

8 WEEKS

began the settlement, a man who owed him ten thousand bags of gold[1] was not able to pay, the master ordered that he and his wife and his children repay the debt.

26 "At this the servant fell on his knees before him. "Be patient with me," he begged, "and I will repay you everything." 27 The servant's master took pity on him, canceled the debt and let him go.

28 "But when that servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a small amount. He grabbed him and began to choke him. 'Pay back what you owe me!' he demanded.

GLAD YOU ASKED

Hard questions asked and answered.



of these little ones. For I tell you that their angels are always in the presence of my Father in heaven." [11] [a]

think? If I own a hundred sheep, and one of them wanders away from the flock, I will leave the ninety-nine on the hills and go to look for the one that went missing. And if he finds it, truly I tell you, he is happier about that one sheep than about the ninety-nine that did not wander off. 14 In the same way your Father in heaven is not willing that any of these little ones should perish.

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"Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. 4 Therefore, whoever takes the lowly position of this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. 5 And whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me."



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Why Did God Let it Happen?

WEEK 1



SMALL GROUP STUDY

Kicking it off:

Share something great that happened this week.

Big Idea:

Sometimes it takes a hurt to have a healing. Sometimes it takes a loss to have a victory.

Key Scriptures:

Psalm 73:11-14 NLT

"What does God know?" they ask. "Does the Most High even know what's happening?"

Look at these wicked people - enjoying a life of ease while their riches multiply. Did I keep my heart pure for nothing? Did I keep myself innocent for no reason? I get nothing but trouble all day long; every morning brings me pain."

Matthew 27:46

"My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"

Acts 9:15-16

"But the Lord said to Ananias, "Go! This man is my chosen instrument to proclaim my name to the Gentiles and their kings and to the people of Israel. I will show him how much he must suffer for my name."

2 Corinthians

11:24-28

"Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was pelted with stones, three times I was shipwrecked, I spent a night and a day in the open sea, I have been constantly on the move. I have been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from my fellow Jews, in danger from Gentiles; in danger in the city, in danger in the country, in danger at sea; and in danger from false believers. I have labored and toiled and have often gone without sleep; I have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without

food; I have been cold and naked. Besides everything else, I face daily the pressure of my concern for all the churches.”

Revelation 21:4 NLT

“He will wipe every tear from their eyes, and there will be no more death or sorrow or crying or pain. All these things are gone forever.”

Psalm 73:16-17, 26

“When I tried to understand all this, it troubled me deeply till I entered the sanctuary of God ... My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.”

Discussion:

1. When you have difficult questions about God, what is your process for finding answers? How does that process impact your faith?
2. Read Psalm 73:11-14. Can you relate to what the Psalmist is saying? Share about a time when you felt your faith was futile.
3. Read Matthew 27:46. Jesus spoke these words during the depths of His suffering. How does knowing His questioning to God impact your own times of questioning?
4. Read Acts 9:15-16 and 2 Corinthians 11:24-28 (about Paul). Although Paul suffered greatly for the cause of Christ, he boasted in his suffering, knowing that through it, not only was he experiencing intimacy with Jesus, but he was furthering God’s Kingdom as well. What perspective does this give for your own suffering and hardships or even those of others?
5. Share about a time when you saw God use a painful part of your story for good. What was that experience like?
6. Read Revelation 21:4 How does knowing that suffering is temporary, influence the way you view it?
7. Read Psalm 73:16-17, 26. Discuss the perspective the Psalmist is sharing.
8. How have you experienced God’s strength in the midst of your own suffering?
9. How might you share that with others?

Why Didn't God Answer my Prayer?

WEEK 2



SMALL GROUP STUDY

Kicking it off:

Share about a time where God answered a prayer in an unexpected way.

Big Idea:

Prayer reminds us that we are not in control and keeps us close to the One who is.

Key Scriptures:

Mark 11:24-25

"Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours. And when you stand praying, if you hold anything against anyone, forgive them, so that your Father in heaven may forgive you your sins."

Matthew 5:23-24

"Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother or sister has something against

you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to them; then come and offer your gift."

1 Peter 3:7

"Husbands, in the same way be considerate as you live with your wives, and treat them with respect as the weaker partner and as heirs with you of the gracious gift of life, so that nothing will hinder your prayers."

John 14:13-14

"And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it."

1 John 5:14-15

"This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. And if we know that he hears us—whatever we ask—we know that we have what we asked of him."

Mark 9:22-24

"It has often thrown him into fire or water to kill him. But if you can do anything, take pity on us and help us." "If you can?" said Jesus. "Everything is possible for one who believes." Immediately the boy's father exclaimed, "I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!"

Matthew 9:22

"Your faith has healed you..."

Luke 7:50

"Your faith has saved you ..."

Matthew 9:29-30

"According to your faith let it be done to you"; and their sight was restored."

Discussion:

1. What initial thoughts do you have when you think about prayer?
2. On a scale of 1-10, where would you rate your faith in the power of prayer? Why did you give yourself that rating?
3. Share about a time when God didn't answer a prayer the way you thought He should. What did you learn through that experience?
4. Read Mark 11:24-25, Matthew 5:23-24 and 1

Peter 3:7. Discuss what you learn from these passages about how your relationships with others can impact your relationship with God and your prayers.

5. Why do you think God cares about our relationships with others?
6. Read John 14:13-14 and 1 John 5:14-15. What do these passages teach about prayer being answered by God? What conditions do you see in these verses?
7. Read Mark 9:22-24, Matthew 9:22 Luke 7:50 and Matthew 9:29-30. What do you learn about the relationship between faith and prayer from these passages?
8. What does it look like to pray so that you can know God better? How will you pray with that purpose in mind this week?

Wrapping It Up:

Father, thank You for the gift of prayer. Please search our hearts and make us aware of any relationships we need to mend, motives we need to fix, or areas where we need more faith. We pray because we want to know You more, so even if we don't understand, we will still believe



Why Can't I Stop?

WEEK 3



SMALL GROUP STUDY

Kicking it off:

What were some crazy habits you had when you were a kid?

Big Idea:

Grace doesn't just forgive you from sin, it frees you from sin.

Key Scriptures:

Romans 7:15

"I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do."

Matthew 23:25-26

"Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You clean the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence. Blind Pharisee! First clean the inside of the cup and dish, and then the outside also will be clean."

Ephesians 3:16 NLT

"I pray that from his glorious,

unlimited resources he will empower you with inner strength through his Spirit."

2 Corinthians 12:9-10

"But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." ... For when I am weak, then I am strong."

Titus 2:11-12

"For the grace of God has appeared that offers salvation to all people. It teaches us to say "No" to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age ..."

Romans 5:20

"But where sin increased, grace increased all the more ..."

Discussion:

1. What is your thought process like when you're trying to break a bad habit?
2. Read Romans 7:15. Clearly the apostle Paul, who

penned this statement, understood the inability to stop certain behaviors and sins. How do you relate to his statement?

3. Read Matthew 23:25-26 and Ephesians 3:16. How could you focus less on the outward and more on the inward power of grace?
4. Read 2 Corinthians 12:9-10. God's strength is made perfect in our weakness. Where might you need to rely on God's power more than yours to be free from the power of sin in your life?
5. You are only as strong as you are honest. Talk about a habit in your life that you'd like to change. How can your group support you?
6. Read Titus 2:11-12 and Romans 5:20. How can you focus on God's grace and its promise of freedom from sin this week?

Wrapping It Up:

Grace not only saves us but also sustains us. Spend time each day this week asking God to remind you of His perfect and abundant grace.

Prayer Focus:

Pray for our Celebrate Recovery ministry and for those who are

seeking help with their hurts, habits and hang ups.

Memory Verse:

"For the grace of God has appeared that offers salvation to all people. It teaches us to say "No" to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age..."

Titus 2:11-12

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Why Would a Loving God Send People to Hell?



WEEK 4

SMALL GROUP STUDY

Kicking it off:

What were some crazy fears you had when you were a kid?

Big Idea:

It's impossible for God to be holy without being just.

Key Scriptures:

2 Peter 3:9

"The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance."

Luke 16:19-24

"There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and lived in luxury every day. At his gate was laid a beggar named Lazarus, covered with sores and longing to eat what fell from the rich man's table. Even the dogs came and licked his sores. The time came when the beggar died and the angels carried him to Abraham's side.

The rich man also died and was buried. In Hades, where he was in torment, he looked up and saw Abraham far away, with Lazarus by his side. So he called to him, "Father Abraham, have pity on me and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, because I am in agony in this fire."

Luke 16:27-28

"... Then I beg you, father, send Lazarus to my family, for I have five brothers. Let him warn them, so that they will not also come to this place of torment."

Romans 5:8-9 NLT

"But God showed his great love for us by sending Christ to die for us while we were still sinners. And since we have been made right in God's sight by the blood of Christ, he will certainly save us from God's condemnation."

Discussion:

1. What are some initial thoughts that come to mind when you think about hell?



Why Should I Trust God?

WEEK 5



SMALL GROUP STUDY

Kicking it off:

Who is someone you trust?
What makes that person trustworthy?

Big Idea:

Trusting God means believing that no matter what happens, that God loves you and is working all things for your good.

Key Scriptures:

Psalm 13:1-2

"How long, LORD? Will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me? How long must I wrestle with my thoughts and day after day have sorrow in my heart? How long will my enemy triumph over me?"

Mark 9:22-24

"It has often thrown him into fire or water to kill him. But if you can do anything, take pity on us and help us." "If you can?" said Jesus. "Everything is possible for one who believes."

Immediately the boy's father exclaimed, "I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!"

Psalm 20:7

"Some trust in chariots and some in horses, but we trust in the name of the LORD our God."

Proverbs 3:5-6

"Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight."

Romans 8:28

"And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose."

Discussion:

1. How easy or difficult is it for you to trust God? Why is that?
2. Read Psalm 13:1-2. If you've ever felt the kind of emotion the psalmist is expressing, share about that experience.

3. How have you coped when you've had those times where God seems far away or uncaring about your situation?
4. Read Mark 9:23-24. The boy's father in this passage was struggling with unbelief. How often do you take your questions to God in prayer in the midst of your struggles? What might your faith look like if you made this a regular habit?
5. Read Psalm 20:7. The nation of Israel made this declaration during a time when the strength of a nation depended on its armies and resources that would overpower enemy armies, including chariots and horses. But their victory always came by God's deliverance, not by the might and power that physical resources provided. Talk about how you can apply this principal to your own life.
6. Read Proverbs 3:5-6. Share about a time when you chose to trust God, even when all seemed hopeless. What did trust look like, and how did it grow your relationship with Him?
7. Read Romans 8:28. Talk about an area of your

life where you might be struggling to fully trust God. How can this passage help you remember that He has a purpose, even if you don't understand the plan?

Wrapping It Up:

Do you have doubts or questions about God? Spend time praying about those things this week. Then, talk to a trusted friend or leader about that process.

Father, thank You for being big enough for our questions and doubts. We want to trust in You with all our hearts, even when we don't understand everything You're doing. Please build our trust in You this week. In Jesus' name, amen.

Prayer Focus:

Pray for our worship team who seeks to lead us in songs that deepen our trust and ability to praise our faithful God.

Memory Verse:

"Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight."

Proverbs 3:5-6



Does God Love Me?

WEEK 6



SMALL GROUP STUDY

Kicking it off:

Did you have a favorite stuffed animal, toy, or blanket when you were a kid? What made that item special to you and how did it make you feel?

Big Idea:

God doesn't love us because we're worthy, His love makes us worthy.

Key Scriptures:

John 3:16

"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life."

Romans 5:8

"But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us."

1 John 4:8-10

"...God is love. This is how God showed his love among us: He

sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins."

Romans 8:38-39

"For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

Discussion:

1. What are some reasons why it might be difficult for people to accept God's love?
2. Read John 3:16 and Romans 5:8. What thoughts come when you read about God's unconditional love for you?
3. There were two kinds of love mentioned in this week's message: a love that loves because the object is valuable, and a love that

Why Does God Feel Far Away?

WEEK 7



SMALL GROUP STUDY

Kicking it off:

Are you more likely to make decisions based on feelings or on logic? Why do you think that is?

Big Idea:

Just because God feels distant, doesn't mean God is absent.

Key Scriptures:

Psalm 88:13-14

"But I cry to you for help, LORD; in the morning my prayer comes before you. Why, LORD, do you reject me and hide your face from me?"

John 6:30

"So they asked [Jesus], "What sign then will you give that we may see it and believe you? What will you do?"

Psalm 16:8-9, 11 NLT

"God is always with me. I will not be shaken, for he is right beside me. No wonder my

heart is glad, and I rejoice. ... You will show me the way of life, granting me the joy of your presence and the pleasures of living with you forever."

Matthew 13:14-15

"You will be ever hearing but never understanding; you will be ever seeing but never perceiving. For this people's heart has become calloused; they hardly hear with their ears, and they have closed their eyes."

Jeremiah 29:13-14

"You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart. I will be found by you," declares the LORD ... "

Psalm 46:10

"...Be still and know that I am God..."

Discussion:

1. Describe a time in your life where God felt extremely present. How did that experience affect your relationship with Him?

2. Now describe a time when God felt exceptionally distant. How did that impact your faith?
3. Read Psalm 88:13-14 and John 6:30. How might you be encouraged by seeing that the psalmist and Jesus' followers also struggled with those kinds of feelings?
4. Read Psalm 16:8-9, 11. How can you remember God is always with you, even if you don't feel His presence?
5. If we always felt God, we wouldn't need faith. What are some ways you can seek God, regardless of your feelings?
6. Read Matthew 13:14-15. What was the cause of God's distance according to this passage?
7. What can cause hardness of heart in your own life?
8. Challenges, hard times, and suffering can bring us closer to God. Share a time when you saw God working, even if you didn't sense His presence.
9. Read Jeremiah 29:13-14. From this passage, what do you learn about connecting with God?

Wrapping It Up:

As you see in Psalm 46:10,

sometimes all it takes to experience God's presence is to be still and experience God in the simple moments of your day. This week, take time to do just that, and ask God to make His presence clear to you, even in the little things.

Take time to listen to Waymaker by Leeland

https://youtu.be/iJCV_2H9xD0

Be encouraged by the lyrics pertaining to God's presence and working in your life.

Prayer Focus:

Pray for the small group leaders who will be investing in our middle and high school students this coming ministry season. Pray for God to equip them with wisdom, patience and compassion for the issues these students face from day to day. And for many students to come into relationship with Jesus through this ministry.

Memory Verse:

"God is always with me. I will not be shaken, for he is right beside me."

Psalm
16:8



3. Share any ways your perspective was challenged or changed by the Q and A time.



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4. Take some time to review share about your experiences throughout this entire series. How has addressing these common wonderings helped or encouraged you?
5. Take some time to pray as a group:
- That you would take your doubts and wonderings to God.
 - That you would grow in your ability to trust and receive His great love for you and be transformed in your identity as a result.
 - That you would more regularly experience His presence in your life.

Top 10 Tips for Leading a Small Group

1. Establish a welcoming, accepting, and safe environment.
 - Take time to prepare.
 - Make sure to give a warm enthusiastic greeting to each person.
 - Verbally communicate the environment that you hope to create.
 - Ephesians 4:1-3
2. On the opening night of your group you need to have some intentional discussions centered around these questions:
 - What is the purpose of our group?
 - What is the vision for our group?
 - What are your expectations?
 - What do you hope to gain from this group experience?
 - What are some things we value as a group?
 - What are some healthy guidelines we need to have in place?
Review and sign a group agreement.
3. Be authentic. Spend time sharing your life stories in order to get to know each other on a deeper level.
4. Find a good balance between:
 - Truth and grace/Bible study and life
 - Encouraging and challenging one another
 - Giving and receiving feedback from each other
5. Ask good questions to stimulate good discussion. Use open ended questions and follow up questions.
6. Hang out together, do things socially, eat together and have fun together!
7. Develop a missional lifestyle, find a service project to do together in the community.
8. Raise up new leadership by rotating facilitation of the group.
9. Share the responsibilities in order to increase individual commitment and ownership of the group.
10. Pray for your group and for each other!

Find ways to celebrate what God is doing in your group! Who else could you invite to join you in order that their life may be impacted by what God is doing in your group?

Group Agreement

OUR PURPOSE

To transform our spiritual lives by cultivating our spiritual health in a healthy small group community. In addition, we: _____

OUR VALUES

Group Attendance: To give priority to the group meeting. We will call or email if we will be late or absent.

Safe Environment: To help create a safe place where people can be heard and feel loved. (Please, no quick answers, snap judgments, or simple fixes.)

Respect Differences: To be gentle and gracious to people with different spiritual maturity, personal opinions, temperaments, or imperfections. We are all works in progress.

Confidentiality: To keep anything that is shared strictly confidential and within the group, and to avoid sharing improper information about those outside the group.

Encouragement for Growth: To be not just takers but givers of life. We want to spiritually multiply our life by serving others with our God-given gifts.

Welcome for Newcomers: To keep an open chair and share Jesus' dream of finding a shepherd for every sheep.

Shared Ownership: To remember that every member is a minister and to ensure that each attender will share a small team role or responsibility over time.

Rotating Hosts/Leaders and Homes: To encourage different people to host the group in their homes, and to rotate the responsibility of facilitating each meeting.

OUR EXPECTATIONS

- Refreshments/mealtimes _____
- Childcare _____
- When we will meet (day of week) _____
- Where we will meet (place) _____
- We will begin at (time) _____ and end at _____
- We will do our best to have some or all of us attend a worship service together.
- Our primary worship service time will be _____
- Date of this agreement _____
- Date we will review this agreement again _____
- Who (other than the leader) will review this agreement at the end of this study _____



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community church

5601 Sunnybrook Drive
Sioux City, Iowa 51106
www.sunnybrookchurch.org