



GROUP DISCUSSION GUIDE

The Bible is full of wisdom and life lessons, but sometimes we attribute things to scripture that aren't there. There are ideas or beliefs that become so popular people are surprised to discover they aren't biblical. Join us for a worship series that will explore some of the most common examples of when this takes place.

This guide is designed for individual or group use. Sermons in this series are available at MiddletownChristian.org/Sermons.

*Series Adapted from Half Truths by Adam Hamilton
Content and questions by Rachel Freeny, Brian Gerard, and Corey Miller
Art by Brando Hall*

ARE YOU SURE?

January 8, 2023

While the Bible is central to our faith, even those who study it the most have something to learn. In fact, those who study it the most are often the first to say that there is always more to learn within its pages. How much do you know about the Bible? Are you sure?

Discussion Questions:

1. Today's message included a quiz called "Star Wars or Scripture?" How did you do on the quiz? Did you find it hard or easy? Why?
2. If you were to rate your knowledge of scripture on a scale of 1-10, what number would you chose? How confident are you in that answer?
3. Have you ever thought something was in scripture but later found out it was not? If so, what was that like? How did it affect the belief you held?
4. Why do you think it is difficult for some people to change their belief about something, even when they are proven to be wrong?
5. Here is a list of the topics that will be covered in this series:
 - a. Everything Happens for a Reason
 - b. God Helps Those Who Help Themselves
 - c. God Won't Give You More Than You Can Handle
 - d. God Said It, I Believe It, That Settles It
 - e. Love the Sinner, Hate the Sin
 - f. God Has a Plan for Your Life

Which of these have you heard and believed were true? How do you feel about hearing what may and what may not be true about them?

EVERYTHING HAPPENS FOR A REASON

January 15, 2023

Key Scriptures: Psalm 23, Matthew 28:19-20, John 3:16-17

When the journey of life brings us or someone we know some kind of challenge or tragedy, we often try to find meaning for why those events happened. In those moments people sometimes try to bring comfort by suggesting that “everything happens for a reason.” While that idea is conveyed with the best of intentions, it is not the message of scripture. The good news is that what scripture says is far better.

Discussion Questions:

1. If you have ever heard or said the phrase, “Everything happens for a reason,” what was the context in which it happened?
2. What are some of the reasons people might want to believe that this statement is true?
3. What are some of the risks of this kind of statement? What does it say about God and the origin of tragic events?
4. In his book, *Half Truths*, Adam Hamilton mentions the following potential negative outcomes that can come from believing that everything happens for a reason:
 - a. It makes God responsible for every horrible action.
 - b. It removes or limits personal responsibility.
 - c. It can lead to fatalism.

What do you think about his assessment of the above outcomes?

5. According to Brian’s message, what does scripture teach about our experience of tragedy? What are some ways we can better represent that theology when we or someone we know faces struggles in life?

GOD HELPS THOSE WHO HELP THEMSELVES

January 22, 2023

Key Scriptures: Proverbs 10:4, 14:23, 19:15, 21:13, 22:9; 2 Thessalonians 3:10-12; James 1:27; Leviticus 23:22; Matthew 25:31-46; Deuteronomy 15:7-11; 1 John 4:19-21

Have you ever heard the phrase, “God helps those who help themselves”? If so, do you know where it originated? Despite what many people believe, it did not originate in the Bible. In this message, we will explore where this phrase gets things right and where it gets them wrong.

Discussion Questions:

1. Have you ever heard the phrase “God helps those who help themselves.”? If so, what was the context in which you heard it?
2. The phrase likely originates from an English politician in the mid 1600s. It gained attention in the United States when it was included in Benjamin Franklin’s *Poor Richard’s Almanack*. Why do you think so many people believe it is in the Bible?
3. While this phrase is not in the Bible, the idea behind it can be found in scripture, at least in part. Read the following passages: Proverbs 10:4, Proverbs 19:15, 2 Thessalonians 3:10-12, Proverbs 14:23
 - a. What comes to mind when you read these?
 - b. What were some examples Brian give in his message where God did help people accomplish something they were working toward?
4. While the above passages indicate that the concept behind today’s phrase can be found in the Bible, there are numerous examples of the Bible demonstrating that God helps those who can’t or even don’t help themselves. Read the following passages: James 1:27, Proverbs 19:17, 21:13, 22:9, Matthew 25:31-46.
 - a. What comes to mind when you read these passages?
 - b. What is the message behind these passages?
5. A core belief in Christianity is that our salvation is dependent upon the grace of Christ. There is nothing we can do to earn it. How does that fact speak to the idea that God helps those who help themselves?

GOD HAS A PLAN FOR YOUR LIFE

January 29, 2023

Key Scripture: Jeremiah 29:11

From an early age, many of us are taught that God has a plan for our life, and we need to figure out what it is and stick to it. Discovering God's plan for our life can feel like treasure hunting without a map. We spend sleepless nights wondering if we're on the right path or if we've messed up God's plan. But what if there is a way to know exactly what God's plan for your life is? What if it's not as complicated as you've always thought?

Discussion Questions:

1. When was the first time you heard someone say that God has a plan for your life?
2. How has the idea that God has a plan for your life affected the way you make life decisions?
3. Is the idea that God has a plan for your life stressful or comforting?
4. In her sermon, Rachel introduces a different way of thinking about God's plan for our lives. Do you agree or disagree? How does this change the way you look at your own life?

GOD SAID IT, I BELIEVE IT, THAT SETTLES IT

February 5, 2023

Key Scriptures: Deuteronomy 23:12-14, 21:18-21, 22:21; Leviticus 11:7-12, 19:19, 19:27; Matthew 5:17-20; 5:33-37, 6:6, 6:19-21, 22:37-40; 1 Timothy 2:9; 1 Corinthians 2:5-6

As Christians, we view the Bible as the sacred text of our faith and seek to follow its teachings as closely as possible. However, sometimes people take that goal further than what is helpful or even possible. That tendency has led to the creation of statements like, “God Said It, I Believe It, That Settles It.” While well-intentioned, this statement is not only unreasonable, it also does not reflect the intention of scripture.

Discussion Questions:

1. If you have ever heard the phrase, “God said it, I believe it, that settles it,” what was the context in which it was said? What do you think people mean when they say something like this?
2. In his sermon, Brian mentioned that Deuteronomy 22:12-14 was one of the most preached about and hotly discussed passages in scripture. What was the controversy about? What do you think about it?
3. Read Leviticus 11:7-12, 19:19, 19:27; Deuteronomy 21:18-21, 22:21.
 - a. While these passages are clear in their instructions, very few Christians argue they should be followed. Why?
 - b. Read Matthew 5:17-20. What does Jesus teach about following the laws found in the Old Testament? How do we reconcile that with our dismissal of biblical laws like the ones you just read about?
4. Some people say that the reason we don’t have to follow laws like those above is because we are a New Testament Church. If that’s the case, then how do we deal with laws like those found in the following passages? Matthew 5:17-20; 5:33-37, 6:6, 6:19-21; 1 Corinthians 2:5-6; 1 Timothy 2:9
5. In his book, Adam Hamilton shares a phrase that seems to capture our approach to scripture more faithfully than “God said it, I believe it, that settles it.” He writes: “God said it. I interpreted it (as best I could in light of all the filters imposed by my upbringing and culture, which I try to control for but you can never do a perfect job.) That doesn’t exactly settle it (but it does give me enough of a platform to base my values and decisions on.)”

What do you think about Hamilton’s phrase?

GOD WON'T GIVE YOU MORE THAN YOU CAN HANDLE

February 12, 2023

"I know that you have recently experienced [insert hardship here], but don't be discouraged! God will never give you more than you can handle!"

Many of us have heard a version of the above statement at one point or another in our life. There are times that a sentiment like this one may have even given us hope or strength to get through something. In fact, this could be a very helpful piece of advice...until it isn't.

Discussion Questions:

1. When have you heard this idea expressed in your life or in someone else's? Was this idea helpful or not?
2. How might this idea not be helpful to someone going through something?
3. When we say things like God will or won't give you something, do you think we take the time to think about what we are implying?
4. When do you feel like God has walked with you through something difficult?
5. How does the idea of a God who journeys with us instead of assigns stuff to us change your idea of God at all?

LOVE THE SINNER, HATE THE SIN

February 19, 2023

Key Scriptures: Luke 18:9-14; 1 John 5:16-17

The last half-truth we will discuss in this series is the phrase, “Love the Sinner, Hate the Sin.” In comparison to the other half-truths we’ve discussed, this one became popular in some Christian circles relatively recently. Not only is it not in the Bible, it is often used in the most harmful ways.

Discussion Questions:

1. If you have ever heard the phrase, “Love the sinner, hate the sin,” what was the context in which it was said? What do you think people mean when they say something like this?
2. Have you ever heard this statement used regarding anything other than things related to the LGBTQ+ community? If so, what was the topic? If not, why is this phrase used in such a specific way?
3. Read Luke 18:9-14. What does this passage teach us about phrases like, “Love the sinner, hate the sin.”?
4. In his sermon, Brian pointed out that Jesus never told us to “love the sinner.” Instead, he called us to love our neighbor. In response to that fact, Brian said the following: “Treating someone like your neighbor recognizes their dignity, their status as an equal, and shows a humility that creates a safe space for others, even those with whom we disagree. Calling someone a sinner demeans the dignity of others, makes clear we don’t see them as our equal, and projects a self-righteousness that creates an unsafe space for those on the receiving end of our words.”

Do you agree or disagree with this statement? Why or why not?

5. At Middletown Christian Church, we seek to be a community where all of God’s children are not only welcomed, but they also belong. In what ways can we do a better job of creating a safe space for the LGBTQ+ community both in our church and in our individual lives?