

CHAPTER 2, SESSION 2: GOD IS GOOD

CHAPTER CHALLENGE

This chapter could raise many questions for your group. First, there could be questions surrounding the idea of God's goodness and that God does not punish sinners. Specifically, questions may surface from the Luke 13:1-5 passage, which is used to illustrate Jesus' narrative about God. Be sure to check out the footnote on that passage for further clarity. There may also be questions about the consequences of sin. Some of these questions are addressed specifically in the section "The Good only the Good Know." Here we start to see the reward for goodness and how that is lost through sin. Further questions should be welcomed. It may be tempting to resolve all of these questions, but often that is not possible. Invite the group to stay with their questions and even keep bringing them up in the coming weeks. As the book unfolds they may find answers, or they may find answers in other sources as they proceed.

SUPPLIES

- 🎧 Recording of the song "Last Kiss" by Pearl Jam
- 🎧 CD player
- 📄 1 copy of the lyrics to "Last Kiss" for each member of the group (see the handout at the end of this chapter)
- 📄 1 blank index card and pen for each participant for the 1-minute essay
- 📄 1 sheet of blank paper and 1 marker for each person for the "Letting Go" exercise
- 🗑️ A trash can for the "Letting Go" exercise

WELCOME

"God is Good" is an intense chapter. At the very beginning of class, even before the silence, a little levity can be introduced by playing the song, "Last Kiss." It is a classic packed with narratives about God, punishment, suffering and heaven! It was covered very well by Pearl Jam—available on iTunes.

Lyrics:

Oh where, oh where, can my baby be
The Lord took her away from me
She's gone to heaven so I've got to be good
So I can see my baby when I leave this world
We were out on a date in my daddy's car
We hadn't driven very far
There in the road straight ahead
A car was stalled - the engine was dead
I couldn't stop so I swerved to the right
I'll never forget the sound that night
The screamin' tires, the bustin' glass
The painful scream that I heard last
Oh where, oh where, can my baby be
The Lord took her away from me
She's gone to heaven so I've got to be good
So I can see my baby when I leave this world
When I woke up the rain was pourin' down
There were people standin' all around
Something warm flowing through my eyes
But somehow I found my baby that night
I lifted her head, she looked at me and said
"Hold me darling just a little while"
I held her close, I kissed her our last kiss
I found the love that I knew I had missed
Well now she's gone Even though I held her tight
I lost my love, my life, that night

Give the class a chance to make observations regarding the lyrics and message of the song. What narratives are revealed about God and heaven? Encourage your group to notice narratives about God, heaven, and self that they receive from society—such stories show up in surprising places.

Recite Colossians 3:1-4 together, then enter into the silence.

5 MINUTES OF SILENCE

PRAYER TO END THE SILENCE

God of goodness, we often take your goodness for granted. In our minds we separate your goodness from the pain and difficulty of our everyday lives. Set us free, O Lord, to enter this time with honesty, trust and compassion to explore your goodness and what it means for us in every moment of life. Amen.

SOUL-TRAINING [10-15 minutes]

Divide into small groups of three or four and spend time discussing what you learned from the two soul-training experiences. To help you begin, you might use these three questions:

1. What, if anything, did you learn about God or yourself through the exercises?
2. Was it hard for you to find 5 minutes for silence each day?
3. What stood out for you as you paid closer attention to the created world around you?

1-MINUTE ESSAY

Before diving into the questions for “Engaging the Chapter,” use this simple exercise to get your group reflecting on the chapter. Pass out index cards and pens to your group. Say:

Take one minute, and no more, to write a two- or three-sentence essay that answers the following: “What was the most important teaching you found in this chapter?”

After the minute is up, split into different groups of three or four. For 5 minutes have participants share their discoveries. Then regroup and have the sub-groups share a theme that surfaced from their conversation.

ENGAGING THE CHAPTER [20-30 minutes]

THE BIG IDEA IN THIS CHAPTER: The dominant narrative about God for many Christians is that God is angry and punishes us for our sins. Jesus rejected this idea.

MAIN POINTS

- ☞ It is somewhat easy to say “God is good!” when our lives are going well, but it becomes much more difficult when we are suffering.
- ☞ Beyond the negative impact that all sins cause in and of themselves, if we start with the notion that God punishes us for our sins when we experience trials, we automatically assume that God caused them.
- ☞ As we examine what we think about God, we must ask, “Is my understanding of God consistent with the God that Jesus revealed?”
- ☞ On two occasions Jesus was confronted with questions about human suffering. On both occasions he rejected the notion that suffering was caused by the sinfulness of those who suffered.
- ☞ God gets the last word; that is, all of our suffering will be transformed in the end.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. The author shares a story of being confronted by a friend who says that either his sin or his wife’s sin had caused his daughter Madeline’s illness. What was your reaction to that story?
2. Have you ever had times when you felt that God was punishing you for a sin or perhaps had a friend tell you that was happening to you? If so, talk about that experience.
3. The author points out that many live by the narrative that says: “God is an angry judge. If you sin you will be punished.” Has this narrative ever affected you? If so, where did that narrative come from?

4. Look back at the section called “The Good Only the Good Know” (pp. 46-47). St. Augustine had a brilliant insight when he shifted the discussion away from the “cause and effect” notion of sin and suffering and taught instead about the “peculiar good” belonging to those who do good and the evil that results from evil. For example, a person who goes about doing good will experience blessings unknown to those who do evil such as inner contentment, the good feeling of having helped another, trust and so on. If time allows, tell stories of people you have known who have received the “good” because of their goodness.

BREAK [5 minutes]

ENGAGING THE WORD [15-30 minutes]

Read John 9 aloud.

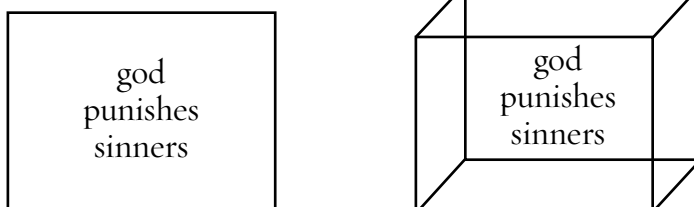
1. *As an onlooker, what do you see, hear and feel?*
2. *Watching Jesus in action in John 9, what do you learn about him?*
3. *What do you learn about human nature through the Pharisees, the disciples and the man who was born blind?*
4. *Are there any areas of your life where you feel God has punished you? If so, imagine yourself in the place of the man born blind. Allow yourself to hear Jesus’ words as if they are spoken to you.*

EXPERIENCING TRANSFORMATION [15 minutes]

The purpose of this activity is to help participants let go of the old narrative that God punishes sinners for misbehaving as well as letting go of the desire to be in control. Say:

We will now be participating in a simple activity to help tangibly understand that God is good, and that there is no logical system to explain what happens to us in this life.

Give everyone in the class a blank sheet of paper and a marker. Invite everyone to draw a square or a three-dimensional box on the paper with the phrase “god punishes sinners” inside it not capitalized on purpose, perhaps like the examples below.



Read the following:

The drawing on paper represents the way our false narratives keep God trapped and leave us with images of God that are not good or beautiful. The chapter examined the false narrative that God punishes those who sin and rewards those who are good. One root of this false narrative is a desire to be in control. If God punishes those who are bad, then we can avoid serious suffering by not being “bad.” As discussed, this equation doesn’t really add up. If life were as simple as this false narrative, then we could control our own destinies—and anyone who suffered would deserve it.

Instead, there is no system to explain suffering. We must trust Jesus when he tells us—and shows us—that God is good.

Tonight, we are invited to let go of our false narratives about God and allow Jesus to give us new narratives. Prayerfully consider your false narratives about God and how you use them to “keep control” of life. When you are ready, individually go to the trash can, wad up your piece of paper and throw it away.

After everyone has thrown away their paper, close with this prayer:

God of Goodness, we have come to this place with many narratives about you—some are helpful but some hurt us deeply and keep us from loving you. Tonight we ask that you would help us let go of these false narratives and embrace the stories about you that Jesus revealed so we can come to know you as a good and beautiful God. Amen!

GO IN PEACE [5-10 minutes]

Have a volunteer from the group read the quote below from the chapter. Then sit in silence and soak in these words to close your time together.

Jesus said his Father was good. Jesus also refused to affirm the idea that external rewards and punishments are given by God on the basis of our good or bad works. Rain falls on the good and the bad. Sometimes we pray for rain (for our crops), and sometimes we pray that it will not rain (for our picnics). Both good and bad people get rained on, whether they want it or not. Jesus faced suffering, rejection, and alienation and the people jeered at him as he hung on the cross, questioning whether his God was really with him. And Jesus believed. And he believes for me. He believes even when we cannot. He prays even when we cannot. We participate in his faith (p. 49).

If you are comfortable doing so, offer prayers of praise and thanksgiving for the God who is good.

FOR THE COMING WEEK

- ☞ Read Chapter 3, “God is Trustworthy.”
- ☞ Do the soul-training exercise of counting your blessings.
- ☞ As you are able, continue observing 5 minutes of silence each day.
- ☞ Memorize Colossians 3:5-6.

“LAST KISS” LYRICS

Oh where, oh where, can my baby be The Lord took her away from me
She's gone to heaven so I've got to be good So I can see my baby when I leave this world

We were out on a date in my daddy's car We hadn't driven very far
There in the road straight ahead A car was stalled - the engine was dead
I couldn't stop so I swerved to the right I'll never forget the sound that night
The screamin' tires, the bustin' glass The painful scream that I heard last

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When I woke up the rain was pourin' down There were people standin' all around
Something warm flowing through my eyes But somehow I found my baby that night
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