

READING AND DISCUSSION GUIDE FOR

Simply Good News

by

N. T. Wright

CHAPTER 1:

WHAT'S THE NEWS?

1. Think about how the gospel has been presented to you. Would you consider it “good news” or something else? What does the phrase “good news” mean to you?
2. N. T. Wright notes, “While some Christian teachers have exchanged good news for good advice, others have preserved the gospel as news, but they are telling a different story from what the New Testament authors meant by *good news*” (p. 5). Have you seen teachers ‘exchange good news for good advice’? If so, how? Why do you think this shift happens? If you have not experienced this shift in your church, has the good news been distorted in other ways?

CHAPTER 2: FOOLISH, SCANDALOUS, OR GOOD?

1. Wright describes some ways that people today understand the gospel: as advice, as a new kind of spirituality, as a new way to live, or as a way to ensure a spot in heaven. If you have shared the good news with other people, did the discussion focus on one of these or a combination (p. 19)? Share some examples of these interactions.
2. Wright believes that people are missing and distorting the good news because they focus on behaving in a particular way to get into heaven (p. 23). Do you agree? If so, when and how have you experienced this?
3. “When Paul told people his good news, he didn’t mean for them to say, ‘Well, that’s interesting. I’ll see if that’s going to suit me or not.’ . . . He was telling them about an event that would cause them to adjust their entire lives in order to come into line with the way things now were” (p. 20). Why have we taken the “power” out of the good news (p. 31)? How do you think we can recapture Paul’s vision for the gospel?
4. Prior to reading this book (or prior to becoming a Christian), which did you believe: that the “good news” was a scandal, boring nonsense, or something that revealed God’s wisdom (p. 34)?

CHAPTER 3: SURPRISED BY KING JESUS

1. In this chapter, Wright highlights the clash between Jesus and the powers of the world alongside the expectation that God would end all evil with power and force (p. 43). How would you define God's power? What does God's power look like? How have you experienced God's power of love in your life?
2. The resurrection of Jesus was very unexpected and difficult to comprehend for the first-century Jew (p. 48). However, Wright states that today, "people come to believe [the resurrection], not necessarily because we can fully understand it (we can't) but because once you get that straight you can understand all sorts of other things" (p. 54). Do you agree with Wright that if you believe in the resurrection, as unbelievable as it may be, you can make sense of God and the world we live in? Why or why not?

CHAPTER 4: DISTORTED AND COMPETING GOSPELS

1. Sometimes we can't recognize the good news because, as Wright says, "the good news is always different from what people think it will be" (p. 60). What assumptions have you had about the good news of the gospel? Where did those assumptions originate?

2. Have you ever experienced people turning the good news into bad news—for example, describing God’s power as tyrannical instead of loving (p. 64)? How did they define the good news? What other problems have you seen when the gospel message is oversimplified or distorted (p. 66)?
3. Wright identifies a split-level worldview that exists today, in which God is sent upstairs and has nothing to say about what is happening downstairs (pp. 76–77). What are your thoughts about this? How does this chapter challenge you to consider a more integrated worldview?

CHAPTER 5: RETHINKING HEAVEN

1. Do you agree with Wright that the good news is *not* about leaving earth and getting into heaven (p. 90)? Is this news to you?
2. How does your perception of the good news change when the lens expands to a broader picture, one in which we don’t leave this world but Jesus returns and transforms it (p. 95)?
3. “The good news, in other words, is not all about me. It is all about God and God’s creation—God’s new creation” (p. 103). How do you think we often make the good news about us rather than God? What are some examples of how you can be a part of God’s new world now (p. 100)?

CHAPTER 6: WRONG FUTURE, WRONG PRESENT

1. The problem of progress is brought to light in this chapter, from the chronological snobbery of the eighteenth century to our current-day eschatological snobbery of progress. How have you seen this “secular ideal of progress” infiltrate the church (p. 110)? How does this problem affect how we understand the good news of the gospel?
2. The early Christians acted on the belief that the good news was true (p. 116). These Jesus followers provided many examples of how to live out the good news in the way they cared for the poor, tended the sick, and looked after the world they lived in. What does this look like in your life? What does it mean to you to work *for* God’s kingdom? How are you called to be a “good news” person (p. 120)?

CHAPTER 7: SURPRISED BY GOD

1. When you look hard at Jesus, what truths do you learn about God and what God is like (p. 131)? How do these truths contrast with the popular view of God: an old man with a beard, sitting on a cloud, separated from all of us down below (p. 135)?

2. In your effort to understand God, how have you constrained him by making him in your own image (p. 133)?
3. “The good news of what happened in Jesus is the central moment in the revelation of the good news that the one true God is the God of utter, self-giving love” (p. 139). How has God’s generous love helped you see the world, your neighbor, yourself, and God with different eyes (p. 151)?

CHAPTER 8: PRAYING THE GOOD NEWS

1. When you pray, do you tend to enter through the “back door” with cries for “help,” or through the “front door,” calling on God as Father (pp. 156, 167)? How do your prayers change when you begin at the front door?
2. “Prayer means standing between the one true God and his world, becoming a place where the love of this God and life of this world (and especially the pain of this world) are somehow held together” (p. 168). With this quote in mind, how has prayer transformed your life? Share some examples.
3. In prayer, how have you learned to *become* the good news?