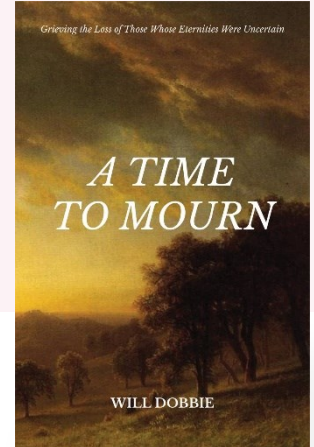




LEADER'S GUIDE

A TIME TO MOURN BY WILL DOBBIE



“... comfort is the one thing you cannot get by looking for it. If you look for truth, you may find comfort in the end: if you look for comfort you will not get either comfort or truth – only... wishful thinking... and, in the end, despair.”

C. S. LEWIS

THEMES

Bereavement

Grief

The Glory of God

Sovereignty

Death

Hope

HEADS UP! (TRIGGERS AND DELICATE TOPICS)

Difficult discussions about death (including suicide, infant loss, those with disabilities, and unbelievers)

STORYLINE

This is a book about how Christians can experience hope after the death of a non-believer, and it is so compelling and compassionately written that I would dare to give it to someone amid their grief. Our hope is found in the character of God as He reveals Himself in Scripture, and Dobbie's examination of Scripture proves that this hope is not fickle, but real and full of comfort.

Dobbie does not shy away from asking tough questions and providing biblical, well-thought-through, compassionate, and sometimes hard-to-accept answers.

“The loss of an unbelieving loved one can, of course, make us re-evaluate our theology. How loving and compassionate is God really? Is He a God I'm able to keep following without resentment? What about predestination? What about babies? What about the severely mentally disabled? And if the person I loved is now in hell, how can I have any consolation, any closure, any peace, ever again?” And while these answers may be challenging to accept, he also provides a way to comfort - through understanding truth and humbling ourselves in awe of the Glory of God.





DISCUSSION QUESTIONS & TALKING POINTS

1

Q. In the *Introduction*, Dobbie acknowledges that the bereaved Christian who is mourning the death of a loved one whose eternity is uncertain is “one of the most heartbreaking of circumstances” (p2), and a “taboo” subject. What were the three points Dobbie made to provide hope in these circumstances?

TALKING POINTS

1. No Shame

- “If you are struggling with the doctrine of hell, there is no shame in that” (p3).
- “as Job flails in the darkness with his bewildered grief, God ends up rebuking the friends who had been correcting him, and in fact commending him: ‘My anger burns against you [Eliphaz] and against your two friends, for you have not spoken of me what is right, as my servant Job has” (p3).

2. No Sin

- “...There’s no sin either- as long as you’re able to keep hold of whatever truth Job had clung to when God said he had ‘spoken what is right” (p4).
- “God calls us to trust, humbly, that He is working in ways mysterious to us. Keep this in sight, and the angst you have over God’s actions is without sin” (p4).

3. Truth and Solace

- “... comfort is the one thing you cannot get by looking for it. If you look for truth, you may find comfort in the end: if you look for comfort you will not get either comfort or truth – only... wishful thinking... and, in the end, despair” – C. S. Lewis (p5).

2

Q. Discuss the quote, “The loss of an unbelieving loved one can... make us re-evaluate our theology” (p4). Have you experienced this in your life?

TALKING POINTS

The loss of an unbelieving loved one can cause us to ask questions such as;

“How loving and compassionate is God really? Is He a God I’m able to keep following without resentment? What about predestination? What about babies? What about the severely mentally disabled? And if the person I loved is now in hell, how can I have any consolation, any closure, any peace, ever again?” (p4).

3

Q. In Chapter One, *The God Who Cares*, Dobbie gives us three examples from Scripture that demonstrate how God cares for those who are grieving the eternal loss of those they love. Which story impacted you the most? Why?

TALKING POINTS

Elijah (p8-9)

- The compassion God directs towards Elijah sees him fed and rested to meet his physical needs.
- “In the midst of Elijah’s suicidal grief at his people’s fatal faithlessness, God cared” (p9).

Jeremiah (p9-10)

- "Because of the Lord's great love we are not consumed, for His compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness." – Lamentations 3:22
- "We have a God whose compassions are frequent and consistent and trustworthy – as much so as the dawning of each new day. We have a God of unfailing faithfulness" (p9).

Paul (p9-11)

- Paul's grief over his fellow unbelieving brothers causes him to "moot the idea of desiring hell for himself in place of his brothers, if only it would mean their salvation" (p10).
- God reveals to Paul that all suffering will eventually lead to our good.

We can lean on these examples of older brothers in the faith who testify to us that amidst grief, God cares.

4

Q. "Your loss matters to God. But more than simply caring about your grief, He Himself grieves. It is His tragedy too" (p14). Did Chapter Two, *The God Who Grieves*, change your perspective on the way God grieves? How did Jesus grieve while here on earth?

TALKING POINTS

Jesus wept over Lazarus and mourned the lost in Jerusalem;

- Even though Jesus knew he would raise Lazarus, he still wept at the tragedy of death and grieved with those who were weeping.
- Jesus also grieves the eternal loss of those who refuse to acknowledge him and reject him as their Saviour.

5

Q. "If God does grieve, why does He proceed with hell?" (p17).

TALKING POINTS

"The answer has two parts: God proceeds with judgement, first because He is committed to more than one object of love simultaneously (not just His love for rebels); and second, because He is operating more than one level of will simultaneously (not simply His will for rebels to be saved)" (p17).

- "As well as loving sinful rebels, God also loves what is good" (p17).
- "He loves justice. He loves righteousness. He loves the destruction of evil. He loves the victims of child abuse and rape and torture and murder" (p17).
- "The question isn't 'How can a God of love punish some of His creatures?' The question is 'How can He not?' He doesn't judge despite His love. He judges because of His love" (p18).
- "His genuine love for rebels and grief over their destruction does not make His destruction of those rebels contradictory or dysfunctional. His grief is not mutually-exclusive with His judgement. His grief is real" (p18).
- "Scripture distinguishes between two types of will His sovereign will, sometimes known as His secret will, and His moral will, sometimes known as His revealed will" (p20).
- "God's desire for the judgement of defiant rebels occurs at the level of His sovereign will, His simultaneous desire that none should perish occurs at the level of His moral will" (p21).
- "despite the existence of hell, God's grief is real. His multiple objects of love and dual levels of will mean that His judgement of rebels is not self-contradictory... (p21).

6

Q. Discuss John Newton's quote, "If I ever reach heaven, I expect to find three wonders there: first, to meet some I had not thought to see there, second to miss some I had expected to see there, and third, the greatest Wonder of all, to find myself there." How can we find rest while not always knowing the answers to our questions?

TALKING POINTS

"We would be crushed if God didn't mercifully grant us vast oceans of ignorance in this life" (p24);

- God is a good Father and does not give us burdens that are too heavy for us or would crush us.
- We were not designed for omniscience which belongs to God.
- Just because we do not know the fate of a loved one, does not mean it was a tragedy.
- "fruit gives as an indication of someone's true identity and therefore eternal destiny" (p25).
- "Ultimately, salvation is a matter of repentance and faith" (p26).

7

Q. How did you feel while reading Chapter Four, *The God Who Judges*? Discuss the tension between God's sovereignty and free choice regarding our eternity.

TALKING POINTS

"If God actively chose to save some before the world began, doesn't that mean, effectively, that He chose for others to reject Him? And if so, how can they then be blamed for rejecting Him? How is that fair?" (p33)

- "God is sovereign and our choices are real" (p33).
- "Do not accept more responsibility than that which God puts on you. If you do, it will break you ... We need not be afraid that, if we do not immediately evangelize everyone we know, they will drop into hell by mistake. Christ will save every one of His chosen people" (Edward Donnelly p32).
- "There is admittedly a paradox here. So, if we deem this reality to be morally or intellectually nonsensical, we need to decide whether we think that God (wise and good infinitely beyond our understanding) is mistaken and we are right - or whether we (with limited, fallen hearts and minds) are mistaken and He is right" (p33).
- "It is never as if those whom God didn't choose for salvation later find themselves desperately repenting and believing but being turned away" (p34).
- "Jesus promises that 'whoever comes to me I will never cast out. But His words immediately beforehand reiterate that anyone only ever comes to Him because of God's sovereignty: 'All that the Father gives me will come to me. So, to answer the questions at the start of this section: yes, God chose for some not to be saved.' And no, God's choice for some not to be saved wasn't unfair. Fairness, by definition, is what God does. He isn't judged by it. He decides it. Right is right because God does it" (p35).
- "The very nature of God's saving grace and mercy is what they are undeserved. And in rejecting God, rebels are pursuing what they truly want" (p35).

Suicide/Infants and Others without Mental Capacity (p36-42).

- "The idea that suicide is the unforgivable sin is cruel and wrong. According to Scripture, the only sin which cannot receive God's forgiveness is ... refusing God's forgiveness" (p36).
- "Whatever the case, we can be certain that God will judge all people in a way that is right and fair and good, for He Himself is the standard of righteousness and fairness and goodness" (p42).

8

Q. In Chapter Five, Dobbie says, “We are more like mirrors than torches” (p44). What did he mean? What are the implications of this for our loved ones who are separated from God eternally?

TALKING POINTS

“Any light of attractiveness or goodness or lovability isn't ultimately generated from us or created in us” (p44):

- “It was God's grace in unbelievers which made them lovable to us in this life. In judgement, they will be cut off from that grace. God's light will be withdrawn from them. So the reasons for which we loved them will therefore no longer be true of them. In some sense at least, from our point of view, they will be different people from those we knew in this life. Those who reject Christ in this world will no longer be our loved ones” (44).
- “... in C. S. Lewis's words, that 'the dullest and most uninteresting person you can talk to may one day be a creature which, if you saw it now, you would be strongly tempted to worship, or else a horror and a corruption such as you now meet, if at all, only in a nightmare?’” (p44).
- “Hard as it may be to feel or imagine now, the eternal display of God's justice and holiness in the eternal destruction of the wicked will result in the eternal praise and joy of His people” (p47).
- “Scripture insists that God works ‘all things’ together for good. ‘All things’ includes the tragedy of others going to hell” (p50).

9

Q. How does God's judgement of sinners reveal His Glory to us?

TALKING POINTS

“The purpose of literally all that God does is His glory” (p54):

- “The reason God is the highest, most worthy Being in existence is His nature – His boundless omnipotence and omniscience and eternity and love and wisdom and beauty and everything else about Him. The Bible calls the manifestation – the display – of this nature His ‘glory’” (p54).
- God's glory should matter more to us than anything else in the universe. “We need to see God for who He is: truly awesome – in the true, original sense of the word. We need to cultivate a joyful, awe-struck fear of Him” (p57).
- “The extent to which we can grasp His glory is the extent to which we can endure the loss of an unbeliever. The degree to which we prize His glory is the degree to which we will cope” (p56).

10

Q. In the final chapter, *The God Who Applies*, Dobbie says, “Our God isn't an impractical academic. Not a single truth in Scripture comes to us without His intention for us to mobilise it in our lives” (p62). Which one of Dobbie's 16 points for strength, comfort, and health, resonated with you most?

TALKING POINTS

1. Pursue Truth (p61)
2. Draw Near to God (p62)
3. Grieve Well (p63)
4. Share God's Comfort to You with Others (p63)
5. Cultivate Contentment in Your Incomplete Knowledge (p63)
6. Learn to Leave People with the Lord (p64)
7. Be Serious about Your Own Salvation (p64)
8. Put Sin to Death (p65)

9. Be Humbled by Your Own Salvation (p66)
10. Be Urgent in Evangelism (p66)
11. Don't Bear Responsibility for the Lost which isn't Ultimately Yours (p67)
12. Be Quick to Forgive Unbelievers (p67)
13. Be Receptive to Renfinement (p67)
14. Keep the Eternal Perspective (p68)
15. Keep Your Loves Well-Ordered (p68)
16. Treasure Christ (p69)



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