

ANCHORS
for the SOUL

Video Series Study Guide

JOHN MARK HICKS



INTRODUCTION



In this opening video, John Mark Hicks explains how the anchors unfold the story of God. He addresses some of the questions that arise when we face suffering and offers the anchors as a way to find comfort and understanding in God. John Mark suggests we all need permanent anchors to give us a sense of who God truly is so that we aren't swept away in the current of life's troubles and trials.

IMPORTANT TAKEAWAYS

- This course is a way of studying and learning about the story of God, while at the same time seeing the story through the lens of those who are hurting and suffering.
- God loves, God listens, God understands, God reigns, and God wins.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. What hurt, suffering, or unresolved pain is in your heart as you begin this course?
2. Who else can you bring along with you in this journey?

TAKE ACTION

Turn to God and seek God's strength and peace as you begin this journey.

NOTES

QUOTES TO REMEMBER



"In the storms of life, we need places to anchor and find stability so we can move forward rather than sink."



"What we need are permanent anchors that give us a sense of who God is."



John Mark Hicks

Chapter and Video 1

MY STORY



In this video, John Mark Hicks explains how stories are a way we might deal with our grief and share our lives. He shares his own story and the many ways he has grown and changed through suffering and grief. He ends the video by encouraging all of us to tell our stories in order to better understand what God is doing in our lives.

IMPORTANT TAKEAWAYS

- See the benefits of faithful lament.
- Understand the difference between joy with lament and joy without lament.
- Learn about suffering from firsthand experiences.
- Realize the importance of telling your stories.

SCRIPTURE READING: Read Psalm 119:65–88.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Does it disturb you to think about the “goodness of affliction” as the Psalmist describes? What can be good about affliction?
2. Does the recognition of that goodness eradicate its pain and hurt? Why or why not?
3. What do we do when we cannot see any “good” in the affliction? This was the case with Job. How does he model endurance for us when we cannot see any good in the situation?
4. What is your story in relation to suffering?

TAKE ACTION

Think about how you can share your story with others in a way that ultimately moves them closer to Christ.

NOTES

QUOTES TO REMEMBER



“The more you tell your story, the more I think you’ll understand what God is doing in your life.”



“Tell your stories of loss and faith in order to see how the two intertwine.”



John Mark Hicks

Chapter and Video 2

GOD LOVES



In this video, John Mark Hicks raises the question with which many have struggled: *Doesn't God love us? If he loves us, why won't he heal those who are suffering?* He addresses what happens when we doubt God's love and offers God's answer to our questioning: the story of Jesus, the cross, and the resurrection.

IMPORTANT TAKEAWAYS

- Explore why we were created to participate in God's unrelenting love.
- Examine God's unrelenting love through marriage and parenthood.
- Contemplate God's love for us through the example of Jesus Christ.
- Know that it's okay to ask hard questions of God.
- Lament, but look to Jesus too.

SCRIPTURE READING: Read Psalm 136 and Romans 8:31–39.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Do you consciously or unconsciously tell yourself that God's love for you is conditional, limited, or dependent upon your performance? What practical difference does it make to say and believe, "God's love will never quit"?
2. Thinking about Psalm 136, what lines of praise would you add from your own life that reflect God's faithful love to you? Where, in your experience, has God demonstrated faithful love?
3. What is the greatest demonstration of God's faithful love?
4. How does God in Jesus reveal a love that never quits? What examples from the life, ministry, and death of Jesus can you remember that reveal his love?
5. If God has demonstrated faithful love to us, how do we demonstrate faithful love to each other? How do we perfect the love of God in our hearts by loving one another? Name a practical example from your own experience.

QUOTES TO REMEMBER



"Doubting the love of God doesn't mean you are an unbeliever; it means you are facing the reality of death and loss."



"The story of Jesus is God's testimony to us that God loves us."



John Mark Hicks

Chapter and Video 3

GOD LISTENS



In this video, John Mark Hicks talks about his own struggles with questioning God and shares his biggest question: *How can I grieve well when I'm supposed to rejoice in everything?* John Mark shares how the Psalms gave him the language to pray as he learned to truly lament.

IMPORTANT TAKEAWAYS

- Pray honestly, even when angry, doubting, or questioning.
- Receive God's willingness and desire to hear your laments.
- Understand the eventual transformation of lament into praise.
- See how the Psalms give us meaningful language to lament.

SCRIPTURE READING: Read Psalm 6 and 13.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Do you have an experience you can share where you expressed anger, disappointment, or frustration with God? Why did you feel this way about God, and why did you tell God?
2. Why do we feel that honest prayers of doubt and disappointment are wrong or inappropriate? Why do we feel guilty when we pray such prayers? Should we? Why or why not?
3. How does confidence in God's steadfast love help us pray these honest prayers?
4. How do the lament psalms help us deal with guilt about such prayers? How are they models for our own lament? The next time you are traumatized by illness, will you be able to pray Psalm 6 without feeling guilty? Will you have the confidence to pray Psalm 13?
5. What in your life makes you cry, "How long? O Lord, how long?" Have you prayed about it honestly yet, or have you put on a "smiley face" for God? Do you think honesty would make a difference? What kind of difference would it make?

TAKE ACTION

Spend time in prayer learning how to truly lament.

QUOTES TO REMEMBER



"Through lamenting, we learn how to once again praise God. When we walk through the lament, then our praise of God becomes a deeper praise."



"God responds with a healing grace by the power of the Spirit."



John Mark Hicks

Chapter and Video 4

GOD UNDERSTANDS



In this video, John Mark Hicks talks about what it means to say God understands our experiences, our sufferings, and our pain. John Mark walks us through how God is transcendent, far away, and distant, yet near—because God became flesh and joined us in our suffering.

IMPORTANT TAKEAWAYS

- Understand that God also experiences pain, betrayal, and rejection.
- Feel that God is near to sufferers and shares our pain with us.
- Experience God’s empathy through the incarnated God, Jesus Christ.
- Remember that Jesus joined us in our suffering.

SCRIPTURE READING: Read Philippians 2:1–11 and Hebrews 4:14–16.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. What is the difference between sympathy and empathy?
2. In what ways is God sympathetic with God’s creation?
3. In what ways is the God of Israel empathetic with God’s creation?
4. How is God empathetic in Jesus Christ? What does the incarnation mean for God’s understanding of human fallenness and weakness?
5. What is the motive of God’s empathy? Why did God express empathy in the incarnation? Why did God go that far?
6. How do we model God’s empathy in comforting sufferers? How does this affect our understanding of what “comforting” is?

TAKE ACTION

Turn to God when you are suffering and know that he truly understands.

QUOTES TO REMEMBER



“Jesus is an insider to suffering because he experienced suffering.”



“Something changed in the life of God when he became flesh, because now God understood some things that he previously had not understood.”



John Mark Hicks

Chapter and Video 5

GOD REIGNS



In this video, John Mark Hicks teaches that asking *why?* is perfectly appropriate. He goes on to share that asking *why?* is a way of talking to God and reflecting on our own suffering. He ends the video encouraging us all to trust that God knows what God is doing.

IMPORTANT TAKEAWAYS

- Rest assured in God’s all-powerful sovereignty.
- Orient yourself with God’s ultimate goal: communion, not “happiness.”
- Trust in God’s faithfulness to the ultimate goal.
- Remember the foundation: God loves, God listens, and God understands.

SCRIPTURE READING: Read Job 1:6–22, 2:7–10, and 42:1–6.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. What do you find most problematic about divine sovereignty?
2. What does it mean to say that God controls or reigns over trouble? Does that disturb you? Why?
3. Was God responsible for Job’s trouble? Why do you think so? Why did God not end his trouble sooner than God did? Was God not sovereign over the trouble?
4. What is God’s goal for the creation?
5. What do you think about the statement, “God must treat everyone just alike”? Is it fair for God to give or permit one person poverty and another prosperity?
6. Describe a circumstance in your life where you believe God’s hand was particularly visible. What was God doing with your life at that moment?

TAKE ACTION

Lean into asking *why?* and know that God ultimately reigns.

QUOTES TO REMEMBER



“Why? is not a bad question.”



“It’s not about figuring out what God is doing. It’s about trusting that God is sovereign and can give meaning to our deepest hurts.”



“God is at work bringing meaning to our suffering. God is at work for good.”



John Mark Hicks

NOTES

Chapter and Video 6

GOD WINS



In this video, John Mark Hicks discusses the interaction of suffering and hope. He explains that hope is a way to walk through pain, a way to endure it. He suggests God is calling us into a future through the resurrection of Jesus.

IMPORTANT TAKEAWAYS

- Anticipate God’s merciful deliverance.
- Live with the knowledge of God’s ultimate victory, the resurrection.
- Dwell in God’s presence.
- Understand that hope changes everything.

SCRIPTURE READING: Read Revelation 4:8–11, 5:8–14, and 7:9–17.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. In what ways was the ministry of Jesus a light in the darkness? What happened in his ministry that is like the new heaven and new earth?
2. Should we pray for the consummation? Should we pray for the Second Coming of Jesus and the fullness of his kingdom? What does praying for the coming kingdom enable our hearts to express?
3. What does it mean to say that death is the epitome of fallenness? What does it mean to say that death is God’s enemy?
4. How does the resurrection of Jesus testify to our own resurrection?
5. What is important about the image of the new heaven and new earth for sufferers? How does it provide comfort?
6. What does it mean to “grieve with hope”? What is the nature of the hope? Should we counsel people to stop weeping at the grave because of the resurrection?
7. How must grief still express itself even when there is a hope of the resurrection?

QUOTES TO REMEMBER



“It’s in the story of Jesus that we see where God wins.”



“When God raised Jesus from the dead, hope emerged.”



“Jesus’ resurrection is our resurrection. We died with Jesus, and we will also be raised with Jesus.”



John Mark Hicks

TAKE ACTION

Ask God to pour his hope into your spirit.

NOTES

Chapter and Video 7

THE COURAGE OF SILENCE



We need the courage of silence. Silence is hard because we feel like we are supposed to say something and fix something. But that comes out of a sense of inadequacy. Silence is about presence. When being with someone and being silent, presence is the overwhelming meaning of that moment.

IMPORTANT TAKEAWAYS

- Learn about the comforting effect of silence.
- Embrace that lament deserves to be heard despite the pain of listening to it.
- Understand the difference between doing and offering.
- Know that silence is about presence.

SCRIPTURE READING: Read Job 5:8–27 (Eliphaz), 6:24–30 (Job), and 21:1–16 (Job).

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Why did Job react the way he did to his friend’s speech in Job 5? What of Eliphaz’s words and attitude hurt him?
2. Why do we feel the need to say something to those who are hurting? Why is silence so awkward?
3. Why is it difficult to listen to one who is grieving or hurting? What makes you personally uncomfortable with lament?
4. Is it hard for you to believe that there are such people as “righteous sufferers” (or innocent victims) in the world?
5. According to Job 5:8–27, why did Eliphaz find that hard to believe?
6. What sort of things have people done for you in your times of grief or in hard times that helped?
7. What do you think about saying, “If there is anything we can do for you, let us know”? What is the problem or appropriateness of asking that question?
8. Think back to a time when you were with someone who was grieving and said or did something unintentionally hurtful (we’ve all been there!). Do you know what you should have done differently?

TAKE ACTION

Take heart and have the courage to be present in silence with those who are suffering.

QUOTES TO REMEMBER



“Feeling inadequate is a healthy response to suffering, because we are inadequate.”



“Silence is hard to come by because we feel like we are supposed to do something and say something and fix something.”



John Mark Hicks

Chapter and Video 8

A TIME TO SPEAK

In this video, John Mark Hicks talks about the appropriate responses to share with sufferers. He speaks from his own experience about responses that aren't helpful but damaging to the sufferer and to their relationship with God. John Mark admonishes us to make sure everything we say ultimately expresses love.

IMPORTANT TAKEAWAYS

- Offer love rather than interpreting events.
- Learn five things you should never say to sufferers.
- Know God's empathetic participation in our pain.
- Remember that God is weeping alongside sufferers.

SCRIPTURE READING: Read Psalm 77.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Keeping in mind what we discussed in the previous lesson, what did Job find so disagreeable about his friends' speeches?
2. What are some of the "stupid," though well-meaning, things you have heard people say to someone in grief? Why are they "stupid"?
3. What sorts of things have you heard people say that were interpretative in character? How do people often interpret another's suffering? What sorts of things do they say?
4. What is wrong with interpreting another's suffering? What does that presume? How is it like or unlike what Job's friends did? Why do you think it is so tempting to make interpretative or judgmental statements?
5. In times of your grief, have there been any particularly helpful things people have said to you?
6. What comfort do you think Job imagines he could have provided his friends if they were in his situation? What might his lips have said?
7. Why is reminding the sufferer about God better than interpreting the suffering? How is remembering (as described in Psalm 77:11–12 and 143:5) better than explaining?

TAKE ACTION

Remember that it's all about relationship—being with people, walking with people.

QUOTES TO REMEMBER

*"Be careful what you say.
There are some things
we should never say in
moments of suffering."*

*"When it's time to speak,
simply express love."*

John Mark Hicks

CONCLUSION



In this final video, John Mark Hicks reveals how the five anchors are really and truly about God and what God is ultimately doing in our lives. He goes on to add that it's also about God in Christ, reminding us that the Spirit is sharing in our hurt. John Mark reminds us of our hope: we can all take heart, because God loves us by pouring the Spirit into our hearts, and ultimately the Spirit will raise us from the dead.

IMPORTANT TAKEAWAYS

- Understand that God will bring meaning out of suffering, even though we can't always see it.
- See how the five anchors are about God and what he is doing.
- Know that we are participants in God's story.
- Remember that it's not about us but about the work and movement of God.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. How does it make a difference to know that God is ultimately good and that God has our best interests at heart?
2. How has this study helped you better endure pain? Will you be able to more effectively support others when they suffer?
3. Are you able or empowered to trust God more now than you could before you began this study? In what ways is this true, and where do you identify the need for further reflection or processing?

TAKE ACTION

- Understand that the anchors are really about the triune God and are a way of telling the story of God.
- Seek out God in all your questioning, in all your doubting, and in all your suffering.

NOTES

QUOTES TO REMEMBER



*“God loves us in Christ.
God listens to us in Christ.
God understands us in
Christ. God reigns in Christ.
God wins in Christ.”*



*“God in Christ, by the
power of the Spirit,
works in our lives.”*



John Mark Hicks

