

Weekly Study Guide

The week of January 24, 2016

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God Is Good

SOUL TRAINING EXERCISES

Option 1:

Christian growth takes practice. Nobody runs a marathon on their first step out the door. Use these weekly "soul training exercises" to help you practice cooperating with the Holy Spirit so that you can hear and walk by the Spirit's leading all throughout your life.

We live in a noisy world; noisy enough to distract our minds from ever hearing our good God. Find just five minutes each day this week where you can shut out the noise and be silent. You might find it helpful to have a tablet (paper or electronic, though technology can be very distracting too) to jot down distracting thoughts you want to remember later. Practice being quiet enough to notice the "whispers" of God in your thoughts.

Option 1 & 2:

Regular habits of private Bible reading strengthen our relationship with God and teach us how to follow Jesus. In addition to the thematic exercise above, you can use this guide each week to lead you through relevant sections of the Bible.

Daily Readings

MONDAY

Mark 3:13-19

TUESDAY

Mark 3:20-35

WEDNESDAY

Mark 4:1-20

THURSDAY

Mark 4:21-25

FRIDAY

Mark 4:26-34

SATURDAY

Mark 4:35-41

Group Discussion

CONNECT

What one event of the last year shaped who you are today?

THIS WEEK'S LEARNING GOAL

We are learning that God is fundamentally good, not cruel or unfair. Even in the midst of suffering and injustice we can trust God with our pain and allow him to use it for good in us.

LEARNING FROM THE BIBLE TOGETHER

Some people who were troubled by a cruel act of injustice long ago asked Jesus about it. A Roman governor named Pilate (the same governor who later presided over Jesus' execution) had slaughtered a group of innocents who were from Galilee, the same area that Jesus and many of his followers called home. **Read Luke 13:1-5** to see how Jesus responded.

- Everybody has a picture of God. Based on Jesus' response in v. 2, try to imagine what picture of God was assumed by those raising the question. What did they think about God's way of acting?
- If God is cruel, causing the slaughter of people who sin, then these must have been some particularly bad sinners. How would you answer the question Jesus asks in v. 2? (Note that Jesus asks almost the same question again in v. 4.)
- Verses 1-2 are about an act of injustice. Verse 4 is about a seemingly random event. What does Jesus say we can know or not know about these events?
- Have you experienced any hard things that made you ask "Why is God doing this to me?" If so, in light of this passage, how do you think Jesus would answer you?

(Some people think that verses 3 and 5 are Jesus saying, "Now you better repent or God is going to get you just like he got them." But that would contradict the rest of his message here, so it is better to see in context that Jesus is warning his readers about the natural consequences of their actions: "If you keep provoking the Romans and stirring revolution, eventually you will get the war you're asking for, and they will crush you. So repent and follow my way instead.")

An early Christian leader named Paul wrote this next passage in a letter to the Christian community in ancient Rome. They knew all about experiencing hard things in life, and Paul encouraged them to trust God's goodness through it all. Read Romans 8:28.

- Does this verse say that God causes all things that happen in our lives?
- Does this verse say that God calls everything that happens "good"?

Group Discussion (cont)

- What does this verse say?
- Do you think a person will always be able to see how God uses a bad thing for good?
- Are there any “hard things” in life for which you need to claim this verse in faith? Can you share it with your group?

The Bible teaches us that we are made to reflect the image of God. Read Jesus’ teaching in Matthew 5:43-45 to learn about reflecting God’s goodness in our own lives.

- How does Jesus describe the character of God in this passage (v. 45)?
- Jesus says his followers are “children of your Father in heaven” in v. 45. How does he imagine in this example that children reflect their parents?
- What specifically does Jesus tell his disciples (including us) to do (v. 44)?
- How or where do Christians today embody the deep goodness of our heavenly Father? How or where might we be in need of correction by this teaching?

SOUL TRAINING EXERCISES

As a group, recall last week’s soul training exercise. Did you learn or experience anything you’d like to share with your group? Now, look at the soul training exercises on the front of this study guide and get ready to practice them this week. Is there a particular time of day or some other specific commitment that would help you succeed in doing these exercises?

PRAY

Share your prayer concerns with one another. Also, in your prayers today, reflect on Jesus’ faithfulness and trust in God’s fundamental goodness even in the hopeless darkness of the cross. Give your trials to God and trust him to bring resurrection light to the dark corners of your struggles too.