

GOOD AND BEAUTIFUL GOD SERMON SERIES DISCUSSION GUIDE FOR SMALL GROUPS

5 & 6 JUNE 2021

GOD IS GOOD... ALL THE TIME?

Scripture: John 9:1-4, Romans 8:14-23

The recommended time allocation for your group meeting is:

If you meet weekly :

- Worship through song (10 mins)
- Discussion - 1 session worth of core questions (40 mins)
- Discussion - 1 session worth of additional questions (30 mins)
- Sharing, Prayer, Fellowship (30 mins)

If you meet fortnightly :

- Worship through song (10 mins)
- Discussion - 2 sessions' worth of core questions (60 mins)
- Optional - additional questions (10 mins)
- Sharing, Prayer, Fellowship (30 mins)

Core Questions for Discussion

(If your group meets fortnightly, combine Core Questions of two sessions and choose one Further Question from either session.)

1. In John 9, we read that even Jesus' disciples thought that the blind man's sinfulness led to his disability. However, Jesus denies this incorrect assumption, and uses the man's blindness to address a theological point about salvation.

A) From v1-4; According to Jesus, why was this man blind? What did Jesus subsequently do for him and what was the blind man's response?

B) What wrong ideas about suffering does v.1-4 dispel?

The disciples assume, like most Palestinian Jews of their day, that sin and suffering are intimately connected. In one sense, they are correct; they are simply working out the entailments of the fall (Gen 3). If rabbis argued that there is no death without sin (Ezek 18:20) and no suffering without guilt (Ps 89:32), Paul in the New Testament would certainly agree (Rom. 1–2; 3:10ff.). The Bible does give such generalizing statements about the origin of the human race's maladies.

However, it is beyond biblical evidence to make tight connections between the sins and the sufferings *of an individual*. Yes, a specific illness or experience of suffering *may possibly* be the direct consequence of a specific sin (see John 5:14, 1Cor 11:30, or Miriam's revolt in Num 12). At the same time, numerous biblical texts flatly deny that an individual instance of illness or suffering is *invariably* due to a specific sin (Job; Gal. 4:13; 2 Cor. 12:7).

In this instance, the disciples erroneously presuppose the tightest possible connection – this specific individual is suffering from blindness, therefore some specific, individual sin must have been the antecedent cause. Because he was born blind, it must be that either he sinned in the womb (certainly regarded as possible by some Jews), or his parent sinned in some way that implicated him (e.g. when a pregnant woman worships in a pagan temple). These assumptions are shown to be incorrect. On this point, the disciples have not progressed beyond Job's 'miserable comforters'.

Jesus responds differently. He does not disavow the *generalizing connection* between sin and suffering, but Jesus does completely disavow the *one-to-one connection* between an individual's suffering and an individual's sin. Ultimately, the blindness from birth was not outside the sweep of God's control, and therefore not outside of God's purpose.

- adapted from D. A. Carson, *The Gospel according to John*, Pillar New Testament Commentary, pp.361–362.

Further notes on John 9

- A major emphasis in John 9 is that Jesus is the light of the world (v.5) who gives true sight (vv.39-41).
- The irony in vv.35-41 is that the Pharisees, who accused the blind man of being a sinner, thought that they could see and regarded themselves as spiritually superior. However, they were actually the ones who were sinners and spiritually blind.
- The blind man, who was considered by the crowds to be a sinner, was given the gift of both physical sight and spiritual sight. He was the one who could truly see Jesus for who he really was - the Son of Man (v.35).
- Through the healing of the blind man, Jesus drives home the point that He is the one who is in charge of salvation and grants spiritual sight - and that is a very good thing.

2. Let's look at Romans 8:14-23. Paul isn't a stranger to suffering especially for the gospel, yet he consistently affirms God's goodness even in the midst of suffering.

A) What is the basis of our confidence in God's goodness amidst suffering (vv.14-18?)

B) What else, apart from humanity, experiences suffering? Is this suffering meaningless? (see vv.19-23)

C) Should we as Christians seek to avoid suffering at any cost? Is there a legitimate place for suffering as we live out our lives before a good God?

D) Based on Scripture, what attitudes toward suffering should we adopt?

3. Have you encountered God's goodness even in the presence of suffering? How will you respond differently to suffering after today's study and discussion? Share with your group.

Further Questions for Discussion

(Optional question for discussion if time permits. Do allocate adequate time for prayer and fellowship.)

4. If the way I live doesn't lead to any suffering in my life, does that mean I'm not really a Christian?

5. Doesn't the Old Testament say that obedience always leads to blessings, and disobedience always leads to curses? Doesn't this mean that good people should not suffer?

6. Suggested Spiritual Workout: SILENCE and AWARENESS OF CREATION

For each session in this sermon series, a spiritual workout will be suggested for you to exercise on your own or together as a group. We encourage you to try this spiritual exercise, then share at your next small group meeting how it has impacted you.

(The following is extracted from *The Good and Beautiful God*, by James Bryan Smith)

SILENCE

Our world is noisy and hurried, and few of us stop to be still. The God who is good can only reach us when we are quiet. To paraphrase the psalmist, we must be “still” to know that God is “good.” This week I encourage you to try to find five minutes each day to sit in silence. Get a cup of something warm and delicious, find a comfortable chair, and just sit quietly. That’s all. It is not terribly difficult, but it yields great benefits. Some tips:

- Look for little free spaces in your day, such as a break between activities.
- Get up a little earlier or leave for your next appointment a little sooner so that when you arrive you will have extra time to find a quiet place and “just be.”
- A lot of people find that their thoughts run to and fro during this time of silence. This is normal. Your mind is used to helping you solve problems; it is not used to being still. Here are two tips that will help with the crazy “thought monkeys” that plague the discipline of silence:
 1. Have a notepad nearby to jot down things that may come to your mind, such as a phone call you need to make or the laundry that needs to be done. This will help quiet your mind.
 2. You may want to “ease in” to the five minutes by reading the Bible for a minute or two.

It may seem challenging at first, but with a little effort you should be able to do this easily every day. I suspect that soon you will find this exercise increasingly important to your daily life. It will help you slow down and become present, more able to focus on God in your midst. It might lead you into a regular practice of developing “rests” that make the notes (your actions) in your life become beautiful music.

AWARENESS OF CREATION

Historically, great theologians have cited the created world and its beauty as the first sign of God’s goodness. Paul said as much in the opening chapter of his epistle to the Romans. Creation speaks of the goodness and glory of God through dazzling colors and intoxicating scents. The sunrises and sunsets are grand spectacles that happen twice each day and are seldom noticed by people too busy to look. God could have made an ugly world; he was not obligated to make a world that inspires awe. Beauty has a lot to do with order. Simply gazing at a daisy reveals the mind of God.

In her book *Experiencing God’s Tremendous Love*, Maureen Conroy advises us to “become deeply absorbed in creation” as a way of experiencing God’s goodness and love. She advocates this exercise experience: take a walk outside and pay great attention to the sights, sounds and colors of nature. If you have access, go to a park or some place that is relatively untouched by humans. Take something to write on and act as if you are on a mission to canvass a small area, jotting down everything you see. Pretend you’re trying to communicate what you are seeing to

someone who has never been able to go outdoors and experience the beauty of the created world. Note the color of the birds, the symmetry of the leaves and the sounds of the wind. Think of God as a great artist and yourself as the art student, paying close attention to the detail of the artwork.

7. Prayer Suggestions

- a) For the persecuted church and the suffering Christians around the world. The website <https://www.opendoors.org/> is a good place to learn more about a country and pray for them.

- b) That we ourselves will have the right understanding of suffering and that God will give us the strength to face it

- c) That we would be willing to risk all for Christ and His gospel