

CHAPTER 3, SESSION 3: GOD IS TRUSTWORTHY

CHAPTER CHALLENGE

There are a few points within this chapter that could be difficult for people to process and accept. One such point which can be very painful for people is the idea of God as Father. The author does a very good job explaining why we should not let earthly fathers define the nature of God, but instead we should allow God to define the behavior of a good earthly father. However, as a leader you should be sensitive to those who continue to struggle with the image of God as Father. Like many things of an emotional and spiritual nature, it can be a slow process of healing. If there is anyone in your group who struggles with this, give them space to express their frustration and pain. Because of the limited amount of time and resources of the small group, it may be beneficial for such a person to meet with a spiritual director. This one-on-one setting allows for the time and attention needed to work through such wounds.

After reading through the third chapter and practicing the soul-training exercises up to this point, it is a good idea to remind folks that these practices are not meant to be done only once but instead should be on-going practices that continue to mold and shape us. With this in mind, spend a few minutes having the class discuss the practices they have continued to do and what they are learning as they continue. There is no need for them to be doing all of the practices all of the time; instead they should be discerning God's guidance into the practices that bring renewal and insight into their life.

SUPPLIES

- ☞ Prize for the welcoming activity if you do it

WELCOME

If you have a group that has just formed for this study, hopefully they are getting comfortable with each other's names. You could have a contest for anyone who could name everyone in the group and say something about the person. Depending on the size of your group, this might be worth a prize.

Recite Colossians 3:1-6 together then enter into the silence.

5 MINUTES OF SILENCE

PRAYER TO END THE SILENCE

*Christ Jesus, by your Spirit
you come and kindle a burning light in us.
We know well that it is not we
who create this source of light,
but you, the Risen Lord.
To all of us, you give the one thing that matters
and which is hidden from our own eyes:*

*a peaceful trust in God
and also poverty in spirit,
so that with a great thirst for the realities of God,
we may take the risk of letting you accompany us, O Christ,
and of accompanying, in our turn,
those whom you entrust to us.*

— Brother Roger, *Songs and Prayers of Taizé*

ENGAGING THE CHAPTER [25 minutes]

THE BIG IDEA IN THIS CHAPTER: We can trust God because Jesus trusted God. If Jesus, as Christians believe, is the second member of the Trinity who has known God the Father for all eternity, then Jesus knows the Father better than any theologian ever will. Therefore, if Jesus trusted his Father—even as he entered into his suffering—you and I can do the same.

MAIN POINTS

- ☞ Jesus addressed God as “Abba,” a term of endearment, somewhat similar to “Daddy” or “Papa.”
- ☞ Jesus revealed a lot about the character of God in the content of The Lord’s Prayer.
- ☞ The nature of what it means to be a father is defined by God, not earthly fathers.
- ☞ At the end of his earthly ministry Jesus prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane, “Father, let this cup pass from me.” “Cup” refers to the suffering he was about to endure. All of us have, or will have, at least one “cup.” This can be a hindrance to trusting God.
- ☞ George Buttrick’s powerful illustration—a small blot on the large piece of paper—shows how we tend to focus on the negative and overlook “the widespread mercies.”

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Have you ever done a team-building exercise? If so, tell your experience.
 - Did the exercise build trust? If so, what did it feel like to “trust your team”?
 - What does it feel like to be part of a team that you do not trust?
2. The author believes God is trustworthy because the God Jesus reveals would never do anything to harm us. God has no malice or evil intentions. How does this compare to your own definition of trustworthiness?
3. In The Lord’s Prayer we encounter a God who is Present, Pure, Powerful; who Provides, Pardon and Protects (pp. 60-61). Which of these aspects of God is most comforting for you? Which one is the most difficult to grasp?
4. If you are in a group of six or more, divide into groups of three or four to discuss the following questions. [Allow about 10-15 minutes for this conversation and prayer.] A “cup” is that aspect of our life that makes it difficult for us to trust God (see pp. 64-65 of *The Good and Beautiful God*). [Refer participants to the Small Group Appendix on pp. 200-201 for the following questions.]
 - Can you name a “cup” from your own life? What have you learned about God or yourself through that experience?
 - The author tells us, “Jesus trusted his Abba, and I will also trust in the God I know to be good.” How does it feel to know that you do not have to “force” yourself to say “all is well?”
 - Whether you are in the midst of tragedy or not, it is amazing to see our story joined with God’s story (pp. 65-67). How does this good news change your perspective and the way you spend your time and energy?
 - If you are comfortable, spend time in prayer for one another, inviting God to join his story with yours.

SOUL-TRAINING [10 minutes]

Near the end of the chapter the focus turns to the blessings we have received. If the group is large enough, divide into new groups of three to four and discuss what you learned from the soul-training practice of counting your blessings. It isn’t necessary to share your list. Use these questions to help you begin:

1. What, if anything, did you learn about God or yourself through the exercise?
2. What were some of the things that made your list that surprised you? Why?
3. What similarities do you notice between everyone’s lists?

ENGAGING THE WORD [15 minutes]

Come back together as a group. Say:

For this session’s “Engaging The Word” we are going to hear the story of Jesus praying in the Garden of Gethsemane. The passage will be read twice. The first time just listen to hear the details.

Have a volunteer read Matthew 26:36-44 aloud. Then say:

Now we will hear the passage again. This time, close your eyes and picture the story in your mind as if you were watching a movie, or better yet, as if you were one of the people in the story.

Have a second volunteer read Matthew 26:36-44 aloud. After the reading, leave a few moments of silence, then discuss the following questions:

1. *What did you notice as you observed and participated in the story?*
2. *What emotions did this scene stir within you?*
3. *How does this moment from Jesus' life impact your ability to trust God?*

BREAK [5 minutes]

EXPERIENCING TRANSFORMATION [15 minutes]

Say: *To help us savor and comprehend the wisdom of The Lord's Prayer, we are going to individually write a prayer using the six characteristics of God from The Lord's Prayer to help express our own understanding of God. The six characteristics are: God is present, pure, powerful, and he provides, pardons and protects.*

Begin the prayer with your favorite name for God: Abba, Spirit, Lord, etc. Next, although they may be very brief, write three sentences that proclaim:

1. *what it means to you that God is present,*
2. *praise of God's purity,*
3. *an aspect of God's power.*

Then write three sentences that petition God in these ways:

1. *by providing for a basic need that you have,*
2. *by pardoning you specifically or generally,*
3. *by protecting you in some way.*

Here is one example of the finished prayer:

Loving Creator,

You are as near to me as the very air that gives me life.

In you there is no darkness, only light!

Through you, all things have come into being and have life!

I am not worthy to approach you, yet you invite me to call upon you

To help me find the things I need, and set me free from the things I want

That you would reveal to me the times I operate against your will, forgive me and grant me wisdom to be transformed

That you would lead me into the reality of your Kingdom!

Amen.

If anyone in the group is comfortable, have them read their prayers aloud. If no one is comfortable doing so, that is all right as well.

GO IN PEACE [5 minutes]

Have two or three volunteers, one person at a time, slowly read all six descriptors of God—God is Present, God is Pure, God is Powerful, God Provides, God Pardons and God Protects—with a pause between each reader. Once all the volunteers have read, have a few minutes of silence.

End the silence with these words:

Go in the assurance of a God who can be trusted.

FOR THE COMING WEEK

- ☞ Read chapter 4, which explores God's generosity.
- ☞ The soul-training practice for the week will be living and breathing the 23rd Psalm—enjoy!
- ☞ Remember to memorize Colossians 3:7-8.