

Weekly Study Guide

The week of February 7, 2016

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SOUL TRAINING EXERCISES

Option 1:

The Lord revealed to us in Psalm 23 is profoundly generous! Find a time every day this week to read through Psalm 23 and then try to pray through it without looking at it.

What parts of the psalm do you remember and retain? What is God saying to you through it? What do you notice about the Lord's great generosity to you in this psalm? As you make the move with the psalmist David, from talking "about" the Lord to talking "to" him, do you notice a change in the attitude of your heart? How is the Lord calling you to cooperate with his love for you?

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 6:45-56

TUESDAY

Mark 7:1-23

WEDNESDAY

Mark 7:24-30

THURSDAY

Mark 7:31-37

FRIDAY

Mark 8:1-13

SATURDAY

Mark 8:14-21

Group Discussion

CONNECT

What is the most generous gift you have ever received from another human being? What was the story behind the gift?

THIS WEEK'S LEARNING GOAL

To break the narrative of “earned love” and receive God’s love, heaped out in generous portions, that as we know the love of the Father, we too might show the love of the Father.

LEARNING FROM THE BIBLE TOGETHER

As we begin this week, start by looking together at The Lord’s Prayer in **Matthew 6:9-13**. When Jesus taught us this prayer, he was doing more than teaching us how to pray. He was also teaching us some important things about the character of the God to whom we are praying. (If you have a copy of *The Good and Beautiful God*, turn to page 61). According to James Bryan Smith, the different petitions of the Lord’s prayer remind us that:

- God is present
- God is pure
- God is powerful
- God provides
- God pardons
- God protects

Discuss how each of these aspects of God’s character are assumed in the prayer Jesus taught us to pray in **Matthew 6:9-13**.

- If we assume these same things are true of God when we pray, how will that impact how we approach him? What do these things tell us about the generosity of God’s character?
- What does it tell us about how we are called to reflect his character of generosity in our lives?

In Luke 10:7 Jesus reminds us “the worker deserves his wages.” There is a certain fairness to the expectation that provision follows effort. However, that works against us as much as it works for us. **Read Romans 6:23**. In this passage who earned the “wage?” Who gives the gift?

- Why do you think it’s important that the second part of this verse is a ‘gift’ instead of a “wage?”
- What happens to our relationship with God when we start to feel that gift given by God is not a gift but another kind of “wage” that we earn?
- How might those thoughts lead us into feelings either of self righteousness or shame?
- What does self righteousness do to our relationship with God, and relationship with others?
- What does shame do to our relationship with God, and our relationship with others?

- How does choosing to hang on to either our self righteousness or our shame (as self punishment) reinforce a theology of redeeming ourselves rather than being redeemed by Jesus?

Thankfully, God's thoughts are not our thoughts, and his ways are not our ways! Read Jesus' parable in **Matthew 20:1-5**.

- If this parable was the only thing you knew about who God is, what would you think was important to him, after reading this parable?
- If this parable had been written by anyone other than Jesus, how do you think it would have ended? What kinds of points do you think those alternate endings would be making?
- What does Jesus' ending of this parable tell us about God?

The surprise ending of this parable leaves no room for self righteousness or shame. There is no "better than" in the vineyard of the Lord, only workers and the master who responded to his invitation to serve with him in the vineyard! When we let go of the idea of earning something from God, we are set free to cooperate WITH God in what he is doing. Knowing amazing grace leads to a life of amazement. Those who know they are loved generously tend to love generously in return! This week, practice noticing, and receiving your Savior's great generosity for you!

SOUL TRAINING EXERCISES

As a group, recall last week's soul training exercise. Did you learn or experience anything you'd like to share? Now look at the soul training exercise for this week on the front of the study guide and challenge each other on committing to a time of day for each of you to practice this exercise. How can you support each other as you grow?

PRAY

Share your prayer concerns with one another. Also in your prayers today, reflect on Jesus' faithfulness and trust in God's amazing generosity to give the gift of salvation, to a world of those who have fallen short of the glory of God. Thank the Lord that he did not place the burden of "deserving" salvation on us, but took it upon his own shoulders, for the sake of all who will come to him to receive it.

Confess to the Lord any times in your life you have fallen into the trap of "self-righteousness." Confess the damage it has done to your picture of the Lord. Confess also the times when you've fallen into the trap of "shame" choosing self punishment as a method of "earning" instead of trusting his forgiveness. Confess the damage it has done in how to your picture of the Lord. Instead, profess your trust that Jesus' generous sacrifice is what has forgiven and redeemed you!

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