

2017

Learning to  
**live & love**  
like Jesus

Small Group Discussion Guide



Who is  
the GOD  
I Know?

Thank you for engaging in the question – Who is the God that I know? Over the next 6 weeks we will be seeking to transform our heart and mind by dwelling on Jesus’ “narratives” about the Father. By “narratives”, we are referring to what Jesus taught about God and God’s kingdom, either directly by his words, or indirectly, such as through his parables or by what he demonstrated.

When we read the Gospels, we see that Jesus confronted the false narratives about the Father and replaced them with the truth. For example, one of the prevalent false narratives was that people who were poor, sick, blind or lame were under God’s judgment either for their own sin or for the sin of their parents. Jesus confronted this false narrative through his teaching, parables and acceptance of such people into the Kingdom of God. It is sometimes said that Jesus preached an “upside-down message”, because he did indeed turn many of the accepted narratives about who God is, completely on their head.

In this booklet, you will find a number of ‘soul-training exercises’ designed to align your heart and mind with the narratives of Jesus that describe who God is.

**Firstly**, there are passages that describe the nature of God, drawn from both the Old and New Testament. Find time each day to meditate on a passage and what it describes about God. If this is something you do not regularly do, try simply “10+10”. Spend 10 minutes in reading the passage a number of times + 10 minutes in prayer asking God to speak to you from His Word.

**Secondly**, there are questions designed for discussion in small groups. If you are unable to join a group, then still create time to consider the questions.

**Thirdly**, there are questions designed for reflection and journaling, seeking to encourage us to identify some of the false narratives that we might be carrying about God. Our perspective on God may be skewed due to upbringing, church cultures or circumstances that have influenced us. Ask God to reveal any areas where you need to align your personal narrative about God with Jesus’.

We trust and pray this series would be transformative to your spiritual life.

**Acknowledgement:** *The pastoral team wishes to acknowledge the work of James Bryan Smith in his book “The Good and Beautiful God”. Many of the ideas, phrases and any direct quotes in this booklet come from his work. For those wishing to engage further in the topics covered, his book would make an excellent companion and further reading to our series.*

## **Who is the God I know?**

<i>Prelude:</i>	Transformation
<i>Week 1:</i>	God is Good
<i>Week 2:</i>	God is Trustworthy
<i>Week 3:</i>	God is Generous
<i>Week 4:</i>	God is Love
<i>Week 5:</i>	God is Holy
<i>Week 6:</i>	God is Self-sacrificing

Sermon Notes (May 7)  
Transformation

Passages to Meditate on  
Week May 8 - 13.

*Spend (at least) 10minutes + 10minutes in reading and prayer.  
Allow the Spirit to reveal something of the nature of God to you.*

Philippians 3:7-16

Colossians 3:1-17

Ephesians 1:17-23

Psalms 19

2 Timothy 2:1-7

John 15:1-8

Welcome to the first small group discussion for the series. In this study we'll set up the series by examining a training approach to how we change.

### *Chance to share*

As you listened to the message on Sunday and thought about the series ahead:

- What area of your life with God would you like to see transformed over the coming weeks?

### **More than will power: a holistic approach to transformation**

Many of us over the years have sought to bring change to our lives; be that a New Year's resolution, diet, habit, attitude or behaviour.

- As you reflect on some of the successful and not-so-successful attempts, what were your strategies (or lack of) for bringing about change?

As disciples of Jesus we are learning to live and love like him. To be ever increasingly transformed into his likeness is our great hope and goal. Although, like a new year's resolution, will-power alone doesn't seem to be an effective means of transformation. Instead, try training yourselves in the following ways:

### ***1. Changing our narratives***

The stories and narratives that inhabit our inner world are incredibly powerful at running (and sometimes ruining) our lives. For example: career driven parents can instil within us a narrative about what constitutes 'success'; movies can give us the narrative that we need romantic love in order to be fulfilled and so on.

- What are some of the harmful narratives you can recognise within yourself that you have picked up from family, culture or religion over the years?

The Bible highlights the importance of right thinking in many verses. Read together Romans 12:2; Philippians 4:8; Colossians 3:1-2 and Ephesians 4:20-24.

- Can you think of an example where a change of thinking was really helpful for transforming a specific aspect of your Christian walk? Share how it did.

## ***2. Engaging in soul-training exercises***

Paul compared the Christian life to the training of an athlete in several passages (see: 1 Corinthians 9:25; 1 Timothy 4:7-8 and 2 Timothy 2:5). Athletes understand the importance of training; they workout and practice over and over so that they can perform naturally, easily and with strength in competition.

- If you embraced the spiritual disciplines in this way from today, what would change in your motivation, purpose and practice of the disciplines?
- Has there been one particular spiritual practice/soul-training exercise that you have found the most helpful in affecting change within your life?

## ***3. Participating in community***

We can easily think of our spiritual transformation as a personal pursuit only and neglect the importance of Christian community. While it is true that we are each responsible for taking our own growth seriously, spiritual formation often happens most profoundly in the context of community. Read together Proverbs 27:17; Acts 2:42-47; 1 Thessalonians 5:11 and Hebrews 10:24-25.

- When you think of the environments which have been instrumental for your spiritual growth, who or what group of people come to mind?
- What was it about that environment or those people that helped bring transformation?

## ***4. All under the empowering leading of the Holy Spirit***

Undergirding any genuinely Christian transformation is the person and work of the Holy Spirit. He is the unseen teacher, guide, empowering presence and fruit-bearer in our lives. See John 14:26, Romans 8:15-16; Galatians 5:16-18, 22-25.

- These verses show how the Holy Spirit is at work in us. How are you able to welcome and partner with Him in that work day by day?

As we finish our time together today consider: in what practical ways can you renew your commitment to being transformed into the image of Christ?

Sermon Notes (May 14)

God is Good

Passages to Meditate on  
Week May 15 -20.

*Spend (at least) 10minutes + 10minutes in reading and prayer.  
Allow the Spirit to reveal something of the nature of God to you.*

Psalm 16

Psalm 84

Psalm 136

Isaiah 43:1-13

2 Peter 1:1-15

John 9

Welcome to week two in our series *Who is the God I know?* In this study we examine the first false narrative many have about God and then compare it to the truth about God that Jesus reveals to us.

### *Chance to share*

Each week we are being encouraged to daily spend time meditating on the daily Bible readings and spending time in prayer.

- How did you go with setting aside time to spend in God's Word, prayer and reflection last week? If you did, was there any difference in your day and awareness of God that you noticed?

### **Exploring false narratives: The Angry God**

In John 9:1-2, the disciples encounter a man blind since birth and ask Jesus a telling question: "Who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?"

- Have you ever had something bad happen to you and wondered what you did to deserve it? Where do you feel such thinking comes from?

Many live with the internal narrative that God is like an angry judge; thinking if they do well then they will be blessed, but if they sin then they will be punished.

- How would someone with such a narrative relate to God? How would they respond to changing life circumstances?

Any discussion on God's goodness is more than academic, by its very nature the discussion is highly emotive and deeply personal.

- Have you ever been through a situation that made you question God's goodness? If comfortable, share what happened and how you felt.

## Embracing truth: God is GOOD

Jesus, in answering the question “who sinned?” (John 9), made it clear that there was no causal connection between the man’s infirmity and any sin he (or his parents) may have committed.

The God whom Jesus reveals is a God of goodness, love and mercy.

- Jesus perfectly reveals God the Father to us; to see and understand Jesus is to see and understand the Father. How does Jesus’ life and teaching reveal the goodness of God?
- What shifts in the way we relate to God when we embrace the truth that He is good?

Read together Genesis 1:31; Psalm 145:9; Matthew 5:45 and James 1:17.

- What evidences of God’s universal goodness do we see in our world today?

Jesus very clearly prepared his followers for the reality that ‘in this world you will have trouble’ (John 16:33). He also assured them that they could take heart and have peace because of Him in the midst of whatever trouble came their way.

- Having a false expectation that following God means that all things should go well for us can be quite harmful. What are some dangers of this mindset?

There is a church tradition where one person calls out “*God is good*” to which everyone replies “*all the time*”, and then the one person calls “*and all the time*” which is met with everyone’s response “*God is good*”.

It is a declaration of faith that regardless of our circumstances, emotions or experience of life that God is unchangingly good by his very nature.

- How have you experienced the goodness of God in your life?
- How has knowing God and clinging to him in the hard seasons of life brought you strength and comfort in those times?
- How have those times deepened your conviction that God is good?



- Recall specific occasions when you faced big challenges such as:
  - difficult circumstances
  
  - unanswered prayer
  
  - a difficult relationship
  
  - discouragement

How did you relate to God through those challenges?

- What narratives about God's goodness may have been evident in the challenging times of your life?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- How well do your narratives align with Jesus' narratives about God's goodness?

Sermon Notes (May 21)

God is Trustworthy

Passages to Meditate on  
Week May 22 - 27.

*Spend (at least) 10minutes + 10minutes in reading and prayer.  
Allow the Spirit to reveal something of the nature of God to you.*

Exodus 15:1-18

Psalm 121

Psalm 139:1-18

Isaiah 40:18-31

John 14:1-24

Matthew 6:1-34

Welcome to week three of *Who is the God I know?* At times we can find it hard to trust God, not really believing that He is trustworthy. In this study we look at how Jesus reveals a God who is completely trustworthy as our 'Abba, Father'.

### *Chance to share*

What have you felt God speak most clearly to you about through the message, readings and prayer times from this past week?

### **Examining false narratives: God is not trustworthy**

To trust someone is to believe that he or she has your best interests in mind, that the person will protect you from harm and is honest and reliable.

- What particular qualities or actions makes a person trustworthy to you?
- How hard do you find it to trust others with tasks? How easy/hard do you find it to trust others with self-disclosure (sharing our fears, doubts, hopes and what's really going on for us)?

Many people in our world today live with the belief and expectation that God is not trustworthy.

- How would someone with such a narrative relate to God?
- What experiences or disappointments in life (and with other people) could contribute to such a narrative about God being untrustworthy?

### **Embracing truth: God is TRUSTWORTHY**

Read together Mark 14:32-42. Even in this moment of deepest anguish, desperate to avoid what was ahead of him, Jesus trusted in his heavenly Father. In doing so, Jesus reveals and models to us that God is completely trustworthy.

- What do you think would cause Jesus to have such trust in God the Father?
- Have you ever trusted God with one of those "yet not what I will, but what you will" prayers? If comfortable, share what it was over and why you had the confidence to trust God with that particular thing.

The trust Jesus had in God in this moment was grounded in deep intimate relationship. 'Abba' is an Aramaic word closest to our English word "Daddy" – it is personal and intimate, yet also conveys a sense of trustful reverence.

- Do you find it natural or hard to relate to God as your *Abba, Father*? Why is that do you think?
- Have you found that the more you know God and the closer you feel to Him, the more you trust him?
- How are you going at the moment with trusting God with your deepest hopes, fears, insecurities and decisions (even if that is to guide you in ways you wouldn't choose for yourself)?

Consider the Lord's Prayer in Matthew 5:9-13. Here Jesus teaches us how and what to pray, yet the content of the prayer also reveals the character of the God we are to pray to:

<i>Our Father in Heaven</i>	God is present
<i>Hallowed be your name</i>	God is pure
<i>Your Kingdom come, your will be done</i>	God is powerful
<i>Give us today our daily bread</i>	God provides
<i>Forgive us our debts</i>	God pardons
<i>Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us</i>	God protects

- How does each one help us to embrace the truth that God is trustworthy?
- Of those six, which do you need to see and understand most at the moment when it comes to trusting God?

Often we can fixate on our 'cup' (anything we struggle to accept as our lot in life) and miss all the blessings that surround us or forget all the ways God has shown himself to be trustworthy in the past.

- What aspect of your life is making it difficult to trust God at the moment?
- What would it look like to fully embrace the truth that God *is* trustworthy with that aspect of your life?

<p style="text-align: center;">Journal Exercise for the week May 22 - 27.</p>
---

*The aim of these journaling exercises is to assist you to identify your narratives about God and to reflect on how they align with Jesus' narratives. Where there are differences, these become areas for restoration. Allow the Lord to show you the area that he would like to restore and follow his lead. Restoration can happen quickly, but often is part of a longer journey. It can happen as you process alone with the Lord, and there are times when the assistance of prayer ministry or counselling is helpful.*

*You may set aside a single time for journaling your reflections on these questions or you may journal over several sessions, allowing yourself to muse on your answers.*

Recall 3 of the most challenging times of your life. Thinking through each event:

Challenging time (1):

- record how you responded to God during the challenge
  
- what happened to your levels of trust in God?
  
- How was this expressed in your actions?

Challenging time (2):

- record how you responded to God during the challenge
  
- what happened to your levels of trust in God?
  
- How was this expressed in your actions?



Sermon Notes (May 28)

God is Generous

Passages to Meditate on  
Week May 29 - June 3.

*Spend (at least) 10minutes + 10minutes in reading and prayer.  
Allow the Spirit to reveal something of the nature of God to you.*

Psalm 95

Psalm 103

Luke 15

Ephesians 1:3-14

James 1:1-18

Matthew 20:1-16

Welcome to week four in our *Who is the God I know?* series. The study today centres around the unearned generosity of God and how that can be quite challenging for those with a strong 'earning favour' narrative about God.

### *Chance to share*

When we are processing something, naturally it is on our mind more. This can lead to it coming up in conversation more readily, especially when we know someone else is processing the same thing.

- Has the series so far given rise to any good conversations about the topics being covered? If so, share as appropriate.

### **Examining false narratives: Earning Favour**

Earning is predominantly the means by which we obtain things in our culture. This goes well beyond the financial. In so many of our interactions we are treated on the basis of how we look, act or perform. Our parents rewarded us for good behaviour; our grades are based on our exam performance; romantic attention is often based on looks; and our inclusion in social groups based on what we contribute (be that humour, a house with a pool or a listening ear).

- How have you seen the earning favour narrative play out in your life to date (within your family, school, work and/or social settings)?

Earning favour is such a deeply embedded narrative in our culture, that many then project the same 'earning favour' narrative onto God. Thus many live as if God's love, acceptance and forgiveness must be earned by right living.

- How would someone who has an earning favour narrative relate to God?
- How have you found yourself relating to God in this 'earning favour' way?

### **Embracing truth: God is GENEROUS**

Jesus told a parable describing what God is like that runs completely counter to our culture's earning favour narrative. Read together Matthew 20:1-15

- What is your natural reaction to this parable Jesus told? To what extent does your reaction reveal how much you filter life through an earning favour narrative?
- If this was the only story about God that you knew, what would you conclude that God is like and how we should relate to him?

It can be easier to agree that God has shown unearned generosity, love and grace towards the world than it can be to personalise it.

- To what extent do you believe and act like the same unearned generosity, love and grace God offers to the world He also gives to you?
- If you fully embraced the truth that God's love is not earned, what would you do differently tomorrow?

James Bryan Smith writes *'The dominant narrative of the Bible is a story of unearned grace, of a God whose love is not thwarted by human sinfulness, and of a Christ who dies for sinners (Romans 5:8). The metanarrative of the Bible is the story of the steadfast love of God that culminates in the incarnation, death and resurrection of God on behalf of a wayward world.'*

Read 1 John 4:11-12. Here the Apostle makes it clear that our love for God does not earn or determine God's attitude towards us; for God loved us first.

- Have you ever received something you did not earn nor deserve (like an extravagant gift, promotion, opportunity etc)? What did you feel and how did you respond?
- When you think of God's unearned love towards you, how do you feel compelled to respond?

The practice of counting our blessings and being grateful to God for them is one helpful way to cultivate an ongoing awareness of God's unearned generosity towards us.

- Share some of the ways you have and are currently experiencing the unearned blessings of God in your life?

**Journal Exercise**  
for the week May 29 – June 3.

*The aim of these journaling exercises is to assist you to identify your narratives about God and to reflect on how they align with Jesus' narratives. Where there are differences, these become areas for restoration. Allow the Lord to show you the area that he would like to restore and follow his lead. Restoration can happen quickly, but often is part of a longer journey. It can happen as you process alone with the Lord, and there are times when the assistance of prayer ministry or counselling is helpful.*

*You may set aside a single time for journaling your reflections on these questions or you may journal over several sessions, allowing yourself to muse on your answers.*

- In your family and from your cultural background, how was (and is) generosity expressed?

Think of some specific ways that generosity was/is expressed regarding:

- Finances and gifts/donations?
  - Time?
  - Service and acts of kindness?
  - Words of affection, affirmation or encouragement?
  - Hospitality?
- Were there any unspoken rules about how it worked?  
*(For example: Did you have to earn it first? Did you have to repay it or reciprocate it? Any other ways that it worked?)*

- What impact, if any, has this had on your view of God's generosity?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- How do your narratives align with Jesus' narratives about the generosity of God?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- When you think of God's extravagant, unearned generosity expressed to you; how do you feel in response?  
*(For example: Do you find it easy or hard to accept and receive God's generosity towards you? Do you feel undeserving or humbled? Do you feel guilty about your own lack of generosity towards God and others?)*
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- What does the above answer reveal about yourself and what might need to be realigned in both your life and in your relationship with God?

Sermon Notes (June 4)

God is Love

Passages to Meditate on  
Week June 5 - 10.

*Spend (at least) 10minutes + 10minutes in reading and prayer.  
Allow the Spirit to reveal something of the nature of God to you.*

Exodus 34:1-9

Psalm 67

Psalm 89:1-18

Romans 8:18-39

1 John 1

Matthew 9:9-31

Welcome to week five in our church-wide series *Who is the God I know?* There is so much 'Gospel' (good news) in this study as we examine the grace-filled message about a God who is, by his very nature, love.

### *Chance to share*

One of the many blessings of belonging to a church community is the time set aside each week to listen to what God is saying to us through the preached Word.

- Was there a particular point, phrase or illustration from Sunday's message that you felt was powerful for you personally?

### **Examining false narratives: God only loves us when we are good**

Similar to the earning favour narrative we looked at last week, this week we examine the performance-based acceptance culture that is so prevalent in our society. We learn and experience this from a very early age and it is constantly being reinforced. Our acceptance in social groups, our work environment, even our closest relationships often shifts according to our behaviour.

- How has a performance-based acceptance narrative been part of your experience? Can you think of an example of this in your own life?

Many in our world live with the inner narrative that God's love is conditional. It is assumed that our behaviour determines how God feels about us in any given moment, therefore God's love is constantly in flux.

- How would someone who has a performance-based acceptance narrative relate to God?
- How would someone with such a narrative then view and relate to others?

### **Embracing truth: God welcomes and loves sinners**

Read together Matthew 9:9-13. Here Jesus calls one of his disciples, and his choice is met with disapproval by those who hold to a performance-based acceptance narrative.

- Do you sometimes feel that God's love depends on your behaviour?
- What does Jesus' answer to the Pharisees' disapproval reveal to us about the nature of God?

One of Jesus' better known parables is the Parable of the Lost Sons. Read it together in Luke 15:11-32. It is a beautiful, yet challenging picture of a God who unconditionally welcomes home and loves the undeserving.

- What was your initial response to Jesus' story? Why?
- Have you ever found yourself wrestling with feeling uncomfortable about grace, as if it is unfair? How did you process those feelings?
- Have you ever been in a position to love someone who rejected you? Or have you ever been loved by someone you have hurt? Describe.
- Do you sometimes feel like the elder brother in the story who is reluctant to accept God's acceptance of others or even of yourself?

Jesus' narrative of unconditional acceptance goes against the grain of the performance-based acceptance narrative that is so deeply imbedded in our lives. We think, *"How could God possibly love sinners? He might be able to forgive them and even love them if they promise to improve."* But this is not what Jesus taught. In actions and words he proclaimed that God welcomes and loves sinners.

- Being honest, what one word comes to mind to describe how you feel about the way God sees you? Or the way God feels about you?
- If that word differs from Jesus' narrative of unconditional acceptance, where do you think that has come from?
- What would change in your relationship with God if you fully embraced, believed and lived in light of this truth: God welcomes and loves you regardless of your religious or moral performance?

**Journal Exercise**  
for the week June 5 - 10.

*The aim of these journaling exercises is to assist you to identify your narratives about God and to reflect on how they align with Jesus' narratives. Where there are differences, these become areas for restoration. Allow the Lord to show you the area that he would like to restore and follow his lead. Restoration can happen quickly, but often is part of a longer journey. It can happen as you process alone with the Lord, and there are times when the assistance of prayer ministry or counselling is helpful.*

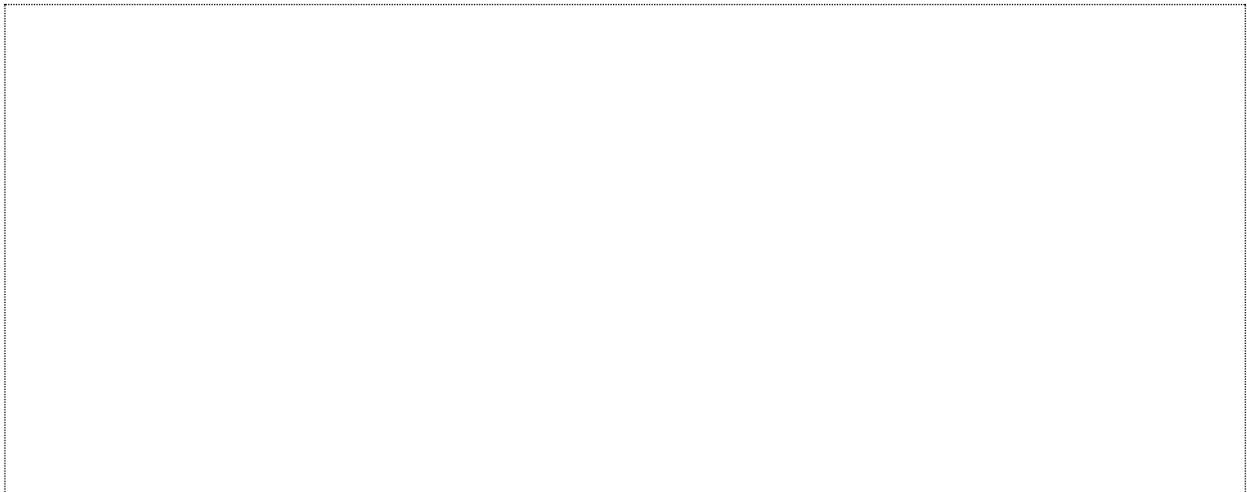
*You may set aside a single time for journaling your reflections on these questions or you may journal over several sessions, allowing yourself to muse on your answers.*

- Begin by reflecting on your various experiences of human love (be that family, friends or romantic love). Think about:
  - Your greatest positive experience of human love
  - A time when your love for someone was rejected, taken for granted or not reciprocated
  - When someone who 'loved you' hurt, disappointed or let you down
  - When your experience of someone's love changed over time
- How do you think those experiences of human love have shaped and influenced your narrative about God's love?

**Exercise:** Spend some time writing as many words as you can in the box below that correctly describes God's love (you could use the alphabet as a prompter!)



**Exercise:** Now spend some time writing as many words as you can that describes your experience of God's love or the way you see and understand God's love personally. (eg: you might personally have experienced God's love as elusive or life-changing or conditional etc)



- In what ways do the two lists match? In what ways do the two lists not match?

Sermon Notes (June 11)

God is Holy

Passages to Meditate on  
Week June 12 - 17.

*Spend (at least) 10minutes + 10minutes in reading and prayer.  
Allow the Spirit to reveal something of the nature of God to you.*

Psalm 76

Psalm 99

Matthew 5:17 -48

1 Peter 1:3-25

Revelation 4

Matthew 16:21 – 17:8

Welcome to our second last week in our series *Who is the God I know?* We continue to pray and hope this series is bringing deep transformation and restoration to your relationship with God. In this study we examine an often tricky topic fraught with false narratives – God's love and holiness.

### *Chance to share*

What has been the single most significant thing for you personally coming out of our series so far? *(It could be a verse, a question, one of the narratives, one of the exercises, an answer to prayer etc.)*

### **Examining false narratives:**

#### **God is wrathful // God does not care about our sin**

If you picture the old fire and brimstone preaching you can understand how some have come to live with an extreme narrative that God is mad all of the time; that wrath and anger are essential to God's nature because God is holy and so much of the world is not.

- How would someone with the wrathful God narrative relate to God? How would they view morality?

At the other extreme is the narrative that God is a cosmic, benevolent spirit who never judges, does not punish sin and sends no one to hell. This "teddy bear god" has become a very popular narrative in our postmodern culture.

- How would someone with the "teddy bear god" narrative relate to God? How would they view morality?

Which of the two narratives do you identify with more?

### **Embracing truth: Wrath is God's loving right action against sin**

The narrative of a teddy bear god who does not care about sin naturally undermines the entire Christian story - there is a very real need for Jesus to die on the cross. Read John 3:19-21, John 5:24-30, Matthew 12:35-36.

- Do you have a tendency to skip over Jesus' words of judgment to dwell instead on his words about God's love? Share why that is your answer.
- Integrating God's love and his wrath can be difficult. How do you understand the way these play out in salvation history and in your own life?

The Bible proclaims the beautiful truth that the Living God is a holy, holy, holy God – there is no sin, evil or darkness in him. Read Exodus 15:11 & Isaiah 6:1-5.

- In what ways do you find the thought of a God who is against sin reassuring?

On the holiness and love of God expressed in wrath towards sin James Bryan Smith writes: *“In the same way that Gods’ love is not a silly, sappy feeling but rather a consistent desire for the good of his people, so also the wrath of God is not a crazed rage but rather a consistent opposition to sin and evil. God is not indecisive when it comes to evil. God is fiercely and forcefully opposed to the things that destroy his precious people, which I am grateful for. It is a sign of God’s love.”*

- How is such a God more worthy of trust and worship than the “teddy bear God” or the “always angry and wrathful God” narratives?
- If you were to embrace this truth, what would change in the way you viewed sin? What would change in the way you relate to God?

Where we can often be prone to excusing our sin or rationalizing our weaknesses, God is against our sin because God is for us. Being soft on sin is not loving, because sin destroys.

- What thoughts and feelings do you have when you consider that God longs to remove everything from your life that would destroy you and separate you from him?
- How is the attitude of 2 Corinthians 7:1 a very fitting way for a follower of Jesus to live?

**Journal Exercise**  
for the week June 5 - 10.

*Take some time to do the following exercise:*

Imagine that your soul is like a deep pond.

Imagine that whenever you harbour bitterness, unforgiveness, selfish ambition, lust and other sins in your heart that it is like throwing putrid objects into a pond. They sink down into the depths of the pond and at the surface everything seems fine but the waters of your soul become bitter. You try to ignore this bitterness but whatever you do to try to cover over the bitterness it remains.

Let's say that this bitterness of soul drives you to God. But whenever you draw near to God your heart is stirred like the waters of the pond being stirred and when this happens all the putrid objects begin to float to the surface. Your immediate reaction is to then reel back away from God. Often this reaction is subconscious; you don't even realise you are doing it. The thought of facing what is in your own heart isn't pleasant and so you avoid thinking about it. You think you are open to God but in fact every time that God draws near you repel Him.

Many Christians repress sin, but when we let those things that contaminate our soul float to the surface, God will free us from them. (Matthew Jacoby)

**Exercise:** On the blank page below, sketch the pond of your life. Allow the Holy Spirit to search you, labelling any sin that may be in the depth of your pond.

-----

Once you've completed the reflection confess as you need to and note any further steps that the Lord would have you do to address the consequences of wrongdoing, eg. restoring a relationship etc.

Through this exercise how easily were you able to:

- Identify your sin?
- Receive God's forgiveness?
- What might this say about how your narrative aligns with Jesus' narrative?



Sermon Notes (June 18)

God is Self-Sacrificing

Passages to Meditate on  
Week June 19 - 24.

*Spend (at least) 10minutes + 10minutes in reading and prayer.  
Allow the Spirit to reveal something of the nature of God to you.*

John 3:1-21

1 John 4:7-21

Romans 3:21-31

Romans 5

Colossians 1:3-23

John 10:1-18

Welcome to our final set of discussion group questions from our series *Who is the God I know?* We end by looking at the radical, initiating, self-sacrificing love that God has for us.

### *Chance to share*

While this is the final study in our church-wide series, each of us can continue to engage with these narratives about God as we learn to live and love like Jesus!

- Was there something in particular you feel God calling you to continue unpacking, processing, embracing or growing in beyond the end of our series?

### **Examining false narratives: We work our way to God**

Although not many people would suggest that God is limited to a physical temple, there is a tendency to view God that way - thinking that we need to take initiative and go to Him. The assumption is that we have to work our way to God, which includes needing to “shape up” or get our lives sorted before coming to Him and experiencing relationship with Him.

- How might someone who has been a Christian for years still subtly experience and wrestle with this narrative?

Many seasoned followers of Jesus are known to experience internal struggles of wondering: *Does God really love me? Am I important to God? Does God care about me? Have I failed too many times?*

- Have you ever found yourself internally wrestling with those thoughts?

### **Embracing truth: God works his way to us**

In his most famous saying recorded in John 3:16 Jesus taught that God took the initiative in sending Jesus. Read the opening to John's Gospel (John 1:1-18).

- Brainstorm a list of the ways that God has taken initiative to reveal Himself to us and to draw us into relationship with Him?

Those who intentionally or subconsciously believe they need to work their way to God can easily fall into a life of legalism; legalism being the pressure to try and work ourselves into God's love and favour through our actions.

- How does legalism undermine the truth and beauty of the Gospel?
- What impact can legalism have on the way we see and experience relationship with God?

Read together Ephesians 2:1-9. God did for us what we could never do for ourselves. The cross is the defining epitome of God's love and self-sacrifice for us. Our salvation is not from ourselves, it is the gift of a loving self-sacrificing God.

- In a world full of so many voices, opinions and cultural narratives, how can we make sure this remains our dominant narrative and message about God?

Read together John 15:13 and Romans 5:6-8. If you ever have, or currently are struggling with those questions of *Does God really love me? Am I important to God?* consider:

- How does asking "*What more could he have done for us?*" reveal the answer to those questions above?
- Chances are you know well the Easter story and what it means, so what is holding you back from fully embracing the truth about God's love for you?

Jesus' self-sacrificial love has left a beautiful and challenging example for all his followers to imitate. See John 13:3-5 and v12-17, Matthew 20:25-28, 1 John 3:16 and Philippians 2:1-8.

- Do you find that the more you understand the radical depths of God's self-sacrificial love, the more normal self-sacrifice becomes in your own life?
- As you embrace the truth and experience of God's self-sacrificial love, what other ways do you feel compelled to respond?

**Journal Exercise**  
for the week June 19 - 24.

*This final journal exercise is designed to help reflect on the series as a whole. Once again you may set aside a single time for journaling your reflections on these questions or you may journal over several sessions, allowing yourself to muse on your answers.*

Look back over this booklet and all your notes, reading reflections and journal exercises gathered throughout the series. Consider:

- Which aspects of your relationship with God do you feel have been affected by any of the false narratives you have held about God?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- Can you identify any ways in which you sense that your narrative about God has become more closely aligned with Jesus' narrative of the Father? What difference has that (or might that) make in your life?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- Flowing out of this series, what new habits, perspectives or behaviours do you want to pursue?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- Who is one person (or group of people) that you can commit to continue processing, journeying and growing in these areas with?

**Exercise:** In the space provided below write a letter to yourself in light of your above convictions. That might seem strange at first, yet it can be a powerful record of allowing yourself to speak truth into your life and how you desire to know and relate to God from this day forward. So give it a go...

Dear \_\_\_\_\_,



*Thank you for being a part of our series Who is the God I know?*

*We pray you have come to a renewed love of The Father through our series and refreshed experience of what it means to be His child.*

*Next Series Begins: August 6*

