

Sermons from the Seats

Week 4 | The Color of Rain (Michael and Gina Spehn)

BOTTOM LINE

There is hope in the midst of suffering and loss.

GOAL OF THE GROUP

This world is not the perfect garden created in the beginning of time but rather a broken and struggling world that contains death, suffering and loss. What does God say about suffering and how can we learn about navigating these struggles?

SCRIPTURE

1 Peter 4:13, John 10:10, Isaiah 53:3, Romans 8:17-18, John 16:33, and Galatians 6:2

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. This final week of the series "*Sermons from the Seats*", brings together the truths from each of the previous three weeks. This week we learn from the story of Michael and Gina Spehn who share their struggle and longing to understand God in the midst of pain and suffering. We will experience battles in this life. We will win some and we will lose some, but God says, "rejoice inasmuch as you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his **glory** is revealed." (**1 Peter 4:13**). This seems contrary to the way we were raised or lead to believe about life, the "good life".
 - a. What can you remember being told about the good life?
 - b. What is the good life to you?
 - c. Are we promised a life without problems, pain or suffering?
2. Jesus was bold in saying that He came bringing the good life. He came bringing life and life to the fullest extent. In fact, he says, "*The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I came that they may **have life** and **have it abundantly**.*" (**John 10:10**)
 - a. What does "the abundant life" mean? Is it a destination we arrive at (i.e. enough money, more time, no problems)?
 - b. Do you think Jesus is talking in the present tense or future? Why?
 - c. Does the world around view problems as something to embrace or escape from? What are ways people escape from problems?
3. **Read Isaiah 53:3 and Discuss:**
 - a. The prophet Isaiah wrote this long before Jesus entered the world. What were the problems, pain, and suffering Jesus went through?
 - b. Do you think Jesus could have avoided the pain and suffering He went through? Why?
 - c. Why do you think Jesus would leave perfection and come to imperfection?
4. **Read Romans 8:17-18 and Discuss:**
 - a. Who does God say you are?
 - b. If you are a child of God and co-heir with Jesus, does it mean you are immune to problems, pain and suffering? Why or why not?
 - c. How does "suffering with Jesus" impact your own life? Consider your past, the present time and your future.

"Suffering has a way of focusing one's life and thoughts. It must not be forgotten that Christianity was born in suffering and oppression, inspired by a prophet who was identified with suffering."
~ Scott Sunquist



TRY THIS

Jesus says in John 16:33 "I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world." Jesus also teaches that we are to share in the suffering (Galatians 6:2). If one part of the "body of Christ" suffers the whole body suffers. We bear one another's burdens. We fight together. God's glory is found in the suffering. This week look for opportunities to share hope with somebody who has lost hope. Look at hopelessness with a new lens. Pray and ask God to open your eyes to see it as He does. Journal your experiences.

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Week 3 | On the Basis of Love (Scott Nobles)

BOTTOM LINE

We are called to advocate for others.

GOAL OF THE GROUP

Learn together what it means to love Christ and follow Him. Followers of Jesus are called to take notice and care for those on the margins; people who are sick, need clothes, are in prison. When we do these acts based in the love of Jesus it is as though we are loving Christ himself.

SCRIPTURE

Proverbs 31:8-9, Matthew 25:34-40, and Philemon 1:1-25

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. This is the third week of the series called "*Sermons from the Seats*" where we are looking at four distinct people and their stories of how God is working in, around and through them. This week Scott Nobles tells his story about working in the prison system and finding himself drawn to a prisoner who was serving a long sentence for a harsh crime. They became friends and Scott realized there was more to this person and started to advocate for his life and his release.
 - a. Have you ever had someone stand up for you? It could have been a parent, a teacher, a friend, a family member. Share with the group.
 - b. How did this person and action make you feel?
2. **Read Proverbs 31:8-9 and Discuss.** There is a pattern throughout scripture of standing up for what is right, just and true. God is a God of the righteous way. He is a protector and advocate for his people. He fights for his people.
 - a. Who did Jesus stand-up for on this earth?
 - b. As followers of Jesus, what are we called to do?
3. **Read Matthew 25:34-40 and Discuss.** We are called to notice and go to the hungry, the thirsty, the stranger, the ones without clothes or shelter, to take care of the sick and the ones imprisoned. When we do this, we are actually loving God.
 - a. What does it mean to see others as Jesus?
 - b. What does it mean to love others and bring them into your "home", to create family?
 - c. What does it mean to advocate for others?
 - d. What does it mean to empower others around you and stand up for them?
4. **Read Philemon 1:1-25 and Discuss.** Paul shares near the end of this letter: "*If he has wronged you in any way, or owes you anything, charge that to my account.*" Being an advocate will cost you something. If it doesn't cost something, you probably aren't actually deeply connected.
 - a. Truly fighting for something requires risk and cost. What are some potential risks and costs?
 - b. Is there a person or situation that you are aware of that requires advocating for? What do you feel God is asking you to do?

"Christ has no body now but yours. No hands, no feet on earth but yours. Yours are the eyes through which he looks compassion on this world. Yours are the feet with which he walks to do good. Yours are the hands through which he blesses all the world. Yours are the hands, yours are the feet, yours are the eyes, you are his body. Christ has no body now on earth but yours."

~Mother Teresa



TRY THIS

"Our Homes Become Our Havens". Spend time with God and ask: how can I create a safe place, a haven, for people to find refuge, healing and advocacy? Journal what you hear from God.

Sermons from the Seats

Week 2 | Life is But a Mist (Elizabeth Dalton)

BOTTOM LINE

Our lives become our legacies.

GOAL OF THE GROUP

To reflect and discuss how one spends their time, talents and resources and are they on things that matter the most.

SCRIPTURE

James 4:13-15 and Luke 10:38-42

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Sometimes we can be far from home yet feel like we are home. Home is not necessarily a location. What or where feels like home to you?
2. This is the second week of the series called "Sermons from the Seats" where we are looking at four distinct people and their stories of how God is working in, around and through them.
 - a. When you hear the story of Elizabeth Dalton, how does it prompt you to reflect on your own life and what your life stands for?
 - b. Does Elizabeth's story encourage you or convict you to do something different? Why or why not?
3. **Read James 4:13-15 and Discuss.**
 - a. What does James emphasize here? What does he challenge us to do?
 - b. The ultimate question James writes is...What is your life, what does your life stand for, what are you living for, what do you wake up every morning dreaming about and what motivates you. From what perspective is he challenging us to view our lives?
 - c. James writes "we are a mist", a vapor appearing for just a little while then gone. He ends this section with a challenge/vision of an "eternal" perspective on life. Knowing this, how would you answer these questions:
 1. What should we be living for?
 2. What should we be doing?
 3. Where should we be doing it?
4. **Read Luke 10:38-42 and Discuss.**
 - a. What distractions are in this world and in our lives?
 - b. Note what was going on in the home of Martha and Mary. What do you think needed to happen to host a dinner party for Jesus? What choice did Mary make?
 - c. Jesus says, "...few things are needed—or indeed only one. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her."
 1. What is our greatest need?
 2. Is this need perishable?
 - d. Mary is making a legacy choice. What we decide to invest in during our time on this earth has eternal consequences. Our lives become our legacies. What is the choice you need to make today to pave the way for your legacy?

"Truly I tell you, wherever this gospel is preached throughout the world, what she has done will also be told, in memory of her."

Matthew 26:13

K

TRY THIS

On your own, read John 12:1-8 and then Matthew 26:6-13.

Mary's legacy is having an impact even to this very day because she chose to invest in Christ. She understood that her earthly life was just a small part of her long eternal journey with God. Knowing that she invested her life in Christ and her legacy lives on to this day whenever Jesus is preached, Mary is remembered for her faith. Pray and ask God this, "Father, what do you want me to be remembered for?" Journal your thoughts.

Sermons from the Seats

Week 1 | Beauty from Ashes (Scott Newport)

BOTTOM LINE

Everyone has a story and that story is a message that can speak life to other people.

GOAL OF THE GROUP

To connect with the pain in our lives and learn how to use that pain to help others in our lives.

SCRIPTURE

Romans 8:18-28 and Isaiah 61:3

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. When you hear the story of Scott Newport, how does it connect you with a past or present situation you or someone you know is going through? Share your experience with the group.
 - a. What is the pain you feel as result of that situation?
 - b. Do you view hardships or challenging situations as good or bad? Why?
2. **Read Romans 8:18-28 and Discuss.** Everyone experiences hardship of some sort and there is no hardship without pain.
 - a. The apostle Paul, in this scripture, speaks specifically about the pain we experience from hardship circumstances. What comparison is Paul making with pain? What is the hope he is talking about?
 - b. What does Paul liken pain to? What are your thoughts on that?
 - c. What does God assure every detail of our lives will lead to?
3. **Read Isaiah 61:3 and Discuss.**
 - a. Does a persons past or present circumstance define who they are? Why or why not?
 - b. For those who place their hope in Jesus, who does God say they are?
 - c. It is from our Identity In Christ that we can be confident that God has a plan to use every detail of our lives to help others and share the hope we have. In your present circumstance or a past one, can you sense that something is being birthed? Please share with the group.
 - d. What do you feel God is saying to you through this message?

Life is not the random mess it may sometimes appear. 'We know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.'

Romans 8:28



TRY THIS

Are you prepared to share the hope you have with others? If not, pray and ask God for the confidence to take the next step in documenting your story. Take a few minutes to write down your personal story of "beauty from ashes" so you can be ready to share it when you are given the opportunity.