



STUDY GUIDE

THE PURSUIT OF PURPOSE 05.21.2017

[set up]

As a LifeGroup leader, share a story from your life about a time when you faced hardship / trial / difficulty and had a hard time seeing God as a God of love / grace / mercy.

Ask each person in your group to take a self-assessment.

- 5 - All of the time
- 4 - Most of the time
- 3 - Some of the time
- 2 - Periodically
- 1 - Rarely

- I view myself more as a Beloved Child rather than as a skeptical employee.
- I live a life of praise and gratitude rather than a life of wondering and questioning.
- People who know me best are encouraged and intrigued by the way I deal with difficulty.
- Trials, difficulties, and hardships serve to increase my faith and my faithfulness.
- I see God's hands as holding and helping me more than I see His hands as ignoring or hurting or stiff-arming me.

Ask for a few members of your group to share. "Where did you score highest? Why? Where did you score lowest? Why?"

[digging deeper]

Read Ecclesiastes 9:1-12. Which parts of this passage speak to you, encourage you, challenge you?

On a large Post-it, make a list (on the right side of the page) of 8-10 of the most difficult things that the members of your group have faced AFTER coming to faith in Christ. Lead your group to have a discussion. How would they answer a person who sees the struggles that the children of God experience and then asks, "What good is your God then?"

Pastor Dave Collins of Christ Church in Strongsville said in commenting on Ecclesiastes 9:2, "The future is in God's hands, not our hands. Good people cannot control the future anymore than bad people do." What is your response to that statement?

- a) Love it.
- b) Like it.
- c) Resigned to it.
- d) Not sure.
- e) Hate it.
- f) Other.

Why do you answer the way you do?

The "name it, claim it" prosperity gospel teachers sometimes make us feel as believers as though our faith is defective if we face trial and hardship. How would you use the Biblical heroes of the faith to challenge and correct that teaching?

In the message, we were encouraged to live happily, live purely, live fully, and live expectantly in spite of our trials. When you are going through trials, which of these is easiest for you? Which is hardest? Why?

Read verses about the hand of God: Psalm 95:7, Isaiah 41:10, Isaiah 62:2-3, and John 10:27-29. Ask, "Which of these images of God's hands toward you is most meaningful? Was there a time in your life when it was easy for you to believe His hands toward you are loving and caring? When was that? Was there a time in your life when it has been hard for you to believe His hands toward you are loving and caring? When was that?"

This problem of pain is one of the most difficult questions skeptics ask about our faith. They say, "If God is great and if God is good, then why is there so much pain in the world? God must not be great or God must not be good or maybe He doesn't even exist." How would you respond to such a challenge?

Read 1 Peter 5:6-11 which has more of a decidedly "above the sun" conclusion than the view expressed in Ecclesiastes. Which parts of this 1 Peter passage seem to challenge the view expressed in Ecclesiastes? Which parts of this passage seem to complete the view expressed in Ecclesiastes?

[living it out]

Ask, "Who do you know who has not yet come to faith in Christ who needs to hear you share your story of struggle and how your belief in the loving, good, and sovereign hand of God has helped you face an uncertain future?" Ask, "When do you think you could have lunch or coffee to share your story with him/her?"

Ask your group to look at the self-assessment they took earlier and to consider what they learned in the message and the study. Encourage everyone to share one thing they will begin to do differently so they can more and more view God's hands as hands that are actively busy in caring for them as His Beloved Children.

On the large Post-it, make a list (on the LEFT side of the page) of 8-10 of the most difficult things that the members of your group are currently facing. Close your time by praying for one another.