

# Sermon Discussion Guide

## Who Do You Think You Are Talking To? 40 Days Of Prayer – Week 3

(Note – may only be reproduced for use as a participant in MCF's 40 Day of Prayer campaign)

*“The Lord is always good. He is always loving and kind, and his faithfulness goes on and on.” Psalm 100:5 (LB)*

Your prayers and everything else you do are influenced by what you think God is like – perhaps a grumpy old man; a moody father; a cop/enforcer; a dictator; or maybe even a Santa Claus. But what matters is what God is really like, not what we think. Prayer should be based on a familiar relationship and a conversation, not a ritual. Our prayers can have power, passion, and purpose, but until we know what God is really like our prayers can seem like drudgery, not delight. In this discussion we'll focus on understanding of God's goodness: what it means for our prayers and how it can influence the way we pray.

**OPEN YOUR GROUP WITH A PRAYER. THIS IS ONLY A GUIDE – SELECT THE POINTS YOU WANT TO DISCUSS.**

*“I know what I've planned for you,” says the Lord. “I have good plans for you, not plans to hurt you! My plans will give you hope and a good future.” Jeremiah 29:11 (NCV)*

1. How can understanding that God has good plans for us help us pray to him?
2. God's plans for us are for good and to give us hope. Why don't we pray and ask for God's guidance instead of simply making our own choices?

*“Even if my father and mother abandon me, the Lord will hold me close.” Psalm 27:10*

3. Why don't people forgive us and welcome us back as readily as God does?

*“He has not treated us as we deserve for our sins.*

*(In his goodness), he has removed our sins as far from us as the east is from the west.” Psalm 103:12 (NLT)*

4. Knowing that God has forgiven our sins, how could prayer help us let go of shame or guilt that continues to hurt us?

*“I am the good shepherd; I know my own sheep, and they know me, just as my Father knows me and I know the Father. So I sacrifice my life for my sheep.” John 10:14-15 (NLT)*

5. Jesus, the Good Shepherd, sacrificed his life for us, his sheep. How can your prayers be enriched by recognizing that he is working for your own good, leading your life as a good shepherd?

*“Jesus died for our sins ... to make us right with God, filling us with God's goodness.” Romans 4:25 (LB)*

6. There are many examples of God filling us with his goodness in bad times. When natural disasters or terrorist attacks occur, some people are shown at their worst and other are shown at their best. Share stories of people showing God's goodness during such times.

### **Diving Deeper (optional)**

1. Share a time when you felt God had a plan for your life and you followed it.
2. Share a time when God gave you what you needed, not what you asked for.
3. The Bible gives examples where God turned a bad situation into good, such as with Joseph and Job. What are some other stories in the Bible that have the same theme and have encouraged you?

**REVIEW ANY ASSIGNMENTS OR COMMITMENTS MADE DURING YOUR PREVIOUS MEETING.**

## Sermon Discussion Guide Leader Notes

### Suggestions for This Week's Study

- Icebreaker: Ask several people to describe experiences where bad things that happened to them were ultimately used for good.
- Goal: Help the group understand that in order to pray effectively to God we need to understand how God is always good.
- Concluding prayer: God, you are good! Help us to understand the depth of your love. Father, teach us to trust in your plan for our lives and to have faith that you will work all things together for good. Help us accept that because of your goodness, you give us what we need instead of what we deserve. Jesus, thank you for laying down your life for our sins to make us right with God, to fill us with his goodness, and to enable us to live in the house of the Lord forever. Holy Spirit, guide our prayers to draw us into a deeper relationship with our Father in heaven and to glorify his name. Amen.

### Preparing to Lead Your Group

- ✓ **PRAY** for insight as you begin to prepare for leading your group. Ask for God's wisdom, that the Holy Spirit will be the teacher and that you will be God's instrument to lead the group to greater understanding and a willingness to commit to becoming more like God. Prayer should be your primary source of personal preparation for leading your group.
- ✓ **PLAN** where you want to take your group in the next 60-90 days. Is your group strong in some areas and weak in others? How can you challenge the members to live more balanced Christian lives? Consider God's five purposes for the church: Fellowship, Discipleship, Ministry, Mission and Worship, and make a plan to encourage your group members to growth and commitment in their weak areas.
- ✓ **PONDER YOUR PROGRESS** after each session and at the end of a series. Reflect on what went well and what didn't. Re-evaluation is key to your growth as a leader. Consider whether your plan is being effective in moving the group to greater understanding and commitment. How are you doing with leading the discussion: is it stimulating, challenging, and meaningful? Are you able to keep the group on track? Do you need to make some changes?

### Using This Sermon Discussion Guide

- Talk It Over is a tool to aid you in meeting the needs of your group. We've designed it so it can be completed easily within 30-45 minutes. As the discussion leader, you should preview and evaluate the questions based on the needs of your group. Decide in advance what is most important to focus on, should time not allow for the entire lesson.
- Feel free to adapt the format to meet the needs of your group. If your group is mature and wants to dig deeper, consider using the Diving Deeper section or add additional Scripture and ask suitable questions. Remember that this is only a guide.
- The questions relating to Bible study methods are helpful to develop Bible literacy and spiritual maturity in our lives. You can help your group be aware of their needs in these areas by using these questions as a regular part of each discussion.
- Personal applications are essential for growth and should be included in every discussion. When discussing how they will apply principles, group members may state very general goals such as "I need to spend more time in prayer." It is important for you to help people make goals that are very specific and commit to specific plans of action by asking, for example, "How are you going to begin?" An example is to get up 25 minutes earlier each morning, spending 15 minutes reading the Bible and 10 minutes in prayer. Encourage each group member to be accountable to the group for personal progress at the next meeting.
- Your goal as the leader is to bring the group into a stimulating discussion that helps the members recognize their needs for personal life change. Ultimately you want them to be willing to commit to change with accountability to the group. Accountability helps us to persevere in our commitments and achieve the blessings of success.