

 CORE CHRISTIANITY

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# IS GOD GREAT AND GOOD?

STUDENT'S EDITION

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## INTRODUCTION: WHY THIS STUDY

TO BEGIN, we would like to thank you, the students, congregants, church leaders, elders, pastors, and churches for supporting and using *Is God Great and Good?* We hope it enriches your Christian life, challenges your hearts, and builds up your faith to the glory of God.

This study was designed with several things in mind.

First, we designed this study to advance the gospel.

According to the Pew Research Center, theists, agnostics, Jews, and Mormons score higher in religious knowledge than Protestants, outperforming them on questions about the core teachings and history of Christianity. Almost 60 percent of our youth leave their churches as young adults, with many of them joining the growing numbers of the so-called “nones”: those who profess no adherence to any faith whatsoever.<sup>1</sup>

Despite this unsettling news, the core message of Christianity, the gospel, is still capable of renewing the church. Rather than worry or act out of fear and self-preservation, we believe that the best hope for Christians, the Church, and the people who feel the pressures to abandon the faith, is the historic Christian faith, the gospel announcement of what God has done through Jesus Christ for the world.

Second, we designed this study to speak to honest questions.

Many in our Evangelical, Baptist, Reformed, Lutheran, and Anglican Churches have honest questions about faith and life that they may even be afraid to ask. Thus, we have sought to shape the material in this study to be of use to the concerns of long-time, committed Christians, new Christians, Christians with wavering faith, and skeptics alike.

We want this study to challenge skeptics and the growing numbers of people leaving the church with answers of substance and beauty, answers that give hope to the hopeless. We designed this study to build the faith of Christians who have doubts and to give new

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.pewforum.org/2010/09/28/u-s-religious-knowledge-survey/>

Christians a firm grasp of the Christian faith. And we want to renew the faith of long-time committed Christians and equip them to better share the faith with others.

Third, we designed this study with an eye toward simplicity and a variety of settings.

We have thought of Sunday school classes, Bible study groups, informal gatherings among friends, and even individuals who want to learn more about the Christian faith. Thus, this study is arranged in a series of short lessons each that could be done within an hour a week, with questions for personal reflection and group discussion so that Christian can come together to share insights, ask questions, pray for their churches and cities, and find hope to share what are learning with friends and family.

The best way to do this study is to plan to meet once a week having read the lesson and answered the questions on your own first. There are two types of questions. Questions for reflection are personal and not something you should feel obligated to share with everyone. Questions for discussion are best discussed in a group where everyone can share their thoughts and questions. After each question, space has been provided for you to answer, but some people prefer to write their answers in a journal or notebook, that is fine too!

Fourth, we designed this study to engage the drama of Scripture, teach the doctrine of historic Christianity, move to doxology, and enable healthy discipleship.

It was really important that we handled doctrine in a way that shows how it naturally arises out of the Bible's narrative of Jesus Christ and his saving work. It was also really important that we should both how this doctrine inspires our worship and leads to life.

In each lesson, there is a section to read followed by a set of questions for reflection and questions for discussion. We have designed the questions for reflection and discussion with a practical emphasis to force you to engage the material in a prayerful way that should inspire worship and lead to a fuller understanding of how to live as a disciple of Christ. The questions for reflection have personal emphasis while the discussion questions are oriented toward groups.

For Christians who want to get a good foundation in the basics, this study is a complete, self-contained study on God and the presence of evil. For Christians who want to go deeper, we recommend reading Michael Horton's book *Core Christianity: Finding yourself in God's Story*.

Before you begin the first lesson, watch this video where Michael Horton gives an overview of what you can expect in this study: <https://vimeo.com/209440643/97bb98ad71>.

## LESSON 1: WHO IS GOD?

### READ

J. I. Packer in his famous book *Knowing God* wrote,

What makes life worthwhile is having a big enough objective, something which catches our imagination and lays hold of our allegiance; and this the Christian has in a way that no other person has. For what higher, more exalted, and more compelling goal can there be than to know God? (34)

It is here where the modern attack of belief in God is most felt. Christopher Hitchens in *God Is Not Great: How Religion Poisons Everything* argued the case that belief in God is irrational, immoral, and takes away from a meaningful life. A key point to his overall distrust of God is tied to the existence of evil and that religious people, above all, are most responsible for evil in the world.

The most challenging part in Christopher Hitchens' work is that it tugs on our emotions. Everyone desires a world in which evil doesn't exist. Why doesn't God fix this? Why does God allow evil?

When we consider the history of humanity, we are overwhelmed with the fact of evil, and much of this evil was done in the name of God or the gods or some religious conviction. From child sacrifice in the ancient polytheistic cultures of the Ancient Near East to the religious ideologies behind Nazi Germany, religion—and often a form of Christianity—has been responsible for much of the evil in the world. But it doesn't stop here. We can think of the senseless, meaningless death caused by natural disasters and famines. How can God be good and great? Think of the mother who suffers a miscarriage. Why would God allow such a reality?

### **The Bible Asks the Tough Questions.**

The Bible doesn't ignore the harsh realities that we experience. God isn't without answers to the pain. The Bible even gives words to our pain, revealing that God invites us to embrace life as it is. In fact, there is a famous psalm in the Bible that we can draw comfort from that seems to contain no hope on a first reading. It's Psalm 88, a song of the Sons of Korah, and it's meant to be sung by the entire congregation of Israel. It was probably used in especially dark times.

Psalm 88 describes the human experience of being without hope, feeling as if God has completely abandoned you. And unlike many lament psalms that turn from sorrow to joy and praise, this psalm ends in the darkness with which it began: “You have caused my beloved and my friend to shun me; my companions have become darkness” (v 18).

But, as I said, this psalm is not without hope; it’s just hidden within the darkness. The beauty of this psalm is that it is even in the Bible. A less honest Holy Book would leave this out. That God allows his Word to contain such honesty reveals that God is aware of our pain. God knows that, at times, we feel abandoned. God knows that our experience of life is harsh, and that we struggle to know that he is good and great. Yet the Bible also places this psalm in context, and thus our experience of suffering, pain, and the feeling of God’s absence is in a larger story of God’s work in the world.

The Psalms give voice to God’s saving work and loving presence. Consider a few examples:

Great is the LORD and greatly to be praised  
in the city of our God!  
His holy mountain, beautiful in elevation,  
is the joy of all the earth,  
Mount Zion, in the far north,  
the city of the great King. (Psalm 48:1–2)

Great is our Lord, and abundant in power;  
his understanding is beyond measure. (Psalm 147:5)

Oh, how abundant is your goodness,  
which you have stored up for those who fear you  
and worked for those who take refuge in you,  
in the sight of the children of mankind! (Psalm 31:19)

The LORD works righteousness

and justice for all who are oppressed.

He made known his ways to Moses,

his acts to the people of Israel.

The LORD is merciful and gracious,

slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. (Psalm 103:6–8)

When we come to passages of praise and thanksgiving, like the laments, we must ask: Why is this here? Praises and thanksgivings are not in the Bible because they ignore reality, but because they acknowledge more of reality, that God has acted in history to save his people from sin and evil.

Psalm 103 is a great example of this. There, David remembers what God has done in history through saving his people from Egyptian bondage. He recalls the times of Israel's sin, their unwillingness to enter the promised land, their idolatry that often involved horrendous practices such as child sacrifice, and their refusal to care for orphans and widows. He reminds God's people that God forgives and heals. He remembers that humans are weak and needy, that life is short and hard. He reveals that God cares and that he reigns with compassion and upholds justice for the weak.

The praises of the Psalms are grounded in a reality of a saving God who cares for his people.

### **Who is God?**

Like David, when we think about the harsh realities of life, we have to consider who God is, remembering what God has done in the person of Jesus Christ. Through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, God has shown compassion to the world. He offers his Son, Jesus, as the perfect sacrifice for sin. He raised from the dead his Son, Jesus, as a demonstration of his love, promising that we who trust in Jesus will rise like him. In Jesus, we see that God has fulfilled his Old Testament promises to make the world new (see Isaiah 64:1–12). And because of Jesus, the apostle Paul could say:

For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us. For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now. And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who

have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. For in this hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience. (Rom. 8:18-25)

The Bible reveals a God who is good and great, a God who has shown his faithfulness throughout history, saving his people from Egyptian bondage, leading them through the wilderness, sending Jesus Christ to live and die for the sins of the world, rise for our justification, and ascend as king over all creation where he is restoring the world to its right order, where mercy and justice will reign over all. As we go through this study, we will consider God, evil, and how he plans to end it so that we can have confidence that God really is good and great.

### QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. How has the existence of evil and suffering in the world and in your own life affected you?

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2. Write down a couple of ways Christ's life, death, and resurrection speaks to God's goodness and greatness in the midst of suffering.

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3. Was there ever a time when you were speechless with some great emotion? Look up a psalm that might speak to that emotion and write down how you might use it to bring that emotion before God.

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## QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Consider how the Bible doesn't shy away from the sufferings and trials of life in this world. How might you use this fact to comfort someone suffering?

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2. Why is hope something that is not seen?

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3. What are some ways that our unseen hope touches our daily lives right now?

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## LESSON 2: CONSIDERING GOD'S ATTRIBUTES

### READ

“In truth, the knowledge that God has revealed of himself in nature and Scripture far surpasses human imagination and understanding,” wrote Herman Bavinck. “The distance between God and us is the gulf between the Infinite and the finite, between eternity and time, between being and becoming, between the All and the nothing” (Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 2.30–31). Bavinck’s words capture the thrust of Scripture. Psalm 19:1 says, “The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork.” And Romans 1:19–20 says all through the pages of Scripture and the world around us, an incomprehensible God confronts us:

For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse.

In the Bible, God is not a small matter. He is the main actor. The entire story of redemption from Genesis to Revelation is about God and his saving work in Jesus Christ. God gave us the Bible through the prophets and apostles so that we might have eternal life. “And this is eternal life,” said Jesus as he prayed to the Father, “That they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent” (John 17:3).

In dealing with the reality of evil in our hearts and experiences, in society and our homes, we need to know that God is great and good. God is great, able to overcome evil. And God is good, not desiring or embracing evil. In this lesson, we are going to consider who God is so that we can have confidence that he is able to save us from evil and draw us into a life of goodness and love.

### The Bible Teaches That God is Great.

God alone is eternal, immortal, all-powerful, all-wise, and all-knowing (1 Tim. 6:15–16). In fact, his spectacular majesty is beyond our ability to comprehend. These attributes of God are called his ***incommunicable attributes*** because they belong to God alone. Let’s consider some of these more closely.

- God is independent of all created things (Acts 17:24–25). The technical term is aseity. He exists as the Triune God from all eternity in perfect love and fellowship.

Unlike us creatures whose explanation for our existence is found in God, God is self-existent. There is no explanation for God's existence outside of himself. He is the reason for his own existence.

- God is pure spirit. He is not made up of parts and has no means of corruption as we do (Jn 4:24). Another way to say this is to say that God is simple and unified. Unlike us, God is not composed of parts. He is not divisible. We can't break God down into elements. He is not like a bicycle that can be taken apart and analyzed according to the individual pieces. This means that even God's attributes are not parts of God. God is God's attributes. And God's attributes are God.
- God is perfect and unchangeable (Jm. 1:17; Mal. 3:6). Usually in the Bible we find God is unchangeable in his character. He is faithful and committed to his promise. God can be so committed because, unlike us, God lacks nothing. There is nothing lacking for God to gain, and since God is perfect, there is nothing for him to lose.
- God is omniscient. Rising above our limited perspective, God knows the end from the beginning because he is eternal (Ps. 139:16). To say that God is omniscient means that God knows everything that there is to know. Unlike us, God doesn't have a limited perspective. God isn't surprised. God is never taken off guard. God knows everything that was, is, and will be.
- God is omnipresent. God rises above the category of "place" that limits us in our words, speech, actions, and presence (Jer. 23:24). The apostle Paul captures this well when he says, "There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call—one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all" (Eph. 4:4-6).
- God is omnipotent. That is, he is all-powerful. Psalm 24:8 says that the Lord is "strong and mighty," and Jeremiah 32:27 declares that he is "the God of all flesh" for whom "nothing is too hard." God is not just quantitatively greater than his creatures, but he is also qualitatively greater (Matt. 19:26).

### **The Bible Teaches that God is Good.**

Everything God does is good because God is pure good. While people can be loving, compassionate, and merciful, showing concern for justice and righteousness, these attributes are only analogies of those God holds in complete perfection. These are also known as God's ***communicable attributes***.

Consider how you relate to your infant or child, or an elderly parent. Similarly, God condescends to us as our heavenly Father (Matt. 7:11; Lk. 11:13).

- God is loving, compassionate, and merciful. The biblical story shows us a God who is love (1 Jn. 4:8). Though he is high in the heavens above us, majestic in glory, he is yet full of compassion and mercy, so that “while we were enemies,” Christ died for us (Rom. 5:10).
- God is just and holy. Holiness is the moral, transcendent perfection of God (Isa. 6:3). It is the purity of his goodness; there is no evil in him at all. God’s holiness asserts that he alone defines what is good; hence, his judgment is good. While the judgment of sinners in the Bible is often seen as cruel and unfair, God’s goodness is seen in his just judgment of sin (Nah. 1:3). Just think about how you feel when you hear about someone receiving a light sentence for a heinous crime, such as rape or murder. We know innately that there is something wrong if evil is allowed to flourish. God is good precisely because he doesn’t overlook injustice but rather condemns it (Prov. 17:15).
- God is faithful. God is faithful to his Word. He is faithful to his justice and holiness. He does not change, because he is faithful to himself. Yet he is also faithful to his promises, sending his Son to fulfill the law and bear our curse. Because of his great love, he found the way through his Son’s sacrifice on the cross to be faithful to his justice and greatness while showing merciful love and saving compassion: “It was to show his righteousness at the present time, so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus” (Rom. 3:26).

The knowledge of God’s attributes helps us to meet present day evils without despair. We might not know *why* certain things happen, but we serve a God who knows everything that was, and is, and will be. We might not have *the power* to solve the problems of society, but God is all powerful, able to conquer any evil that opposes him and his people. God’s goodness and greatness give us hope in the midst of the presence of evil, because he alone is willing and able to destroy it completely.

## QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. Pick three of God’s incommunicable attributes and write down some ways that attributes of God might affect your daily life.

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2. Pick one of God's communicable attributes and write down some ways you bear the image of God with by having that attribute.

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3. Take any one of the attributes of God. Think of a time in your life where it would really matter that God had that particular attribute. How might you praise God for that aspect of who he is?

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### QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. What are some attributes of God we can see from nature? What are the attributes we can only learn from the Bible?

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2. How does knowing God's attributes bring you hope?

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3. If a friend from church confessed to you that they had a hard time believing in God because of some evil or suffering in their life, the temptation might be to rebuke them for having weak faith. But how might we be compassionate toward a person with such a confession? What should we do when people admit struggles and doubts?

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## LESSON 3: HOW SHOULD WE UNDERSTAND EVIL?

### READ

The attributes of God show us that he is both good and great. Yet when we watch the news or experience personal tragedy, we are confronted by realities that aren't good and great. It seems almost impossible to affirm God's goodness and greatness amid the horrific evils in the world.

Throughout the pages of Scripture, we're introduced to a self-existent, eternal, and all-powerful God who is also loving, gracious, and merciful. In the opening lines of Genesis, we are told that this God spoke the universe into existence by the word of his power and "does according to his will among the host of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth." This God, according to Jesus, is not only great and powerful, though; he's also *infinitely good*. In fact, at the end of the day Jesus says that after the Fall, "No one is good *except* God alone" (Lk. 18:19; Mk. 10:18). Yet evil still exists. In this lesson, we are going to consider what the Bible teaches about evil.

### **Evil is a corruption of creation.**

Sometimes people imagine that evil is a necessary part of ultimate reality. It's the opposite of good, and some people say that equal forces balance the powers of the cosmos. Other times people imagine that God created evil, that God willed it into existence, and that he upholds it for the time being.

Both views are wrong. The Bible tells the story about a supremely good and majestic God who created a world that was good. After God created the world, he called it good: "And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day" (Gen. 1:31).

The story continues. As God placed Adam, the man he had created, in the garden, and he made a woman to be with him and help him in his task to govern all of creation (Gen. 1:28; 2:15; 2:18–24). Adam called his wife Eve.

Now a key point to this story is that God gave Adam a command. Genesis tells us, "And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, 'You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat

of it you shall surely die” (Gen. 2:16–17). This command reveals an important aspect of the story. God created Adam and Eve with free will, the ability to choose between good and evil, love and hate, obedience and disobedience to the creator who loved them. This is important for what it implies about evil.

Evil is not a timeless principle. Evil is not an independent existing reality. Evil is the corruption of good. It’s a twisting of love. It’s the rebellious actions in history against God’s rule. It’s the resulting reality of sin and death. It’s the corruption of nature resulting in flood, famine, poverty, natural disasters, racism, human trafficking, war, earthquakes, and hurricanes. Evil results from Adam and Eve’s choice to disobey God’s command. Evil is the reality resulting from God’s justice and punishment of human disobedience (Gen. 3:17–19). Evil has infected the entire created world.

The apostle Paul contrasts the state of the entire world as corrupt to reveal the saving work of Christ and how it will change the entire created order. He says, “For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now” (Rom. 8:20–22).

### **God is working all things together for good.**

As we reflect up the world and witness evil both within our hearts and within the created world, it’s important to remember that God is not a helpless victim of evil nor does God allow evil to reign. In *Walking with God Through Pain and Suffering*, Tim Keller explains, “Evil is an intrusion into God’s good creation. And often evil and suffering occur without regard to an individual’s relative moral decency of deserts. But even though, as we will see, the Bible is insistent that suffering is not outside of God’s control, it is crucial to understand evil as an enemy of God” (136).

To say that God is sovereign over evil means that God rules over it, governs it, and uses evil for his purposes. Much of the Old Testament narratives about Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Israel reveal God working right in the middle of evil, saving his people, and using evil to bring about a good purpose. One famous story that illustrates this well is the story of Joseph in Genesis 37–50. Joseph is one of Jacob’s sons. In fact, Joseph is Jacob’s favorite son. One day Joseph had a dream.

The Bible says,

Now Joseph had a dream, and when he told it to his brothers they hated him even more. He said to them, “Hear this dream that I have dreamed: Behold, we were binding sheaves in the field, and behold, my sheaf arose and stood upright. And behold, your sheaves gathered around it and bowed down to my sheaf.” His brothers said to him, “Are you indeed to reign over us? Or are you indeed to rule over us?” So they hated him even more for his dreams and for his words. (Gen. 37:5–8)

Then, having not learned his lesson from the first dream, Joseph has a second dream that he tells his brothers:

Then he dreamed another dream and told it to his brothers and said, “Behold, I have dreamed another dream. Behold, the sun, the moon, and eleven stars were bowing down to me.” But when he told it to his father and to his brothers, his father rebuked him and said to him, “What is this dream that you have dreamed? Shall I and your mother and your brothers indeed come to bow ourselves to the ground before you?” And his brothers were jealous of him, but his father kept the saying in mind. (Gen. 37:9–11)

In both cases, Joseph tells a dream about him ruling over his brothers, and in each case, it stirs his brothers to jealousy. What we might miss in a story like this is how the dream brings out the heart of his brothers. It may not be fair that Joseph would rule his brothers and be recognized as greater than his brothers, but God had done such things in the past. God had chosen their father, Jacob, as the heir to the promises over his brother Esau (Mal. 1:2; Rom. 9:13). God has often chosen the weak over the wise and powerful (1 Cor. 1:26–29). It is God’s right to govern and guide the world in such a way that Joseph would end up a ruler and his brothers as his servants.

After Joseph tells his brothers his dream, his brother’s plot to kill him, but they end up selling him into slavery. Joseph has a hard time in Egypt, landing in prison and being accused of attempted rape. While in prison, God continues to speak to Joseph through dreams, and eventually his interpretations of dreams catch Pharaoh’s attention. Pharaoh dreams of a famine that will hit Egypt and wipe the entire kingdom out. Pharaoh takes Joseph’s interpretation seriously, and he places Joseph as second only to himself over all of Egypt. The famine comes, and because of Joseph, Egypt is prepared.

In a surprising twist because of the surplus in Egypt and Joseph’s position of power, he is able to also save his brothers who had sold him into slavery years before. Joseph’s first dreams had come about. He was now a ruler over his brothers. They were afraid that he might take his revenge, but Joseph reveals to them how God works: “As for you, you meant

evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today” (Gen. 50:20).

This story drives home the point that—for the time being—God allows evil, but God is also working all things together for good.

### QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. Has there been a time in your life when you doubted God’s goodness because of some evil you experienced or saw?

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2. Can you think of some good things that have come out of your times of suffering or trial?

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3. Do you tend to put God on trial every time something evil happens? How does the Bible give us reasons to trust God even though we experience evil and suffering?

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**QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION**

1. Consider how God works through even bad things to bring good things to his people. What does this tell you about the power and sovereignty of God over evil in this world?

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2. How do natural disasters point to evil being a corruption of God’s good creation?

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3. How might we read the Bible as a book from which to draw hope and courage rather than as a book that simply gives us some information?

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## LESSON 4 : GOD'S PLAN TO DEFEAT EVIL

### READ

The existence of evil can be one of the most emotionally difficult challenges to faith in God, and when this challenge comes we need to remember that God has a plan to defeat evil that he has set in motion.

At the beginning of Jesus' ministry, he took on the evil and sin in the world. Right after being baptized in the wilderness Jesus encountered Satan, allowed himself to be tempted, and in this way began his resistance of evil and the other worldly powers. Jesus' ministry of healings, exorcisms, and even his preaching are demonstrations of the kingdom of God that opposed the powers of sin and death. In this lesson, we will consider God's plan to defeat evil.

### **God defeats evil through Jesus' cross and resurrection.**

In the beginning of the Bible—in the book of Genesis—God created the first human couple, Adam and Eve. They were supposed to watch and tend God's created world, but through the temptation of the serpent (who we would later come to know as Satan), Adam and Eve sinned. They rebelled against God, choosing to trust the words of the serpent over the word of God. After Adam and Eve sinned, God made a promise: "I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel" (Gen. 3:15).

This prophecy Jesus accomplished through his cross and resurrection. Through the cross—the place of death and defeat—Jesus triumphed over the evil powers at work in the world (Eph. 1:19–21). By his sinless life and perfect sacrifice for sin, Jesus conquered sin's power (Rev. 12:9). Through the cross Jesus dealt Satan a deathblow. In this current time—between the cross and second coming—we wait for Jesus to subdue Satan, sin, and death under his feet (see Psalm 2 and Romans 16:20).

For God to defeat evil, he had to punish sin. He had to pour out his wrath upon sinners like us for our rebellious hearts. Because of the sin of Adam, all humanity is born guilty and corrupt (Rom. 5:12, 16). To defeat evil without punishing us for our sin, he had to send the Son to become like us, sharing our humanity.

The Bible says, “Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might break the power of him who holds the power of death—that is, the devil” (Heb. 2:14). This means that when God judged Jesus for the sins of the world, he began his defeat of evil, and with the resurrection Jesus brought eternal life that we could receive through faith (John 3:16, Rom. 3:21–22; 5:1; Eph. 2:8).

With Christ's resurrection from the dead, a new reality has burst forth into the universe—a redemption of cosmic proportions. As fully man, Jesus has entered into God's holy presence in the highest heavens above every rule and authority (Rev. 5:12). He went to the depths so that he might ascend to the highest heavens and spread the light of God's redemption everywhere.

Most kings send their servants to die for them in battle, but not so with Jesus. Christ's rule as king began with his suffering on our behalf (Rev. 17:14). Once he has saved all his chosen people, Christ will establish his kingdom in all its final glory. He will rule over a completely new heavens and new earth. In that realm, there will be peace instead of war. Death and grief and pain will be replaced with rivers of eternal life and joy. Everyone will have plenty of food, clothing, and shelter, and the earth, with all its plants and animals, will be easy and safe place in which to work and live. God himself will be the light of the sun, and Christ the king will rule in perfect wisdom and love.

### **God will reign over evil when Jesus returns.**

Today it can seem as if Christ is not ruling over evil. How can he be reigning if evil still exists and the devil seems to be winning? Christ won the war, but many battles are still waging while Christ gathers his people from the four corners of the earth.

Christ continues to conquer sin and the devil by saving people from the power of the devil and bringing them into his kingdom (Col. 1:13). Jesus extends his kingdom rule by using his church to declare his gospel to the world (Matt. 28:16–20). Christ's rule is revealed in the power of the Word of God going out and redeeming those lost in sin. Christ reigns over evil by interceding on behalf of those who believe in him, saving them from their sin and misery and pouring his Spirit out upon them (Col. 2:13–15; Eph. 1:3–14; Rom. 5:5). That is the power that Christ's reign brings today.

We experience Christ's reign over evil when God pours out his grace and the heavenly gifts upon us (2 Cor. 5:1–10). His glory and our good are now the same (Col. 2:6–15; Phil. 2:5–11). He gives us all the good things that we need for life and godliness. Christ also rules by putting the sword of the Spirit, the Word of God, into our hands. We defend ourselves with the best weapons of the king of glory! With the sword of the Spirit in the power of

prayer, we can subdue the enemy's lies and deceptions that infect us and tempt us to doubt Christ's reign.

Jesus' victory doesn't just restore broken sinners. Because of it we also anticipate the restoration of a broken world. The apostle Paul said that because of the work of Jesus, "The creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God" (Rom. 8:21). While Jesus was on earth, he demonstrated that he had power over natural evil (Mark 4:39), and, having gained victory over sin, he has also gained victory over the natural evils that accompany sin's entrance into the world.

Because Christ is victorious, we too share in that victory. Yet although our victory is sure, we must persevere until Christ returns to judge his enemies. The Bible says, "They will make war on the Lamb, and the Lamb will conquer them, for he is Lord of lords and King of kings, and those with him are called and chosen and faithful" (Rev. 17:14).

The hidden wisdom of God is seen in our weakness, and suffering for his grace is seen in our complete dependence upon him (Eph. 3:7-13). We conquer with Christ by suffering and dying to ourselves and the world and living for Christ (Rev. 12:11). Our suffering is our glory (Eph. 3:7-13). As we are united to Christ by faith, our suffering is a participation in undoing death and fear in our lives. We are freed to undo the effects of shame and sin by his power and glory now at work in us.

## QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. Many times our life does not seem victorious. Have there been times when it has seemed Christianity hasn't worked for you?

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2. What was most difficult to hear in this lesson?

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3. What was the most hopeful thing you learned in this lesson?

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**QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION**

1. We tend to expect God’s reign now to be flashy and conform to our ideas of what is impressive and strong. How does Jesus’ conquering death by dying on a cross give us a different way of understanding how God reveals his power?

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2. How are sin and evil related?

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3. Paul tells the Corinthians in 2 Corinthians 4:18 that “the things that are seen are transient but the things that are unseen are eternal.” What are some ways we can remind ourselves to hope for the unseen eternal things when we are tempted to despair because of the evil and suffering that are seen all around us?

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