

GOOD AND BEAUTIFUL GOD SERMON SERIES DISCUSSION GUIDE FOR SMALL GROUPS

10 & 11 JULY 2021

OUR GOOD GOD LOVES US SACRIFICIALLY

Scripture: Philippians 2:5-11, Hebrews 2:9-18

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. Read Philippians 2:5-11. In this poem, Paul asks us to be of the same mindset as Jesus Christ. (v.5). What characteristics of Jesus does this passage of Scripture describe?

- Paul highlights Jesus' humility. Paul says that Jesus did not use His place in heaven and His divine nature for his own gain, nor did he hold it close to Himself. Instead, Jesus gave all these up to take on the nature of a human being and a servant.
- Jesus did not just come down to live among us. His purpose in coming down to Earth was also to give up His life for us so that we can be saved. In doing so, He was obedient to God, who sent Him to be the sacrifice for our sins. In addition, Christ did not remain dead but was raised and exalted to the right hand of God. He will likewise also raise our humble bodies, transforming them in glory (3:21).
- Jesus' sacrifice of himself on the cross is the prime example of his humility. In fact, Christ's *humility* brought Him even to the point of *humiliation*, for being executed by crucifixion was perhaps the most publicly shameful death during Roman times (Refer to Further Questions for Discussion).
- The extent of humiliation that Christ endured on the cross is described in Isaiah 53:3 - "He was despised and rejected by mankind, a man of suffering, and familiar with pain.

Like one from whom people hide their faces, he was despised, and we held him in low esteem.”

- Hence, Paul asks us to reflect Christ’s deep humility in our relations with one another. When interacting with our fellow brothers and sisters in Christ, we should place our ambitions, our interests, our wants and our needs below others, sacrificing our own gain for others. God humbled Himself to the point of humiliation for us, are we willing to make similar sacrifices for our brothers and sisters in Christ?

2. Read Hebrews 2:9-18. The author of Hebrews paints a picture of us united with Christ sharing in His glory. Why is Christ’s sacrificial love necessary for us to be united with Him?

- Jesus’ death on the cross makes all of us holy. (v.11) As humans, our sinful nature sets us apart from a holy God. Because of this sinful nature, we deserve death and condemnation.
- However, Jesus suffered humiliation and tasted death that we deserve. (v.9) Because He was sinless, He could fulfil the just requirements of all of humanity’s sin. In doing so, He broke the devil’s power over us and freed us from our slavery to sin and death. (vv. 14-15)
- We cannot find salvation or come close to God on our own accord or by our own works or merits. The Israelites’ burnt offerings and sacrifices were insufficient to free them from their sinful nature, and likewise, nothing we can do can free us from our sinful nature.
- Instead, only Jesus, acting as the sacrifice for our sins, can make us holy and sinless. It was God who first reached out to us in love, becoming like us and sharing in our humanity, our “flesh and blood” (v.14). Jesus had to be made fully human so that He can act as the atonement for our sins. (v. 17) Thus, God became like us so that we could become like Him.
- Hence, through making us holy, we can become part of God’s family, people whom Jesus calls brothers and sisters. (v. 10) In this, we can find hope. We can look forward to the day when Christ comes again, and we are united with Him for eternity in the new creation.
- The author of Hebrews quotes from Psalm 8 in Hebrews 2:5-9 to describe how God has glorified humans despite us being far away from His glory.
 - Reflect on God’s glory as the King of Kings and the creator of the heavens and the Earth. Think of how small we as humans pale compared to God. (If you have time, read Psalm 8 to better understand this idea.)
 - Although we are far away from His glory, Jesus gave it up so that He could come down to die for us. From His place in heaven, Jesus became like humans, lower than the angels. Because of Jesus’ work on the cross, God crowns us with glory and honour. (Psalm 8:5, Hebrews 2:9)

3A. How do these passages deepen our understanding of Christ's love for us?

- Christ's self-sacrificial love reveals the depth of His love for us.
- God isn't a god who is distant or apathetic towards humanity and our struggles. Both of these passages illustrate that God is actively involved in humanity and desires to be with us for eternity.
- God loves us so much that he would give up his own place in heaven and suffer for us so that we can be united with Him for eternity. He humbled Himself even to the point of humiliation, in order to win us with His love.
- Furthermore, Jesus understands what it means to be a human and to struggle as a human. He understands our suffering and our temptations to sin. Hence, he can help us and guide us when we struggle with sin and temptation.
- Thus, we can look to Him in our times of need, finding comfort in knowing that he empathises with our struggles.
- Set aside some time for quiet reflection for your group members to process and appreciate what Jesus has done for us and how much He loves us.

3B. How does Christ's example in Phil 2:5-11 change how we relate to our fellow brothers and sisters in Christ? (Hint: Refer to Phil 2:1-4, where Paul shares his hopes for the Philippian church)

- Paul desires **unity** in the church (vv.1-2): "So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind"
- Paul encourages the Philippians also encourages the Philippians to live in humility and to place others' interests above their own (vv.3-4).
- Paul sets Jesus as the role model that they (and we) can look to as we relate to one another.
- Phil 2 vv.5-11 emphasises Jesus' humility that led Him to die on the cross for our sins. Paul calls us to imitate Jesus' humility in how we relate to each other, and in doing so strive for unity
 - In the Philippians 2:12-18 passage in the GBG #1 study, Paul calls us to continue to work out our salvation with fear and trembling. He begins v.12 with 'Therefore,' setting Jesus' humble nature as an example to look to, as described in vv.5-11.
- How humility leads to unity : humility is about putting others above ourselves, in thoughts and actions. It requires us to think about ourselves less. Unity is oneness & achieved when we value the needs of the group above our own. The church needs to be one in

thinking and action, it's only by humbling ourselves, thinking of our needs less & putting aside our own wants that we submit fully as God's holy church under His rule

- Our fellow brothers and sisters in Christ are part of the same family in Christ. Do we love fellow Christians in the same way that we love our biological parents, siblings and children? Do we feel uncomfortable including and welcoming certain people in the church in God's family?
- Do we simply wait for people in need to come to us? Or do we go out and actively reach out to others, just as Christ took the initiative to come down to us?
- Do we use the power, status and wealth that God has given us merely for our own benefit or the benefit of our immediate families? Or worse, to take advantage of the people around us? Or do we humble ourselves, do we concern ourselves with others' interests, and actively look for opportunities to serve our brothers and sisters in Christ?
- Is God calling you to sacrifice something that you hold close to your heart? Perhaps God is calling you to give up your time to serve in a new ministry. Or perhaps God is calling you to give your savings to help the less fortunate. Christ was willing to even be humiliated. Will you be willing to go out of your comfort zone for Him?
- If you are struggling to give up these things, may Christ be an example to model after as a servant who loved and gave Himself freely. May we learn to love and serve our brothers and sisters in Christ just as Christ first loved us.

Further Questions for Discussion

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

4. Philippians 2:8 describes Jesus as 'Obedient to death – even death on a cross!' Why do you think Paul felt it was necessary to add 'even' to describe Jesus' death on the cross?

- Paul adds in the extra clause of 'even' to emphasise the humiliation Christ endured on the cross.
- Crucifixion was not like any other form of dying. It was a form of capital punishment in the Roman Empire. This slow and painful death was usually reserved for the worst criminals. It was held in public as a deterrence towards other criminals.
- However, Jesus was far from the worst criminal of the Roman Empire. Jesus was pure and sinless.
- On top of bearing for our sins, Paul highlights that Jesus had to go through one of the most extreme forms of humiliation that a human could go through, even though he was faultless.

- Hence, Paul suggests that we too will also suffer as we serve one another. However, just as God glorified Jesus after He suffered, we will also share in Jesus' glory.

The Humiliation of Crucifixion

“Crucifixion was the most humiliating form of state-sponsored execution, a form of death reserved for slaves. It is clear that, from Rome’s perspective, those who were crucified were not simply humiliated, but humiliated by Roman power. The public display of the crucified body served both as testimony to Rome’s power over all bodies and as a public warning against future transgression.”

-Stephen E. Fowl, *Philippians*, Two Horizons New Testament Commentary, p.99.

“As a man, Christ became what no one would ever want to become—forsaken, under a curse (Gal 3:13), and tortured. Humility and obedience marked his path to the cross. One can go no further in identifying with humanity than in experiencing death—but death on a cross is the most humiliating and painful death. This death was particularly revolting to Romans. [The Roman orator] Cicero said “The very word ‘cross’ should be far removed not only from the person of a Roman citizen but from his thoughts, his eyes and his ears” and that to crucify someone was to “hang him to the tree of shame.” But the Romans used it as a deterrent to any who would oppose them and as a way to keep their subjects docile. God uses it to reveal love beyond all comprehension. All human speculation about God stumbles at the foot of the cross. Being a slave comports well with dying on a cross, since slaves in this era were subject to this brutal death.”

-David E. Garland, *Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Ephesians–Philemon* (Revised Edition), p.221.

5. Suggested Spiritual Workout: Reading the Gospel of John

(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)

In the four Gospels, we encounter Jesus, seeing Jesus in striking ways. The brilliance of these written records is in their ability to bring Jesus into vivid view.

This week find a few hours to read the entire Gospel of John. It is not often that we read an entire book of the Bible. Usually, we read small portions or a short devotion based on a single verse. By reading the whole book, we experience the complete story, beginning, middle and end.

Some may wonder, Why the Gospel of John, and not one of the others? John is a unique Gospel. It begins with a prologue that tells us about the Logos, the Word or the Son of God, who was “made flesh, and dwelt among us.” John gives us a glimpse into Jesus with a series

of unique stories, but most important, John's Gospel clearly depicts Jesus' relationship with His heavenly Father.

Breaking up the Gospel into four sections and reading five to seven chapters at a single sitting may be helpful. Try to avoid constantly consulting the study notes (if you have a study Bible). If you have pressing questions that arise during the reading ("Why did Jesus turn water into wine?"), you might want to write them down and search for answers at another time. For now, simply read the Gospel as if you were reading a story with a beginning, middle and end. For most people, this will be a challenging exercise, but it is very rewarding.

Prayer Suggestions

6. Consider praying for the following:

- a) That God would reveal a deeper understanding and appreciation of Jesus' sacrifice on the cross. Take some time to thank Him for coming down to Earth and giving Himself up so that we may be made holy and be allowed into God's family.
- b) That God would grant us a heart of humility and service. If there are any areas of pride that we may struggle with, ask God to show you these areas and ask Him to allow you to see others just as He sees them.
- c) If God is calling you to make a sacrifice of your time, your money, or your energy, ask God to soften your heart that you may give of these things willingly and ask Him to teach you to trust Him as you give of these things.