

STUDY GUIDE:

Are We there Yet? | Fall: “Things that don’t work” Week of February 1-7

Last week we saw the story of humanity turning away from God in the garden of Eden. This story happened in the third chapter of the Bible. The next several hundred pages of the Hebrew Bible (Old Testament) remind us of the various humans have tried to solve the problem of sin.

INTRODUCTION

Pastor Bruce referred to the popular evangelistic tool known as the Jesus Film. He reminded us that the title of the film would lead us to expect the story line to begin with Mary and Joseph, baby Jesus, shepherds and wise men. Instead the film makers felt the need to go back to the beginning of the Bible and set up the story of Jesus by reminding us why the world needs a Savior.

Another way of setting up the story of Jesus would be to remind us of the various human attempts to solve the problem of sin. In our fallen world there are repeated failed attempts to make the world better. The entire Old Testament tells of several failed attempts to transform the human heart to goodness and love.

CHAT

What are some of the ways you see people try to fix problems in our fallen world? There is a quote that goes something like, “Government cannot legislate morality.” The idea is that government can pass legislation to keep neighbors from damaging each other’s property and committing violence against each other, but it cannot force neighbors to love each other. To what extent do you agree or disagree with this statement?

READ & DISCUSS

Genesis 4:2-9

God tells Cain that “sin is crouching at your door ... but you must rule over it.” Cain could have chosen a different route from violence in his jealousy and insecurity. He felt overlooked. He felt that his brother received favor while he did not. His heart turned against his brother. The first act of violence in the Bible takes place within the family. Even though Adam and Eve tried to be good parents, they could not force their sons to love each other.

1. How are families uniquely subject to hurt feelings, failed expectations, and jealousy? What can families do to address these human tendencies?
2. The book of Genesis features flawed families. How much of your own family life do you see as nature (inborn and genetic) and how much is nurture (children learned behaviors from parents)?

Exodus 32:15-20

Moses could not even get the Ten Commandments down from the mountain before God's people had already broken them. Moses, in his rage, throws them on the ground and breaks the two stone tablets. The Apostle Paul later reflects that the main reason for the commandments turned out to be the exposing of sin rather than transforming hearts to goodness and obedience. (Romans 7:7-10)

1. How have religious rules and commandments worked or not worked in your life to make you desire goodness and love?
2. Where do we see people arguing that teaching more religious rules and God's commandments will fix our world's sin problems? Can we expect people that don't know God to behave as if they did?

1 Samuel 8:19-21

God's people knew that the commandments and laws failed to transform their hearts. As a fall back position, they asked for a king to rule over them. They hoped leadership would solve their problems. They thought a king would make them better people. Unfortunately, they learned the hard way that leaders are sinners also and the government cannot fix human sin.

King Saul became arrogant; King David abused his power for the sake of his lust; King Solomon compromised too much for the sake of peace. How are these similar to our political leaders today?

Micah 6:6-8

The prophets served God by preaching a revival of faith and trust in God. Micah was clear that God did not require more religion or more sacrifices. God's desire was for the heart more than religious activities.

What are reasonable expectations of 'religious activities' or even 'church attendance' for believers today? Do you think church is necessary and/or what's the value of it?

WRAP UP CHALLENGE: In our society people often assume that Christians want to impose more religious rules, post the Ten commandments, control Washington, and impose family values. Is there someone you might pass on the insight that none of these approaches transform human hearts? If someone comes to mind, the Holy Spirit may have them on your heart for a reason... pray for them, and ask for guidance and orchestration of that conversation.

CLOSE IN PRAYER FOR ONE ANOTHER

