

A FIVE WEEK STUDY

The
SOVEREIGNTY
of
GOD

PATRICIA CLARKE

WEEK 2: TRUSTING GOD WITH MATERIAL POSSESSIONS

Opener: Discuss the idea that we often *love things* and *use people*, when we are designed to *use our possessions*, and *love people*.

Read: Psalm 8

1 Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth! You have set your glory in the heavens. **2** Through the praise of children and infants you have established a stronghold against your enemies, to silence the foe and the avenger. **3** When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, **4** what is mankind that you are mindful of them, human beings that you care for them? **5** You have made them a little lower than the angels and crowned them with glory and honor. **6** You made them rulers over the works of your hands; you put everything under their feet: **7** all flocks and herds, and the animals of the wild, **8** the birds in the sky, and the fish in the sea, all that swim the paths of the seas. **9** Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth!

Questions

1. What do you think the word *stronghold* means in verse 2?

2. The word *enemies* in the Psalms often means those who threaten with physical violence. In our context, *an enemy* is anything that harms our life, whether it is external circumstances (like debt or a difficult relationship) or internal thoughts (like fear or discouragement). Write down three of your enemies that come to mind.

WEEK 2: TRUSTING GOD WITH MATERIAL POSSESSIONS

3. How does loving and worshiping material items help us cope with our enemies? Does it help us fight off enemies?

4. According to this Psalm, what authority does God give humans?

5. In the space below, list some ways you experience joy in exercising this authority by bringing order, creating beauty, or effectively using what God has given you?

WEEK 2: TRUSTING GOD WITH MATERIAL POSSESSIONS

6. Re-read Psalm 8 out-loud as a meditation of praise. What does the psalmist consider that leads to a sense of wonder?

7. How could praise and worship be an effective weapon against your enemies?

8. Brainstorm as a group different ways you could praise and worship God this week as the psalmist does here. Don't be afraid to think outside the box!

WEEK 3: TRUSTING GOD WITH OUR SURROUNDINGS

Opener: What are different areas of life where we have no control, but wish we did?

Read: Matthew 8:23-27 + Matthew 14: 22-33

23 Then he got into the boat and his disciples followed him. **24** Suddenly a furious storm came up on the lake, so that the waves swept over the boat. But Jesus was sleeping **25** The disciples went and woke him, saying, "Lord, save us! We're going to drown!" **26** He replied, "You of little faith, why are you so afraid?" Then he got up and rebuked the winds and the waves, and it was completely calm. **27** The men were amazed and asked, "What kind of man is this? Even the winds and the waves obey him!"

22 Immediately Jesus made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead of him to the other side, while he dismissed the crowd. **23** After he had dismissed them, he went up on a mountainside by himself to pray. Later that night, he was there alone, **24** and the boat was already a considerable distance from land, buffeted by the waves because the wind was against it. **25** Shortly before dawn Jesus went out to them, walking on the lake. **26** When the disciples saw him walking on the lake, they were terrified. "It's a ghost," they said, and cried out in fear. **27** But Jesus immediately said to them: "Take courage! It is I. Don't be afraid." **28** "Lord, if it's you," Peter replied, "tell me to come to you on the water." **29** "Come," he said. Then Peter got down out of the boat, walked on the water and came toward Jesus. **30** But when he saw the wind, he was afraid and, beginning to sink, cried out, "Lord, save me!" **31** Immediately Jesus reached out his hand and caught him. "You of little faith," he said, "why did you doubt?" **32** And when they climbed into the boat, the wind died down. **33** Then those who were in the boat worshiped him, saying, "Truly you are the Son of God."

Questions

1. What are the main similarities and main differences in the two accounts?

WEEK 3: TRUSTING GOD WITH OUR SURROUNDINGS

2. What do you think it was like for the disciples to find Jesus asleep in the midst of the storm? How is this an invitation to us?

3. What was Peter afraid of when he stepped out of the boat? Why do you think Peter asked Jesus to tell him to come to him on the water?

4. The sudden storm terrifies the disciples because it is beyond their control and their lives are in peril. Write down one area where you try to control your environment in an unbalanced way.

5. Describe what a storm would be like in that area. In other words, what do you fear will happen if you don't take control?

WEEK 3: TRUSTING GOD WITH OUR SURROUNDINGS

6. Peter took one step on the water toward Jesus and began to sink. What does Peter say? What does Jesus do? What is one specific step you could take toward trusting Jesus in the area you want to control?

7. For the disciples, the boat was something they built so they could safely fish on the lake, but it was feeble the face of a true storm. Similarly, our control is futile when the real storms of life come. Trusting God in small ways where fear is present **reinforces a pattern of trust**. Likewise, control based in fear **reinforces a pattern of fear**. When you step out of the “boat of control” and expose yourself to the inevitable storms, fear will come. As a group brainstorm, different ways we can turn and look for Jesus' hand in when we are sinking.

8. Read: Isaiah 43:2-3 aloud and take 3 minutes to write a personalized version of these verses. Be specific and have fun with this! For example, Or “When I’m being overlooked and undervalued at work...” Or “when I pass by a sink full of dirty dishes left by...”

WEEK 4: TRUSTING GOD WITH OUR PHYSICAL BODIES

Opener: What does the culture value about the human body? Compare that to the idea that your body is a temple, a dwelling place for God.

Read: Romans 12:1-8

1 Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship. **2** Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will. **3** For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the faith God has distributed to each of you. **4** For just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, **5** so in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. **6** We have different gifts, according to the grace given to each of us. If your gift is prophesying, then prophesy in accordance with your faith; **7** if it is serving, then serve; if it is teaching, then teach; **8** if it is to encourage, then give encouragement; if it is giving, then give generously; if it is to lead, do it diligently; if it is to show mercy, do it cheerfully.

Questions

1. In ancient cultures the word “sacrifice” in verse 1 would refer to an animal that was killed as an offering to the gods. How is the word used differently here?

WEEK 4: TRUSTING GOD WITH OUR PHYSICAL BODIES

2. How would you describe “the pattern of this world” when it comes to how we view our bodies? How does this narrow definition of beauty impact your thoughts, your actions, and your relationships?

3. In what ways does this pattern encourage us to be controlling and adversarial with our bodies? In what ways does this approach lead to *being controlled* by our bodies?

4. What do verses 3-5 communicate about our relationship with others? How does comparison and envy disrupt this vision?

WEEK 4: TRUSTING GOD WITH OUR PHYSICAL BODIES

5. Read verses 6-8. Write in the space below what gifts God has given you even if they are not listed in these verses. **a God-given gift is something about you that comes easily. It is a natural overflow of who you are. It brings you joy and it bless others.*

6. Neuroscience research indicates a mind-body connection. What we think about affects our body. What we do with our body affects our thoughts and mood. Describe how exercising your gifts for the benefit of others would be an integral part of being “transformed by the renewing of your mind.”

7. This week if you are tempted to control your body, how could you redirect that tendency by serving others with your God-given gifts? Write about a few possible ways below.

WEEK 5: TRUSTING GOD WITH OUR RELATIONSHIPS

Opener: Discuss the word *self-righteousness*. Why is it considered a negative word? Describe a time when self-righteousness was evident in you or someone you know.

Read: Luke 10: 38-42

38 As Jesus and his disciples were on their way, he came to a village where a woman named Martha opened her home to him. **39** She had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet listening to what he said. **40** But Martha was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made. She came to him and asked, "Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me!" **41** "Martha, Martha," the Lord answered, "you are worried and upset about many things, **42** but few things are needed—or indeed only one. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her."

Questions

1. What is Martha doing and why is it important? Why is she angry?

2. What two verbs describe what Mary is doing?

WEEK 5: TRUSTING GOD WITH OUR RELATIONSHIPS

3. List some of the “many things” that “worry and upset” you, that occupy your time, and that distract you from listening to God, to others, and ultimately to your self.

4. Together as a group, make a list of 10 things you came up with.

5. Why do you think Martha takes her complaint to Jesus instead of Mary? In what ways can you relate to Martha’s complaint to God?

6. In what way can caregiving be controlling?

WEEK 5: TRUSTING GOD WITH OUR RELATIONSHIPS

7. Why is it hard to take care of yourself? How does caring for others keep you from facing yourself and your accumulation of disappointments?

8. The Virgin Mary is a role model for us. Loving her son Jesus meant letting him bear his cross and entrusting him to God's care. What is one thing you can do this week to let go and trust Jesus with people you love?

9. Take 5 minutes of quiet as a group. Close your eyes and imagine yourself sitting and listening at Jesus' feet. In the quiet of your thoughts, what is one thing you hear from him today?

