

SMALL GROUPS

Overview

This guide is designed to help your group process and apply the key themes from this sermon. The central idea is that God never wastes what hurts -- and that the painful, broken, and even seemingly finished chapters of our lives are often the very places where God does his most powerful work. Work through the sections below at whatever pace fits your group.

Key Takeaways

- Bad has perfect timing. Hardship never asks for permission, and we spend enormous energy trying to avoid it. But avoiding the bad can cause us to miss what God wants to do through it.
- There is a difference between saying "this is good" and saying "God can bring good from this." One is denial. The other is faith.
- God never wastes what hurts. The thief on the cross, the Israelites at the Red Sea, and Lazarus in the tomb all demonstrate that God specializes in redeeming what looks finished, hopeless, or beyond repair.
- Proximity to Jesus is not the same thing as surrender to Jesus. You can be near him and still miss him entirely.

- Delay is not defeat. When God says "not yet," it can feel like "no." But his timing is never early, never late, and always purposeful.
- God often asks us to participate in the miracle. Some stones he is waiting for us to roll away -- pride, unforgiveness, fear, hidden sin, or the belief that our best days are behind us.
- Faith is not pretending everything is okay. Faith is bringing your broken heart to the one who can actually heal it.

Discussion Questions

Work through these questions together. You do not need to cover all of them. Let the conversation breathe and go where the group needs it to go.

Section One: The Bad We Create

The sermon opened with the story of the thief on the cross -- a man who was guilty, condemned, and hours from death, yet encountered Jesus in his final moments.

1. Pastor Jon said, "Regret is a cruel companion. It will convince you that your past is louder than God's grace." Has regret ever made you feel like you were beyond reach? What did that feel like?
2. Two thieves were on crosses that day. Both were close to Jesus. Only one surrendered to him. What do you think was the difference between the two men?
3. Pastor Jon said, "Your proximity to Jesus is not the same thing as surrender to Jesus." What does surrender to Jesus actually look like in everyday life? What makes it difficult?
4. The thief's only recorded sermon was essentially three words: "We deserve this." Pastor Jon said, "Before grace can transform you, honesty has to find you." Is there an area of your life where you have been slow to take honest ownership? What has that cost you?

5. The thief could not kneel, raise his hands, walk an aisle, or be baptized. All he could do was turn his head toward Jesus. What does that tell us about what God actually requires of us to begin a relationship with him?

Section Two: The Bad We Did Not Choose

The sermon moved to the Israelites at the Red Sea -- people who were following God and still found themselves trapped, with no way forward and no way back.

6. Pastor Jon said, "Sometimes following God does not make the path easier. It makes his presence clear." Has there been a time in your life when following God seemed to make things harder before they got better? What did you learn in that season?
7. The Israelites had witnessed miracle after miracle, yet one obstacle made them forget everything God had already done. Pastor Jon asked, "What miracle have I forgotten because I am staring at today's problem?" Take a moment to answer that question honestly. What has God already done in your life that you may be overlooking right now?
8. God gave Moses one instruction: stretch out your staff. The sea did not split before Moses moved. Moses moved, and then the sea split. Where in your life might God be waiting for your obedience before he reveals what is next?
9. Pastor Jon said, "There are things you will only learn about God when there is no way out except through him." What is something you have learned about God specifically because of a hard season -- something you could not have learned any other way?

Section Three: The Bad That Feels Finished

The sermon closed with the story of Lazarus -- dead for four days, past the point where anyone expected anything to change.

10. Pastor Jon talked about a "spiritual cemetery" -- a place inside us where we have buried things like hope, trust, callings, marriages, or

the belief that things can get better. What have you buried that you have quietly stopped believing God could resurrect?

11. Martha said to Jesus, "If you had been here, my brother would not have died." Pastor Jon said, "Jesus is not afraid of our honest prayers." How honest are you with God when you are hurting or disappointed? What holds you back from bringing your real feelings to him?
12. Jesus asked, "Where have you laid him?" even though he already knew. Pastor Jon suggested that Jesus invites us to take him to the places we have been trying to avoid. Is there a place in your story -- a wound, a failure, a loss -- that you have been steering around rather than bringing to Jesus?
13. Before raising Lazarus, Jesus wept. He knew the miracle was moments away, and he still stopped to cry. What does that tell you about how God views your pain, not just your outcome?
14. Pastor Jon said that God often asks us to participate in the miracle -- to roll away the stone. What stone might God be asking you to move right now? What would it take to actually do it?

Practical Applications

Choose one or two of these to commit to before your group meets again.

- Name your cemetery. Take some time this week in prayer or journaling to identify something you have buried -- a hope, a calling, a relationship, or a belief. Bring it honestly before God and ask him what he wants to do with it.
- Trace the faithfulness. Make a list of specific ways God has been faithful in your life -- answered prayers, open doors, moments of grace. Keep it somewhere visible this week so that today's problem does not erase your memory of his track record.
- Identify your stone. Ask God to show you one stone he is waiting for you to roll away. It might be pride, unforgiveness, a hidden struggle,

or a lie you have believed about yourself. Take one concrete step toward moving it this week.

- Pray an honest prayer. If you have been performing for God rather than being real with him, set aside time this week to tell him exactly how you feel -- no polish, no church language, just honesty. Martha did it. The thief did it. You can too.
- Share your bad. Pastor Jon said, "Don't waste your bad." Think of someone in your life who is walking through something difficult. Reach out this week -- not with answers, but with presence. Let your own experience of hard seasons be something that helps them.
- Take the next step. If there is an area of your life where you have been waiting for certainty before obeying God, identify what one step of obedience looks like and take it this week.

Closing Prayer Prompts

Close your time together in prayer. You may want to use one or more of these prompts to guide it.

- Ask God to help each person in the group believe that he is still working even when they cannot see it.
- Pray specifically for anyone in the group who is standing at a Red Sea -- overwhelmed, with no visible way forward.
- Ask God to resurrect something in the group that has felt finished or beyond hope.
- Thank God that he never wastes what hurts -- and ask him to make that truth real in each person's daily life this week.

Memory Statement for the Week

Write this somewhere you will see it.

"God never wastes what hurts.