

NAME

The Good Place Audio.mp3

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DURATION

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2 SPEAKERS

Speaker1

Speaker2

START OF TRANSCRIPT

[00:00:00] Speaker1

The following is a message from Wellspring's congregation.

[00:00:05] Speaker2

Hello, Wellspring's, and guess my name is Beverly Fox, and I am thrilled to once again be serving as your lay preacher today with another message from our summer series of messages, spirit flicks about these spiritual messages that we receive from our screens, which I know that we've all been using quite a lot of over the past year. Today, I'm going to be talking to you about one of my favorite television series of all time, The Good Place. This was a American comedy program that aired from 2016 to 2020. It has since it's airing gone on to win countless awards, critical acclaim, all that other good stuff. But at its heart, it is terribly endearing and very wonderful program about life after death, interestingly enough. And before I get into the details of kind of some of the messages that I've gotten from watching this program, I wanted to share just a little bit about kind of why it is so meaningful to me, as many of you know, because I've been very kind of vocal about sharing about it, because I believe that that's important. I struggle with depression and anxiety, and this particular time there tends to get really bad. Just because summertime is not it's not a particularly good time for me. And in some of my more anxious and or depressed states, my thought process can become very, very dark very, very quickly. And one of the core things that I tend to worry about more than pretty much anything else in my life is this whole question of am I a person because I have made this mistake or hurt this person or had this failure in my life.

[00:01:58] Speaker2

Am I a bad person in my messing up or am I not enough? Anyone who's ever read of rock knows about this this trance of unworthiness that she talks about, where we fear that whatever it is that we are constituted just is not enough to be able to deal with life on life's terms, to be lovable, to be worthy, to be part of our existence as we have it. And because that's a question that constantly pops up for me and a reassurance that I tend to need to provide myself on a regular basis. It's kind of helpful to know what a good person is. And that, in a nutshell, is kind of what the good place is about. It begins with Elinor Ostrom, played by Kristen Bell, who I'm sure you all know is utterly adorable. She finds herself being welcomed into the afterlife and told that she is in a good place because she was a good enough person during her life. And she gets a tour of the neighborhood by Michael the architect, and she meets Janet and I, who is there to provide her with anything she may need. And she meets some of the other humans that are part of the neighborhood with her.

[00:03:12] Speaker2

There is cheating the ethical and moral philosopher who spent his entire life kind of studying this question. What does it mean to be a good person? There is Tahani, who spent her entire life doing fundraising in order to give money to charities. And obviously it's clear that she's a good person. That makes sense. Right. And we have Jason, who is not who he appears to be when we first meet him, and also another person that you would normally immediately think of as a good person, but someone who in his kind of simplicity, is very much concerned with the things that are most important friendship, loyalty, helping other people. And that's kind of what brings us into this world of a good place. And from there, things start to go wrong very, very quickly. And we learn a whole lot of things about this afterlife that lead us to believe that it's not quite the utopia it originally presents itself to be. And one of the first things that we can kind of take away from the good place, not surprisingly, is an answer to this question of what does it mean to be a good person? What does it take? And in the beginning, we have a bunch of philosophical and moral perspectives presented by cheating our resident philosopher. And he goes over everything from the basics of Aristotle and Socrates to the more complex kind of thinking styles of constant Kirkegaard.

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And he talks about kind of a variety of different thought experiments that one could do to try to answer this question. And we learn very early on that motives matter quite a lot. Why you're doing what you're doing and doing the right thing for the wrong reasons is. Actually, not so good we learn about, you know, it's not just a matter of kind of numbers, you know, how many people benefit from a particular thing doesn't outdo the suffering that may be done to the people who don't. And relatively early on, we start to see these characters who I think become endearing to us very early on, doing some things selflessly, trying to be kind to other people, finding themselves to a certain extent, sacrificing themselves for the greater good of people that they have come to feel close to, that they have come to feel a kinship with. So, you know, and cheating and all of his moral philosophy is side. The answer becomes kind of relatively quickly be good, practice goodness towards other people, try to be kind to try to be helpful, try to be caring and compassionate. And if you can be selfless from time to time and yeah, we're all human, that's easier said than done. But in a nutshell, and it happens time and time again in the show when we see our characters kind of making the most valuable decisions and learning the most important lessons, these are the things that it always comes back to kindness, caring, positive regard for one's fellow man.

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And as much as that may have a whole variety of different religious undertones from a whole variety of different religions at its basis, that message is very core to, I think, all of life after death questions and this answer to what it means to be a good person. And our architect, Michael, who we learn more about as the series goes on, I think sums it up very beautifully when he tells us that what matters isn't if people are good or bad, what matters is if they're trying to be better today than they were yesterday. Which brings us pretty quickly to heart to nobody is perfect. This is a comical mispronunciation of nobody's perfect meaning. I'm demonstrating the fact that I make mistakes by making a mistake in my saying of it, our humans are terribly flawed and even in their quest to kind of earn the right to be in a good place and prove that they are, in fact good people, they mess up a lot. And even Michael, the architect of this afterlife neighborhood that they're all existing in, messes up a lot. And even our AI Janet, who seems like she should be infallible, messes up her, maybe not a lot, certainly not nearly as much as everyone else does.

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But she definitely learned some lessons along the way. She definitely finds out some things that don't necessarily compete with her programming. And both she and Michael are architect over the course of the series become more and more human because they make mistakes, because they are fallible, because their plans, as much as they thought that they figured out all the different criteria that they needed to in order to come up with the best plan to execute failed over and over and over again. And our humans, by virtue of being human, failed over and over and over again. And that's kind of an underlying message of the whole series, is that we're going to make mistakes, we're going to mess up in all of our efforts to try to be better versions of ourselves. There's going to be a million and one different, less, better versions of us along the way. And the only thing that determines Michael said previously, what makes us good people or not, is that we keep trying, we keep working, try to be better versions of ourselves. We try to be better people. We try to handle situations better than we did in the past. And that's really all we can do. And again, I quote Michael, our resident architect, who tells us you fail and then you try something else and you fail again and again and you fail a thousand times and you keep trying because maybe the one thousand first idea might work.

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And our characters learn more and more about this world that they're in this after a life that has been constructed and much like they themselves, it is not perfect. The whole thing operates based on a relatively convoluted and complicated points system that for all of its intricacies, is actually pretty black and white. There are good points for doing the right thing and bad points for doing the wrong thing. And then depending upon your total at the end of your life, that determines bing, bang, boom, heaven help. Dull and shockingly enough, human life is a lot more complicated than that. And you can't judge someone's actions on that kind of a black and white scale because things are complicated nowadays. You can do the right thing for the right reasons and still have things go terribly wrong. You can try your best to be caring and kind and still hurt people that you care about very deeply. You can set your best intentions to have things go according to plan. Controlling for all the variables that you could possibly control for and then still have things completely fall apart. And that brings us to her three. Pandemonium, I don't know about you guys, but I often struggle to make sense of the world that we live in because it's very, very rarely does most of the things that I understood to be logical, to make sense, to be like, well, of course, this must be the way that this works, because that's what makes sense.

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Things don't work that way. And the world, as I feel like it should be, is not. And if there is anything that I ever prove that it's just turning on the news. We had literally an insane person as the president for four years. We had an entire pandemic that is still shutting down the country in large parts of it. And there's all of these people arguing about science and other things and saying, well, that's just not true. Even though logic would make you think that it's true then and there's racism and sexism and poverty and people treating people really, really terribly and a lot of things that people do to try to improve these things, to heal trauma, to undo damage, to provide aid and caring and nurturing and support don't work. And we're constantly finding that previous message of failing and again and again popping up, because the only thing that we can do is keep trying. And in the midst of all of it, we also have to try to find a way to be OK when things are not OK, as they very rarely are. And that kind of core message is, how can I sit with this? How can I be OK with this? How can things being as devastating as they are right now, not break me and allow me to still strive to be the best version of myself, care about the people that I will provide aid and support as I can, and not turn into some cynical, nasty person who just does whatever they do? Because what the heck is the point in trying, which is something that our characters in the series struggle with a lot.

[00:13:34] Speaker2

What's the point? Why am I doing all this? My efforts keep failing. Why do I trust? And the answer is, yes, that's kind of all we got. Life is complicated and messy, and being a human means that we're going to keep from falling flat on our faces over and over again. But we don't really have any other choice. We're not allies that we're designed to be perfect. And again, our eye in the series really isn't we're not architects that we're designed to create some structure to test out humans and help them kind of prove to be better versions of themselves. We're we're flawed. We make mistakes all the time. So the best that we can do, I think, is to try to be at peace when things are peaceful, to try to stay as calm as we can, when things are chaotic. And this girl comes from Elenor, kind of part of our story, who says, I guess all I can do is embrace the pandemonium, find happiness in the unique insanity of being here.

[00:14:53] Speaker2

Yeah. Over the course of the series, our characters are humans change a lot, even our eye changes a lot and becomes a lot more human. She experiences human emotions. She goes through human heartbreak. She finds that even her efforts, as perfectly designed as they are, fail. And she becomes a version of herself that is a lot more in touch with the human experience. And because of that, she becomes a really good friend. She becomes a very good lover. She becomes a really good person. And Michael, our architect, who it turns out is the afterlife entity, who originally did not seem terribly highly of humans, he is also there kind of just really simple creatures. And, you know, of course, it makes sense. They're treating each other so terribly because they're just they're not very intelligent. This is just how they are. He comes to love the humans that he has been kind of aligned with through all of these different quests over the course of the series and to really, really envy them and their experience as flawed and messed up and messy as it is. And that's where we kind of come to work for. All good things must come to an end. Life is precious because it is finite, life is meaningful because death is something that awaits all of us.

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Our experiences are manageable, never really painful, because we know at some point in their bones and our joys are valuable because we know at some point they will end. And interestingly enough, that they come to find out about eternity and the afterlife is that that, too, doesn't actually mean anything if there is in this area. So and come up with a new way for humans to be evaluated in life after death to kind of fix heaven and hell and all the structures involved, they rewrite things from scratch and eventually they come to a point where they are at peace. And each one of our characters in their own way gets to experience version of the end that is really poignant and meaningful for them and for us as the audience that has come to love them over the course of the past four seasons. And our architect, who, as I pointed out, is very, very envious of these humans that he has come to love so deeply, eventually gets what he wants most in the world. Spoiler alert, he gets to go back and be human. He gets to have all the experiences that he has seen these people go through first hand. And in thinking about what life is like for him, what his experience and journey is going to be, Elmore kind of, I think sums up the human experience, the very simple but very eloquent way.

[00:18:16] Speaker2

She says, I assume he's doing the same as every human. Some good days, some bad days. He's got a few friends, few people he can't stand, he's learning some things all by himself and hopefully learning to ask for help when he needs it. He's messing up and trying again and messing up again. And then things go wrong and then trying to make things right. That's what everyone does. And obviously, that's kind of an oversimplification of the human experience, but it's also kind of its purest form, trying and trying again and doing about. Now is the time when I would ask you if you are comfortable to close your eyes, to join me in hearts and mind in this moment of kind of moving inwards a little bit and noticing the breath in your lungs and the beat of your heart and noticing the experience of being right here right now exactly as you are. And we're going to do a little practice, but I have become very fond of known as rain, which may be familiar to you. So we're first simply going to recognize. What does it feel like to be here right now, both in our physical presence of our bodies and all the thoughts that we may have in our minds and then all of the emotions that come with this? There may be chaos.

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There may be come there may be joy, there may be sadness. Whatever is here right now just to see if you can allow yourself to experience it, which is the suffering allow, except. Simply be OK, even if you're not OK. And then the eye, which is to investigate not only the physical experience of our emotions and the way that they feel, whether our chest is heavy or if her throat is tight, whether we notice that her body actually is calm and you can sit comfortably resting where we are, but also investigating all of the spots, all the stories, all of the judgments and criticism, all the things that come along with that voice in our heads, nagging us and putting us into that, working or investigating that. Investigating whether or not that is true and whether or not we could use a little compassion, a little allowance, her own humanity, and then finally and which is nourishing ourselves and maybe saying something, caring for ourselves, maybe offering forgiveness for ways in which we feel like we have failed and maybe recognizing that this is simply part of being human and we can be better versions of ourselves simply by trying to be better, even if we don't always get it right. You know, letting go of the practice and opening your eyes. I wish to say thank you so much for listening to this message today.

[00:22:09] Speaker1

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END OF TRANSCRIPT



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