

Pioneer Congregational Church
Wednesday Night Bible Study Discussion Guide

Bible Study: Exploring *The Good Place* (Season 1, Episode 2)

The second episode of *The Good Place* on Netflix is titled "**What We Owe to Each Other.**" This episode continues the story of Eleanor Shellstrop, who is in the afterlife and believes she doesn't belong in "The Good Place" because of her morally questionable life on Earth. In this episode, Eleanor tries to be a better person, but finds it difficult in a place full of perfection.

Here is a Bible study that draws from the themes and events in this episode, highlighting biblical concepts such as grace, moral responsibility, and personal transformation.

Bible Study: What We Owe to Each Other

Key Scripture:

- **Ephesians 2:8-9** – *“For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast.”*
- **Romans 12:9-10** – *“Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. Be devoted to one another in love. Honor one another above yourselves.”*
- **Matthew 7:3-5** – *“Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother’s eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? How can you say to your brother, ‘Let me take the speck out of your eye,’ when all the time there is a plank in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from the other person’s eye.”*

Context of the Episode:

In this episode, Eleanor learns that she is in the Good Place by mistake, as she doesn't feel she has earned it. She decides that she needs to be a better person, which creates a moral dilemma, especially when she realizes that becoming good isn't as simple as she imagined. She struggles with her past, her guilt, and how to navigate this new "perfect" environment.

This episode focuses on Eleanor's attempt to change and be someone she believes she ought to be. The Good Place, with its utopian features, exposes her faults, but also gives her an opportunity to grow. Throughout the episode, we see the struggle between her desire for change and her habitual actions.

Key Themes and Biblical Insights:

1. **Grace vs. Works:**

- **Eleanor’s Struggle with Worthiness:** Eleanor constantly feels she doesn’t deserve to be in the Good Place because she lived a selfish and morally compromised life on Earth. This reflects a common human struggle — believing that we must be perfect to be accepted by God. However, *Ephesians 2:8-9* reminds us that salvation is not earned by our good deeds or moral perfection but is a gift from God. We do not have to strive to earn God's favor through works because grace is given freely. Like Eleanor, we might feel unworthy, but God’s grace makes us worthy, not our actions.
- **Romans 3:23** reminds us that “all have sinned,” but God’s grace offers us forgiveness and redemption despite our shortcomings. Eleanor's journey in the Good Place is symbolic of our own journeys in life, as we come to terms with our flaws and embrace the grace that is available to us.

Reflection: Do you ever struggle with feeling unworthy of love and grace? How can you remind yourself that God's grace is not based on what you've done but on h/er love for you?

2. Transformation and Change:

- **Eleanor’s Desire to Improve:** Eleanor is trying to change and be a better person. She tries to act morally and do good deeds, but struggles to fully change her heart. This mirrors the Christian concept of sanctification — the ongoing process by which believers are transformed to become more like Christ, with the help of the Holy Spirit. Changing behavior isn’t easy, but God empowers us to grow and become more like Jesus.
- **Romans 12:9-10** speaks about genuine love and honoring others, which is the type of moral transformation that the Bible speaks about. It’s not just about “doing good” but about having a sincere heart of love that reflects God's character.

Reflection: What are the areas in your life where you are trying to change? Are you focusing more on external actions or on transforming your heart to align with God’s will?

3. The Importance of Community:

- **Eleanor and Chidi's Relationship:** Eleanor’s relationship with Chidi is crucial in this episode. Chidi, a philosopher, becomes Eleanor’s moral guide. He helps her understand what it means to be a good person. This illustrates the importance of community and mentorship in the Christian faith. Just as Chidi helps Eleanor navigate her moral struggles, we as believers are called to help each other grow in faith and character.
- **Matthew 7:3-5** calls us to be humble in our judgment of others, focusing on our own flaws first before criticizing others. In the Christian community, we are called to love and build one another up, not judge or condemn. Chidi and Eleanor’s relationship is a reminder that we all need help in growing spiritually, and we are called to support each other.

Reflection: Who are the people in your life who help you grow spiritually? How can you be a source of encouragement to others who may be struggling with their own moral or spiritual journey?

4. Moral Responsibility and Ethical Living:

- **Eleanor's Battle with Selfishness:** Eleanor's character is selfish and morally ambiguous, yet she is now trying to live in a place that expects perfection. She faces the challenge of reconciling her past with her future. In a similar way, Christians are called to live in the world but not be of the world. We are to strive for holiness and moral living, even though we fall short.
- **How ought we to live?**

Reflection: How do you balance your past mistakes with your desire to live a worthy life? How can you take responsibility for your actions while relying on God to transform you?

Discussion Questions:

1. **Grace and Salvation:** How does the concept of grace challenge the way you view your past mistakes? Do you ever feel like you need to "earn" God's grace, and how can you embrace the truth that it's a gift freely given?
 2. **Personal Transformation:** Eleanor tries to change her behavior to fit into the Good Place. What are the challenges you face when trying to live in a way that honors God? How do you navigate the tension between wanting to change and the reality of your weaknesses?
 3. **Community Support:** Who are the people in your life who help you become a better person? How can you be a support and source of wisdom to others in their moral and spiritual growth?
 4. **Moral Responsibility:** What does it mean to you to live ethically in a world that sometimes feels morally ambiguous? How do you strive to live out your faith in a way that honors God and reflects your best self? What responsibilities do we have toward others?
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Closing Prayer:

Heavenly Father Mother God,

We thank You for the grace you have shown us through Jesus Christ, who offers us forgiveness and new life. Just as Eleanor struggles with her past, we too often face our own mistakes and weaknesses. Help us to rest in your grace, knowing that we are not saved by works but by your love. Transform our hearts so that we may live according to your will as well as what is best for others and ourselves, and help us to support and encourage one another as we grow in faith. May our lives reflect your goodness and love to the world around us. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.