

Paradoxology: by Krish Kandiah

Summary of book for groups use

Introduction

Paradoxology makes a bold claim that the paradoxes that seem to undermine belief are actually the heart of our vibrant faith and that it is only by continually wrestling with them that we can really worship God, both individually and together.

Whether exploring God for the first time or have leading a church for years, the premise of this book is based on the liberating fact that the Bible has more room for doubt, uncertainty and struggle than we have ever allowed ourselves to believe. God is fully able to handle our enquiries and our inconsistencies. We do not need to protect God or the faith he has given us from our difficult questions.

We can bring our questions into the open with confidence, and with humility we can listen to what God says, following the clues the Bible gives us and our faith will grow not founder.

Week 1 **The Abraham Paradox: *The God who needs nothing but asks for everything***

Read the account of Gyeonggi

Questions

- a. How after losing his home, his unborn child and his wife, and after surviving three years in a North Korean prison, could a father abandon his only daughter whom he loved?
- b. Why would a teenage girl have to pay such a high price for her father to follow God?
- c. Why would God demand such an outrageous impossible thing?
- d. What kind of God could possibly need his followers to make these kinds of sacrifice?

The more we reflect on the nature of God the less these kinds of sacrifices make sense as God is supposed to be all powerful and all sufficient.

Every day Christians face, not the life of peace and contentment, but often impossible situations – situations in which God seems to want them to take the hardest path. A young girl who had been abused by her foster parents while she was a child and yet she had been called by God to phone them and forgive them. Christians who have heard Gods call and moved to difficult neighbourhoods. Single women who have left their jobs and friends they care for to go and nurse elderly parents. Those who have been disowned by their families because of their new found love for Jesus.

The author writes that he wonders if God is insecure, cruel or greedy.

- God seems to behave like a jealous or hopeless lover who demands huge sacrifices and outrageous demonstrations of devotion because he needs reassurance that he is still loved.
- God can appear to be behaving like a nasty child to see how much pain can be endured, testing our resolve, seeing how much loss can be coped with.

- God seems to be asking for the impossible making him look greedy.

In the New Testament Paul explains that God is not served by human hands as if he needed anything. Rather he himself gives everyone life and breath and everything else.

Here is the heart of the paradox. An all powerful self sufficient God who asks for costly worship. This paradox challenges us not at just the intellectual level but also an emotional level. It strikes at the core of our faith because it is about the very nature of God. Is God loving, kind and compassionate? Or is God cruel, insecure and greedy? If we don't resolve this issue we will become miserly towards God – refusing to give him what he demands – or miserable with God – resenting giving him what he deserves.

Read Genesis 22

Read the account of Abraham up to “Here is hope for the living dead”.

Looking at this story there are three things that we can establish about the true nature of faith:

First – faith is not a leap in the dark.

The Bible is full of stories - including this one – that present the reasons for trusting in God. It is not a step of faith more an informed decision. Even crossing the road requires us to gather evidence with our eyes and ears in order that we make the decision that it is safe to cross. Abraham had his eyes wide open when he decided to lead his son to Mount Moriah to offer him as a sacrifice. He had evidence that God would fulfil his promises. He had seen that God could bring dead things to life. He knew that his future was safe in God's hands.

Second – there is a narrative and relational context.

Abraham had heard many times from God. He knew first hand of God's ability and power to intervene, of God's kindness, of God's patience and too of God's often unusual ways of working. Abraham had enough experience to continue to trust and be willing to go to such lengths to follow God's call on his life.

Third – not a bypass of but an engagement of Abraham's critical faculties.

Abraham knew that Isaac was essential to the fulfilment of God's promise. Abraham is referred to (- and in Romans) as “as good as dead”. Certainly the 3 day journey to Mount Moriah gave him plenty of time to think.

His conclusion was that God had the authority to demand the impossible; he knew that God had the power to perform the impossible; and he knew that God had been unchanging in his love in the past. So even though he couldn't understand the reason why, he still needed to trust God's promises and lift the knife to kill his son.

This still leaves the questions:-

Why does God demand so much of us?

When Abraham had climbed the mountain and built an altar and laid out Isaac as a sacrifice and had raised the knife why did God intervene and say use a ram instead?

Why submit Abraham to all that emotional torment only to let him off at the end?

What did God achieve by putting Abraham through this ordeal?