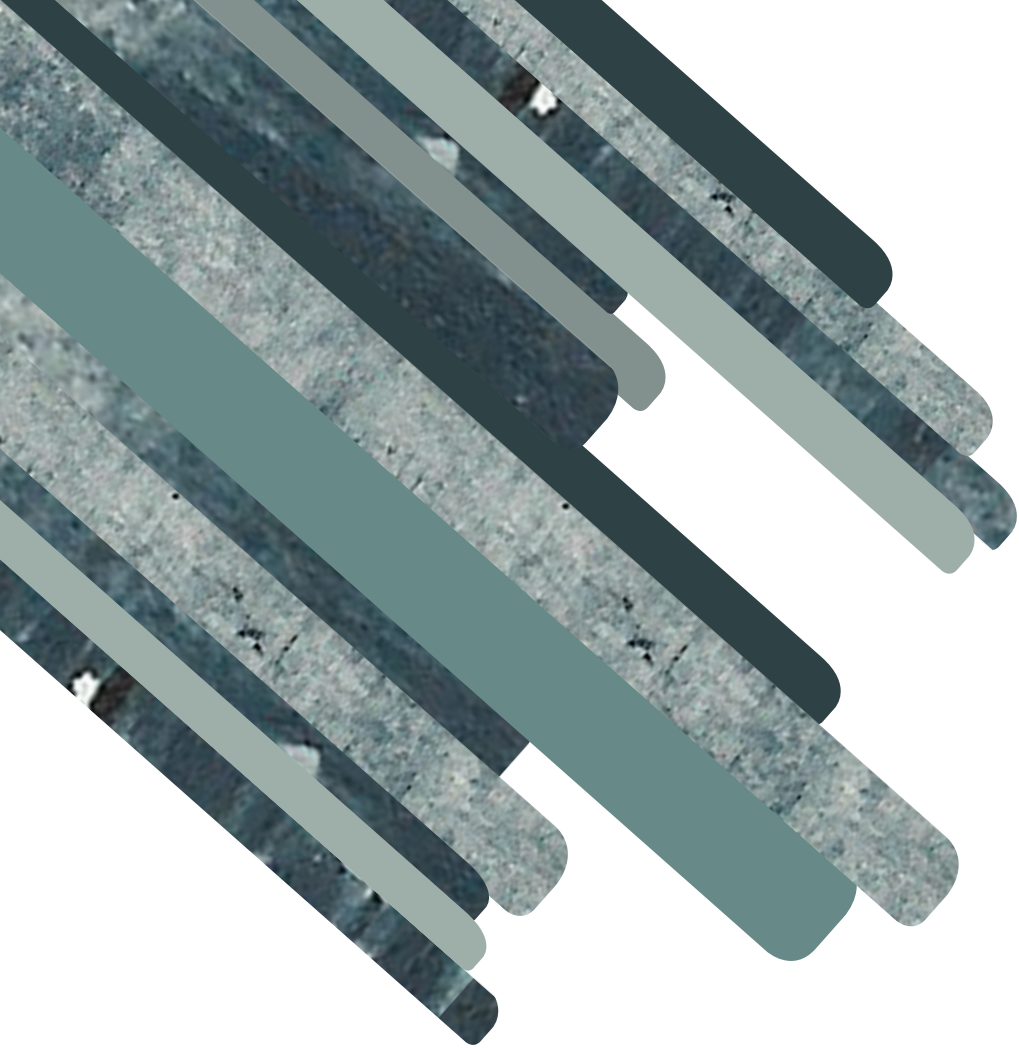


4 WEEKS

THIS
SUMMER
FEST



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DOES GOD REALLY CARE?

SMALL GROUP STUDY

Kicking it off:

Share a time when you were accused of not caring about a person or a situation.

Big Idea:

God's heart is always loving; His ways are always higher and His presence is always enough.

Key Scriptures:

Romans 8:35, 37-39

"Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword?... No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

Isaiah 55:8-9

"For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways," declares the LORD. 9 "As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts."

1 Samuel 12:24

"But be sure to fear the LORD and serve him faithfully with all your heart; consider what great things he has done for you."

Psalms 23:4

"Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I will fear no evil, for you are with me..."

Discussion:

1. Read Romans 8:35, 37-39.
Share a time when you most doubted God's loving presence with you. What caused you to doubt Him most? Did something in particular restore your faith?

2. What does it look or feel like when you experience the love and presence of God? Can you give some examples?
3. Read Isaiah 55:8-9. Have you ever prayed for something that didn't go your way? How did you deal with that?
4. Have you ever seen a seemingly unanswered prayer result in far more than you could have imagined? Share a story.
5. Are your prayers more focused on submitting to God's will or asking Him to carry out your desires? How did you come to praying this way?
6. Read 1 Samuel 12:24. What three things does this Scripture ask of us? How does this describe our intended relationship to God?
7. Are there any areas in your life where you still don't understand God's plans or how He's involved? How can we pray about this together?
8. Read Psalm 23:4. Be reminded that God's love and His presence is certain in every situation.

Wrapping It Up:

God, we want to trust, but sometimes we struggle. You said You're, loving, trustworthy, and with us. But we have situations in our lives that lead us to doubt You. Will You bring Your love into our darkest valleys? Will You help us in our unbelief?

MEMORY VERSE:

"Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I will fear no evil, for you are with me..."

Psalm 23:4

ISN'T HE JUST A GOD OF RULES?

SMALL GROUP STUDY

Kicking it off:

What's the craziest or silliest rule you've had to follow? Are you more of a rule-follower or a rule-breaker?

Big Idea:

Religion focuses on the external rather than the internal. You cannot earn God's acceptance by obeying the law. The purpose of the law is to show your need of a Savior. Being right with God comes by faith in Christ alone.

Key Scriptures:

Matthew 23:3-4

"...Don't follow [the example of the Pharisees]. For they don't practice what they teach. They crush people with unbearable religious demands and never lift a finger to ease the burden."

Romans 3:20-22

"Therefore no one will be declared righteous in God's sight by the works of the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of our sin. But now apart from the law the righteousness of God has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. This righteousness is given through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe..."

Matthew 23:25-26

"Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You clean the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence. Blind Pharisee! First clean the inside of the cup and dish, and then the outside also will be clean."

Ephesians 2:8-9

"For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— not by works, so that no one can boast."

Discussion:

1. Read Matthew 23:3-4. Did you grow up hearing about a lot of rules in church? How do you think this shaped your view of God? What are some ways we expect people to follow the law to earn righteousness today?
2. Read Romans 3:20-22. Do you live more like your rule-following makes you close to God, or like Jesus makes you close to God? How does this play out for you?
3. Can you share an example of how God's law (His Word) made you conscious of your sin?
4. Read Matthew 23:25-26. Religion is focused on the external while God is focused on the internal. Are there any ways you still try to act religious?
5. How do you think we go about cleaning the "inside of the cup"?
6. Read Ephesians 2:8-9. How have you experienced the undeserved grace of God in your life? Can you share something specific?

Wrapping It Up:

Thank You Jesus, that what You did to take the place of the law for us is beyond what we can possibly repay with our good works. We want to give You our love and our life. Will You show us how to receive Yours? Amen

MEMORY VERSE:

"But now apart from the law the righteousness of God has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. This righteousness is given through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe..."

Romans 3:21-22

WHY DON'T I FEEL GOD?

SMALL GROUP STUDY

Kicking it off:

Describe the most memorable and amazing feeling you've ever felt.

Big Idea:

If you don't always feel God's presence, you're not alone. The Presence of God is so much bigger than our feelings.

Key Scriptures:

Psalm 88:13-14

"But I cry to you for help, Lord; in the morning, my prayer comes before you. Why, Lord, do you reject me and hide your face from me?"

Matthew 27:46

"About three in the afternoon Jesus cried out in a loud voice, 'Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?' (which means 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?')."

John 6:30-31

"So they asked [Jesus], 'What sign then will you give that we may see it

and believe you? What will you do? Our ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written: 'He gave them bread from heaven to eat.'"

Matthew 13:14-15

... 'You will be ever hearing but never understanding; you will be ever seeing but never perceiving. For this people's heart has become calloused; they hardly hear with their ears, and they have closed their eyes.

Acts 17:26-27

"From one man [God] made all the nations, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he marked out their appointed times in history and the boundaries of their lands. God did this so that they would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from any one of us."

Jeremiah 29:13-14

"You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart. I will be found by you," declares the Lord... "

Psalm 16:9-11

"Therefore my heart is glad and my tongue rejoices; my body also will rest secure, because you will not abandon me to the realm of the dead, nor will you let your faithful one see decay. You make known to me the path of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand."

Discussion:

1. How do you personally determine whether or not God seems close to you?
2. Read Psalm 88:13-14 and Matthew 27:46. In these passages, both the Psalmist and Jesus himself express feeling far from God. How does knowing that even Jesus expressed this in His darkest hour make you feel?
3. Knowing that you're not alone in experiencing difficulty feeling God, it might be helpful to examine possible reasons. Read John 6:6-31. The disciples here were looking for a sign, they were over sensationalizing God's presence. Pastor Jeff said that feelings are not the only evidence that God is with us – if you always felt God you wouldn't need faith. Discuss this contrast.
4. Another reason you might not feel God is that your heart

is hardened. Read Matthew 13:14-15. Is there anything in your life (unconfessed sin, unforgiveness, bitterness) that may be causing your heart to be calloused?

5. Sometimes we have difficulty feeling God because He wants to draw you closer. Read Acts 17:26-27 and Jeremiah 29:13-14. In what ways are you actively seeking God?
6. How do you most often experience God? How do you think you've come to experience God this way?
7. Read Psalm 16:9-11. How might this promise encourage you when you're not "feeling: God?"

Wrapping It Up:

God, You said if we seek You, we will find You. We are seeking You. We ask that You would bring Your presence into our daily lives. We don't need to always feel You, but we do need You. Will you show us how to find You this week? Amen.

MEMORY VERSE:

"You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart. I will be found by you," declares the Lord... "

Jeremiah 29:13-14

IF GOD EXISTS, WHY IS THERE SO MUCH PAIN?

SMALL GROUP STUDY

Kicking it off:

How do you tend to react when things aren't fair?

Big Idea:

Sometimes God doesn't seem fair. But there is always a purpose in your pain and He is always present in your pain.

Key Scriptures:

Psalm 103:10-12

"[God] does not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us according to our iniquities. For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his love for those who fear him; as far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us."

1 Peter 1:6-7

"...There is wonderful joy ahead, even though you must endure many trials for a little while. These trials will show that your faith is genuine."

It is being tested as fire tests and purifies gold—though your faith is far more precious than mere gold. So, when your faith remains strong through many trials, it will bring you much praise and glory and honor on the day when Jesus Christ is revealed to the whole world."

Psalm 56:8

"You keep track of all my sorrows. You have collected all my tears in your bottle. You have recorded each one in your book."

Psalm 46:1

"God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble."

2 Corinthians 12:9-10

"But [God] said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness. Therefore, I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.'"

Discussion:

1. Have you ever asked God, "How could You let this happen?" What life events led to your question?
2. Read Psalm 103:10-12. Have you ever felt as though God was punishing you in the midst of pain or difficulty? How does this passage reframe your thinking?
3. Read 1Peter 1:6-7. Pastor Jeff said, "God doesn't always cause the pain, but God can always use it." How have you seen this play out?
4. Read Psalm 56:8. What reassurance do you gain from reading this passage?
5. Read Psalm 46:1. How have you experienced God's help and strength in the midst of troubles?
6. Read 2 Corinthians 12:9-10. What difficulties or pain can you begin to view from this Scripture's perspective?

Wrapping It Up:

God never wastes the pain we experience. Think of one or two people you know who are hurting right now. Include them in your prayer time, and do something practical to show them God's love this week.

MEMORY VERSE:

*"You keep track of all my sorrows.
You have collected all my tears
in your bottle. You have recorded
each one in your book."*

Psalm 56:8

Take Courage

by Kristene DiMarco (Bethel Music)



Slow down, take time
Breath in He said
He'd reveal what's to come
The thoughts in His mind
Always higher than mine
He'll reveal all to come

(Chorus) Take courage my heart
Stay steadfast my soul
He's in the waiting
He's in the waiting
Hold onto your hope
As your triumph unfolds
He's never failing
He's never failing

Sing praise my soul
Find strength in joy
Let His Words lead you on
Do not forget
His great faithfulness
He'll finish all He's begun

Chorus x 2

And You who hold the stars
Who call them each by name
Will surely keep, Your promise to me
That I will rise, in Your victory
And You who hold the stars
Who call them each by name
Will surely keep, Your promise to me
That I will rise, in Your victory!

Chorus x 2

He's in the waiting...

Even When It Hurts

by Hillsong United

Take this fainted heart
Take these tainted hands
Wash me in Your love
Come like grace again

Even when my strength is lost
I'll praise You
Even when I have no song
I'll praise You
Even when it's hard to find the words
Louder then I'll sing Your praise
I will only sing Your praise
I will only sing Your praise
I will only sing Your praise

Take this mountain weight
Take these ocean tears
Hold me through the trial
Come like hope again

Even when the fight seems lost
I'll praise You
Even when it hurts like hell
I'll praise You
Even when it makes no sense to sing
Louder then I'll sing Your praise
I will only sing Your praise
I will only sing Your praise
I will only sing Your praise

And my heart burns only for You
You are all, You are all I want
And my soul waits only for You
And I will sing 'til the morning
has come

And my heart burns only for You
You are all, You are all I want
And my soul waits only for You
And I will sing 'til the miracle
comes

Even when the morning comes
I'll praise You
Even when the fight is won
I'll praise You
Even when my time on earth is done
Louder then I'll sing Your praise
I will only sing Your praise



Top 10 Tips for Leading a Small Group

1. Establish a welcoming, accepting, and safe environment.
 - Take time to prepare.
 - Make sure to give a warm enthusiastic greeting to each person.
 - Verbally communicate the environment that you hope to create.
 - Ephesians 4:1-3
2. On the opening night of your group you need to have some intentional discussions centered around these questions:
 - What is the purpose of our group?
 - What is the vision for our group?
 - What are your expectations?
 - What do you hope to gain from this group experience?
 - What are some things we value as a group?
 - What are some healthy guidelines we need to have in place?

Review and sign a group agreement.
3. Be authentic. Spend time sharing your life stories in order to get to know each other on a deeper level.
4. Find a good balance between:
 - Truth and grace/Bible study and life
 - Encouraging and challenging one another
 - Giving and receiving feedback from each other
5. Ask good questions to stimulate good discussion. Use open ended questions and follow up questions.
6. Hang out together, do things socially, eat together and have fun together!
7. Develop a missional lifestyle, find a service project to do together in the community.
8. Raise up new leadership by rotating facilitation of the group.
9. Share the responsibilities in order to increase individual commitment and ownership of the group.
10. Pray for your group and for each other!

Find ways to celebrate what God is doing in your group! Who else could you invite to join you in order that their life may be impacted by what God is doing in your group?

Group Agreement

OUR PURPOSE

To transform our spiritual lives by cultivating our spiritual health in a healthy small group community. In addition, we: _____

OUR VALUES

Group Attendance: To give priority to the group meeting. We will call or email if we will be late or absent.

Safe Environment: To help create a safe place where people can be heard and feel loved. (Please, no quick answers, snap judgments, or simple fixes.)

Respect Differences: To be gentle and gracious to people with different spiritual maturity, personal opinions, temperaments, or imperfections. We are all works in progress.

Confidentiality: To keep anything that is shared strictly confidential and within the group, and to avoid sharing improper information about those outside the group.

Encouragement for Growth: To be not just takers but givers of life. We want to spiritually multiply our life by serving others with our God-given gifts.

Welcome for Newcomers: To keep an open chair and share Jesus' dream of finding a shepherd for every sheep.

Shared Ownership: To remember that every member is a minister and to ensure that each attender will share a small team role or responsibility over time.

Rotating Hosts/Leaders and Homes: To encourage different people to host the group in their homes, and to rotate the responsibility of facilitating each meeting.

OUR EXPECTATIONS

- Refreshments/mealtimes _____
- Childcare _____
- When we will meet (day of week) _____
- Where we will meet (place) _____
- We will begin at (time) _____ and end at _____
- We will do our best to have some or all of us attend a worship service together.
- Our primary worship service time will be _____
- Date of this agreement _____
- Date we will review this agreement again _____
- Who (other than the leader) will review this agreement at the end of this study _____

TRUST



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