

Weekly Study Guide

The week of February 28, 2016

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God is Self-Sacrificing

SOUL TRAINING EXERCISES

Option 1: Read and meditate on Philippians 2:1-18. In Philippians 2, we are given a vision of a different focus for our lives. A life of self is a life marked by grumbling. A life of self-sacrifice is one that focuses on what is larger than oneself. It is an expanding life.

An ancient historical Lenten soul training practice has been to give up something for the 40 days. As we retrace Jesus' journey to the cross, we, too, choose to sacrifice something to help us remember God's self-sacrificial love. Sometimes this is a vice—something that tends to stand in the way of our relationship with God. Sometimes this is something that takes our time away from prayer and devotion. As you meditate on Philippians 2 this week, what might you choose to sacrifice for these 40 days to practice this character of heart?

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 10:46-52

TUESDAY

Mark 11:1-11

WEDNESDAY

Mark 11:12-26

THURSDAY

Mark 11:27-33

FRIDAY

Mark 12:1-12

SATURDAY

Mark 12:13-17

Group Discussion

CONNECT

Other than Jesus, who in your life has shown self-sacrificial love for you? How? Did you see it at the time or only after the fact? Have you had the opportunity to thank them?

THIS WEEK'S LEARNING GOAL

To see what it means for us that the love of God is not a self-serving, but a self-sacrificial love, so we can find larger life beyond the focus of self in a God-sized vision of life instead.

LEARNING FROM THE BIBLE TOGETHER

This important characteristic of God's love shows us so clearly how our God is different from what so many people assume. His great power is shown, not in domination, but in bending low to lift us up.

Read John 12:23-32. What emotions and thoughts do you think Jesus is wrestling with in verses 27-28?

In every choice we make in life, the thing we choose is chosen over another: you can't be in two places at once. Choosing to be in one place means you're not in another.

- Have you ever been in a situation where you had made a choice and believed it was right but still struggled with the cost that would come with that action?
- How would Jesus' obedience in going to the cross for us feel different if it seemed to be an easy choice for him? What difference does it make for us to see Jesus' struggle and his resolve?

Read aloud **Philippians 2: 1-18**, and then **read John 12:25-26** aloud again.

- When we end up living a life of grumbling, where is our focus? How does our life actually become little and lost?
- When we live a life of humility and self-sacrifice as Jesus has modeled for us, where is our focus? How does our life expand? How is it kept for eternity?
- How does 'losing' our lives help us 'find' them?

In **John 12:24-25** Jesus talks about the need for a kernel of wheat to die and be buried in the ground in order to be able to become the source of new life for many new kernels of wheat. How is this true of Jesus himself?

Read John 12:32-33 and **Philippians 2:8-11**.

- What does this tell you about the character of God the Father, and what he values?
- When you consider an action to be heroic, what elements of character need to be present? What makes an action heroic?
- Why do you think we come to admire those traits?

In the ancient world, self sacrifice was not seen as noble, but as a weakness.

Read 1 Corinthians 1:22-25.

- Why do you think the world sees the cross as foolishness?
- Why do you think that God chose to save the world, not by taking away human freedom, but by entering into the brokenness of the world himself?
- What does this tell you about whom God is?
- In a world that is as full of pain as this one, why does it matter that God showed his love through self-sacrifice?
- How does finding God's presence in the suffering, death, and resurrection of Jesus help hurting people to know God's love in their pain?

Jesus' words in John 12 state the kernel of wheat dies in the ground, but why does it die? What is the purpose of that death?

Jesus didn't come to suffer. He came to save. Real love is self-sacrificial because it values the other above the self. Knowing that this is how God loves you, how does that lead you to respond to him?

God's great risk—his great sacrifice, was to risk all of this for human beings who may or may not respond to his love. God would not need to live into this kind of risk.

- What does it tell us about whom God is, that he chose to give us the freedom to respond to him, or walk away from him?
- This week, how will you respond to his love?

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

Pray for those who don't yet trust in God's love for them to see the self-sacrificial love of Jesus this Lenten season and know that God's love is real and can be trusted.

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