



Winter 2018 Discipleship Group Materials

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Introduction

In this cold and bleak season of the year, we will spend six weeks focused on the awesome God to whom we belong—the God who is Love, revealed in Jesus; the One who is so much more than we could ever imagine! Through this series, we will explore some of the characteristics of God found in scripture and experienced in our own lives. The intention is not to advance our learning *about* God so much as to enrich our *experience of* God.

We will take time to think about words often used of God—*holy, just, mighty and good*—and what these words meant to the writers of the Bible. We will consider how these characteristics were manifested through Jesus' life in Palestine 2,000 years ago. And we will challenge one another with the implications for our own lives today.

Exploring the characteristics or attributes of God can easily become a theoretical, abstract activity. While we will fully engage our minds to discuss the meanings of and tensions between various divine characteristics, we also recognize our human limitations. Our thoughts are not God's thoughts (Isaiah 55:8-9). By focusing on these themes, we want to enter more into the mystery of God and inspire a sense of worship, rather than trying to distill or dissect God into intellectual categories.

Throughout the series we will use the biblical claim that "God is Love" as the lens through which we view other dimensions of God's nature and character. While *holy, just, mighty and good* are adjectives that describe God, in 1 John 4:8 we read that God is not only loving (adjective), God is Love (noun). Similarly, Paul affirms the preeminence of love in chapter 13 of his first letter to the Corinthians, which concludes: "And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love."

It would be very strange indeed to spend six weeks discussing the character of someone who was with us in the room without actually talking to that person directly! In this series particularly, then, we want to ensure time and space during our Sunday services, small group meetings, and individually in the week to speak to God and to wait expectantly to hear from God.

Our prayer is that through this series each of us will grow closer to God, experiencing more of God in our everyday lives; and will be inspired to live in ways that better reflect the divine image within us. We will therefore take time to think through how our understanding of what God is like impacts how we live out our lives in practical ways. We will share stories of how we have encountered and responded to God in different contexts, and we will celebrate the mystery of a God who is so much more than we can describe or understand.

Overview

Each week we will explore an aspect of God's character. Since we are attempting to deepen our understanding and experience of the same God each week, these different characteristics will necessarily overlap. We will include in each of the weeks a story about Jesus, or a story Jesus told.

The six weeks of the series will cover the following:

- *January 7: Are You Love?*
The very essence of God is Love, as revealed in the ancient Trinitarian understanding of God as a community of persons held together through interdependent, deferential relationship; God invites us to embrace Love.
- *January 14: Are You Holy?*
God's holiness can be viewed as awesome beauty and perfection that draws us into intimacy with God and one another, transforming us into healthy, mature and complete children of our loving heavenly parent.
- *January 21: Are You Just?*
God breaks cycles of injustice through love, forgiveness and mercy; champions and protects the oppressed; and calls us to act in defense of the vulnerable, let go of our demands for vengeance, and pursue a way of mercy and non-violence.
- *January 28: Are You Mighty?*
God is Love—and as love is vulnerable, risks rejection, and allows us freedom, God's will is not always done. God calls us into partnership, and as we submit our plans to God, we can trust God to be with us, working all things together for good.
- *February 4: Are You Good?*
God's goodness is embodied and defined in Jesus. Immanuel, God "with us" suffers with us and walks us through our pain; and although we continue to wrestle with our questions, God is faithful and trustworthy—and calls us to be the same.
- *February 11: Are You More Than We Can Imagine?*
We do not need to understand or explain God—we are invited to live as God's children, enjoying and exploring God, using our imaginations, and being open to other people's perspectives and experiences.

Practicalities

Messages

In this packet you will find the discussion questions for each of the first 5 weeks. The questions assume you have heard the message for that week, so if you were not able to be at Cedar Ridge that Sunday, please listen or watch the message online (www.crcc.org/messages/) or via the Cedar Ridge app.

Prayer

The materials for each week include a prayer practice as part of the discussion time. We strongly encourage you not to rush over that part of your time together as a group. We get to know someone so much better by spending time with them, rather than from reading and talking about them!

Questions

As always, if you have questions or comments on the material in this series, please send them to us at questions@crcc.org.

Recommended Reading

Thousands of books have been written about the attributes, character and nature of God! The resources listed in the Appendix represent a very small sample of the many helpful books available. Feel free to share with your group other titles that have been helpful to you in deepening your experience of God.

Additional Activities

Creative Cup Coffee House – January 20, 7 PM

As our community ponders the justice of God, fittingly, we will also commemorate as a nation the life of Martin Luther King, Jr. Our annual *Creative Cup Coffee House* will feature an art show entitled "Breaking Down Barriers," as well as live music by Africa American social commentator Crys Matthews. Coffee and dessert will be served at this family-friendly event. This is a great opportunity to invite family, friends and neighbors to Cedar Ridge.

Q&A Session – February 4, 11:30 AM

Immediately following the Sunday service there will be a time for open discussion of the topics covered through this series. Feel free to bring your questions, ideas, and doubts to this informal conversation at the front of the auditorium. If you have specific questions that you would like to submit in advance, send them to questions@crcc.org.

Potluck Lunch – February 11, 11:30 AM

Immediately after the final service in this series, we will hold a potluck lunch. Please bring a dish to share, and plan to stay to make new friends and catch up with old ones!

Pancake Dinners—February 13

There are no questions for the final week of the series. Instead, we encourage groups to meet for Shrove Tuesday pancake dinners, and invite neighbors and friends. If you have space for additional people to join your group that evening, please let us know, and we will post sign-ups online and in the Commons.

Ash Wednesday—February 14, 7 PM

We will gather together on Ash Wednesday to mark the beginning of the season of Lent with a traditional evening service including the imposition of ashes, and periods of reflection and silence. There will be no childcare, but everyone and all ages are welcome.

Winter Discipleship Series 2018 Who Are You, God?

Week 1: Are You Love?

We begin this series on the Sunday when we celebrate Epiphany: the celebration of the “manifestation” (the meaning of Epiphany) of Jesus to the world. This sets the tone for the whole series because as followers of Jesus, our conviction is that if we want to see what God is like, we look at Jesus. The baptism of Jesus is a traditional Epiphany story, and in this story we see God manifest in a unique way as Father, Son and Spirit. This ancient Trinitarian view of God as a community of persons in a loving, interdependent relationship can help us understand and experience God as One who *is* love, and not just One who happens to be loving. God is Love; the very essence of God is Love, and this is the lens through which we will explore all other aspects of God in the series.

Jesus taught and demonstrated love, and we can experience this more—both love for ourselves, and also in loving others. In the story of the return of the prodigal son, Jesus uses the metaphor of a loving, vulnerable and distraught father who misses his lost son desperately. Jesus shows us that we belong to God, not because we are owned like some kind of slave to God, but as God’s children. We are connected to God and to one another as a family is connected. This is the basis of love: we belong.

This week’s discussion questions

1. What insights did you gain from the message this past Sunday? What was most helpful for you? What was difficult for you?
2. Does the concept “God is Love” ring true for you existentially? Is it easy and natural for you to experience God’s love, or more of a struggle? What factors in your life have led to this posture?
3. Read Mark 1: 9-11. If baptism was for the forgiveness of sins, why do you think Jesus was baptized? What does this say about God?
4. How might the traditional Trinitarian way of viewing God as a community of persons held together through interdependent, deferential relationship help us see that God is Love? What are the implications of this for our universe (and reality as a whole), the world around us, and our own personal lives?

5. Read Luke 15:11-31.
 - a. In what ways do you identify with the son who leaves in this story?
 - b. In what ways do you identify with the son who stays?
 - c. Do you identify at all with the father in this story?
 - d. What does Jesus tell us about God through this story?
 - e. How does Jesus' view of God here differ from your own?
 - f. How could you reconcile those differences?

6. Set aside 10 minutes for this reflective exercise.
 - First read the three passages below. Read them slowly and out loud. Try to take in the mystery and meaning of the words and the reality they speak about. Take about 5 minutes for this.
 - Then do the simple breath prayer exercise below. Take about 5 minutes for this.

No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us. This is how we know that we live in him and he in us: He has given us of his Spirit. And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the Savior of the world. If anyone acknowledges that Jesus is the Son of God, God lives in them and they in God. And so we know and rely on the love God has for us. God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in them.

1 John 4: 12-16 (NIV)

"My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one—I in them and you in me—so that they may be brought to complete unity. Then the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me."

John 17: 20-23 (NIV)

For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God. For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received a spirit of adoption. When we cry, "Abba! Father!" it is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God.

Romans 8: 14-16 (NRSV)

Prayer Exercise

In this simple breath prayer exercise we will make room for the Spirit to *"bear witness with our spirit that we are children of God."*

- Sit comfortably with your back straight, feet planted on the floor, arms relaxed and hands supported in your lap. Close your eyes and relax your shoulders.

- To begin, listen to your breath as you breathe. Feel your breath in your nostrils, chest and abdomen, inhaling and then exhaling fully and deeply—hold your exhale a bit longer than usual to completely expel air. This has a very soothing, cleansing effect. Breathing accompanied by prayer will also help you to “wake up” and “breathe in” the love of God as you calm your mind, heart and body.
- As you breathe, imagine the room filled with God’s love for you. Imagine you are like a sponge in a vast ocean. God is all around you and God is in you. You are in God and God is in you. Take a few moments to get used to this. Allow yourself to feel God’s presence and passionate affection for you.
- As you breathe in, breathe in God’s love. As you breathe out, relax into this love. With each in-breath imagine yourself being filled more and more with God’s love. With each out-breath relax deeper and deeper into this love. Don’t resist it but surrender to it. If your thoughts stray or you begin to feel unloved, just become aware of your breathing again, and focus on breathing in God’s love.

Practice during the week:

Take 10 minutes each day this week to repeat the exercise above.

Winter Discipleship Series 2018 Who Are You, God?

Week 2: Are You Holy?

“Holy” is a word that is used often in scripture, as well as in hymns and other religious songs. But it is a term we rarely use in everyday life, and when we do, it is generally in a derogatory “holier than thou” sense. Holy means separate, or set apart—and for some of us, the holiness of God conjures up images of an austere authority figure: an unapproachable king ruling from on high, perhaps; or a judge who is displeased with our performance. And yet Jesus—the exact representation of God’s being (Hebrews 1:3)—is God with us, one of us, and a friend of sinners.

The Jewish people understood that God was so much “more” than the creaturely idols of surrounding cultures; and that they were called to be special, reflecting the just, merciful and loving nature of God. In the stories of the Jewish people’s experiences of God—and much more fully in the life of Jesus—we find holiness presented as being *dedicated* to God; *belonging* to God as children of an all-loving parent. We see in the gospels how the holiness of Jesus is not contaminated by people’s brokenness, but brings wholeness and healing to such people. Far from making God unapproachable, holiness invites us to join God in a loving, life-giving and inclusive relationship. It is from this oneness with God and others that we experience transformation, learning to love even our enemies, and to be salt and light in our homes, neighborhoods, and society.

This week’s discussion questions

1. What struck you about the message on Sunday? What did you find most helpful? What was most difficult or challenging?
2. What does the word “holy” mean to you?
 - a. When you read or sing that God is holy, how does this make you feel? What images does it conjure up?
 - b. Do you think of yourself as holy? Why or why not? What do you think a holy person is like?
3. Read Isaiah 6:1-8. Isaiah’s vision of God includes Jewish religious imagery, such as a temple, smoke, and an altar.
 - a. What might this imagery have communicated to Isaiah?
 - b. How does Isaiah respond (in v5 and in v8)? Why do you think he responds in these ways?

4. Read Matthew 21:12-17. In this second story about a temple, merchants (selling animals for sacrifices, and changing money for the payment of the temple tax) had set up shop in the Court of the Gentiles—the only part of the temple grounds open to non-Jews.
- How would you describe Jesus' actions in this story?
 - Why do you think Jesus acted this way?
 - Why were the priests so indignant?
 - What might this story tell us about Jesus' view of holiness?

5. In the description of the death of Jesus in Matthew's gospel account, we have another reference to the temple in Jerusalem:

And when Jesus had cried out again in a loud voice, he gave up his spirit. At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom.

Matthew 27:50-51 (NIV)

The curtain hung in front of the "Holy of Holies," where God's presence was believed to dwell, and which only the High Priest could enter once a year after meticulous preparation.

- Why do you think the writer of Matthew's gospel included this in his account?
 - What does it tell us about God's holiness?
6. There is no record in the gospel accounts of Jesus talking about holiness, but he does teach about the need to be different or set apart for God in the Sermon on the Mount. Read Matthew 5:13-17 and 43-48.
- What does this passage reveal about Jesus's attitude to the Jewish law?
 - How are we called to be "set apart"? What does this look like in your own life?
 - What do you think it means to be "perfect"?
 - In what areas of your life do you want to become more "perfect"?
7. Set aside the next 10 minutes to focus on the holiness of God. Read the following slowly, taking time between each step.
- Sit comfortably, with your back straight and your feet flat on the floor. Become aware of your breathing: breathe slowly and deeply, filling and emptying your lungs completely.
 - Quiet your mind: let go of any tensions, worries and distracted thoughts. Physically relax your muscles.
 - Picture God's holiness as being like the sun in a clear blue sky—bright and warm. Feel the warmth on your face and arms.
 - Welcome God's light into every part of your being. Allow yourself to bask in the holy, healing love of God.

- If there are relationships, situations or concerns weighing on you, open them up to God's holy light.
 - As you breathe, inhale God's holiness; exhale any guilt, anxiety or striving.
 - Ask God to help you on your journey to wholeness.
8. How do you feel as a result of this exercise? Is there anything you want to share with the group?

Practice during the week:

Set aside 10 minutes each day this week to repeat the exercise above.

Winter Discipleship Series 2018
Who Are You, God?

Week 3: Are You Just?

Humanity seems to have an innate sense of justice. We have all been treated unjustly, and we feel that very acutely. We have also seen injustice dealt out to others, and we are often stirred to speak up and act. But we are each perpetrators of injustice, too. We have treated others unfairly in personal ways, and often we are complicit in systemic injustice through our silence and through our cooperation with such systems when they benefit us. Sometimes even our reaction to injustice can lead to anger, violence and judgment that itself becomes another injustice.

This week we consider God as “just.” God’s nature is to break this cycle of injustice through love, forgiveness and mercy. God is a champion and protector of the oppressed, who hears the cries of the subjugated, and who calls us to act in defense of those who cannot defend themselves. We recognize that life is often not at all fair, and that a large part of striving for a more just world requires us to let go of an expectation or demand for vengeance (that kind of balancing of the scales of justice) and to pursue a way of mercy and non-violence.

This week’s discussion questions

1. What insights did you gain from the message this past Sunday? What was most helpful for you? What was difficult for you?
2. Read the following passages and discuss what they say about God’s nature, and what the implications are for our own lives:
 - a. Deuteronomy 10:17-18
 - b. Exodus 2:23-25
 - c. Micah 6: 6-8
3. The speaker on Sunday suggested that overall injustice eventually destroys itself, citing the rise and fall of empires throughout history. Do you agree with this? Do you think ultimately justice prevails?
4. Read the story Jesus tells in Matthew 18:21-35
 - a. There are two servants in this story. How do you identify with each one and why?
 - b. In what ways is this story unfair? In what ways is it fair?
 - c. What does this story say about Jesus’ view of justice?

5. Read the following two quotes:

Here's another old saying that deserves a second look: 'Eye for eye, tooth for tooth.' Is that going to get us anywhere? Here's what I propose: 'Don't hit back at all.' If someone strikes you, stand there and take it. If someone drags you into court and sues for the shirt off your back, giftwrap your best coat and make a present of it. And if someone takes unfair advantage of you, use the occasion to practice the servant life. No more tit-for-tat stuff. Live generously. You're familiar with the old written law, 'Love your friend,' and its unwritten companion, 'Hate your enemy.' I'm challenging that. I'm telling you to love your enemies. Let them bring out the best in you, not the worst. When someone gives you a hard time, respond with the energies of prayer, for then you are working out of your true selves, your God-created selves. This is what God does. He gives his best—the sun to warm and the rain to nourish—to everyone, regardless: the good and bad, the nice and nasty. If all you do is love the lovable, do you expect a bonus? Anybody can do that. If you simply say hello to those who greet you, do you expect a medal? Any run-of-the-mill sinner does that

Jesus in Matthew 5:38-48 (The Message)

Nonviolence is the answer to the crucial political and moral questions of our time: the need for man to overcome oppression and violence without resorting to oppression and violence. Man must evolve for all human conflict a method which rejects revenge, aggression and retaliation. The foundation of such a method is love.

Dr. Martin Luther King during his acceptance speech for Nobel Peace Prize in Stockholm, Sweden on December 11, 1964

- a. In what ways are these quotes similar? In what ways are they different?
 - b. What are some situations in your own personal life where you need to practice mercy triumphing over judgment (James 2:13)?
6. How can we work collectively to embody this form of justice and respond to injustice in our society?
7. Take some time to pray for one another and for our church to respond effectively and lovingly to injustice in our society.

Practice during the week:

This week look out for specific ways where you can practice mercy triumphing over judgment.

- At the beginning of each day take a moment to invite God to awaken you to your reactions to unjust treatment.

- Throughout the day be deliberately conscious of your interactions and responses with others. Each time you feel harshly spoken to or treated, take a moment to breathe in God's love and mercy.
- Hold back on your response for a while. When you are more settled consider what would be a merciful and loving response. This does not mean ignoring any wrongdoing. It might mean you challenge the behavior but in a loving way, or you might choose to say nothing. Either way, respond from a center of love and forgiveness, rather than vengeance.
- For each situation, consider an act or spoken word of kindness to that person that they almost certainly don't deserve. Having considered it, do it before the end of the day.

Winter Discipleship Series 2018
Who Are You, God?

Week 4: Are You Mighty?

We believe that God is beyond time and space, powerful, all knowing, and infinitely wise. Yet scripture also portrays God as vulnerable: desiring a relationship with us, and longing for the love bestowed on us to be returned. God offers God's self to us, coming as a servant, who suffers with and for us. God chooses to partner with us in the work of reconciling all things, and we are entrusted to be God's ambassadors, acting on God's behalf. In the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, we continually see this divine tension between miraculous power and sacrificial love. God is Love, and love does not force its way. Love is vulnerable; it risks rejection; and it allows freedom and choice.

When we say that God is "in control" it cannot therefore mean that God get's God's own way all the time, or that God micro-manages all the decisions and activities of each person on earth. God calls us into partnership: we have a responsibility to live a life of love, in accordance with what God has shown us through Jesus; and to submit our plans to God, being open to God's guidance, and asking—as Jesus did—that God's will, not ours, be done. Living in such a way, we can be confident that God is with us in every circumstance, and that the wisdom of God will work all things together for good.

This week's discussion questions

1. Did you practice "mercy triumphing over judgment" this week? How did that go? Is there anything you want to share with the group?
2. What struck you about the message on Sunday? What did you find most helpful? What was most difficult or challenging?
3. When you think of God, do you more naturally think of a God who is powerful, or a God who is vulnerable? Why do you think that way?
4. The speaker on Sunday said that "God is in control" cannot mean God makes everything happen according to God's will. Do you agree or disagree? What incidents in your life have led you to believe that God is (or is not) in control?
5. Read Luke 22:39-53.
 - a. In what ways is Jesus in control in this story?
 - b. In what ways is Jesus not in control?

6. Read the following verses and discuss what it means for God to have a plan for our lives:
 - a. Jeremiah 29:11
 - b. Micah 6:8
 - c. Acts 16:6-10

7. Read Luke 11:1-13.
 - a. Why do you think Jesus instructs his disciples to pray that God's kingdom would come?
 - b. What do you think is the point of the (somewhat humorous) story of the shameless friend?
 - c. What does the comparison between an earthly father and our Heavenly Father teach us about prayer?
 - d. In what ways do you think prayer illustrates partnership between God and people?

8. How does thinking of God as being in control help us to pray? How does thinking of God as not being in total control of everything give more urgency to prayer?

9. Take time to pray for anyone in the group in particular need of God's guidance.
 - a. Have the person share briefly about the situation.
 - b. Pray for God's peace and wisdom in this situation.
 - c. Sit silently for 5 minutes, opening your heart and mind to God's Spirit.
 - d. Pray that God's will would be done in this situation.
 - e. If thoughts, images or feelings came to you during the time of silence that you think might be from God, share them with the group with humility—recognizing that we can all be mistaken. Be careful to only share what you experienced, rather than trying to interpret it for anyone. Above all, before you share something, ask yourself: "Is this love?" If it is not, let go of that thought or feeling.

Practice during the week:

Each morning this week, think through all you need to do in the upcoming day.

- Identify the things that bring you pleasure: thank God for those things, and ask God to help you sense God's presence in them.
- Identify the things that may be difficult for you: ask God to help you act lovingly in those situations, and to be aware of God's presence with you in them.

Each evening this week, think through the activities of the day.

- Think about the times in the day when you experienced God's presence. What happened, and how was God present? What did you do that enabled you to experience God?
- Think about any times in the day when you were resistant to God's presence. What happened, and how did you resist? How could you have thought or acted in a way that would have embraced the reality of God's presence, and channeled more love into the situation?
- Ask God to help you be more embracing of God's presence tomorrow.

Winter Discipleship Series 2018
Who Are You, God?

Week 5: Are You Good?

Scripture is full of statements that God is good, but we live in a reality that does not always feel friendly or safe. We all wrestle with the question of how a good and powerful God can allow bad things to happen, and we struggle to trust in God's goodness in the midst of suffering. Jesus is the one who embodies and defines the goodness of God. We see in Jesus a God who is faithful, trustworthy, and healthy. And Jesus calls us to live the same way.

During his life on earth, Jesus experienced great emotional and physical pain. The incarnation, God "with us" (Immanuel), does not explain the origin of evil and suffering, but it does provide us with a way of viewing suffering. Rather than try to seek a contrived, objective "explanation" for suffering, or to understand suffering as God's will, we find comfort and strength in God's presence with us in our pain, experiencing it with us and walking through it with us.

This week's discussion questions

1. What insights did you gain from the message this past Sunday? What was most helpful for you? What was difficult for you?
2. Is the goodness of God an easy concept for you to accept or more of a struggle? In your view, is the universe essentially friendly or hostile? What life experience has led you to this perspective?
3. How does this week's theme (God is Good) speak to last week's theme (God is Mighty)? Historically, in the Christian tradition, God has been viewed as all-powerful and completely good. What tensions does this create? How might we resolve these tensions?
4. Read the following passages and discuss what they mean with regard to the goodness of God.
 - a. Genesis 1:31
 - b. James 1:17
 - c. Psalm 100
 - d. Psalm 145: 13b – 16

5. In the message on Sunday, the speaker did not present an explanation for evil and suffering in the world, but rather suggested an approach that involves i) working to alleviate suffering wherever we are, and ii) seeing God not as the cause of suffering but subject to it, and with us in it.
 - a. What is your response to this approach?
 - b. Are there more helpful ways to understand and walk through pain and suffering?
 - c. How could we develop deeper trust in God as good?

6. Read the story about Jesus in Luke 7:36-50.
 - a. In what ways do you identify with the woman?
 - b. In what ways do you identify with Simon the Pharisee?
 - c. In what ways does Jesus demonstrate goodness in this story?
 - d. What are some ways you need to be more like Jesus in this regard?
 - e. How might the character of Jesus in this story help us trust more deeply in God as good?

7. Break into groups of 3. Take some time to share and then pray for one another: for the ability to trust God in painful areas of our own lives; and for strength to alleviate the suffering of others.

Practice during the week:

This week's exercise involves setting aside time at the end of the day on 3 days of the week.

Day 1

Reflect on your day and make a list of all the things that happened (big and small) that you feel express the goodness of God. For this moment, ignore any bad things and focus on the good. After reviewing the day, add to your list other good things from your life: things that have happened in the past, ways you feel God has been faithful, ways in which you feel "blessed."

Now read Psalm 100:

Shout for joy to the Lord, all the earth.

Worship the Lord with gladness; come before him with joyful songs.

Know that the Lord is God.

It is he who made us, and we are his; we are his people, the sheep of his pasture.

Enter his gates with thanksgiving and his courts with praise; give thanks to him and praise his name.

For the Lord is good and his love endures forever; his faithfulness continues through all generations.

Spend some time celebrating this psalm, and giving thanks for all the good things in your life.

Invite God to help you be more aware of God's goodness in life in general.

Day 2

Reflect on your day and make a list of all the bad things that happened. Add to your list issues and situations in your life and the world that do not seem at all good. Be honest, and do not hold back.

Now read Psalm 13:

How long, Lord? Will you forget me forever?

How long will you hide your face from me?

How long must I wrestle with my thoughts and day after day have sorrow in my heart?

How long will my enemy triumph over me?

Look on me and answer, Lord my God.

Give light to my eyes, or I will sleep in death, and my enemy will say, "I have overcome him," and my foes will rejoice when I fall.

But I trust in your unfailing love; my heart rejoices in your salvation.

I will sing the Lord's praise, for he has been good to me.

Spend some time talking with God about what is wrong or not good in your life and the world. Use this psalm to help you get in touch with your emotions about this. Get angry if you feel angry. Rail against God about what seems unjust or where you feel God has forgotten you or the world (remember that if God is good, then God can handle our honest feelings and emotions).

End by spending a few minutes in silence. Invite God into this silence. Invite God to show you where God was and is in all this pain and suffering. Sit quietly and open your heart.

Day 3

Repeat day 1.

Winter Discipleship Series 2018
Who Are You, God?

Week 6: Are You More Than We Can Imagine?

Over the course of this six-week series, we have looked at the God who is Love as holy, just, mighty and good. Clearly these few words do not define who God is! In fact, no amount of thinking or studying could ever contain and explain the mystery of God. The good news is that we do not *need* to understand or explain God—we are invited to live as God’s children, enjoying and exploring God, using our imaginations, and being open to other people’s perspectives and experiences. Three of the many ways of experiencing the Divine Mystery are through beauty—including nature and art; relationships with friends and family; and silence and solitude. May we all experience more of God this week!

There are no discussion questions for this week. You are encouraged to meet as a group for Shrove Tuesday pancake dinners, and to invite former group members, neighbors and friends.

Don’t forget the Ash Wednesday service at 7PM on Wednesday February 14.

Winter Discipleship Series 2018
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Appendix: Recommended Reading

Are You Love?

- *Abba's Child: The Cry of the Heart for Intimate Belonging* by Brennan Manning
- *The Inner Voice of Love: A Journey Through Anguish to Freedom* by Henri J. M. Nouwen
- *The Return of the Prodigal Son: A Story of Homecoming* by Henri J. M. Nouwen

Are You Just?

- *Generous Justice: How God's Grace Makes Us Just* by Timothy Keller
- *God of the Oppressed* by James H. Cone

Are You Mighty?

- *God of the Possible: A Biblical Introduction to the Open View of God* by Gregory Boyd
- *The Uncontrolling Love of God: An Open and Relational Account of Providence* by Thomas Jay Oord

Are You Good?

- *Where Is God When It Hurts?* by Philip Yancey
- *The Problem of Pain* by C. S. Lewis
- *When Bad Things Happen to Good People* by Harold S. Kushner