

Weekly Study Guide

The week of February 21, 2016

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SOUL TRAINING EXERCISES

Option 1:

Christian growth takes practice. Nobody runs a marathon with 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. One of the passages in our study guide this week included the verses Ephesians 4:22-24. This passage invites us to cooperate with God's love and power in leaving behind that which harms us and moving toward that which helps us. Each day this week, read this passage and ask God, "What do you want me to 'put off,' and what do you want me to 'put on'?" Then, throughout the day look for opportunities to put God's leading into practice as you grow in holiness.

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 9:38-41

TUESDAY

Mark 9:42-50

WEDNESDAY

Mark 10:1-12

THURSDAY

Mark 10:13-16

FRIDAY

Mark 10:17-31

SATURDAY

Mark 10:32-45

Group Discussion

CONNECT

What does the word "holy" mean to you?

THIS WEEK'S LEARNING GOAL

We are learning this week that God is holy. Because God is for us, he is against that which harms us.

LEARNING FROM THE BIBLE TOGETHER

Jesus welcomed sinners with grace and healing. But Jesus was neither blind to nor silent about the real harm that sin causes us. Read Matthew 23 together as a group. The passage is a bit long, but it's an important part of our picture of Jesus.

- One of the themes in this speech is Jesus' opposition to religious hypocrisy. Where do you see examples of this theme?
- Another theme is Jesus' opposition to placing heavy burdens on others. Where do you see examples of this theme?
- In historical context, these words were addressed to people in positions of social power and personal confidence. Is it significant that Jesus changes his tone when speaking to people in different circumstances?
- How do you react when you see Jesus not only forgiving but also opposing sin?

Jesus' representation of the holiness of God stands in continuity with God's prophets before and after him. The following passages summarize God's holy concern under three headings: injustice, immorality, and idolatry.

- ◆ Because God is for us, he is against injustice. The prophet Isaiah spoke for God to the ancient Israelites hundreds of years before Jesus, and Jesus quoted from Isaiah more than any other prophet. Read Isaiah 1:13-18 to hear a key part of his message about injustice.
 1. God says (through Isaiah) to "take your evil deeds out of my sight" and to "stop doing wrong" (v. 16). What "evil" or "wrong" is God speaking against in these verses?
 2. Who are the "oppressed," "fatherless," and "widows" (vv. 17-18) that worshipers of God will care about today if they share this same heart of God?
 3. God's holiness includes anger over injustice. How do you find yourself reacting to this?
 4. In our society, we don't have perfect agreement over what constitutes (in)justice. Can we still value and pursue justice while some disagreements remain?
- ◆ Because God is for us, he is against immorality. The apostle Paul, an influential follower of Jesus in the 1st century, wrote a letter to the Christian communities around Ephesus, many of whom were learning about God for the first time and learning to live a

different lifestyle in the way of Jesus. Read **Ephesians 4:17-24** to get a sense for Paul's vision that following Jesus means living a new way of life. Now read also **Ephesians 4:29-5:7** to see some of the content of this vision.

1. Why would God's love for us call us away from "bitterness, rage, and anger" (v. 31)? How might we be harmed by this?
 2. Why would God's love call us away from greed (v. 3)? How might we be harmed?
 3. Why would God's love call us away from sexual immorality (v. 3)? How might we be harmed?
 4. It's likely that even within your group, there is not perfect agreement on what constitutes bitterness, greed, or sexual immorality. Can we still value and move toward morality while some disagreements remain?
- ◆ Because God is for us, he is against idolatry. Read **Isaiah 44:9-20** and **Romans 1:18-23**. Both Isaiah and Paul (the writer of the letter to the Romans) understood that how we worship and how we live are inseparable and important.
1. Why does it matter what we think God is like?
 2. We've been learning to know the God Jesus knew and embodied. What harm can come by seeking God differently?

What step do you think God wants you to take away from something that harms you or your world? Can you share this with your group?

SOUL TRAINING EXERCISES

As a group, recall last week's soul training exercise (reflecting on God's love in 1 Corinthians 13). 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 God's holiness. Ask God to help you share his love and grow in godly holiness.

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