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# The Good Place (15)

Series two, episode five (‘The Trolley Problem’)

Watch the whole episode together or concentrate on the clip: 07:44 to 10:53 and then 11:47 to 13:17.

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## Synopsis

After an administration error, selfish Eleanor finds herself in the Good Place, an afterlife for people who have lived moral and just lives. After being assigned a soulmate (Chidi), she has to learn how to be a good person in order to fit in with her surroundings while teaching the architect of the Good Place how to be human. This episode takes place in season two after a few twists and turns (no season one spoilers here!) but can be viewed as an individual clip with no understanding of the backstory or characters.

The trolley problem is a classic ethical dilemma. The set-up is simple and originates with philosopher Phillipa Foot in 1967: a trolley (think a tram) is hurtling down a track and heading towards a group of people (usually five). As a bystander you have the option to pull a lever that will redirect the trolley towards one person. The trolley problem asks a lot of ethical questions – is it better to act or not to act? Should morality be consequentialist or rule based? What do you do in a situation where both outcomes seem wrong? *The Good Place*, a Netflix comedy, regularly tackled ethical dilemmas as the characters explored what it meant to be good. This clip excellently highlights a famous dilemma and will certainly get your group talking.

## The episode

This session is aimed at 15-plus. With that in mind, chat through the following questions to help settle them into the discussion format:

* Has anyone in the group seen *The Good Place*? What did they think of the show?
* Does any of the group know an ethical dilemma that the group could debate?
* Has anyone in the group come across the trolley problem before?

The clip that this session focuses on takes place in episode five of the second season. Michael and Chidi are discussing the theoretical idea of the trolley problem. Michael is struggling with a thought experiment, claiming that it is just too theoretical for him to understand. Michael therefore decides to test whether Chidi actually knows what he would do in the trolley problem by putting him in a simulation and making him experience it for ‘real’. When faced with the dilemma for real Chidi realises that ethics is more difficult to live out than he realised. Later in the clip Michael makes Chidi experience a variation of the trolley problem where a doctor is faced with the dilemma of whether to sacrifice one patient to save five. (Note: this clip involves some comedy blood.) Once the clip has been shown, break into small groups and chat through the following questions:

* What do you think is the right outcome in the trolley problem. What is the reasoning you have gone through to get to that decision?
* Should we always follow rules or take more of a ‘situational’ approach to moral decision making?
* Do you think there is a difference between what we think we would do in a scenario and how we would actually act. Why might that be?
* Is doing nothing in the scenario just as bad as doing ‘something’?

## The Bible

Taking on the theme of the trolley problem and having to make difficult ethical decisions, read Luke 8:40-56 together. Afterwards, chat through the following questions:

* Is Jesus wrong to stop on his way to help someone to interact with the bleeding woman? How might Jairus have felt in this situation?
* When faced with a dilemma of who to save, what is the outcome for Jesus? What might this miracle mean?
* What was required of those receiving miracles in this passage?
* Why do you think that Jesus tells the parents not to tell anyone of the miracle in verse 56?

*The Good Place* is available to stream on Netflix.

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