

STUDY GUIDE
GROUPS / INDIVIDUALS

FIVE SESSIONS

L A U R A S T O R Y

WHEN GOD DOESN'T FIX IT

*LEARNING TO WALK IN GOD'S PLANS
INSTEAD OF OUR OWN*





SESSION ONE

Don't Be Surprised by Trouble

Our hope comes in Jesus, even when he doesn't do what we want him to do. Even when he doesn't fix what's broken in our life. . . . When Jesus is with us, he's our anchor in the rough waters of a troubled life. If we want to survive the storm we need to cling to him like the salvation he is.

L A U R A S T O R Y

Introduction

There is a popular expression that says, “Into each life some rain must fall.” We all encounter stormy times in our lives. Sometimes this takes the form of just a gentle rain, but at other times it is an intense down-pour with hurricane-force winds. When these times come, it is difficult for us not to be taken back and ask, *God, why did this happen?*

Perhaps what we need to do is adopt the mindset of a young boy named Daniel. Daniel grew up in a tough neighborhood. He had friends whose houses were robbed, and he knew that if he left his bike out front at night, there was a good chance it would be gone in the morning. He knew better than to walk around his block alone after dark. He was on his toes when he saw strangers and was ready to run home as fast as he could if he sensed trouble.

Would you say that Daniel was *paranoid* or *prepared*?

The truth is, Daniel sees the world he lives in the way it really is. He has learned that he should be prepared, careful, and aware of his surroundings. Daniel has his eyes open to the fact that this world can be a dangerous place and the neighborhood where he lives has very specific hazards. His preparedness actually makes his neighborhood a safer place for him.

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Dear friends, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal that has come on you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice inasmuch as you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed (1 Peter 4:12–13).

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If Daniel did not recognize the risks around him, or if he decided to ignore them, he would be in greater danger. But by honestly looking at the threats in the environment where he lives, he can make decisions and take actions that help him make it through each day. As believers in Christ, we need to do the same. We need to take to heart

Jesus' words when he said, "In this world you will have trouble." But we must also remember the rest of that verse: "But take heart! I have overcome the world" (John 16:33).

Talk About It

Welcome to the first session of *When God Doesn't Fix It*. If you or any of your fellow group members do not know one another, take some time to introduce yourselves. Next, to get things started, discuss one of the following questions:

- What are some beliefs you held as a child that turned out not to be true? How do the misconceptions we hold as children often shape our lives?

or

- How can the recognition that this life will have loss, pain, and trouble prepare us to face these challenging times? What are some of the consequences if we deny or ignore the reality of pain in this life?

Video Teaching Notes

As you watch the video teaching segment for session one, use the following outline to record anything that stands out to you.

Trouble finds its way into our lives

When hard truth comes crashing in

A new understanding of the biblical story

The good news of the gospel:

- The reality and cost of sin
- The gift of grace (God's love revealed through Jesus)
- The glory of eternal life

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Man chose to disobey God and the result was a marring of creation that could only be rectified by the sacrifice of a loving Savior.

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The cost of following Jesus

Standing on the solid rock

Bible Study and Video Discussion

Take a few minutes with your group members to discuss what you just watched and explore these concepts in Scripture.

1. Many people grow up believing or being taught that God promises to give us a good, safe, pain-free life if we do our best to follow and honor him. What were you taught or led to believe about how God will treat you if you seek to live a good life for him? Where do you think this teaching came from?

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The older I get, the more I learn that
the pursuit of truth is a lifelong endeavor.

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2. In the story of Daniel, we read how God closed the mouths of lions and allowed him to walk out of the den unscratched. In the story of David, we see how the giant Goliath fell defeated at his feet. What is the danger of simplifying Bible stories like these into lessons that give the impression that people of faith always end up on top and win the earthly battles they face? What are other Bible stories that are often used in a way that sends this message to children and adults?
3. The truth is that few characters in the Bible were so good that their behavior warranted God's unquestioning blessing.

Who are some characters in the Bible who had both good and bad qualities? How does the presence of so many biblical characters with a mix of good and bad affirm that God's blessings in our life are not based on our "good behavior"?



Our hope isn't found in being good so God will be good to us.
Our hope is found in the person of Jesus Christ, his overwhelming love for us, and his ability to sustain us no matter what this life brings.



4. Read **Romans 6:19–23**. What do you learn in this passage about the battle between sin and righteousness? According to Paul, what are the consequences of sin? How do you see this reality in our world today?

What are the results of becoming a "slave" to God? What benefits do we gain from living a life of holiness?

5. Read **Romans 5:12**. Why is it absolutely essential that we understand the bad news of sin if we are going to fully understand the good news of the gospel and the hope we have in Jesus? If someone looked at you and said, “I don’t think sin is really a big deal,” what would you say to help him or her understand the extent and cost of sin?

6. Read **Romans 3:23**, **Ephesians 2:8–9**, and **Romans 8:1–4**. How is salvation a gift to be received and not a payment to be earned? What is the danger of believing that our actions and “goodness” are the reason for our salvation?

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Despite what culture tells us, Scripture states clearly that the way to know eternal life is through the person of Jesus Christ.
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7. How does a relationship with Jesus and the hope of eternal life help you stand strong during the storms you face in this life? What is a tough time you recently walked through? How has your relationship with Jesus enabled you to stand strong and endure?

8. Read **2 Corinthians 4:16–18**. What does the apostle Paul mean when he says, “Our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all”? How can we keep our eyes and focus on what is unseen and eternal as we walk through the hard times of this life?

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For the disciples, following Jesus didn't lead to better homes or better jobs or more comfortable lives. It led the majority of these men to their deaths, but not before experiencing the kind of life worth dying for.

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9. Read **2 Corinthians 11:16–33**. What are some of the struggles, pains, and losses the apostle Paul faced as he lived for Jesus? How could he be so optimistic and joy-filled in light of all he suffered?
10. How can your group members pray for you and support you as you walk through a painful time or as you support someone you love who is going through a difficult time?

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In our search for truth, is it possible that God, in his sovereignty, might allow the things in life that appear to be sturdy to lose their sturdiness, in order to show us that Jesus truly is the only sturdy thing in this life?

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Closing Prayer

Use the prompts below to guide your group in a time of prayer together:

- Thank God for those people who taught you the Bible and instructed you in the truth of God's Word.
- Praise God for the times he has delivered you from the lions' den and given you power to overcome giants—and also praise him for the power he gives to stand in faith even when the battles you face don't have a happy ending.
- Celebrate the amazing and undeserved gift of grace revealed in the death of Jesus for your sins.
- Ask God to teach you to walk in joy even during the storms of life.
- Pray for group members to cling to Jesus with deep faith for as long as they walk through the valley of pain and loss . . . even if it takes a lifetime.



Between-Sessions

P E R S O N A L S T U D Y



Reflect on the content covered in this first session by exploring the following material from the Bible and from *When God Doesn't Fix It*. Before you begin, answer these questions:

What are you hoping to gain from this study?

What are some difficult situations that you are facing right now?

What questions do you have for God about these situations?

What do you feel God is teaching you through these circumstances?

Day One: The Reality of Our World

In the video this week, Laura shared about some of the symptoms her husband, Martin, began to experience after they moved to Atlanta. For several months he had been more forgetful than usual, but now he began to seem perpetually exhausted. At first Laura thought it was because of his hectic work and school schedule, but soon he started falling asleep during Bible studies or—even worse—during worship services at Perimeter Church.

Martin had been a go-getter with tons of energy, but soon he began falling asleep at social events. For Laura, he had become someone she didn't recognize. Ultimately, the doctors diagnosed the cause of Martin's symptoms: a brain tumor. This life-changing event shook Laura and caused her to reassess the beliefs she had held about God since she was a child. These were beliefs such as if she followed Jesus and was the “best” Christian she could be, God would reward her with a pain-free life. But Laura came to understand that God didn't owe her anything—and that she could never be “good enough” to earn God's blessings. As Isaiah wrote, “All of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags (64:6).”

But the question remains: *Why does life have to be so hard?* Paul summed up the reason in Romans 5:12: “Just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin . . . in this way death came to all people, because all sinned.” Our world is decaying—seen in the form of death, addiction, adultery—because *sin* entered our world. In fact, when we look at the story of the Bible, we find the narrative breaks down into four parts: creation, fall, redemption, and restoration. Understanding these four segments of the narrative, and where we fall within them, will give us insight into what we can expect not only from God but also from ourselves.

1. Read **John 16:33**. What does Jesus say our lives will involve here on earth? What promise does he give to us?

2. Read **Romans 5:18–19**. What does Paul say are the effects of sin entering into the world? How are people made righteous again?

3. Given these passages, why is it unrealistic to expect that we will not have trials in life—regardless of how “good” we think we are before God? Why should we expect trouble?

Day Two: God's Perfect Creation

How did we come into being? How did the world come to be? You've probably asked those and similar questions—and by now, you've likely arrived at an answer. Whether in church, or in a science class, you've heard one or more explanations of how the earth was created, and you've chosen which one you believe. If you accept what is taught in the Bible, you believe the world was created by an all-knowing, all-powerful, and all-loving God. God, the Creator of the universe, was there before time began and will be there when time ends.

He was. And is. And will always be.

Some argue whether God created the world in a literal six days or whether he allowed it to evolve over several millions of years. But more important than exactly *how* it was created is the truth that “in the beginning *God* created the heavens and the earth” (Genesis 1:1, emphasis added). The earth was beautiful. And good. It was a tropical paradise lit by a brilliant, yellow sun and cooled by deep, blue pools of water. Every animal flourished in harmony with each other and with the humans God created to oversee them all. Peace and purpose reigned.

The pinnacle of God's creation was a man named Adam and a woman named Eve. God created them to worship, love, and serve him. "God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them" (Genesis 1:27). More than anything, God wanted a relationship with Adam and Eve, and he gave them free will so they could do those things freely and voluntarily. And for a while, they did.

The Lord put Adam into the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it. Together, he, Eve, and God would walk through the garden. They would stop to pet the lion that had lain down with the lambs. In that perfect Eden, Adam and Eve were free to do whatever they chose—with one exception. God warned them not to eat the fruit off of one particular tree—the tree of the knowledge of good and evil—which stood in the center of the garden.

When Adam and Eve disobeyed God's command, it ushered in the next section of the Bible's narrative: sin and the fall.

1. Read **Genesis 2:5–17**. How would you describe the earth based on this account?
2. What task did God give Adam to do in the garden? What freedoms did God give him? What restrictions were imposed?
3. What did God say would be the consequences of Adam's disobedience?

Day Three: Sin Enters the World

“When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it” (Genesis 3:6). So it was that Adam and Eve disregarded God’s instruction. There was a lot of temptation and blame to throw around, but in the end they broke the one rule God had given them and ate fruit from the forbidden tree.

Despite what Adam and Eve thought (or perhaps what they hoped), the created could never hope to be equal to the Creator. Though they had dominion over all creation, and though God had given them freedom to make their own decisions and rule the earth, Adam and Eve had no right to disregard the Lord’s rule. When they did, the consequences of their rebellion were real and swift.

Immediately, they realized they were naked and hid in shame. They were forced to leave the peace and serenity of the Garden of Eden and were not allowed to return. For the first time they had to scrounge for food, as their once-ample supply was now gone. They developed a taste for meat. Animals and humans would no longer be safe mixing with those that weren’t the same species. Eve gave birth to children, and it was painful. The children fought, and eventually one son killed the other. Sickness and disease entered the world. What was once healthy, and eternal, began to decay. Death followed.

The consequences of Adam and Eve’s sin is a tidal wave that has continued to knock down every generation in its path. The world God made is no longer at peace, and nothing is in the same condition as when he created it. People don’t act like they should. The result of sin is on the front page of every newspaper, as well as the eleven o’clock news. All around us, we observe broken lives, broken treaties, broken promises, and broken relationships. We ourselves are treading in the stinky, murky, dark, dirty waters of our own making, hoping not to go under.

The biggest break is our relationship with God. And yet, rather than repair it, we continue the rebellion through our lies and grudges, holding on to anger, and lusting over people and things we prefer to keep private. We hold hate in our hearts and envy in our eyes. We lust, we leak, we fumble, and we fail. “There is no one righteous, not even one; there is no one who understands; there is no one who seeks God. All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one” (Romans 3:11–12).

It’s called the “fall” because we’ve fallen away from God, and we can’t get up by ourselves. Everything is distorted and broken, and as much as we try, we can’t put our humpty-dumpty world back together again. But fortunately, God did not leave us in this state. Even as he uttered the curse against humankind, he was planning a way for each of us to be reconciled. God’s plan would usher in the next section of the Bible’s narrative: redemption.

1. Read **Genesis 3:6–10**. What were the immediate effects of Adam and Eve’s disobedience?
2. Read **Genesis 3:11–19**. What were the long-term effects of their sin (the curse)?
3. What are some of the consequences of the fall that you see today?

Day Four: Restoring the Broken

In our broken world, each of us has a plan to fix the things we see are broken. Maybe, for you, the answer is a political party, an ideology, or a philosophy. Perhaps it is a self-help book or a person you idolize. We believe that if everyone would just see things the way *we* do—do what we tell them to do—everything would be okay. The problem is that none of us can agree on what that plan should be.

Whenever we try to integrate our solution, we reach a point where we can't take it any further. As much as we'd like, *we don't rule the world*, because we didn't create it. So we fail at our attempts to spread our personal gospel of solutions—yet somehow, we each believe there is *someone* or *something* that can make things right. We can agree there is a rescuer, even if we can't agree on who or what it is.

And we are right. There is a rescuer. Even though God hated our sin and rebellion, he determined to restore his relationship with us. Ever since Adam and Eve messed up, God has had a plan to restore us. He even promised Adam and Eve there would be a rescue. He said one of their descendants would crush the evil that had been unloosed on the earth.

Through the generations, God's plan continued to unfold. Centuries before the rescuer's coming, the prophets dropped hints about his birth, life, and death. They recorded these accounts and passed them down in both oral and written form. In these accounts, which we have assembled into sacred Scripture, we learn he would live the perfect and blameless life we were intended to live—and that our punishment would become his.

The entire record, gathered into what we today call the Old Testament, points to this rescuer and this climactic event that would occur in history. And then it did. Jesus Christ, the Son of God, entered history as a baby born in Bethlehem. This God-man spent his life helping those around him understand what these ancient eyewitness accounts meant when they alluded to him. He interpreted them and prophesied about his own death and

resurrection. He directed people to his loving Father. And though he lived a blameless and perfect life, as part of his Father's plan, he agreed to take the punishment for our sins—past, present, and future.

Our faith in Christ's ability to rescue us relieves us of the punishment we are due and restores our relationship with his Father—God, our Creator. For all those who believe Jesus is their rescuer, his death and resurrection overcomes our sin and its consequences. He overcomes physical death and restores eternal life. “The Lord Jesus Christ, who gave himself for our sins to rescue us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father, to whom be glory for ever and ever” (Galatians 1:3–5).

Outside of Jesus, we cannot restore our relationship with God or our broken world. We can't stop sin or the consequences of sin from happening. But with our faith in God's plan and in Jesus whom he sent to rescue us, we can now turn from our rebellious ways and have victory over sin. But the story doesn't end there, for God promises to renew the whole world. This is the final section of the Bible's narrative: *restoration*.

1. Read **2 Corinthians 5:17–21**. What does Paul say God sent Jesus into this world to do? What happens to us when we accept Christ as our rescuer?

2. Now that we have been reconciled to God, what does the Lord command us to do? What does it mean to be an “ambassador” for Christ?

3. Read **Hebrews 10:10**. What does it mean that Christ paid the price for our sins once and for all time?

Day Five: A New Heaven and Earth

In the book of Revelation, we read how Christ will one day return to judge sin and evil and escort in righteousness and peace. The disciple John gives us a glimpse of what this glorious new heaven and new earth will look like. He also writes that at this time, “[God] will wipe every tear. . . . There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away” (Revelation 21:4).

Perhaps you have your own vision of what this new reality will be like. Picture the world as you’ve always wanted it, with no more earthquakes, tornados, tsunamis, or hurricanes. No more wars, guns, hate, or aggression. A place where people aren’t defined by their race, gender, or physical limitations. No more sickness and no more cancer. No more broken hearts. A place where family members can no longer hurt you, where bosses won’t lie and cheat, and where gossiping friends cease. Broken things will be completely fixed. No more selfishness and no more divorce.

For the first time, you’ll feel whole. You will be complete. You’ll never fight or argue again. The things you long for most—love, security, joy, meaning, and purpose—will be abundant. Death, decay, and destruction will be gone. Peace and love will prevail. Humans and animals will once more live together in harmony. The world will be perfect, the way God intended it to be.

All of the good things we desire will be present, but this won’t be a utopia with us at the center of it. Though we all have a shared vision for this perfect world, at the center of it will be Jesus to whom all praise, glory, and honor belong. We will worship him. We will serve him. And we will be in perfect relationship with him for eternity.

Until then, even though we've been rescued, we still feel the consequences of the original fall. We still deal with unexpected troubles and pain because we are still living in a fallen world. But because we've been rescued, we know that Jesus is our anchor in the rough waters of a troubled life. We can survive the storm by clinging to him like the salvation he is. And when we're with him, we can be a part of the restoration.

It starts with us restoring our relationship with our heavenly Father. With us recognizing that as people who are rescued and who know the rescuer, we can help others escape their own sin cages. With us understanding that our job, our purpose, is to help reveal God's coming perfect world for others to glimpse before it is ushered in completely. And as we serve God, love Jesus, and respond to the Holy Spirit's whispers in our lives, we can heal ourselves and begin to give others a glimpse of what life looks like when what's broken is fixed. Together, we can begin to work for the world that we all desire.

1. Read **Revelation 21:1–5**. How does John describe the new heaven and new earth?

2. How do you picture the restoration that God promises to provide?

3. How can you help give others a glimpse now of what this restoration will look like?