

Way of Discipleship Small Groups

Does everything happen for a reason? Doubt and honesty before God.



Touching base (5 minutes)

Open in prayer as is helpful for your group.

If this is your first session take time to introduce yourselves and set any ground rules you want to for your time together.

If you met previously take the opportunity either as a group or in pairs to check in with each other about how your response from last time has gone.



Opening question(s) (5 minutes)

Read Romans 8:28. What do you think it means?



Understanding the information (30 minutes)

Share these thoughts in your own words or read them together:

Does everything happen for a reason and is doubt a bad thing?

The phrase ‘everything happens for a reason’ can do enormous damage both to an individual in pain, and to our picture of God. This is because if we see God as being behind every sickness and tragedy the harder it is to know that He truly loves us.

The key verse Romans 8:28 is not saying that all things are good in themselves, or that everything is God’s will. Rather it is saying that, whether circumstances are good or bad, God can continue to work for our good.

By taking the risk of being human, and being crucified, God willingly shows His true power by giving up the ability to control everything. His true greatness is not by being able to make “everything happen” but being able to work out His purposes even if things do not always go His way because of, for example, our freedom to make bad choices.

In terms of the place of doubt, if faith means having ‘psychological certainty’ then it will be hard for us to face events which are challenging, or to grow in trust. But faith in the Bible is demonstrated by Israel, whose name means “one who struggles with God”. It is about keeping trust with God as a covenant-partner in the face of uncertainty. Jesus expressed His love for His Father by asking why He had forsaken Him. The more mature our faith, the more confident we will be with the things we cannot understand.



How honest can I be about my pain to God?

The ability to express grief, sorrow and frustration is necessary for genuine healing and wholeness, and so it is notable that Jesus gives us an example of grief, in weeping at his friend Lazarus' tomb. Because our hope is still to be fully realized, Jesus shares with us in the tears at the frustration and loss of bereavement that is our experience in this age. Tears can be a gift of healing.

As well as the reality of grief, the Bible is also full of examples of lament before God. While there are sometimes elements of complaining in lament, while a complaint is an accusation against God that maligns His character, **lament is an appeal to God based on confidence in His character.**

Many of the Psalms (over one-third of them) and the prophets ask questions, express doubts and even challenge God to be faithful and just. Job feels able to ask God, "Why did I not perish at birth, come forth from the womb and expire?" (Job 3:11) Jeremiah cries out, "Why is my pain continuous, my wound incurable...?" (Jeremiah 15:18) Lament is a direct way of praying. Jesus "offered up prayers and petitions with fervent cries and tears to the one who could save him from death." (Hebrews 5:7) Lament is also a place in which we can say things that are not 'right' but need to be brought to God.

Do I pray to the Father, Son, or Holy Spirit?

Christian prayer will involve the Trinity. Paul writes that, "Through him [Jesus] we have access to the Father by one Spirit." (Ephesians 2:18) Anglican collects (written prayers) are often addressed to God "through Jesus Christ our Lord". But some are addressed to Christ, and a few to the Holy Spirit. In prayer we can come to a loving Father, accompanied by a Saviour and Lord, and inspired by His Spirit.

What does 'God's discipline' mean?

Jesus' brother James saw suffering as the greatest opportunity for us to grow in our discipleship: "Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything." (James 1: 3-4)

Our struggles can sharpen our sense that God alone is all that matters. The more we can approach suffering as an opportunity for "the Lord's discipline" to shape us, the more we will grow as disciples.

God's discipline is never punishment related to our behaviour, but it can be the way that God can use the sometimes random and meaningless suffering and difficulties we endure to grow our dependence upon Him and shape our characters, if we allow Him to do so. As Hebrews says, "No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it." (Hebrews 12:7-11)

Discuss: How can I trust in God if things are hard?

Reading the Bible (15 minutes)

Read Hebrews 12: 1-12 which offers advice for those in hard times.

Discuss the Discovery Bible Study questions:
What does this passage teach me about God?
What does this passage teach me about people?
How does this passage call me to obey God?
What might I do in response to this this week?



Seeing how it looks in real lives (10 minutes)

Watch the video at:

<https://youtu.be/pKZqGv99JPs>

What struck you as important in the video?



Responding to God's leading (5 minutes)

Give people an opportunity to think about, "What might God be showing me and how might I respond?" They may like to write this down and/or share it with the group and/or share it with one other person. A friendly question is to ask each other, "Is there anything that would be helpful to ask you next time?"



Group prayer (5 minutes)

The Lord is my light and my salvation— whom shall I fear?
The Lord is the stronghold of my life—of whom shall I be afraid?
For in the day of trouble he will keep me safe in his dwelling;
he will hide me in the shelter of his sacred tent
and set me high upon a rock.
Hear my voice when I call, Lord;
be merciful to me and answer me.
My heart says of you, "Seek his face!"
Your face, Lord, I will seek.
Do not hide your face from me,
do not turn your servant away in anger;
you have been my helper.
I remain confident of this:
I will see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living.
Wait for the Lord; be strong and take heart
and wait for the Lord.
Amen



From Psalm 27



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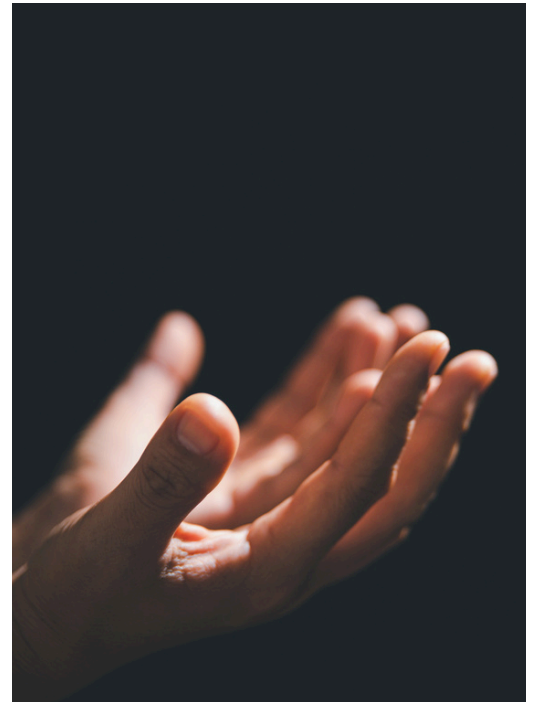
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