

To KNOW Christ and one another more deeply,
To CARE for one another in truth and in love,
To GROW as followers of Jesus.
- CG Mission Statement

Worship: Psalm 23

(Here is a psalm/song to help your group as you worship.)

Read Psalm 23 using the prayer practice of Lectio Divina. Read the passage aloud 3 times but read from a different translation for each reading of it. After each reading, spend a few minutes reflecting. After the first reading, open yourself to the presence of God. On the second reading, listen for a certain word or phrase that stands out to you. On the third reading, listen to what God's invitation might be for you.

Icebreaker

What is one of your favorite simplest pleasures?

Text for Discussion: Ecclesiastes 3:1-22

Turn in your Bibles and read this passage aloud together.

Aid for Discussion: Sermon Summary

Worry and anxiety over the future. Resentment and bitterness about the past. Both poison our present by shifting focus from what we can control to things we cannot. They rob us of joy as we exhaust ourselves trying to avoid pain and heartbreak. We've learned from the lie that strength, knowledge and fortitude can overcome the realities of life. But ultimately, we're not in control, and life is hard – on all of us.

“For everything there is a season,” and our attempts to avoid the inevitable will never bear fruit. It's vanity to think otherwise: Arrogance to think the world is waiting on us. Pride to believe we could ever fully understand God. Self-centered to try to alter what we cannot. But the Bible never tries to absolve God from the burden of His sovereignty. Our Father is good and in control over everything that takes place in His creation... but that doesn't mean bad things won't happen. There is an appointed time for all that takes place under Heaven.

This doesn't keep us from asking why. We long to see the big picture. Of course we do: God put eternity in our hearts. But so much worry is spent on things we have no control over. “Which of you by worrying can add an hour to your life?” Why then be anxious or fearful? We are precious and wholly known by our Father. Contentment will come when we settle down in complete dependence on Him, because life won't work without God. How then are we to “put a tourniquet” on those things that draw us away from being present in the time God has given us?

God is wise; we are not. “Do not be wise in your own eyes; fear the Lord,” for “The way of a fool is right in his own eyes” (Prov 3:7, 12:15). God may not offer reasons for why things happen, but He does offer stories. Because the only way we will ever learn to trust God is by living our way through these questions in our own stories until we see His goodness. We must learn our place in creation, choosing to trust God here, now, today.

Don't let what we cannot control poison what we can enjoy. “There is nothing better than to be joyful and to do good as long as we live” (Ecc 3:12). Wisdom comes from learning to live in God's world in God's way. Our posture then shifts from one of resenting what we don't have to one of gratitude for what we do, for the present moment is a precious gift.

Surrender to God's will. Whatever God does endures forever. Our Father is wise, and by knowing our place, we can sit in awe before Him, trusting Him, knowing that one day all the absurdity will vanish and something so beautiful will come to pass that it will atone for all the events of history.

Jesus is God's forever promise to us – the Light that broke into the darkness of our world, “delivered up by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God” (Acts 2:23). God used the worst thing that ever happened to do the most important thing in the whole story: to set us free and make us His children. And if God can redeem the worst thing that's ever happened, can't He do the same for us?

Guiding Question of the Week

(This question is intended as a target for the whole conversation. Do not ask for responses now. It will be repeated later in the study.)

In what areas of life are you prone to "let what you can't control poison what you can enjoy"?

Questions for Discussion

(Remember it is better to wrestle deeply with two good questions than gloss over many. Sub-bullets are intended for potential follow-up.)

- After reading Ecclesiastes 3:1-22, what stood out to you?
 - Use four words to describe your own circumstances in the past year. Finish the phrase “A time to....”
- Ecclesiastes 3:1-9 challenges us to think about God's sovereign control over all of life's experiences and “every matter under heaven.” Which pair in this catalogue of human experiences stands out to you and why? How does the truth that God is sovereign over time comfort you?
- Why would the first pair of verse 2 in the catalogue of human experiences be an appropriate place to start?
 - Do you have a story in which you were glad that you knew that God was in control of the circumstances?
- What is the answer to the question of 3:9, “What gain has the worker from his toil?” See verses 12-13.
 - What would this look like in your daily life?
- In what areas of life are you prone to "let what you can't control cause you to miss what you can enjoy"?
- Verse 11 gives us the promise that God has made everything beautiful in its time. How does this build trust in a wise and good God?
- Read verse 14. To fear God is key in the book of Ecclesiastes. What do you understand this fear to be?
 - What is the difference between fearing the future and fearing God? Which do you choose?

Experiment of the week

(A suggestion for engagement in following the way of Jesus this week)

This week journal about how God ordered the timing of your life's events to bring you to the point of faith in Christ. Share the timeline with your group.