rice's "quitting" Christianity? Can you relate to what she wrote about her decision? Does it offend you in any way? Explain.
2. Think about the stories of tragedy and suffering we see in the media each day. Is it difficult to believe that love can make a difference in the face of great hardship? Why or why not?
3. **Read 1 John 4:8.** What does "God is love" mean? Talk about the connection between loving others and knowing God. How does it challenge your own assumptions about what it means to be a Christian?
4. Have you ever tried to demonstrate love to someone with whom you disagreed? How did you manage the tension between loving and defending your opinion? What happened?
5. Does **1 John 4:10** shed any light on how Jesus' kind of love actually works in the practical world? Remember: *we owe it to God to love others.*
6. Last week we challenged you to love someone in your sphere of influence who is difficult to love. What did you do? How did the person respond?

MOVING FORWARD

Jesus would say we give up our leverage in culture when we focus on anything but love. If we loved like he calls us to love, people wouldn't feel condemned by Christians or coerced to join the faith. In fact, they'd feel drawn to the church. What does love look like in the marketplace? In our families? In our marriages? In our friendships? If we don't love well, it doesn't really matter what else we do. So try it. Focus on it. Meditate on it. This week, practice loving the people around you.

PRAYER

Ask Jesus to help us become a 1 John 4:7-12 Jesus-following community, and more and more 1 John 4:7-12 people.

