

Week 3: The God who is Love

Key Verses:

1 John 4:7-9

⁷ Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. ⁸ Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love. ⁹ This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him.

Isaiah 55:8-9

⁸ "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways," declares the Lord. ⁹ "As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts."

Idea:

In our struggle to understand the suffering in the world at large and its occasional unwanted presence in our own lives, we must come back to the one foundational truth that has been proven irrevocably: that God loves us deeply and extravagantly. Currently we can only see the tapestry of God's plan for the world from our limited rear view. At times it appears to be a tangle of threads that serve no purpose and have no discernible pattern. But we must rest on this one unassailable yet mysterious truth: God is love. [Page 36]

Reflect:

- Are you able to share specific instances of suffering that you or a loved one have struggled with? Have there been times in your life when you have questioned the goodness and love of God? What have you found helpful during times of suffering? What has helped you to continue to trust in God's love and good purposes?
- Read Romans 5:1-11. Notice the flow of Paul's argument. Verses 1 & 2 speak of our salvation through Christ. Verse 3 to 5 describe the role that suffering plays in our lives. The remaining verses speak again of our salvation. What does this passage imply about the purpose and role of suffering? Notice the two references to God's love in this passage; in verses 5 and 8. Read these two verses aloud again. What evidence is given here to show that God loves us? How does that help us in times of suffering?
- Rod suggested that God can and does redeem suffering (eg. Joseph's Story... Genesis 50:20). As you look back on past trials, can you notice where God was at work in them? When challenges hit, what question(s) do you ask of God? God where are you? God, why? Rod suggested another question to ask: "God, how are you at work in this?" It doesn't take away any of the suffering or pain, but can help us see things from God's perspective and more easily allow transformation/growth/perseverance to occur.

Pray:

- Pray for yourselves and others who are experiencing suffering or who may be struggling to trust the goodness and love of God in the midst of difficult circumstances. Pray also for wisdom for yourselves and for your church, in knowing how to reach out to a suffering world with the love of God.