

Session 1 – Introduction: Stewarding All That We Have (Matthew 25:14-30)

KEY IDEA: In this fallen world, we are all afflicted in various ways. But rather than be hopeless victims of circumstance, we can find hope when we seek to honor God by being faithful stewards of what He has sovereignly placed in our lives.

I. See Your Circumstance in Light of God’s Sovereign, Wise, and Loving Hand

“In God’s providence, everything is significant. Everything is meaningful. Nothing is random, nothing is pointless, nothing is meaningless.”

(John Piper)

II. See Your Circumstances as Opportunities to Honor God in Loving Faithfulness

We are given the following graces to help us glorify God:

- a. The Gospel gives hope in hopeless circumstances
- b. The Word provides clarity in complex circumstances
- c. The Church is our help in overwhelming circumstances

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. What is one difficult circumstance or affliction that you are currently struggling with and how does this text help you to conceptualize that differently?
2. This weekend, we hope to study three “fingerprints:” Anger, depression, and anxiety. Which one is most relevant to you and why (whether it’s personal or it’s because you know someone who struggles with this)?
3. In the past, how have you sought to find hope in your afflictions or difficult circumstances? How does it give you hope to know that Christ has given us every grace we need to respond with hope and to do so well?
4. Who are the people in your life that you can be open and honest with to come alongside you in your struggle? If no one, what do you think it might look like for you to begin that journey of having others come alongside you?

Session 2 – Anger: What’s Got You All Worked Up? (James 4:1-12)

KEY IDEA: When we are angry, God gives us grace to respond in Christ-like ways.

I. Defining Anger (cf. John 11:33)

“Active displeasure toward something that’s important enough to care about” (David Powlison).

There are things that should arouse our anger. The problem however is that:

- a. What often arouses our anger are the things that don’t arouse God’s anger.
- b. Even if what arouse our anger is good, our response can be bad.

II. Themes and the Experience of Anger

Three themes in the experience of anger: “This is wrong, I’m against this, and I must respond.”

a. What treasure do I fight for? (Idol vs. God's Glory)

Two evaluative questions:

- Do I sin to get what I want or sin because I didn't get what I wanted?
- Does someone's wrong against me move me to retaliate with wrong?

b. What role do I take? (Judge vs. Helper)

Questions to think about:

- Do I tend to drag them through the courtroom of my mind, or do I seek to lift them up before the throne of God?
- Do I tend to judge their actions or behavior, or can I actually empathize with them because I'm more like them than I realize?
- Do I see their actions as the greatest offense, or can I say of my own heart that like Paul, "I am the chief of sinners?"
- Do you find yourself more ready to defend yourself, or are you more ready to suffer their wrong so that you might love?
- Do you tend to see the bad in their life, or can you first see the good in their life and be moved by the hard?

c. What response do I choose? (Sinful Anger vs. Christ-likeness)

Ways to respond in Christ-like anger:

- Patience: "This is wrong, but I am committed to you for the long haul."
- Forgiveness: "This is wrong, but I am committed to not holding your offense against you."
- Charity: "This is wrong, but I am committed to being kind to you."
- Constructive Conflict (Confrontation): "This is wrong, but I am committed to wisely and lovingly help you see evil to right what is wrong."

III. Responding to Anger

What does it look like to respond with Christ-likeness?

a. First, evaluate and repent of any rival desires.

Repentance is three things:

- Conviction
 - How has holding onto this rival desire resulted in bad fruit in your personal life, with others and with God?
 - What do you suppose might happen if this rival desire was left unchecked?
- Confession
 - What passages from Scripture speak most clearly about my sin?
 - How does my sin or desire rival God?
 - Besides God, who else has been affected?
- Change
 - How am I fueling the wrong idols?

- What specific truths do I need to reflect on more instead?
- How can I bring the church into my life?
- What is the next step that would please God and love others?

b. Second, respond as a helper, not as a judge.

Questions to help you display Christ-likeness in anger:

- i. What is the deeper wrong happening in their heart?
- ii. Do I notice their suffering in this situation?
- iii. Am I taking this wrong personally or do I see it primarily as against God?
- iv. Can I accept with hope that what is wrong won't change right away?
- v. Am I willing to work slowly to solve things?
- vi. Has my relationship with God prepared me with a heart of forgiveness?
- vii. Am I able to humbly confront in love and help someone see their wrong?
- viii. Do I have a conscious awareness of God's mercy toward me as I seek to forgive?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. What were some of your conceptions of anger before this message?
2. When you think back to your last struggle with sinful anger, what treasure would you say you were fighting for? What did fighting for that treasure look like?
3. Of the four mentioned, which way can you demonstrate Christ-like anger toward your specific struggle with sinful anger?
4. How can your small group help you grow in this way?

Session 3 – Depression: When the Darkness Won't Lift (Psalm 42-43)

KEY IDEA: Depression often feels hopeless. Yet God gives us hope to live faithfully in the midst of the darkness.

I. Defining Depression

What is depression? A form of despair with a variety of expressions that experiences and perceives some measure of hopelessness.

II. Themes and the Experience of Depression

a. Depression is suffering

5 possible causes of suffering:

- i. Suffering comes from ourselves
- ii. Suffering comes from physical problems
- iii. Suffering comes from others
- iv. Suffering comes from Satan
- v. Suffering comes from the filter of God's sovereign wisdom and love

The biggest question isn't where suffering and depression comes from or why, but rather *how will we respond and who will we trust?*

- b. Depression is emotionally weighty

We don't need to be happy to draw near to God

- c. Depression is stubborn and lengthy

III. Responding to Depression

- a. Make it your long term aim to live faithfully in the midst of suffering, NOT to get rid of suffering.

There will be a time where there will be no more suffering (Rev 21:4), but that is God's responsibility and not yours. Simply seek to live faithfully in the midst of it.

- b. Resolve to hope in Christ in the midst of depression.

- i. Scripture: What is your perspective of life and how does God's Word correct that?
- ii. Prayer: What is your perspective of life, and can you ask God to bring it more closely in line with His perspective?

- c. Consider what rival hopes your heart are drawn to.

What is your hope in the midst of depression? If you can't call out a specific thing, you can at least ask what do you want right now more than anything?

- d. Take specific actions to fuel your faith and hope in Christ.

Begin by creating a purpose statement for your life (cf. Hosea 6:3; Matt 22:37-39)

"My purpose is to _____, and I will seek to accomplish that by doing the following:"

- i. Steward your physical context wisely

Examples of questions to consider:

1. How is your physical health/relationships/school/culture influencing your heart?
2. What does your day-to-day schedule look like?
3. When did you last consult with a medical professional?
4. Have you ever had suicidal thoughts?

- ii. Create a thoughtful holistic daily schedule

1. When will you wake up?
2. When will you eat?
3. When will you sleep?
4. When will you have quiet times?
5. When will you exercise?
6. When will you plan to go to school or do school work?
7. When will you plan recreation?
8. When will you - talk to others?

- iii. Lovingly engage with the church body meaningfully

1. Who can you thank?
2. Who can you greet?
3. Who can you pray for or ask for their prayer request?
4. Who can you listen to?
5. Can you give a family member a hug or kiss?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Have you or anyone you know ever struggled with depression? How would you or they have described it personally?
2. How does it encourage you and give you hope to know that Scripture would categorize the experience of depression as suffering?
3. What is your “purpose statement?” What is one step you can do to live accordingly?
4. What would it look like for you to lean into the body of Christ in the midst of depression? Alternatively, how can you help those struggling with depression?

Session 4 – Anxiety: Gripped by Fear (Luke 12:22-34)

KEY IDEA: God doesn’t condemn our fears, but he encourages us to move toward Him with trust even in the midst of our fears.

I. Defining Anxiety

Anxiety is “a God-given capacity for knowing that something bad is going on in your world” (Powlison).

Biblically fear and anxiety can be understood in the following ways:

- a. Human weakness (Luke 12:32)
- b. A demonstration of love (2 Cor 11:28)
- c. A sin that points to forgetting God (Matt 8:23-27)
- d. A deceitful weapon of the enemy (Ps 11:1-3)
- e. A revealer of what our hearts love and trust (Ps 56:3)

The point: Don’t be so quick to dismiss your fears as sinful.

God is more concerned with how we respond in our fear and anxiety.

II. Themes and the Experience of Anxiety

Sinful anxiety says, “You live in a fearful world full of dangers, and everything you love is vulnerable.”

- a. Sinful worry and anxiety misguides our priorities

Are my fears and anxieties keeping me from:

- Loving God?
- Loving others?

- b. Sinful worry and anxiety act as false prophets

Sinful anxiety and worry speaks as false prophets:

- Speak to the future and says God cannot be trusted with daily provisions
- Speaks to His goodness and tells us that God cannot be trusted with what is best

- c. Sinful worry and anxiety adds to our frustrations
- d. Sinful worry and anxiety reveal where we truly place our hopes

III. Responding to Anxiety

- a. Slow your thoughts and body down

Examples:

- Box-breathing: 4 seconds in; 4 second hold; 4 seconds out; 4 second hold.
- Counting backwards from 10.
- Removing yourself from the situation to give yourself space.

Remember: See this as a way of stewarding your body so that you're in the best position to move toward Christ.

- b. Consider the grace you have today
 - i. Who is God to you?
 - ii. How has He cared for you?
- c. Thoughtfully engage with your heart and with God
 - i. Name the sources of anxiety
 - ii. Identify how you express that anxiety
 - iii. Ask, "Why am I anxious?"
 - iv. Which promises of Jesus speak to you the most?
 - v. Pray with honesty and trust
 - vi. Turn yourself outward to others instead of inward
- d. Take ONE step toward God

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. What have been your latest and most significant fear as of late? How have you responded to it?
2. Why do you think you are so anxious and fearful? What do you fear losing? And how does the gospel speak to that?
3. What do you think you can begin to do to fuel your heart toward trusting God by turning outward instead of being crippled by your fear and turning inward?
4. What would it look like for you to ask the body of Christ to help you trust God in the midst of anxiety?