

OVERCOMING CYNICISM

Psalm 23



SYNOPSIS

As we continue on in our series "A Praying Life," we look at ways we can pray practically and tangibly to overcome cynicism. Cynicism seems to be everywhere. It's the air that we breathe, and we realize how easy it is to fall into temptation of cynicism towards God and cynicism towards one another.

In many ways, as we go through life, we get hurt and disappointed. We have promises that are broken. We try to shield ourselves from getting hurt by being cynical (which can be a good defense mechanism), but we need to realize that to love is to be vulnerable. So how do we combat cynicism towards God and towards one another?

Psalm 23 is a psalm that reminds us that the Lord is our shepherd. In the way He leads us, we remind ourselves that He is intimate in the way He leads us. But not only is He intimate in leading His sheep, He is infinite in nature. He is all powerful - and in the dark valleys of life, we recognize that He has gone before us and He leads us, even putting himself in harms way to lead us. So combatting cynicism towards God is the reminder that we are deeply and intimately cared for by our intimate and infinite Father in Heaven.

When we look at the Apostle Paul's letters to the churches, we realize that though he has a lot to correct and rebuke, he nearly always starts out with a heart of gratitude. That is a great way to combat cynicism towards others - celebrating what the Holy Spirit is doing in others around us and trusting that the good work that the Holy Spirit has begun in our brothers and sisters will be brought to completion.

At the end of the day, the battle against cynicism can seem like an uphill battle, but we are encouraged to be "cautious optimists." We are cautious because of the sin and evil we recognize in ourselves and those around us, but we can be optimistic because of the hope that we find in redemption through Christ Jesus.



OUTLINE

1 OVERCOMING CYNICISM TOWARDS GOD

Sometimes we feel disappointed or hurt by God. We feel that He has abandoned us in the dark valleys of life, but we need to recognize and remind ourselves that our Good Shepherd is intimately involved and He is infinitely able to protect and care for us. Take a moment to pray Psalm 23 over the group and remind yourself of the truth that we find in this shepherd-sheep relationship.

2 OVERCOMING CYNICISM TOWARDS OTHERS

We can easily become cynical towards others. All of the hurt and pain we have experienced from others can drive a wedge in our relationships. Yet, what we can learn from the Apostle Paul is the way we can be intentionally grateful for the ways that the Holy Spirit is moving in others around us.

3 BECOMING LIKE A CHILD

Jesus tells us to become more childlike in our faith and in many ways this is so difficult because the older we get, the less childlike we feel. But may we be a people that are more tenderhearted towards God and towards others at the end of our life than at the beginning.



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DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1

Icebreaker: Would you consider a cynical person? What is the difference between being realistic and being cynical?

2

Do you feel your cynicism prevents you from loving others? Does it prevent you from receiving love?

3

When was a time when God led you through a "dark valley"? How did you feel?

4

Was there a time someone else's cynicism hindered your ability to trust, be joyful, hope in something, or to love someone?

5

What does it mean/look like to be cautiously optimistic? How can we be childlike in our faith?



BIG IDEA

Cynicism is all around us and we fight an uphill battle at times to remain pure and tenderhearted towards God and towards one another. As we go through life, we need to pray and ask God for the grace and the mercy to remain childlike in our faith - to come to God, trusting that He is intimately involved in our lives and infinitely able to lead us, and coming to one another, trusting that the work that the Holy Spirit began in us will be brought to completion.