

Pioneer Congregational Church
Wednesday Night Bible Study Discussion Guide

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

Title: "The Good Place" and the Concept of Heaven

Overview of *The Good Place* (Season 1, Episode 1)

In the first episode of *The Good Place*, the main character, Eleanor Shellstrop, finds herself in the afterlife's "Good Place," which is essentially a perfect heaven designed for the morally good. However, Eleanor realizes that she doesn't belong there. She had lived a selfish and unethical life on Earth, and her presence in the Good Place is a mistake. This episode sets up the moral and philosophical themes of the show, including the tension between good deeds, personal responsibility, and grace.

The central dilemma that Eleanor faces is the question of whether or not she truly deserves to be in the Good Place, and how she can "fix" her life before it's too late.

Key Biblical Themes in the Episode:

1. Salvation and Grace

- Eleanor's situation presents a thought-provoking question: Can a person earn their way into heaven through good deeds, or is it a gift freely given? In her case, she's there by mistake, and she's desperate to make herself "worthy" of her spot.
- Orthodox biblical interpretation teaches that salvation is not earned by works but is a gift from God. This echoes Paul's words in 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."* (Ephesians 2:8-9, NIV)
- In *The Good Place*, Eleanor's belief that she has to prove herself worthy is a direct contrast to the biblical teaching of grace, where salvation is not something we can earn, but a free gift from God.

2. Good Works vs. Faith

- Eleanor's confusion about her worthiness is tied to the idea of "good works." In her eyes, she believes she has done enough to deserve a good afterlife, but her actions were selfish and morally questionable.
- In the Bible, good works are important, but they are the fruit of a genuine relationship with God. Jesus teaches that what truly matters is not outward actions but the state of one's heart and faith in God.
- Matthew 7:21-23 reminds us that not everyone who does good deeds is necessarily "known" by God: *"Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom*

of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.”
(Matthew 7:21-23, NIV)

3. Repentance and Transformation

- Eleanor’s journey is also one of repentance and self-transformation. She recognizes that she doesn’t deserve the Good Place and that she must change her life to avoid being exposed as a fraud.
- Biblically, repentance is essential for salvation. It is not just about feeling sorry for our sins, but about a turning away from our old ways and toward God. In 2 Corinthians 5:17, Paul says: *“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!”* (2 Corinthians 5:17, NIV)
- Eleanor’s potential for transformation mirrors the Christian doctrine of sanctification, which involves a process of becoming more like Christ over time.

4. Heaven and the Afterlife

- The concept of the afterlife in *The Good Place* provides an interesting lens through which to view biblical teachings about heaven. The show presents heaven as a reward for good behavior, but the orthodoxy teaches that heaven is the result of God's grace through Jesus Christ. Is it a mix of the two? How do we get to the “good place” ourselves? Or, is there even a good place for us to look forward to?
- In John 14:2-3, Jesus promises to prepare a place for His followers: *“My Father’s house has many rooms; if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am.”* (John 14:2-3, NIV)
- The Bible's picture of heaven is not a place earned by good deeds but a place where believers live in perfect communion with God, made possible by the sacrifice of Jesus.

Discussion Questions:

1. **What does Eleanor's story reveal about human nature and the desire for redemption?**
 - All religions teach of ethical values to live by and how those values affect our eternal destiny or one’s reincarnation. Do you worry about life after death? Do you worry about what will happen to you after you die? How can you be certain of what will happen?
 - How does this relate to the Christian belief in the need for salvation through Jesus Christ?
2. **In the episode, Eleanor realizes she doesn't deserve to be in the Good Place. How does this mirror the Christian concept of grace and the recognition of our need for forgiveness?**

- How do you personally understand grace—what does it mean for you that salvation cannot be earned?
3. **Eleanor seeks to change her life in order to "deserve" her spot in the Good Place. How is this similar to the biblical idea of repentance and transformation?**
- What role does genuine repentance play in the Christian walk of faith?
4. **How do you understand the difference between "good works" and "faith" in the context of salvation?**
- Is it possible to do good things without a relationship with God? How does faith relate to the idea of being "saved"?
5. **What biblical passages or teachings help you better understand the afterlife and what it means to be with God in heaven?**
- How can we live in light of eternity, knowing that our reward is not based on our works, but on the finished work of Christ?

Closing Prayer:

Heavenly Father Mother God,

Thank You for the gift of grace and the promise of eternal life with You. We confess that we often strive to earn Your favor through our works, but we know that salvation is a free gift given through Jesus Christ. Help us to live in the freedom that comes from Your grace, knowing that we are loved and accepted because of what Christ has done, not because of what we have done. Teach us to walk in repentance and transformation, reflecting Your love and truth in all we do. In Jesus' name, Amen.