

# IS GOD

Angry?  
Judgmental?  
Cold-hearted?

A West View Devotional Guide



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Week 1  
**IS GOD ANGRY?**

**Monday – Guilt, sacrifice and appeasing the gods**

**Hebrews 10: 1 (Common English Bible)** *“The Law is a shadow of the good things that are coming, not the real things themselves. It never can perfect the ones who are trying to draw near to God through the same sacrifices that are offered continually every year.”*

How do you know when God is happy with you? How do you know when you have disappointed Him? If things are going wrong in your life, does that mean God is angry with you? Is he punishing you because: you didn't go to church last Sunday, you were rude to your co-workers, you got into debt, you used sand paper on a cricket ball, you [insert your worst “sins” here]. Can we do something to make up for our faults?

Since the beginning of humanity, people have asked these types of questions. When the crops weren't growing I obviously haven't done what the gods want. I should sacrifice my best goat. When the crops are growing well I don't want the gods to think I am ungrateful. I should sacrifice my best goat. Or maybe two, just to be sure.

Religion arrived in response to these types of questions. “Priests” who claimed to know what the gods wanted would guide the people on which sacrifices were needed, given the current predicaments or successes. This resulted in a whole industry springing up which made money from this sacrificial system (see **John 2:14-16**). Religion can make money off people's guilt, even today.

The writer of Hebrews challenges us to think differently. The Law and the sacrificial system cannot bring us closer to God. You don't need to appease God by your actions. God is not angry with you. God is love. Jesus brought a message that disrupted the sacrificial system. A message of love, peace and forgiveness. Your guilt is not necessary.

**Prayer:** Lord I am sorry for the times that I do things that I understand to be against your will. Help me to understand that you have forgiven me. Help me to let go of my feelings of guilt. Help me to live in response to your love, not your anger.

AMEN

## Tuesday – That don't impress me much

**Micah 6: 7-8 (NIV)** *“Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, with ten thousand rivers of olive oil? ... And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God”*

In Shania Twain's hit song *“That don't impress me much”* she laments how men want to impress her with their cars, qualifications or good looks. What she really wants is someone to keep her *“warm in the middle of the night!”* Relationships are about so much more than appearances and possessions. Similarly, God is not impressed by our religious rituals. He is far more concerned about us doing life with Him.

The prophet Micah challenges the Israelites to rethink their understanding of what God needs from them. He isn't impressed by their sacrifices and gifts. Instead, He is looking for people who treat one another fairly, people who are capable of loving one another, people who want to do life in partnership with Him.

While we are no longer caught up in the sacrificial system, we do still try to do things to impress God. We believe, at least subconsciously, that we make God happy by our faithful attendance at Sunday services, volunteering at church or by feeding the hungry. While these are all good things, we make a mistake when we do them in order to keep God happy, or to appease his “anger”.

The writer of Hebrews explains that *“it's impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins” (Hebrews 10:4, CEB).*

- Are there “works” which you find yourself doing to cover over guilt for mistakes you have made?
- If you knew that God's love for you is not changed by what you do or don't do, would you do anything differently?

**Prayer:** God help me to act justly, love mercy and walk humbly with you. Help me to do this because it is good, not because I think you are angry. Amen

## Wednesday – Peace after sacrifice

**Leviticus 26: 6 (CEB)** *“I will grant peace in the land so that you can lie down without anyone frightening you. I will remove dangerous animals from the land, and no sword will pass through it.”*

There is nothing quite like the feeling you experience after a high intensity workout. After putting oneself through “pain and torture” at the gym, there is that moment after you stop when your body fills with endorphins. After the sacrifice of getting out of bed and pushing your body, you are filled with feelings of happiness, even peace.

The book of Leviticus is dedicated to outlining the sacrificial system. A system devised to help people feel right with God. A way of righting your wrongs. A way of showing gratitude for blessings. A way of “keeping God happy”. The system responded to people’s fear of God’s anger.

But near the end of the book, there is a promise of peace. After the violence, blood and death that accompanied the sacrificial system, God promises His people... peace. The contrast between fear and peace cannot be missed. It is not God’s will for us to live in fear. It is His will that we live in peace. Peace with Him. Peace with others.

- Perhaps you have experienced this in your life. After a productive day at work, do you leave with a sense of peace in your mind? After attending a worship service, do you leave with a sense of peace in your soul? After doing something kind for someone else, do you feel a sense of peace in your heart? Is it possible that when we live in accordance with our understanding of God’s will for our lives, we can discover His peace?

**Prayer:** Lord, help me to understand the peace you offer. The peace that surpasses all understanding. Help me to understand what it means to not live in fear. Help me to experience your peace.

AMEN

## **Thursday – A pleasing sacrifice**

**Hebrews 13: 16** *“And do not forget to do good and to share with others, for with such sacrifices God is pleased”*

It is very sad for parents when their children do not get along with one another. Moms and dads dedicate their lives to raising their children in a loving home, but often the children are unable to show love to one another. Sometimes siblings compete for their parent’s attention, even though the parents did not show favouritism. Other times they hurt one another so deeply that the relationship seems irreconcilable.

It is not that the parents are angry at their children for not getting along. It is that they are saddened.

But taking it a step further, how would you feel if one of your children deliberately hurt one of your other children? Would you be angry? Would you be disappointed? How would you respond?

As God's children, we often do not live at peace with our fellow humans. We are all God's creation, but we struggle to share the grace and love which God has shown us. Much like the parable of the unmerciful servant (see **Matthew 18:21-35**, where a man is forgiven a great debt by his boss but cannot forgive his colleague's small debt), we are called to respond to God's mercy by showing mercy to others.

As Paul puts it, "...because of God's mercies, I encourage you to present your bodies as a living sacrifice that is holy and pleasing to God" (*Romans 12:1, CEB*). We do not give our lives as a sacrifice to earn God's mercy, we give our lives as a sacrifice because of God's mercy.

- How can you respond to God's grace, love and mercy?
- Is there a relationship you need to repair?
- Is there someone you need to forgive?
- Is there someone you need to care for?

**Prayer:** Lord, help me to live as a living sacrifice to you and the people around me. Teach me what this means in my life today. AMEN

## Friday – Does God ever get angry?

**Mark 11: 15 (CEB)** *"After entering the temple, he threw out those who were selling and buying there. He pushed over the tables used for currency exchange and the chairs of those who sold doves."*

In the aftermath of the 2004 tsunami in South-East Asia, an email was circulated which told the story of a group of Christians who gathered on a hill just prior to the tsunami striking. The email suggested that these Christians were "saved" by God while He "punished" non-Christians with death and destruction. It suggested that God was angry with those who chose to follow "other" gods.

It is unfortunate that Christians utilise natural disasters to try to explain the nature of God. This understanding of God's anger is very unhelpful and inconsistent with the teachings of Jesus. Hopefully, this week's devotions have reminded us that God is calling us to a far greater purpose than determining who God loves and who God is cross with!

But it would be equally foolish to suggest that God never gets angry. Scripture is littered with examples of God's anger. Nonetheless, this is a different anger to the one we typically understand and experience in our own lives. It is not an anger that comes from losing one's patience (think road rage). It is not an anger that comes from not getting one's way. It is not an anger that results in an outburst or seeking vengeance.

In today's Scripture verse, Jesus shows anger because God's Word has been manipulated to exploit poor, faithful believers. His anger is real, but it is rooted in love for people. God's anger rises when those He loves do not love others. God's anger rises when those He loves are thirsty or hungry or in pain. God responds to this anger not by punishing his children, but by calling his children to respond to their fellow human's need. He calls us to care for one another, to love one another.

- Do you see suffering in our world that you think angers God?
- Is God calling you to be a part of alleviating that suffering?

**Prayer:** Lord, May the things that anger you, anger me. May the things that sadden you, sadden me. May the things that please You, please me.

AMEN

## HOME GROUP MATERIAL

### Week 1 – Is God Angry?

#### Opening discussion

As Christians, we claim to be believers in grace and forgiveness. But many of us spend a great deal of time feeling guilty, feeling like we have disappointed God. Share with the group

- an example of the “Christian guilt” you feel or have felt (it could be as simple as missing a week of home group!)
- an example of when you have been “fearful” of God

#### Scripture passage

Read together **Hebrews 10: 1-10**.

The author Peter Rollins explains that there is a funny thing about sport. No one ever wins. A cricket team might win a match or a tournament. But no one ever wins cricket once and for all! Sport is structured to be never ending. (For Blue Bulls supporters it is a never-ending source of frustration and anguish!)

Human beings have had a similar relationship with gods. The sacrificial system saw us trying to find ways to please and appease the gods. When times were good, thanksgiving offerings were made to show appreciation for their kindness towards us. When times were bad, atonement offerings could be offered to show that we were sorry for angering the gods. Or in our case, God. We assumed God was by default angry with us and so we utilised the sacrificial system to try to change his mood.

But there was no end to the sacrificial system, there was no sacrifice that could keep God happy for ever or that could atone for all our wrongs. That was until God sent Jesus to put a stop to it all.

The writer of Hebrews describes this beautifully by describing the futility of the sacrificial system and the perfect sacrifice made by Jesus on the cross.

While we don't practice a sacrificial system today, we do still partake in spiritual rituals which are often misunderstood by Christians as acts done to please or appease God.



## Suggested questions for discussion

1. What are some of our modern day “sacrifices” or spiritual rituals which can be misunderstood as aiming to please or appease God?
2. In verse 10 the writer emphasises that we have been made holy by God’s will. How does this contrast with the idea of a God who is angry?
3. Is there a difference between God’s anger and human anger? How would you contrast the two? (see day 5 of this weeks devotion material for some ideas)
4. In Romans 12: 1, Paul calls us to be “living sacrifices”. What does this mean and why is it different to the sacrificial system referred to in the Hebrews passage? (see Micah 6:7-8)
5. Is there a link between the things that make God angry and Christians who offer themselves as “living sacrifices”? For an example, compare the parable of the unforgiving servant (Matthew 18: 21-35) with the parable of the good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37).

## Prayer time

Option 1: Is there anyone in your home group who is struggling with feelings of guilt? Is there anyone who feels their faith has been built or broken by a belief that God is angry with them, or that God wants to punish them? Spend some time in prayer for these individuals asking God to reveal to them His unconditional love.

Option 2: Spend time as a group praying that God would challenge the group members to feel anger towards the things that anger God, and that He would guide you to respond constructively to bring God’s grace, peace and love into these situations.

Week 2

## IS GOD JUDGMENTAL?

### MONDAY – Judgement and own will

**Isaiah 66: 2-3 (NLT).** *“My hands have made both heaven and earth; they and everything in them are mine. I, the Lord, have spoken. I will bless those who have humble and contrite hearts, who tremble at my word. But those who choose their own ways- delighting in their detestable sins- will not have their offerings accepted.”*

A lady named Emma Goldman wrote, “Christianity (is) the leveller of the human race, the breaker of man’s will to dare and to do.... an iron net, a straightjacket which does not let him expand or grow.” Does Christianity take away freedom, initiative, and enterprise and just have this negative, levelling effect on people?

In our reading today, Isaiah contrasts humble persons who have a profound reverence for God’s message and their application to life, with those who choose their own ways. God has given us the freedom of choice. We can choose to follow Him or choose a life not honouring God.

Throughout the Old Testament we read how God through his Judges, Kings, and Prophets urged people to follow in His ways towards a better life – eternity. Time and time again His chosen people followed their own sinful ways and came to harm, yet those who lived their lives trying to remain within God’s guidelines through faithfulness and humility, were blessed and experienced forgiveness, peace, love and grace.

God shows mercy to the humble, but he curses the proud and self-sufficient. Our society urges us to be assertive and to affirm ourselves. Don’t let your freedom and right to choose lead you away from God’s pathway to eternal life.

- Are God’s Laws still relevant to you today or are they restricting you from enjoying your life?
- Is there an area in your life that you know is not honouring God?

**Prayer:** Thank you Lord for giving me the ability to choose my destiny. Guide me through your Spirit to follow your ways and protect me from sin and evil. AMEN.

## Tuesday - Judgemental behaviour

**Matthew 7: 1-3, 12:** *“Do not judge others, and you will not be judged. For you will be treated as you treat others. The standard you use in judging is the standard by which you will be judged. And why worry about a speck in your friend’s eye when you have a log in your own? <sup>12</sup>Do to others whatever you would like them do to you. This is the essence of what is taught in the law and the prophets.”*

Browsing the Internet to define being judgemental presents the view that it is having an excessively critical point of view; quick to criticize; to judge harshly. It describes someone who rushes to judgement without reason, because they think they know everything when in fact they don't. Now, is that true to God?

In our reading we learn that we may judge ourselves, and judge our own acts, but we must not judge our neighbour. We just cannot refrain from seeing the wrongs of others and pointing it out to others. Likewise, we are judged by others and find it annoying and sometimes unfair. In our environment the definition given above seems spot-on.

In verse 12 Jesus gives us a principle on how to become non-judgemental – known as the Golden Rule. Treat your neighbour as you want to be treated. You want to be loved by all? So love all those people you meet along the way. Sounds familiar doesn't it?

The teaching of Jesus Christ during the Sermon on the Mount is filled with love and righteousness. The guidelines given on how to live do not condone judgemental behavior. It forbids an excessively critical point of view towards others. It does not condone criticism or harsh judgements. It does not sound like Jesus wants us to rush to judgement without reason or the truth.

- If God sent His beloved Son to teach us to love Him and our neighbours, how could God be judgemental?

- Try to identify times when you were judgemental. Now test the moment against the Golden Rule and ask yourself if your judgement was fair?

**Prayer:** Lord, help me to remove the logs in my own eyes before I see the specks in my neighbour's eye. Please guide me to become less judgemental.  
AMEN

## **WEDNESDAY – Judgement explained**

**Matthew 13: 27-29(NLT).** *“The farmer’s workers went to him and said, ‘Sir, the field where you planted that good seed is full of weeds! Where did they come from?’ ‘An enemy has done this!’ the farmer exclaimed. “Should we pull out the weeds?’ they asked. “‘No,’ he replied, ‘you’ll uproot the wheat if you do. Let both grow together until the harvest. Then I will tell the harvesters to sort out the weeds, tie them into bundles, and burn them, and to put the wheat in the barn.’ “*

Jesus tells the parable of the Weeds to the crowd and later in verses 35 to 43 he explains the meaning to His disciples.

In Jesus' own words he explains that the farmer who sows the good seed is the Son of Man. The field is the world and the pure seeds represent the people of the Kingdom. The weeds are the people who belong to the devil, and the enemy who sows them is the devil. The harvest is the end of the world and the harvest hands are the angels.

The picture of the weeds being pulled up is a scene at the end of the world. The Son of Man will send his angels, and they will remove from his Kingdom everything that causes sin and all who do evil. The angels will throw the weed into the fiery furnace and be done with them.

You can choose whose hand sows you! Your conduct on earth will decide how you will be dealt with at harvest time. If you produce good fruit such as love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control you will remain in the Kingdom.

This parable also tells of God's patience with the world and His church. He does not get rid of the weeds immediately but waits until the harvest is ready. He gives time for the good seeds to influence the environment to allow even

the weeds to also change and bear good fruit. It also demonstrates God's everlasting love for us.

- Will the angels be able to recognise you as a product of the good seed that was sown?
- How could the weeds change into fruit bearing plants?

**Prayer:** Precious Lord. Help me to bear good fruit. Allow me to help others through my conduct to produce good fruit. Keep me from sinful and evil ways so that I may remain in your Kingdom. AMEN

## THURSDAY – Judgement in practice

**John 8: 7-11 (NLT).** *“They kept demanding an answer, so he stood up and said, “All right, but let the one who has never sinned throw the first stone!” Then he stooped down again and wrote in the dust. When the accusers heard this, they slipped away one by one, beginning with the oldest, until only Jesus was left in the middle of the crowd with the woman. Then Jesus stood up again and said to the woman, “Where are your accusers? Didn’t even one of them condemn you?” “no, Lord,” she said. And Jesus said, neither do I. Go and sin no more.”*

It was the scribes and the Pharisees who brought the woman caught in adultery to Jesus. They were up to no good. There are some major problems with their story. Although they cited the Law of Moses, they didn't get it quite right. In fact, the law says that both the man and the woman are to be executed. (Deut. 22:22). So, it would seem that they forgot to bring the man. So judgemental people confront Jesus!

This is a significant example about judging others and not being judgemental. Because Jesus upheld the legal penalty for adultery, stoning, he could not be accused of being against the law. But by saying that only a sinless person could throw the first stone, he highlighted the importance of compassion and forgiveness. These are the two attitudes that prevent us from being judgemental.

Jesus didn't condemn the woman accused of adultery, but neither did he ignore or condone her sin. He told her to leave her life of sin. Jesus

considered everything. He was not following the crowds or listening to half-truths. This is why only God is to judge and not us. He knows our hearts, we don't.

As Jesus' disciples we are allowed to ask others or warn others not to sin or do evil deeds in a compassionate manner, but not to judge them. That leaves them with a choice – to stop sinning or not.

- Do you feel that Jesus was judgemental in telling the woman not to sin anymore?
- Do you feel that you are considering all the information available to you when judging others?

**Prayer:** Dear Jesus, help me to be compassionate and forgiving when I deal with the everyday encounters with family, friends and strangers.

## **FRIDAY – What about the lost ones?**

**Luke 15: 1-7 (NLT).** *“Tax collectors and other notorious sinners often came to listen to Jesus teach. This made the Pharisees and teachers of religious law complain that he was associating with such sinful people – even eating with them. So Jesus told them this story: “If a man has a hundred sheep and one of them gets lost, what will he do? Won't he leave the ninety-nine others in the wilderness and go to search for the one that is lost until he finds it? And when he has found it, he will joyfully carry it home on his shoulders. When he arrives, he will call together his friends and neighbours, saying, ‘Rejoice with me because I have found my lost sheep.’ In the same way, there is more joy in heaven over one lost sinner who repents and returns to God than over ninety-nine others who are righteous and haven't strayed away!”*

Why were the Pharisees and teachers of religious law upset that Jesus associated with sinful and “unclean” people? They went well beyond the law in their avoidance of certain people and situations and in their ritual washings. Jesus risked defilement by touching those who had leprosy and judged unclean and unworthy. Jesus came to offer salvation to sinners and to show that God loves them.

It may seem foolish for the shepherd to leave 99 sheep to go searching for just one. But the shepherd knew that the 99 would be safe in the “kraal”, whereas the one lost sheep was in danger. Because each sheep was of high value, the shepherd knew that it was worthwhile to search diligently for the lost one. God’s love for the individual is so great that he seeks out each one and rejoices when he or she is found. Jesus associated with sinners because he wanted to bring the people considered beyond hope, the Good News of God’s Kingdom. Before you were a believer, God sought you; and is still seeking those who are lost.

We are able to understand a God who would forgive sinners who came to Him for mercy. But a God who tenderly searches for sinners and then joyfully forgives them must possess an extraordinary love. Such a loving God wants to allow you to live an abundant and joyful life. He is not a judgemental God who binds you in a straightjacket!

- Are you only associating with certain people who are acceptable to your status and judgements?
- Have you ever helped the Lord to bring back a person who has lost his or her way to God’s Kingdom?

**Prayer:** Dear Jesus, thank you for allowing me to come back to you after I have lost my way. Thank you for forgiveness when I ask for it. AMEN.

### **Taking action**

Think of the one person who has hurt you the most in your life or a type of person whom you feel the most uncomfortable with. If you have not forgiven the person who hurt you, try to do it this week. Try to look at all the relevant aspects that make you uncomfortable when with certain persons and ask God to help you resolve the issues/judgements you may have.

## HOME GROUP MATERIAL

### Week 2: IS GOD JUDGMENTAL?

**Genesis 1:28 (NLT).** *“Then God blessed them and said, ‘Be fruitful and multiply. Fill the earth and govern it...’”*

**Genesis 2:16-17 (NLT).** *“But the Lord God warned him, ‘You may freely eat the fruit of every tree in the garden – except the tree of knowledge of good and evil. If you eat its fruit, you are sure to die.’”*

- What are the first commands God gives to humanity?

**Galatians 5: 13-14 (NLT).** *“For you have been called to live in freedom, my brothers and sisters. But don’t use your freedom to satisfy your sinful nature. Instead, use your freedom to serve one another in love. For the whole law can be summed up in this one command: “Love your neighbour as yourself.”*

When we lose the motivation to love, we become critical of others. We stop looking for good in them and see only their faults – being judgemental.

**1 Timothy 2:5-6 (NLT).** *“For, there is one God and one Mediator who can reconcile God and humanity – the man Christ Jesus. He gave his life to purchase freedom for everyone. This is the message God gave to the world at just the right time.”*

Some people think that there are several ways to God. The truth is that each person must choose a single way.

- Why does following God’s commands set us free?
- How does this differ from doing whatever we want to do?
- In what way does Christ enable us to be free?
  
- Consider a decision you made that you now believe was wrong.
- What were the consequences?
- What might have happened had you acted according to God’s will?
- Ask God to help you to learn from this and change.

**Prayer:** God, show me what is keeping me from enjoying an abundant life, and with the power of the Holy Spirit, to help me break free to become the person you created me to be. AMEN



Week 3  
**IS GOD COLD-HEARTED?**

**MONDAY: Where do we find God in this?**

**Psalm 56:8 New Living Translation** <sup>8</sup> *You keep track of all my sorrows. You have collected all my tears in your bottle. You have recorded each one in your book.*

Have you ever felt the chorus line from Bette Midler's song "From a distance" to be true of your life?

*And God is watching us, God is watching us,  
God is watching us from a distance.*

*Oh, God is watching us, God is watching. God is watching us from a distance.*

This is how it initially felt on that ordinary day. Allow me to share the story with you. It was late in the afternoon when we received the news that our daughter had discovered a lump and that it was possibly malignant. What to do? We immediately contacted our closest friends and asked for prayer. This couldn't happen – there is a young granddaughter who needs her mother!

Results came in, it looks benign – relief! A word of caution from the doctor – have further tests done. Then came the news after all the biopsies were done, it was malignant, and surgery was recommended as soon as possible. Where was God in all this? Did he not hear our prayers? Did He not care? Questions arose as the tears flowed. We had trusted Him with our fears. Had He not heard the prayers? Was He indeed cold-hearted?

Where do we find God's love and compassion in all of this distress? Scripture tells us that He is the God of all comfort.

**2 Corinthians 1: 3-5** reads as follows <sup>3</sup> *Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort,* <sup>4</sup> *who comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God.* <sup>5</sup> *For as we share abundantly in Christ's sufferings, so through Christ we share abundantly in comfort too.*

So how do you experience this comfort when it feels as though all is crumbling around you?

- What is your first response to bad news?
- Do you have some support system, people you can trust and rely on to be there for you?
- Are you able to believe that God hears your prayers even when you feel numbed by circumstances?

**PRAYER:** God, thank you that in the midst of our pain and sorrow you come to us in human form through the love and compassion of people who care for us. Help me to trust you to bind up my aching heart. AMEN

## **TUESDAY: The pain of waiting .....**

**Deuteronomy 31: 8** *Do not be afraid or discouraged, for the LORD will personally go ahead of you. He will be with you; he will neither fail you nor abandon you."*

**Psalms 40: 17** *"But I am poor and needy; yet the LORD thinks upon me. You are my help and my deliverer; do not delay, O my God."*

How do we wait in times of difficulty? Everything within us strains for an answer, for relief from the stress of waiting but sometimes God says 'wait'. In this world where so many things are available to us instantly it has become very hard for us to do this. We have instant meals, we Google answers to questions that puzzle us, we are not programmed to wait patiently. Is God asking something that is too difficult or could he be at work in you and me? The day when the surgery was to take place, we continued to hope that the cancer would be contained and that no further treatment would be necessary, but the surgeon explained gently and patiently that chemo and radiation would be required. A long road lay ahead of us all.

- How do you occupy your mind when you need to wait for an answer from God?
- Do you think you could trust God more fully by reading the above scriptures and taking time to listen to His reassurance that he will not leave you?

**PRAYER:** God, waiting for answers is one of the most difficult things to do. Please calm and quiet my spirit as I wait for you to lead me forward. AMEN

## **WEDNESDAY: Help is on the way**

***Psalm 50: 15** Call to me in times of trouble. I will save you, and you will honour me.”*

***Psalm 147: 3-5** He heals the brokenhearted and bandages their wounds. He counts the stars and names each one. Our Lord is great and very powerful. There is no limit to what he knows.*

God uses His church to bring comfort, guidance and stability to our lives when we are troubled. His people are his hands and feet and the resources of his church such as counselling, prayer, fellowship and kindness are available to all.

As a family we were recipients of the immediate response of friends, our church community and neighbours. Meals were delivered by a group of concerned friends each time that chemo happened. Friends volunteered to be there during chemo sessions, there were phone calls of enquiry and encouragement and prayers for strength and endurance.

So many kind acts showed God’s love and care towards us in so many ways. How could we feel that God had was cold-hearted and had abandoned us? A long journey indeed, but through this experience God’s compassion was demonstrated by his faithful and caring people.

- Are you aware of the many resources available to you? Why not pick up some information brochures from the foyer this week? There are many places to turn to for help.
- Have you found someone to talk to regarding your fears or questions?

**PRAYER:** God help me to see your face in the faces of those who surround me with care. Help me to know that you have not left me alone. AMEN

## **THURSDAY: Is there a purpose in this?**

***Romans 8: 28)** “And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love Him, who have been called according to his purpose”*

***2 Timothy 1: 9.** “He has saved us and called us to a holy life—not because of anything we have done but because of his own purpose and grace”*

Hard times can make it difficult to see God's purpose especially when we only feel pain and grief. We don't want to think that God could be shaping, pruning and working in our lives. However, when we look back over our difficulties, very often we see that we have been drawn into a closer relationship with Him and that our faith, which may have felt as if it was being stretched to the limits, has indeed grown as a result of this time.

It was not an easy journey, there were moments of tiredness, times when the road felt long and stony despite all the love and care, so what did we gain? An awareness of God's presence on good days and bad, a closeness to one another as we supported and prayed, the comfort of a community of believers who held us in their hearts and a new assurance that God never lets us go.

**PRAYER:** Loving Father, we see you in fellow believers, we experience your love, compassion and care through those who faithfully serve you. Help us to offer our hands, feet and voices to bring peace to the troubled, strength to the weary and hope to those who have lost their way.

## **FRIDAY: A time for hope and rejoicing**

**Psalms 5: 11 NIV** *But let all who take refuge in you be glad; let them ever sing for joy. Spread your protection over them, that those who love your name may **rejoice** in you.*

**Romans 12: 12 NIV** *Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer.*

**Acts 2: 26 ISV** *That is why my heart is glad and my tongue rejoices, yes, even my body still rests securely in hope.*

The journey is not over. It continues to be part of our lives. We will travel this road for the foreseeable future needing follow-up tests. The chemo and radiation were completed, blood tests needed to happen, and we awaited the results anxiously but hopefully. The phone call came – "I am in remission!" This time we shared tears of joy.

It has been two years, and the results of each test have confirmed God's goodness.

What have we learned from this journey? We have realised anew that we are not spared the trials of this world. We will have troubles, but God will be with us all the way. There may be moments of doubt and fear, but he will not leave us without comfort.

Is God cold-hearted? I would argue that he certainly is not. The evidence of the work and witness of the people God sends to walk through dark days with us, to pray for us and to be his hands and feet when we feel alone, convinces me that God is compassionate, tender-hearted and kind.

*“Great is Thy faithfulness,” O God my Father,  
There is no shadow of turning with Thee;  
Thou changest not, Thy compassions, they fail not  
As Thou hast been Thou forever wilt be.*

*“Great is Thy faithfulness!” “Great is Thy faithfulness!”  
Morning by morning new mercies I see;  
All I have needed Thy hand hath provided—  
“Great is Thy faithfulness,” Lord, unto me!*

- Have you ever considered how your struggles could help another?
- What is your perspective of God? How present is He in your life?

**PRAYER:** God of mercy and grace, thank you that you are not far away from us, you do not watch from a distance, but you are intimately concerned with each of us. We ask you to teach us to hold on to you during difficult times and to trust you more and more as we experience your love.

**TAKING ACTION:** Look around you this week and try to find someone with whom you could share your story. Even if you are still struggling with some issues, be bold and share this with another and see where this takes you.

## HOME GROUP MATERIAL

### WEEK 3: Is God Cold-Hearted?

Read the following Psalm together

Psalm 40

<sup>1</sup> I waited patiently for the LORD; he turned to me and heard my cry.

<sup>2</sup> He lifted me out of the slimy pit, out of the mud and mire; he set my feet on a rock and gave me a firm place to stand. <sup>3</sup> He put a new song in my mouth, a hymn of praise to our God. Many will see and fear the LORD and put their trust in Him.

<sup>4</sup> Blessed is the one who trusts in the LORD, who does not look to the proud, to those who turn aside to false gods. Many, LORD my God, are the wonders you have done, the things you planned for us. None can compare with you; were I to speak and tell of your deeds, they would be too many to declare. Sacrifice and offering you did not desire— but my ears you have opened<sup>1</sup>— burnt offerings and sin offerings<sup>[d]</sup> you did not require. Then I said, “Here I am, I have come— it is written about me in the scroll. <sup>8</sup> I desire to do your will, my God; your law is within my heart.” <sup>9</sup> I proclaim your saving acts in the great assembly; I do not seal my lips, LORD, as you know. <sup>10</sup> I do not hide your righteousness in my heart; I speak of your faithfulness and your saving help. I do not conceal your love and your faithfulness from the great assembly. <sup>11</sup> Do not withhold your mercy from me, LORD; may your love and faithfulness always protect me. <sup>12</sup> For troubles without number surround me; my sins have overtaken me, and I cannot see. They are more than the hairs of my head, and my heart fails within me. <sup>13</sup> Be pleased to save me, LORD; come quickly, LORD, to help me. <sup>14</sup> May all who want to take my life be put to shame and confusion; may all who desire my ruin be turned back in disgrace. <sup>15</sup> May those who say to me, “Aha! Aha!” be appalled at their own shame. <sup>16</sup> But may all who seek you rejoice and be glad in you; may those who long for your saving help always say, “The LORD is great!” <sup>17</sup> But as for me, I am poor and needy; may the Lord think of me. You are my help and my deliverer; you are my God, do not delay.

#### Questions for reflection and study

In the light of this week’s study on “Is God cold-hearted?” read and discuss your response to the following quotes from C S Lewis.

1. “when pain is to be borne, a little courage helps more than much knowledge, a little human sympathy more than much courage, and the least tincture of the love of God more than all.”

— **C.S. Lewis, The Problem of Pain**

2. “We want not so much a Father but a grandfather in heaven, a God who said of anything we happened to like doing, ‘What does it matter so long as they are contented?’”

— **C.S. Lewis, The Problem of Pain**

3. “Try to exclude the possibility of suffering which the order of nature and the existence of free-wills involve, and you find that you have excluded life itself”

— **C.S. Lewis, The Problem of Pain**

4. How will you respond in the future when your immediate expectation is not initially met?

### **Life Application**

Consider coming alongside someone who is suffering to help them maintain trust when their hope is fragile.