

Divine Disruption

PLACE YOUR FAITH
IN GOD WHEN LIFE
BREAKS YOUR HEART

a 5-Week Small Group Discussion Guide

DivineDisruptionBook.com

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JOSHUA 24:14–15

“Therefore, fear the Lord and worship him in sincerity and truth. Get rid of the gods your ancestors worshiped beyond the Euphrates River and in Egypt, and worship the Lord. But if it doesn’t please you to worship the Lord, choose for yourselves today: Which will you worship—the gods your ancestors worshiped beyond the Euphrates River or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you are living? As for me and my family, we will worship the Lord.”

ISAIAH 43:18–19

“Do not remember the past events; pay no attention to things of old. Look, I am about to do something new; even now it is coming. Do you not see it? Indeed, I will make a way in the wilderness, rivers in the desert.”

PHILIPPIANS 4:4–7

“Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! Let your graciousness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. Don’t worry about anything, but in everything, through prayer and petition with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.”

Anthony

On a visit as a kid to Six Flags Over Texas, I raced to my favorite ride, the Shock Wave. I thought I was ahead of the line only to be told by a maintenance engineer that the ride was shut down. “It won’t be open today. Or even tomorrow,” the engineer explained. “See, we’re turning you upside down twice in an open-air car that’s going sixty miles per hour. So we have to take our time and make absolutely sure that every tiny bolt, screw, and wheel on this thing is safe and secure.”

I stood there and thought about what the engineer had said. On the one hand, I was disappointed. On the other hand, I knew what he was telling me was not only true, but it was for my own good. I was simply going to have to wait. So I had to decide something that morning. Did I believe the engineer knew what he was talking about or not?

In the same way, we have to make a decision concerning God, the One who engineered our minds, bodies, and spirits. Can we take Him at His word? Does He know what He is talking about when He decides to shut things down in our lives? Life can be a lot like that roller coaster; it moves fast and whips you every which way. Far less damage is done when repairs are made and maintenance is attended to—even when things are seemingly at a complete halt. What makes it hard is when you watch other people's lives moving at one hundred miles per hour and they seem to be having the best time. In those moments, you and I have to make the decision that we trust the Engineer on our unique journeys and that He will do what He promised to get us back on track.

Our family felt like life was shutting down when, within a short span of time, God called several close family members home to heaven. When our lives of ministry took a sharp turn in the face of a pandemic. When our prayers for healing weren't answered according to our desires. When you feel like your life has shut down and you have to wait, do you trust the Engineer? When the ride has been disrupted, are you going to have faith that God is still in control?

Tony

I have always believed that God is sovereign, even in the midst of bad times. Nothing happens that does not first pass through the hands of God. Within that sovereignty, I have to function in a way that seeks to glorify Him and bring good to others. I firmly believe that serving others is a key to enduring in difficult times. When we minister to the hurting and lost, God ministers to us. By blessing, we are blessed.

It's easy to praise the Lord when all is well and life is good, prayers are answered, miracles are witnessed, victories are won. We get confused about God when the opposite occurs. But God is God in good times and bad. In Job 13:15, Job said,

"Even if he kills me, I will hope in him" (csb). True faith praises through the storm. Just like our family, Job went to a whole lot of funerals in a short amount of time too.

God's grace and blessing ever flow. I serve others, doing my best to live in a manner worthy of the calling. God blesses me. Out of that blessing, I continue to serve others even more. And God continues to bless. Living water is never stagnant. It flows persistently, streams into rivers into the sea.

In this life there will be sorrow and pain. Wars will be fought. Disease will spread. Conflicts rise. But I would rather face crisis with God than to face it alone.

GROUP DISCUSSION

How does believing God is good and sovereign affect how you handle difficult circumstances that you don't understand?

How can God's Word and worship help you wait on God when life feels like it is shutting you down?

What mindset do you want to have when you face the next disruption in your life? How can serving others help you face crisis with God's strength?

Prayer

Lord God, You created the heavens and the earth, and I now make a decision to trust You in all circumstances. I know that life brings sorrow and pain, but I also acknowledge that You provide mercy and grace and bring unexpected blessings to Your people as we walk with You. I know that in spite of the way I feel, I can face anything in my path through the strength You provide to those who call on Your name. Amen.

PSALM 22:1–5

“My God, my God, why have you abandoned me? Why are you so far from my deliverance and from my words of groaning? My God, I cry by day, but you do not answer, by night, yet I have no rest. But you are holy, enthroned on the praises of Israel. Our ancestors trusted in you; they trusted, and you rescued them. They cried to you and were set free; they trusted in you and were not disgraced.”

ISAIAH 40:28–31

“Do you not know? Have you not heard? The Lord is the everlasting God, the Creator of the whole earth. He never becomes faint or weary; there is no limit to his understanding. He gives strength to the faint and strengthens the powerless. Youths may become faint and weary, and young men stumble and fall, but those who trust in the Lord will renew their strength; they will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not become weary, they will walk and not faint.”

Jonathan

For four straight days my ten-year-old daughter wouldn't eat. We did everything we could to persuade her, but nothing seemed to work, and we were getting more worried as time passed. “What is wrong?” we begged. “Why won't you eat?” Finally, she responded in a low, sad voice. “I just don't know what's happening to our family.” It was clear. All of the loss and heartache we'd been facing was taking a toll on even the youngest members of our family.

Once we figured out why she wasn't eating, it was even harder. How do you help a child process the deaths of so many people she loves? You can't exactly say, “Well, Kelsey, our family is under spiritual attack.” It's a heartbreaking thing to hear your child say, “Daddy, is something gonna happen to me next?”

Tony

I lost my brother, my sister, my brother-in-law, my niece, my father at Thanksgiving, and my wife just after Christmas. Priscilla had half of a lung removed because of a cancerous tumor. Then Chrystal discovered a suspicious growth too. After that, we faced the biggest pandemic in over a century, throwing our church into lockdown, halting our outreach and ministry. I'm sure you also know what it's like to face one crisis after another, to struggle with confusion and pain.

Truth is, there are times in life when God seems nowhere to be found. We feel distant, lost, forgotten. Every honest believer, at some point, comes to a place where instead of singing praises, they sing the blues. We have all cried out in the dark, "God, where are You?"

I have devoted my life to study and prayer. Let me share a hard truth I have discovered along the way: God can be difficult to understand. Sometimes He will explain, but often He does not. We can ask God questions, but we cannot question God. Asking God questions means we are humbly seeking understanding. But to question God is to challenge His authority. Challenge is steeped in rebellion and arrogance.

God is all-knowing, all-seeing, all-powerful, unrestricted by time and space. God is limitless yet intimate. A low view of God in crisis means the crisis can own you. A high view of God says the crisis no longer has the last word. I cannot deny the circumstances, but I can refuse to give circumstances the final say.

When crisis has knocked you down and you're fighting for the next breath, a few praise songs and a Sunday morning sermon aren't enough. You have to press in tight, walking so close with God that every breath is prayer and praise, sunrise to sunset, all through the night, weaving Jesus into every piece and portion of your life. That brings new strength.

How can we know we are on the right track? When the majority of our time waiting on God is spent in worship and thanks instead of complaining. The Lord doesn't promise to answer every question. He doesn't promise to explain, but He does promise to inhabit the praises of His people (see Psalm 22:3) and give strength to those who trust by waiting on Him (see Isaiah 40:31).

GROUP DISCUSSION

During a time when you felt like God was distant and uncaring about your circumstances, what choices did you have in how you viewed God? In the midst of a crisis, how does the truth of God's Word inform your view of God?

What does it look like to walk close to God through a crisis? How are praise and prayer parts of this walk?

How does God's promise to renew the strength of those who trust and wait on Him encourage you?

Prayer

Heavenly Father, as I struggle during difficult times, I am thankful that You are with me. I am thankful that You are able to renew my strength. I am thankful that in You I can overcome those things that threaten to drag me down. Even when I don't understand my circumstances, I know that You are with me and that You are able to make a miracle out of any mess. Amen.

PSALM 91:1–2

“The one who lives under the protection of the Most High dwells in the shadow of the Almighty. I will say concerning the Lord, who is my refuge and my fortress, my God in whom I trust.”

JOHN 15:4–5

“Remain in me, and I in you. Just as a branch is unable to produce fruit by itself unless it remains on the vine, neither can you unless you remain in me. I am the vine; you are the branches. The one who remains in me and I in him produces much fruit, because you can do nothing without me.”

Chrystal

If you’ve ever struggled with sickness in your body, you know that sometimes the only way to move forward and get back to a good quality of life is by cutting out those things that are hurting you. And not just by changing your diet or having something surgically removed, but by cutting out bad habits or lifestyle choices that are making you sick.

God made all things to work together for the good physically, spiritually, and mentally. But sometimes, in order to prioritize our spiritual health, we need to pull away from anything that might be holding us back—even things that aren’t necessarily sinful. The Bible tells us that anything that holds us back from God can become an idol and get more of our focus or energy than is right. God commands that we devote our heart, mind, and soul to Him. He is a loving but jealous God. So if we are watching five hours of Netflix a night, but we cannot spend five minutes in prayer and the Word, it’s time to cut it all back. It’s time to remove anything from your life that may be distracting you from God.

With the pandemic, there has been a lot more opportunity to spend time with God. And there is the need, because in forced rest there is also anxiety and fear. Scripture tells us that the solution for fear and anxiety is to draw close to the Lord. To abide in Him and rest in the shadow of His wing, to let our praise and fellowship be unbroken. When the storm hits, anxious sheep stay close to the shepherd's side. Now is the time to dwell.

This is a time for more prayer, more devotion, more worship, more time in the Word. Our strength is found in the joy of the Lord. "Dwell" simply means that we remain in a constant state of fellowship with our Father, putting aside everything that might distract us from His purpose and running our race to win.

Tony

For me, the concept of dwelling and abiding has meant more time meditating on God's Word. During the pandemic, there's been less sense of urgency, so I've tried to take advantage of that. Sometimes in the middle of the night when I wake up, I pray and meditate. Most mornings, I read three chapters of the Bible. I've had time to reflect more on the things that matter, and it's been good for me to spend time with God without it being tied to a program or a sermon series. This season has highlighted my need for God, for His presence and guidance and help.

Moses told the Lord in Exodus 33:15, "If You don't go with us, we're not going to go." So it's not so much about goals or plans; it's about His presence. I don't want the blessing of the promised land if I can't have God too. It's better to stay in the desert with God than enter the promised land without Him. I've had to prioritize my relationship with God over work. It's better to have His presence in hard times than to have times of plenty without Him.

GROUP DISCUSSION

What activities or habits in your life hold you back from time with God?
How can you set aside these distractions?

How can you build time with God into your day?

What are you willing to sacrifice to prioritize your relationship with God over all else? What does God promise to those who do this?

Prayer

Lord, I ask You to reveal to me those things in my life that distract me from following You with my whole heart. I choose today to make You first in my life. I bring my fear, worries, and anxiety to You and choose to rest in the comfort of being Your beloved child. As I meditate on Your Word and praise You, I thank You because You are always with me, and even in the dark that is enough. Amen.

DEUTERONOMY 30:19–20

“I call heaven and earth as witnesses against you today that I have set before you life and death, blessing and curse. Choose life so that you and your descendants may live, love the Lord your God, obey him, and remain faithful to him. For he is your life, and he will prolong your days as you live in the land the Lord swore to give to your ancestors Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.”

2 CORINTHIANS 4:16–18

“Therefore we do not give up. Even though our outer person is being destroyed, our inner person is being renewed day by day. For our momentary light affliction is producing for us an absolutely incomparable eternal weight of glory. So we do not focus on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal”

Priscilla

The pace of our lives has always been fast. Mom would remind us over and over again, “Slow down. Take time. Stop and smell the roses before they’re gone.” She could see from the outside looking in that if we weren’t mindful of our schedules and commitments, we could easily be overrun by them. Her wise counsel continues to help me make decisions about the pace and priorities in my life. Balance is tough, but it’s an ongoing pursuit.

I don’t minimize the hardships we’ve all been through, but the pandemic did present an opportunity to be still. To enjoy time with my husband and kids without a 6:00 a.m. cross-country flight hanging over my head. Even in this tragedy, there have been so many moments of tiny grace. Little opportunities to breathe all the way in and all the way out again. I don’t want to miss that or take it for granted.

Life is so short. Eight months after Mommy, my mother-in-law passed away. Another major loss. Another long process of grieving. We didn't have time with Jerry's mom like we did with my mother, though. She passed suddenly. I don't want to take any of my loved ones for granted. I want to appreciate every moment, best that I can, and invest in things that give joy, have eternal value, and build a good legacy for generations to come.

Tony

When the Lord disturbs something, it serves to highlight the spiritual over the physical. We have allowed our spiritual lives to fracture and go stale, going through the motions of Bible study and prayer. When our efforts are mostly surface, God becomes an afterthought.

I'm not suggesting God unleashed a plague to teach us a lesson, but in the broad sense I feel He has said, "I'm closing the church doors for a while. I am going to change the paradigm. I'm not going to let you do things like you used to do because you have valued religion over relationship with Me. So let's tear it down to the foundation and start over again."

The pandemic forced me to reorient my priorities—to reconsider what matters most and how I can focus on those things intentionally. Some of those old things we did out of habit and routine were undone in an instant. In the light of all this loss, I was reminded that relationships are what matter. Not routines. Family matters. I don't have to fill a sports arena and preach to be content and feel a sense of purpose. Time with my grandkids is just as fulfilling, and even more so. I can't go back to the way things used to be. I don't want to. God has brought me and my family a new normal, and we are pressing on.

We want the coronavirus to disappear, for racial harmony to arise, for dignity to reassert itself, for unity to be magnified and manifested. But there must be a resetting of priorities. We must define our lives by kingdom standards. God desires to give us another opportunity to embrace humility, realign culture, and return to Him. As a nation, we are too divided, and we have strayed too far. The solution is to return our hearts to God and lead by example.

GROUP DISCUSSION

How can disruptions become opportunities to get your priorities straight?

In what ways can you invest in things that give you joy and have eternal value?

In which areas of your life do you need to apply God's kingdom standards to your priorities?

Prayer

Lord, You hold all things together. When I feel overwhelmed by life, help me to place Your priorities first and to invest in what matters most. I rejoice in the opportunity to live according to Your kingdom standards and to align my heart with Yours. I praise You for the relationships and opportunities You provide and for the joy and hope that come from living for eternal things. Amen.

DEUTERONOMY 6:4–9

“Listen, Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength. These words that I am giving you today are to be in your heart. Repeat them to your children. Talk about them when you sit in your house and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Bind them as a sign on your hand and let them be a symbol on your forehead. Write them on the doorposts of your house and on your city gates”

PSALM 34:11

“Come, children, listen to me; I will teach you the fear of the Lord”

1 CORINTHIANS 11:1

“Imitate me, as I also imitate Christ”

1 CORINTHIANS 4:15–17

“For I became your father in Christ Jesus through the gospel. Therefore I urge you to imitate me. This is why I have sent Timothy to you. He is my dearly loved and faithful child in the Lord. He will remind you about my ways in Christ Jesus, just as I teach everywhere in every church”

Anthony

Times are still kind of stressful. Just as a rare Dallas blizzard nearly destroyed the ministry offices, Dad caught COVID. Thank God, he was mostly asymptomatic.

Mom was fiercely protective of Dad, so I want to help take care of him as best I can. “Keep the ministry going,” she told us.

We made it through the anniversary of her passing, and all I can really say is it was bittersweet, difficult in ways I can’t even begin to explain. But sweet, too, because we realized what a wonderful legacy she left for us to share. I don’t know why we have to lose something to fully appreciate its significance. But that’s how it seems to work down here.

As we prepared to celebrate our first Christmas without my mom, we tried to re-create everything she did. Mom loved Christmas and did everything in a big way—decorations, lights, and food. I stood in front of our house for a long time, thinking about all the memories we shared, wondering what the future might hold without her. When I walked inside and soaked in the sounds and smells of Christmas, the bustle of my sisters in the kitchen, it felt like Mom was still here.

And then I realized something. Mom is here. She’s here through Priscilla, through Chrystal, through Jonathan, and through me. Here through the grandkids and great-grandchildren as they run around the house she loved so.

As a kid, you take so much for granted. Then you grow up and realize what a gift you have been given and what a privilege it is to carry those traditions forward. The best thing you can leave behind is a good legacy. In that sense, Mommy will never leave. We will always have a part of her here with us.

Daddy isn’t going anywhere anytime soon. As long as he has breath, he will serve God’s people and preach the Word. But Jonathan is in place to follow in his footsteps, and when that time comes, he will be ready. I think about my

mother's dedication to excellence, and I want to be faithful and diligent with family and friends, in work, play, and serving God. Legacy inspires legacy. I want to leave a good mark too.

I think about all the loved ones we have lost over the last few years. The Bible says they will not return to us, but we shall join them. On that day it will be all sweet and no bitter, all peace and joy, no more loss or grief or pain. Because of the hope we have in Christ, we will see Mommy again. That takes away a bit of death's sting. Until then, we will carry the mantle, and we will carry on.

God has reminded us that life is so futile and fleeting. We are only passing through. There is a time for everything. To laugh and to cry. To grieve and to dance. A time to be silent and another to speak. Not just for our family, but for all of God's family. Even when life breaks our hearts, we can still hold on. To faith. To love. To promises. To hope. And to each other. All of us together, trusting God.

GROUP DISCUSSION

Whose legacy of faith have you received? What did you learn about following Jesus from that person?

Who watches your life and faith during disruptions and difficulties?

How can you intentionally create a legacy of faith to pass on to someone else?

Prayer

Father, thank You for the legacy of faith that I have received from Your faithful ones. I know that my time on earth is fleeting in light of eternity, so I pray that You will use my life to bring others close to You. May my kingdom legacy be that of a faithful servant. When life breaks my heart, may I choose faith, love, and the hope that I have in Your promises. May my example of what it means to trust You bless others for generations to come. Amen.

