

GOOD AND BEAUTIFUL GOD SERMON SERIES DISCUSSION GUIDE FOR SMALL GROUPS

26 & 27 JUNE 2021

GOD LOVES US, GOOD OR BAD

Scripture: Luke 15:11-32

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.)

1A) In this parable, we read of a father who accepted his younger son back into his family despite his son leaving and spending his inheritance. Do you think the son deserved his father's love and acceptance? Why or why not?

1B) Do we deserve God's love and acceptance into His kingdom? Why or why not?

2. The older son was angry that the father celebrated his undeserving younger son's return, while he felt that the father had ignored the hard work he had put in all these years. Are there occasions when we act like the older brother? Are there times when we think our good works give us a higher standing with our Father in heaven or grant us more favour from God? Do we begrudge God's love and acceptance of those who are undeserving?

3. How does the cross of Christ break down both these narratives - that we need to earn God's love, and that others are undeserving of His love?

4. How does understanding the new narrative of the Father's love for the undeserving:
 - A) Change the way we respond to God?

B) Change the way we see and relate to people in the church? (our fellow brothers and sisters)

Further Questions for Discussion

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

5. Look up this parable in different English Bibles. Do their section headings all give the same title for the parable?

6. Suggested Spiritual Workout: Lectio Divina

(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 adapted from *The Good and Beautiful God*, by James Bryan Smith)*

The spiritual exercise for this week is called Lectio Divina, which is Latin term for “divine reading.” It is a method of reading the Bible that involves meditating on God’s word. It’s an ancient practice which involved reading select passages of the Bible with specific pauses and concentration on certain words.

In Lectio Divina we turn to a passage of the Bible—usually no more than a few verses—and read it over and over, very slowly, reflecting on each word and phrase, while paying attention to the impact the words have on our hearts.

Lectio Divina is a complement to the study of Scripture. The reading and study of the Bible to understand the passage in its context and to grasp the communicative intent of the divine Author, must be paired with the practices of meditation, reflection, prayer, and listening in silence before God, and vice versa. God’s living Word has to come alive both in our minds as well as in our hearts. Study and meditation must go hand in hand to strengthen and inform each other. In this way, we can grow in loving God with all our heart, and soul, and mind, and strength (Mark 12:30).

SUGGESTIONS FOR ENGAGING IN LECTIO DIVINA

1. First, select a passage of the Bible which you are familiar with and have previously read or studied. This provides a safeguard that the passage is not being taken out of context. In this specific exercise, we will use our passage, Luke 15:11-32. It is recommended that you use a different Bible translation for this exercise.
2. Spend a minute in silence to prepare your heart to listen and obey God's word
3. Read the passage thrice. Read it slowly, taking time to pause between each sentence as you internalise it. Pay attention to words or phrases that catch your attention or may seem to stand out each time you read the passage. It may help to note down these phrases.

4. Pondering. Reflect for a while on the phrase that moved you. Repeat it a few more times. Let it touch your heart, desires and fears. What might God want to say to me specifically?
5. Prayer. Turn that last question into a prayer, asking God, "What is the word you have for me in this passage, God? Is there anything you want to say to me today?" Listen. Write down anything you sense God might be saying to you.
6. Rest. Be still and silent for a while. Enjoy being in the presence of God. In this step, you move from doing to being.
7. Response. Ask yourself and God: "What am I being called to do as a result of the Word I have been given?" Perhaps you are feeling challenged to love God more or to accept some aspect of who you are, or to serve someone you know, or to begin changing some aspect of your character. Whatever it is, write it out. Thank God for the word and the calling you have been given.

Prayer Suggestions

7. Would you consider praying for the following:

- Are there any hindrances that keep you from approaching and drawing close to God? Pray that God will set you free from these false narratives and that you may enjoy the freedom God has given you and a close relationship with God.
- That God will illuminate His word and truth for you as you try out the Lectio Divina spiritual workout.
- That God will surface the prejudices we may unconsciously hold against those whom we consider unworthy or undeserving. Pray that God will transform your heart such that we may see others just as He sees them, and love and welcome them unconditionally.