

Devotional & Reading Plan



Welcome

To a special devotional and Bible reading plan.

If I were to ask Bible believing Christians whether or not they had ever read through the entire New Testament, only one in three would answer yes. You can imagine how few I would find who had read through the entire Old and New Testaments. We know the importance of studying our manual for life, but it often becomes something we put off doing.

By setting aside just 15 minutes each day we can read through the entire bible in a year. Some of us set aside that much time each day to read through the newspaper, or through a favorite magazine or book, or watch our favorite sitcom or news show.

We know there are a variety of options for each of us as to how we can achieve reading through the Bible, yet *"this devotional is specifically designed with the purpose of helping you get through this Bible this year"*. This reading devotional takes a fresh approach and walks through the Bible chronologically (in the order each event occurred). It also concentrates on a new theme each week and gives much to think about.

The passages are laid out in an easy-to-follow manner and the devotionals themselves maintain a very practical and encouraging approach. Our quotes come from the New Living Translation, a good interpretive work, making each passage fresh and contemporary.

Many have used this devotional and have accomplished their goal of reading through the Bible in a year, many for the first time. More than anything, we just want to encourage each of you to make reading through God's Word a priority this year. And may you be encouraged as God's Word touches your life. "For the word of God is living and active." (Hebrews 4:12)

-Pastor Mike Fast

“I find my delight in your commandments,
which I love.” —Psalm 119:47

This Devotional was written by Pastor Mike Fast with some notes and thoughts from Pastor David Curtis. My goal was to encourage all of us to set aside 15 minutes each day to read through the Bible this coming year. The short devotional will help keep us on track, as it lists the chronological reading passage for the day, and includes a devotional that will correlate with your day's reading, and each week will have a theme and thought to make it more practical and personal.

You can get a new set each week on our website, but if you or a friend don't have internet access often, then make sure to let Alison know you need a hard copy, or you could make your own three-ring binder full of devotionals for the year.

Our website:

www.ebcdallas.org

Our app is on the play store or apple store

EBC Dallas

Week 1

January 1-7

Week 1 – January 1st – 7th (or whenever you choose to start)

This week you will read Genesis 1-24, along with a little bit of the genealogies from 1 Chronicles. Each day we are going to look at the issue/theme of faith in more detail. We will talk about our need for faith in God, and we will look at examples of faith in the lives of Abel, Noah and Abraham. My prayer is that, by the end of this week, your faith would be strengthened and maybe even challenged a little bit.

Day 1 – January 1st

Read Genesis 1-3. “Paradise Lost”

God’s creation was perfect in every way, shape, and form, “God looked over all He had made, and He saw that it was excellent in every way...” (Gen. 1:31)

I have often pondered what life would be like if Adam and Eve had chosen obedience that day in the garden. I would imagine that Satan would have shown up the next day to tempt them again. After all, he is the deceiver and father of lies; he is in the business of tempting mankind.

However, no matter how many times I ponder this thought, the story never changes. On that fateful day, sin and death entered into the entire human race (Rom. 5:12). But, by the grace of God that is not the whole story. In fact, you need not read past today’s reading to find hope for mankind. In God’s judgment upon the serpent is a foreshadowing of Jesus’ triumph over sin and death at the cross. The offspring or seed of the woman that will crush the serpent is the first mention of God’s redemptive plan for mankind. So, reader, take hope. There is more to the story, oh, and please keep reading.

Day 2 – January 2nd

Genesis 4-6; 1 Chronicles 1:1-4. “Without faith it is Impossible to please God” – Hebrews 11:6

So why exactly was Abel’s offering accepted by God and not Cain’s offering? Some have argued that it is because Abel sacrificed an animal while Cain only brought produce of the ground. However, both grains and animals are used in the sacrificial system of the old covenant.

To find out why God accepted one and not the other, we have to go to the New Testament book of Hebrews. In Hebrews 11:4 we see that it was a matter of faith that made Abel’s offering stand out. This issue of faith is one that comes up time and again in the scriptures. God is more concerned with our faith than with the externals of religion and public service. Certainly, Cain brought an offering for the same reason as Abel. However, for Abel, it was an expression of faith, but for Cain it was religious duty.

How do you approach the worship of God? Do you worship God from your heart because you have faith in His promises? Or do you worship out of duty or obligation or because someone is watching? May your worship be like that of Abel.

Day 3 – January 3rd

Genesis 7-10; 1 Chronicles 1:5-23. “Faith is believing without seeing”

Years ago, our family watched the animated movie *Chicken Little*. In that movie the lead character, Chicken Little, warns everyone in town that the sky is falling. Of course, he is ridiculed for taking a stand on this issue. I think Noah may have felt somewhat like Chicken Little. 2 Peter 2:5 says that, “Noah warned the world of God’s righteous judgment.” Can you imagine the response Noah would have received from these wicked people?

Noah had faith in God. He was unfazed by the critics. He was undaunted by the challenge of building such a large boat (without the help of Home Depot!). Noah was the only one who heeded God’s warning. Noah acted in faith. He didn’t need God to prove anything. He believed in God’s Word and acted accordingly.

Are you willing to listen to God’s Word and act accordingly? Or are you still waiting for God to prove himself? Exercising faith means to take God at His Word and act appropriately. May you be doers of the Word and not merely hearers of it.

Day 4 – January 4th

Genesis 11-14; 1 Chronicles 1:24-27. “If you say go, we will go”

In church, we sing a song with the line; “If you say go, we will go.” As I think about what God asked Abram to do, I thought about that song. Like many of you, I am prone to sometimes sing worship music without allowing the meaning of the words to sink in. Abram, as he was known at this point, embodied what this song is all about. God gave Abram a directive to go to a foreign land. He didn’t ask Abram to go or if he even wanted to go. God commanded Abram to go.

Amazingly enough, Abram responded in faith and obeyed God’s command. Genesis 12:1 reveals some of the magnitude of this move, “leave your country, your relatives, and your father’s house...” Basically, God told Abram to abandon all that he knew – every source of security and comfort and to stake his whole life on God.

It is hard to imagine a greater example of faith. If God were to tell you to go, would you go? Are you willing to step out in faith and stake your life on God and his promises? May you have faith like Abram to do just that.

Day 5 – January 5th

Genesis 15-17. “A crisis of faith”

Have you ever found yourself really struggling in your faith?

If so, you have something in common with Abram. In spite of God’s powerful promises and constant provision for his needs, Abram was struggling to believe that God’s promises would materialize. God had already promised that Abram would “become the father of a great nation” (Gen. 12:2). However, after ten years (16:3), Abram was growing impatient (15:2-3).

Even though the Lord reassured Abram of his promises, Abram decided to take matters into his own hands. This led to Abram fathering a child with Hagar. Clearly, in the chapters we have read today, Abram was struggling with the Lord’s timing.

Are you struggling like Abram? Trust in the Lord’s timing. Exercise patience and remember what the Lord spoke through the prophet Isaiah, “For just as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts higher than your thoughts” (Isaiah 55:9).

Day 6 – January 6th

Genesis 18:1-21:7. “The Lord knows how to rescue godly people from their trials” – 2 Peter 2:9

You wouldn’t know by today’s reading that Lot “was a righteous man who was distressed by the wickedness he saw and heard day after day” (2 Peter 2:8). Peter gives us that insight to Lot’s heart. Have you ever felt like Lot? Are you worn down and beyond frustration with the world around you? Well, if you are, then fear not. As the verse that serves as our title for today says, the Lord knows how to rescue people. All hope is not lost because God will have the final say.

God provided a way of escape for Lot from the wickedness of Sodom and Gomorrah. God has also provided a way of escape for you from the wickedness of this world. Through faith in Jesus Christ, we have the confidence in knowing that we will be with the Father when we die, or even better, when Jesus returns. So, reader, do not despair, if you have trusted in Christ, your day of escape is coming. You will only have to endure the wickedness of this world for a short season before you can enjoy eternity with God.

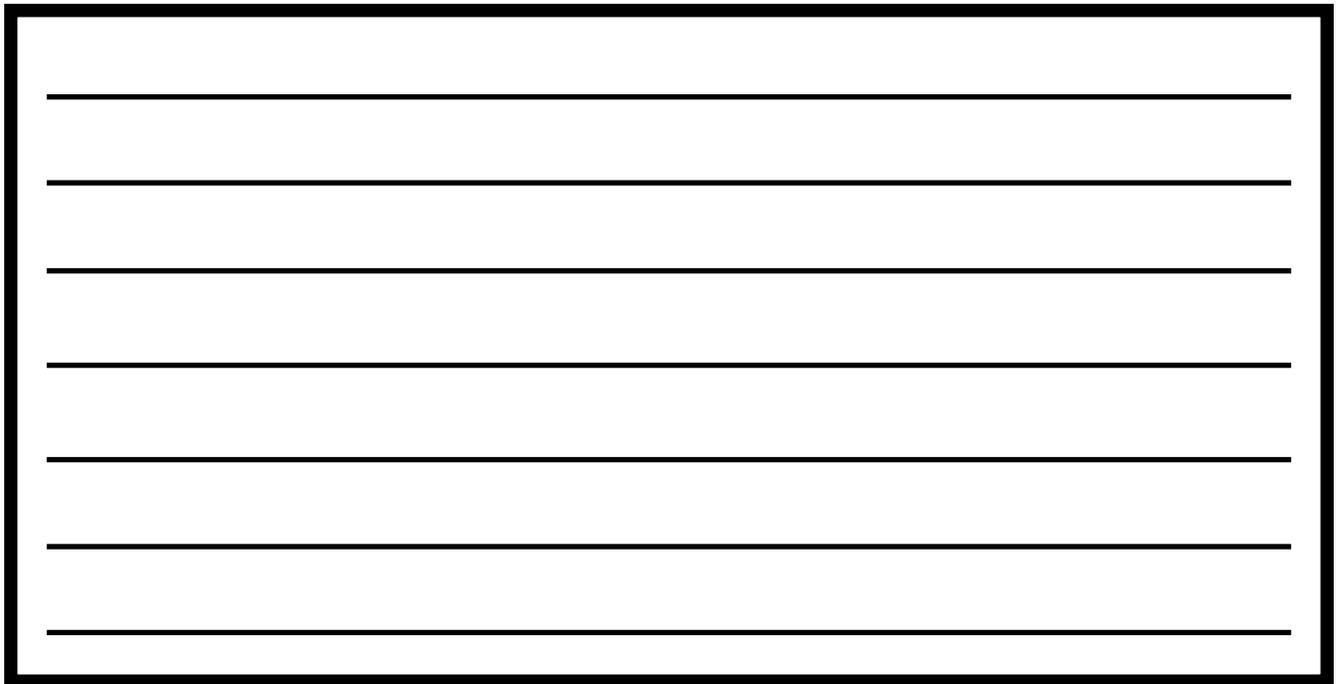
Day 7 – January 7th

Genesis 21-24. "Extreme Faith"

"I couldn't do it, I just couldn't do it," Abraham said to Sarah. "Whatever do you mean, Abraham?" she asked. "Well, God asked me to offer up Isaac as a burnt offering and I just couldn't do it," he said.

Aren't you glad your Bible doesn't read that way? I have often wondered if it were my faith being tested, how the story would have turned out. Abraham had an extreme faith in God. It wasn't that Abraham was calling God's bluff or knew it was only a test. No, he was ready to do exactly what God asked of Him. Hebrews 11:19 says, "Abraham assumed that if Isaac died, God was able to bring him back to life again..."

Abraham had to trust God with Isaac's life. Are you willing to do the same? Now, God isn't asking you to physically sacrifice your life or the life of a loved one, but he is asking you to die to yourself and trust Him with your life.



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Week 2

January 8-14

Week 2 – January 8th – 14th, Genesis 25:1-39:23 and 1 Chronicles 1:28-2:8

The theme for this week has to do with choices. We will read of the choices made by Abraham, Isaac, Ishmael, Jacob, Esau, Rebekah, Laban, Rachel, Joseph and his brothers, and even of the choices God sovereignly makes. The practical aspect of choosing God's will becomes a predominant theme this week.

January 8th

Genesis 25:1-26 and 1 Chronicles 1:28-34. "Choices"

Abraham had several wives and children. Yet, God chose Sarah, not Hagar or Keturah, to be the mother of Isaac, the child of promise. Likewise, God chose Isaac long before he was ever born to be the heir of Abraham.

We also read of God choosing Jacob as the child of promise as opposed to his twin brother Esau, the one who, traditionally speaking since he was the firstborn, should have been the heir of promise.

In Romans 9, the Apostle Paul uses the story of Jacob and Esau to illustrate God's choices. It's interesting to remember that years later Jacob was used to bless Joseph's son Ephraim instead of the older one Manasseh as even another example of God's choosing.

According to Romans nine, God's choices are determined by His will. Prayerfully our choices are in line with His will as well.

January 9th

Genesis 25:27-28:5. "What's in a Name?"

Yesterday we were introduced to someone before they were born, namely, a boy who was wrestling within his mother's womb (25:22). The boy was born grasping the heel of his older twin brother.

He was given the name, Jacob. The meaning of the name had somewhat to do with his "heel catching" event, but it also has to do with "tricking" or "deceiving." Did Jacob do anything in his life to earn the title "deceiver"? Well, yes, there was the time he carried out an underhanded plan for acquiring his brother's birthright. Then, he deceptively received his father's blessing, generally reserved for the oldest. Later, there was the reason he would leave Esau's presence, which was not presented as pure truth.

Jacob's life of deceit is beginning to catch up with him. A life of deceit will catch up with us as well if our actions are deceptive and our choices are self-seeking.

January 10th

Genesis 28:6-30:24. "New Life, New Lessons"

The character of Jacob is beginning to change, from deceiver to believer. There does not appear to be any evidence of Jacob's conversion before chapter 28. In Genesis 27:20 Jacob referred to the God of Abraham and of Isaac as "your God." Now, in chapter 28 Jacob affirmed, "The LORD will be my God" (v. 21).

When you read through chapter 32, you find that Jacob, who was a deceiver, is not only now a believer, but his name is changed by God to Israel.

Jacob was over 70-years-old when he takes off on his 400-mile journey north to Haran. He works seven years for his Uncle Laban in exchange for Rachel's hand in marriage, but Laban deceives Jacob and obligates him to an additional seven years.

Now, Jacob, who had deceived others, has felt the pain of deceit himself. As the story continues, we find a few other unfortunate consequences of his earlier life of mistakes, some of which was that others had learned the art of deception (31:35).

January 11th

Genesis 30:25-31:55. "Ethics"

By chapter 32 Jacob has transformed spiritually, but here in chapter 31, Jacob lacked any ethical system in his life. For Jacob, legality was equated with morality, and there are many people who fall into this category. That is, anything which was not contrary to the law was no problem for his conscience. Jacob has not broken the law in anything he did, but he trifled with ethics. Jacob's contract with Laban and his manipulation of the flocks in order to prosper at Laban's expense was hardly ethical, but it was strictly legal—so much so, in fact, that he could later challenge Laban to accuse him of any infractions of their agreement (31:36-42).

Laban had lived and worked closely together with Jacob for 20 years, and he was convinced of Jacob's lack of integrity. He had felt cheated by him before. Now Jacob leaves at a time when Laban is off busy elsewhere. Laban comes back and finds that his precious idols have been stolen and Jacob is gone. When he does catch up with him, the first tent he searches is Jacob's.

January 12th

Genesis 32:1-35:27. "Expectations and Assumptions"

It is almost hard to imagine the amount of anxiety Jacob was experiencing as he prepared to meet his brother, Esau. Chapter 32 lets us in on some of that anxiety. After all, it had been 20 years since they had last met, and at that point Esau was prepared to kill Jacob.

But when they meet... things could not have gone better. Perhaps it was just the passing of time, perhaps it was God at work on two hearts, perhaps it was a realigning of values and understanding the importance of their relationship over anything else, or perhaps it was a combination of all the above.

Jacob and Esau had both seen the blessings of the LORD in the years gone by. They had both learned the value of forgiveness, and the ugliness of bitterness.

Jacob's false expectations and assumptions put off an event that he should have perhaps done much earlier. Sometimes we are guilty of justifying something in our mind and putting something off that we should be doing.

January 13th

Genesis 36:1-43 and 1 Chronicles 1:35-2:2. "God's Course"

Prior to the births of Jacob and Esau, the LORD said to Rebekah, "Two nations are in your womb, and two peoples from within you will be separated; one people will be stronger than the other, and the older will serve the younger" (25:23).

The descendants of Jacob were the Israelites, while the descendants of Esau were the Edomites. Though both were descendants of Isaac there were not many similarities. During the Exodus, God told Israel to leave the Edomites alone because they were relatives. But Edom refused to let them enter the land, and later they became bitter enemies of King David.

God's prophetic words rang true once again. God's plans will not be thwarted (Job 42:2).

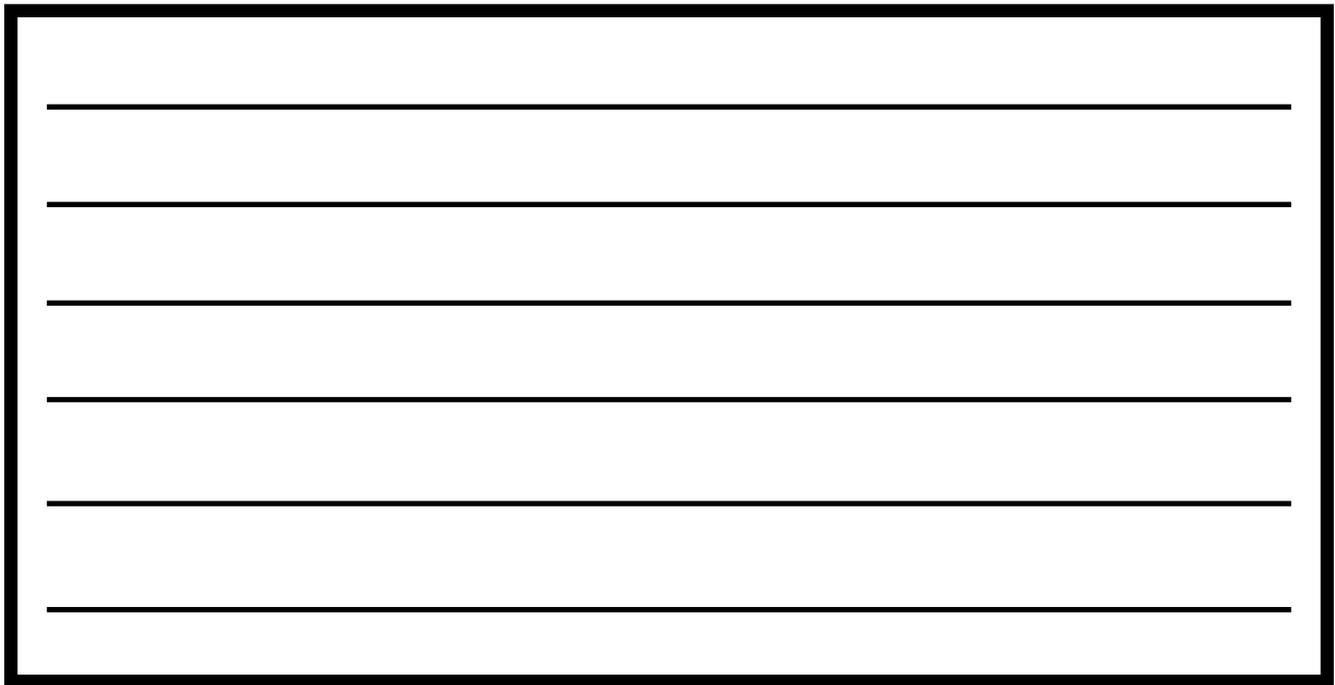
January 14th

Genesis 37:1-39:23 and 1 Chronicles 2:3-6, 8. "Godly Direction"

Joseph was a man of integrity, ethics, and conviction. God had unique, although specific, direction for Joseph's life. And furthermore, God gave Joseph's life direction. Has God given your life direction?

At 17, Joseph's brothers sold him into slavery. He became a servant in the house of Potiphar. The Lord blessed his work and faithfulness. The direction of Joseph's life changed again as Potiphar's wife actively pursued Joseph, and when she found his convictions and integrity to be so well grounded that he would not sin with her she decided to lie about him committing a terrible act of sin upon her. And, because of her lie Joseph wound up in prison.

After yet a few more years Joseph will go from pit to palace again. His life was far from comfortable, yet God honored his steadfastness and obedience to Him.



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Week 3

January 15-21

Week 3 – January 15th – 21st, Genesis 35:28-29; 40:1-50:26; Job 1-11

The theme for this week is the sovereignty of God. *The Evangelical Dictionary of Theology* defines the Sovereignty of God as “The biblical teaching that God is king, supreme ruler, and lawgiver of the entire universe.”

We will see this important truth in the lives of two men, Joseph and Job. In Joseph’s life we see him go from being wrongly imprisoned to second in command in all of Egypt. In the life of Job we will meet a righteous man who must come to grips with trials and tribulations that are brought into his life. Each day this week you will see God’s sovereignty powerfully demonstrated in the lives of these two men.

I also want to add a word about why you are reading Job right after Genesis in our chronological reading. Job is a godly man but makes no mention of God’s law given to Moses and he performs his own sacrifices (Job 42:8). Both of these would not make sense if Job lived after Moses. Scholars generally agree that the events of Job best fit during the time of the patriarchs (Abraham, Isaac, & Jacob).

January 15th

Genesis 35:28-29; 40:1-41:57. "It is better to be a poor but wise youth than to be an old and foolish king...Such a youth could come from prison and succeed" (Ecclesiastes 4:13-14a).

It was a courageous choice full of integrity that landed Joseph in jail, but it was the sovereign hand of God that brought him out. Joseph had no ability to change his position. Through the series of events you read today, God brought about restoration for Joseph. However, it is not as though Joseph didn't do anything. I see three key things Joseph did:

- 1) Joseph worked hard for the chief jailer,
- 2) Joseph exercised wisdom and the gift of interpreting dreams,
- 3) Joseph exercised patience, spending over two years in jail.

Indeed, Joseph did his part and so did God. God orchestrated different meetings, gave dreams to people, and gave Joseph the wisdom and ability to interpret those dreams. Thus, we see an important principle: God's sovereignty and man's responsibility work hand in hand in our lives.

January 16th

Genesis 42:1-45:15. "To God be the glory; great things He has done"

Joseph gives God full credit for ending up in Egypt and for his position as second only to Pharaoh. He recognizes that it was the hand of God in his life all this time. When Joseph's brothers sold him into slavery, or when he was falsely accused and jailed by Potiphar, or when he was forgotten by Pharaoh's cupbearer for two years, he knew that God's hand was guiding his life.

Like Joseph, are you able to give God the glory for what he has done in your life? Joseph's life was far from easy. There were good times and bad, but in it all, Joseph recognized that God was in control. Are you in a difficult stage of life? Do not despair, for God is in control. Is life seemingly perfect for you right now? Great, but don't be proud, for all you have is

from God. So, no matter what stage of life you are in, you ought to give glory to God as Joseph did.

January 17th

Genesis 45:16-47:27. "The Beauty of God's Sovereignty"

There are many important truths that are related to, or find their origins in, the sovereignty of God. In today's reading, I am struck by God's provision for Jacob and his family. God demonstrated His faithfulness to Jacob by providing a way of escape during these terrible years of famine.

From time to time I will meet someone who does not want to acknowledge that God is sovereign. They want to ignore that God is indeed ruler of His creation. However, at the same time they are praying for God to provide for their needs. Ignoring God's sovereignty and asking for his provision is a contradiction, for God's ability to provide is dependent on His absolute sovereignty. If God were subject to some external force, then His ability to meet our needs would be limited. I hope you see that it isn't a restriction of our freedom to believe in God's sovereignty. To the contrary, His sovereignty allows us to trust in His promises, care and provision, which will truly set us free.

January 18th

Genesis 47:28-50:26. "Looking to the Future"

Genesis 50:24 foreshadows the events of the book of Exodus as God led Israel out of Egypt. Joseph is speaking of a future time when God will lead His people back to the Promised Land. Why is it that Joseph can make this statement with any amount of confidence? It is because Joseph believes in the sovereignty of God. He experienced the hand of God in his own life and he was taught about the great promises God made to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, so he has no difficulty in knowing that God will act on His promises.

God's sovereignty is part of the reason we can have hope for the future. God's promises concerning the future would be meaningless if He is not sovereign. His ability to bring about His plan of redemption would be subject to failure if He wasn't sovereign. Joseph did not worry over the future of Israel for he knew God's sovereignty. Do you worry or fret over the future? We all do at

times, but those who trust in a sovereign God are not consumed by such worry. What a blessing to know that God is in control of our future.

January 19th

Job 1-4. "Sovereign over all Creation"

Nothing exists that doesn't fall under God's sovereignty. This profound truth extends even to the existence of evil. Many have wondered why God allows evil to exist, but this question is ultimately futile because we cannot change the fact that it does exist. What we must focus on is how to live appropriately in light of the fact that evil is present in this world.

A large part of that issue is the ability to put Satan and his evil forces into a proper context. Satan is not the evil equal of God; rather he is a created being, a fallen angel who will ultimately be defeated by our great and glorious God (Rev. 20:10).

The story of Job helps us to understand the proper context of evil. God, in His sovereignty, grants Satan a measure of authority in Job's life. So, we know that Satan and evil are real and have significant power and authority in this world. However, none of it is beyond the sovereignty of God. Thus, in spite of evil, the believer can rejoice in the sovereignty of God and the knowledge of the Lord's ultimate victory.

January 20th

Job 5-7. "God Ways are Higher than our Ways"

"God's ways are as hard to discern as the pathways of the wind, and as mysterious as a tiny baby being formed in a mother's womb" (Eccl. 11:5).

I would imagine that at this moment Job would very much relate to the above verse. Job is struggling to reconcile his current state with how he has lived his life. We all struggle with this same issue; we often ask the question, "Why do bad things happen to good people?" This may be an exclusively American question, though, because the majority of us live a charmed life compared to the rest of the world.

A key principle we learn from Job is that living a righteous life will not guarantee a life free of trials and grief. The purpose of living a righteous life or a

life of obedience to God is not to manipulate God into blessing us, but rather to bring pleasure to our Heavenly Father who loves us.

January 21st

Job 8-11. "God's Sovereignty Hits Home"

There is a difference between knowing truth about God and allowing that truth to impact how we live our lives. The same day I started writing about God's sovereignty in Job's life, I was diagnosed with pinkeye and was coming down with a nasty cold. I was miserable. Worse than that, I had become grouchy and irritable and was acting like a jerk (best word to describe it) to my family. After two days of my inappropriate behavior my wife had to confront me about it. I knew I was acting out, but it hit me like a ton of bricks when she said it. I realized how much of a hypocrite I had been for writing about God's sovereignty in Job's life while not allowing His sovereignty to control my life. I entirely ignored the fact that even though I felt bad, God was still in control and had a purpose for all this. Are you like me? Have you lost sight of God's sovereignty in your life? Are you allowing life's circumstances to dictate your behavior rather than the truth of God's Word? I want to encourage you to take a step back, reevaluate, and recommit to living with God's sovereignty as a constant reality in your life. *-David Curtis*

Week 4

January 22-28

Week 4 — January 22nd – 28th, Job 12-34

The theme for this week has to do with consistency. There are a variety of topics, but consistency is an indicator of success within each area. For instance: Are we consistent in how we interpret the Word of God? Are we displaying consistency in our life, as it pertains to godly character, as we go through an intense trial?

January 22nd

Job 12-14. "Tested Truth"

Job was a righteous man whom God permitted to endure an awful time of testing, pain and hurt. Job struggles with some of his own thoughts as well as some imprudent thoughts from his friends, yet as he reasons through these thoughts (which we are privileged to read) we see that he often makes some very insightful observations.

In today's reading passage he makes statements such as: "The life of every living thing is in God's hand, and the breath of all humanity" (12:10), "Oh, how I long to speak directly to the Almighty. I want to argue my case with God himself" (13:3), "How frail is humanity! How short is life, and how full of trouble!" (14:1).

Job is learning the value of experience. I could quote to others all the correct spiritual answers without going through a single test, but after the testing comes, those answers take on a different perspective.

What good is a test in our life? It can produce a deeper conviction of truth. It can get us out of a stagnant phase in life. It gives our answers a valid dimension.

January 23rd

Job 15-18. "Is It Proud or Appropriate"

Three of Job's friends show up after his intense time of suffering. For seven days and nights they sit silent with him. Their time of silently grieving with their friend is a beautiful and powerful example of concern. But then they begin to talk, they reason and try to explain why this could be happening. Their conclusion is that the blame falls on Job.

Today's passage points out an interesting trait (or perhaps flaw) in human character. Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar were older than Job's father (15:10). They were not just peers, but men who believed they held the right answers. They all take a turn discussing their theory with Job. Then, starting at chapter 15 they each take a second turn. In chapter 22 they start the third round. In each instance they are not stating new ideas, but stating their original ideas more forcefully.

Job gives them a fitting reply, "I have heard all of this before. What miserable comforters you are!" (16:1). Remember, the wise use few words, and the comforter does not use the opportunity to prove a point.

January 24th

Job 19-21. "Job's Pillar of Hope"

At this point Job has no idea what had transpired in respect to God and Satan's discussion about allowing the testing of "righteous Job." Although he feels as though God's hand is against him (which truly was not the case), he clearly believed God was fully on his side.

Job's trust in God remained faithful. Job is a pillar of hope for us as we go through life and life's experiences. God was obviously the pillar of hope for Job.

"I know that my Redeemer lives" (19:25). Job verbally states his faith in One who can save him. He proclaims that this One is alive. He proclaims God is concerned with him, and is his.

Job goes on to declare not just the eternal nature of God, but the eternal aspect of man's existence (vv. 25-27). Job makes statements about the

resurrection of man long before the idea was introduced in many of the more popular portions of Scripture.

The impression Job had of God and His abilities shaped his faith. Nothing was impossible for his Redeemer.

January 25th

Job 22-25. "Is It Fair?"

God "gives his sunlight to both the evil and the good, and he sends rain on the just and on the unjust" (Matt. 5:45).

Eliphaz, for the third time, tells Job his suffering is because of his wickedness. Job answers Eliphaz with a philosophical observation when he asks Eliphaz why the wicked are not always being punished. He says they can steal and harm without penalty. However, as he continues, he also notes that death consumes them, people forget them, and true assurance eludes them.

We are often guilty of the same kind of thinking as Eliphaz, that punishment must be as a result of wrong actions. Yet, this side of judgment, that is not always true of the saved or the unsaved. God's thoughts and methods are nothing like ours (Isa. 55:8,9). He is patient and is not bound to our time schedule. God is fully aware of everything and everyone (Job 25:23), and His judgment will be fair and certain.

Graciously remember that Christ died for all—the just and the unjust (1 Pet. 3:18).

January 26th

Job 26-29. "Where to Find Wisdom"

Mankind can achieve great things. Does that make him wise? Do years of schooling and academic degrees make a man wise? If a man is worth millions of dollars does that make him wise?

The answer to all of these questions is no. True wisdom is found in one realization, and Job and many other Bible writers give the same answer. It is found in the "fear of the LORD" (28:28).

Fearing the LORD is the understanding of who God is. We recognize His power as we call Him Creator and Judge. We gratefully respect Him as we identify Him as our Heavenly Father and seek to worship, please Him, and turn from evil.

True wisdom makes things so clear. There are days I hear the world claim some act of wisdom that to me does not seem like even common sense.

Perhaps that is what the Apostle Paul meant when he stated that God has made the world's philosophers, scholars, and brilliant debaters all look foolish and has shown their wisdom to be useless nonsense (1 Cor. 1:20). Job had discovered that fact as well.

January 27th

Job 30-31. "Trials"

It is supposed to be; "It's always darkest just before the dawn", but my aunt, who has been through an amazing number of trials in her life, has said, "It's always darkest just before it goes totally black." Job stated nearly the exact thing, "I waited for the light, but darkness fell" (30:26).

Job defines trials for us in chapter 30. A trial is not some mild irritation, but rather an intense painful event. He defines his trial with words like; anguish, gloom, persecution, humiliation, desolation, affliction, and darkness.

We can float through a mild irritation and come out unproven. However, nothing tests our faith as effectively or honestly as an intense trial. A true trial will test our love, faith, obedience, endurance, patience, and much more. We will come face-to-face with what we really believe about God. What do we really believe about His purpose and power? We will see first-hand how we react. Are we critical and callous? We will see every aspect of our character become truly tested.

January 28th

Job 32-34. "Consistency"

Job's three friends were absolutely convinced that he had some hidden fault which would explain why he had to suffer. Job affirms his innocence in chapter 31, which incidentally, I would challenge you to read that chapter with the intent of asking how you would measure up. I imagine very few could honestly claim what Job could.

Yet after Job and his three friends are done throwing their theories around, Elihu take his turn. The young Elihu notes how Job is becoming a bit arrogant in some of his replies and justifications. Elihu questions the "wisdom" of Job's friends, and yet Elihu has a theory or two of his own that may not be entirely on

target. Elihu still connects Job's testing to sin (34:11), but Elihu does make some wonderful statements about God's providence and justice.

There is a great lesson here for us. Each man's speech contained much truth, but every now and then a false assumption came to the surface. The fact is; 100% of our assumptions had better be consistent with the Word of God.

Week 5

January 29- February 4

The theme for this week is God's power. As you read this week, you will be challenged to consider the power of God in your life. The lives of Job and Moses will serve as the backdrop for your personal reflection. May you, this week, be confronted with the reality of God's power in your life.

January 29th

Job 35-37. "Omnipotence"

Elihu makes the statement in 36:22 that God is all powerful. Theologians refer to this as omnipotence, which is the teaching that God has the power to accomplish all that He wills to do. Elihu also gives us two key applications of this truth.

The first is that God doesn't need us to instruct Him in what to do or how to do something (36:23). In fact, God doesn't need us at all. He is perfect in His existence. Are you like me? Have you ever found yourself trying to instruct God in how to accomplish something? A better way is to receive instruction and direction from an all-powerful God.

The second application is that we should have a response of joy to God's omnipotence (37:1). Have you ever wanted to do something, but were powerless to accomplish it? God never experiences that. How hopeless would our lives be if God were powerless to accomplish His desires.

May you, like Elihu, find joy in knowing that God has the power to fulfill His good purposes in your life.

January 30th

Job 38:1-40:5. "Creator"

The work of creation is one of the greatest evidences of God's power. He uses it here to help Job understand how great the Almighty One is.

On the first day of this month you read the biblical account of creation. Many of us take God's creation for granted and have lost sight of the magnitude of what God did. Mankind has become quite skilled at creating different things from automobiles to computers; we can make some pretty amazing stuff. However, no one has ever created something *ex nihilo*, or 'out of nothing' as God did. It is not as though God brought together the raw materials of the universe and followed the instruction manual. No, he simply

spoke things into existence. His creative power is beyond all that we can imagine. "In the beginning God created..." (Gen. 1:1). God has always existed. We may not be able to fully comprehend this, and we certainly cannot create *ex nihilo*, but we can accept it and believe just as Job did (40:3-5).

January 31st

Job 40:6-42:17. "Political Power?"

About this time of year we sometimes receive our voters' pamphlets in the mail, giving us details on all the candidates involved in the upcoming election. I don't know about you, but I am becoming a bit of a political cynic. Every candidate promises to have the solutions to all the problems we face, but once their term is up, the problems remain. I am so thankful that God's power is not a political power. God was not elected to His position and His power is not subject to anyone else.

As you read the closing chapter of Job today, you noticed that God chose to bless Job. God did not have to defend that decision to anyone. He didn't have to get the approval of the House or the Senate. God's promises are not like those of a politician. Because of God's power, we know that every last one of his promises will come true. Do you trust in God's promises? What about God's power? Do you believe that God has the power to accomplish whatever he desires? We must first believe in the power of God before we can trust in His promises; otherwise God is nothing more than a politician. *-David Curtis*

February 1st

Exodus 1:1 - 4:17; 1 Chronicles 6:1-3a. "Roadblocks"

Have you ever done something that can only be explained as the power of God working in your life? One experience of the power of God in my life was on a mission trip to Alaska, when our group was witnessing to members of the Bahai faith. While I recognize that God was speaking through me, I also recognized that I had a part in the experience. God couldn't have used me unless I had been willing to go on the trip and been willing to open my mouth. God's power is truly amazing, but often God chooses to work through His servants. This means that we can either allow God to work, or become a roadblock to His power.

God chose to work through Moses, but Moses was unsure about his role. Moses attempted to be a roadblock to God's power. Thankfully for the Israelites, Aaron was willing to be used by God. Are you more like Moses or Aaron? Are you a roadblock to God's power or are you willing to be used by God?

May you be willing to be used by God and thereby experience His power in your life.

February 2nd

Exodus 4:18 - 7:13. "Is God Really Powerful?"

The Israelites had lived under Egyptian oppression for a long time, so it was not difficult for Moses and Aaron to convince the leaders of Israel that God had sent them to free His people (4:31). They were convinced, that is, until things got difficult. Following Moses' and Aaron's first request for freedom, Pharaoh ordered their workload increased. This turned Israel against Moses and Aaron (5:21). Pharaoh showed his power by taking action, while God invited Moses, Aaron and all Israel to believe in His power to deliver them.

Do you find yourself ever trusting in the power of what you can see or touch rather than in God's power? Are you like the Israelites who doubted God's power to deliver when life becomes difficult? I think that God performed the plagues, not only to show His power to Pharaoh, but to His own people as well. What more does God have to do to prove His power to you?

February 3rd

Exodus 7:14 - 9:35. "Working on Multiple Levels"

In sending the plagues, God demonstrated His great power over all creation. In spite of all these demonstrations of power, I think there is something that reveals God's power even more in this story. After every plague that takes place, we read that Pharaoh hardened his heart. That is, until you come to the plague of boils. If you notice, following the plague of boils, it says that the "Lord made pharaoh even more stubborn." (9:12).

Now wait a minute, you may be thinking, if God's goal was to deliver Israel why would He make Pharaoh's heart more hard or stubborn? While deliverance was God's goal, it was not all that He was working to accomplish through the plagues. In 9:16 God reveals the greater purpose of revealing His power and seeing His fame, "spread throughout the earth." So not only is God in control of all creation, but He is working on multiple levels at the same time.

I think that sometimes we lose sight of God's ability to work in this way. We can become short-sighted and focus only on what we want God to accomplish in the here and now, instead of looking for the bigger picture that God might be doing.

February 4th

Exodus 10-12. "A Bigger Perspective"

Exodus 10:1-2 really sums up the whole theme for this week's devotionals. The hardness of Pharaoh's heart allowed God to demonstrate His power through miracles among the Egyptians.

However, during this time I would imagine that Moses and Aaron experienced some frustration as Pharaoh would repeatedly change his mind about letting them go. Moses and Aaron had to hold to the bigger perspective that God had given them. Could you imagine the history of Israel without the plagues of Egypt and God's great deliverance? Time and time again God would remind His people of the great signs and wonders He did in Egypt. If Pharaoh had been a push-over, then God's people would have no concept of His power and ability to deliver. There was indeed a bigger perspective in place.

Could it be that the times when it seems God is delaying an answer to prayer or is not delivering you from a situation, that He is working with a bigger perspective?

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Week 6

February 5 - February 11

In the wilderness. This week's passage covers the Hebrews "exodus" from Egypt, and their commencement into the wilderness. There are several terrific accounts revealing the power of God, as well as His evident concern for His people. We will observe the numerous "wilderness experiences" of the Israelites. Furthermore, we will see parallels with our "wilderness experiences."

February 5th

Exodus 13-15. "Why Lord?"

The sequence of events we read in this passage will become very familiar as we walk through the next several chapters. The Hebrews had been in slavery for over 400 years, nearly twice as long as the United States has been a nation. As it came to an end, they watched as God displayed His power before Pharaoh, and finally he yielded. And now they're free!

They celebrated their independence, and intentionally set a day aside to remember it annually. They left with the wealth of Egypt and God's leading. Then at the Red Sea they saw Pharaoh's army closing in. Their immediate response was, "Why were we brought out here to die in the wilderness?"—we will see that response appear several more times. Nevertheless, God provides another miracle. God delivered them, and they celebrated with song and dance. In the very next paragraph the people complain to Moses about a lack of good water.

God's answer to their "why's?" is found in 15:25; a "test."

How have you done with your wilderness tests?

February 6th

Exodus 16-19. "The Wilderness"

The Hebrews had just traveled two months, and over 100 miles out into the wilderness. What the wilderness was to them I believe is something we can relate to well. Their physical wilderness was also their spiritual and emotional wilderness. It was the place where God continued to test them (see 16:4 and 17:7).

What is the wilderness? It is a place where things are uncomfortable and unfamiliar. It is a place where we are forced to rely on God. It is a place of testing (faith, obedience, integrity, etc.). It is a place we come out of stronger, and if not, then we may be spending more time in it.

Moses spent his time in the wilderness prior to the exodus of the Hebrews. God was preparing his heart.

We each need to spend our time in the wilderness as God prepares us for whatever task He has in store. In the wilderness God presents us with challenges; changing our will, refining our character, developing our dependence on Him, and much more.

February 7th

Exodus 20-22:15. "Rules and More Rules"

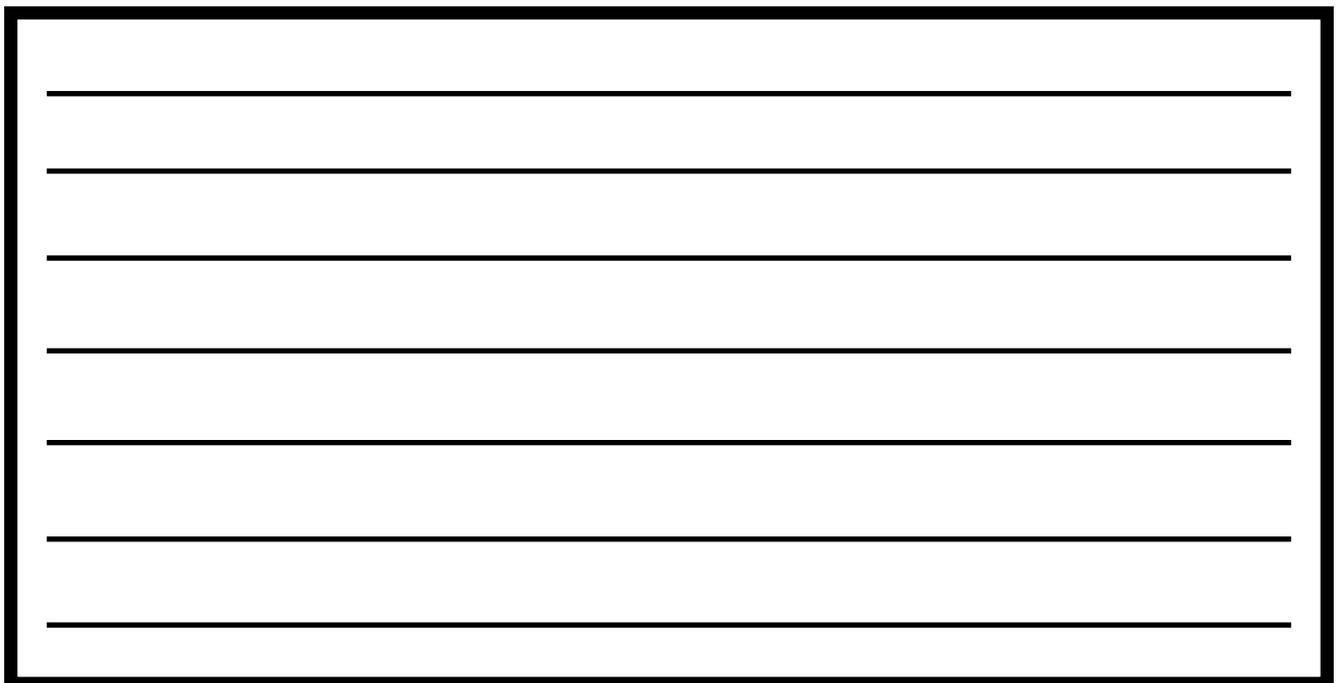
Rules. It's not just the Ten Commandments. We will see that there are literally hundreds of rules as our readings continue.

Furthermore, it is not just the Old Testament, although some people have that idea. In the New Testament Jesus expounded on the commandments. He added statements of generosity to a rule about stealing (Mt. 5:40). He added statements of guilt if a person even thinks immorally (Mt. 5:28).

He changed the course from focusing externally to focusing internally. Although He added to it, He also simplified it. Jesus said the Law is based on Loving the Lord with all our heart and loving others (Mt. 22:40).

I appreciate the insight from the Life Application Bible: The rules God laid out "had several objectives: (1) to protect the nation, (2) to organize the nation, and (3) to focus the nation's attention on God."

The guidelines God gives us today also have our protection and direction in mind. God's instructions are not without purpose.



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February 8th

Exodus 22:16-24:18. "Short Term Dedication"

This is an important passage to remember, because we will reflect on it again in just a few days. Think about what they have just seen. God's angel is before them leading the way (23:20). He will also go before them and destroy their enemies (23:23), but in a manner so organized that the land will not be harmed (23:27-31).

Furthermore, the people profess their allegiance to God, more than once, with the words, "We will do everything the LORD has told us to do" (24:3,7). And to top it all off, the leaders saw God! Over 70 men saw God and even shared a meal with God (24:9-11).

Can you imagine a series of events more life changing? Or was it? The very next time Moses sees these people they will be worshiping an idol (chapter 32). Their intimate encounters with God lasted forty days.

How long do your "mountain top" experiences last? May our dedication not be so short-lived.

February 9th

Exodus 25-28. "Symbolic Significance"

"The old system in the law of Moses was only a shadow of the things to come", evident in how "we can boldly enter heaven's Most Holy Place because of the blood of Jesus" (Hebrews 10:1,19).

The detailed instructions for the tabernacle had purpose even beyond the immediate usable purpose for the Israelites. There was great symbolic purpose as God looked ahead to the One who would tabernacle among us (John 1:14).

There is symbolic purpose in some of the other items mentioned as well. The priest's clothing was to remind him of his place before God and his position as an intercessor for the people.

However, I was considering what it would do for us to wear some of the items Aaron was to be clothed with. What if you had the names of people written on a chest-piece you wore over your heart? (28:29). What if you

wore a medallion across your forehead that read, "Set apart as Holy to the Lord"? (28:36). Would you live, act, react, or respond differently?

February 10th

Exodus 29-31. "Conviction"

Eric Liddell was the "flying Scotsman." He set an Olympic record in the 400-meter run at the 1924 Olympic Games. Although favored at 100 meters, he had withdrawn from that race because the qualifying heats were to be run on a Sunday, a day he had firmly set aside for worship and rest. Instead, he spent the next several months training for the 400. Incidentally, he also won a bronze in the 200.

Liddell lived out his convictions even when the whole world encouraged him otherwise. His actions would also fall under the category of integrity. Moreover, he was willing to follow his heart regardless of the outcome. We may not be rewarded this side of Heaven for abiding by our convictions. In fact, it could be a bit painful.

Yet, that is where the rubber meets the road. Take a minute to think through your convictions. What are they? How much pressure would it take to change them?

"Remember, it is sin to know what you ought to do and then not do it" (James 4:17).

February 11th

Exodus 32-34. "A Man of Great Character"

Moses was an amazing individual. He was the instrument God used to change the heart of Pharaoh. He was the man who led God's people out of Egypt. He held his staff over the water and the Red Sea opened up. He talked with God and met Him on the mountain. Through the LORD, he provided water and food. Moses counseled, and judged, and led.

Moses was gone from their presence for forty days. During that time, they rebelled against the Lord's instructions and refused to worship Him, but instead chose to worship a golden calf.

God told Moses that He would destroy them for their terrible sin and instead make "Moses into a great nation" (32:10). Moses pleaded with God to not do that. Instead, Moses asked God to forgive them (32:32).

I believe God was testing Moses' character, and Moses passed the test. The Israelites could not have had a better person leading them through the wilderness. May each of us be that for others.

Week 7

February 12 - February 18

Exodus 35-40; Leviticus 1-8; Numbers 7-9

This week's readings continue in the detail of the covenant that God established with Israel. You will read about the building of the tabernacle and the details associated with it. Following the construction of the tabernacle, the Lord gives instruction as to how He is to be worshipped. In all of these instructions we find an underlying need for us to do things God's way. Whether it is a willingness to give or submit, it is dependent upon a heart that is willing to do things God's way.

February 12th

Exodus 35-36. "Stop Giving!"

I have yet to visit a church that has more money and resources than it can truly put to use. However, that is exactly what we see take place today. God's people give above and beyond what is needed to build the tabernacle.

Now, my intent with today's devotional is not to go off on the importance of giving, but I do want to note something interesting in Ex. 35:20-22. What largely catches my attention is not what they brought or even how much they brought, but rather how they brought it. Everyone whose hearts were willing brought what they could. I think it is safe to say that not every Israelite gave to the building of the tabernacle, rather only those whose "hearts were stirred and desired to do so" gave their offerings.

This is how it is to work in our own lives. God doesn't want us to give out of compulsion or obligation. If that is why you give then you should keep your money. Look at Ananias and Sapphira in Acts 5:1-11. They gave out of a wrong motive and were dishonest in their giving. May we give as the Israelites gave, with willing hearts.

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February 13th

Exodus 37:1-39:31. "Lost in the Details"

Not long ago, I went on a retreat with some middle school boys. While at this retreat, I discovered that they can easily get lost in the details of a story and totally miss the point. I hope that isn't the case for you as you read this passage today. I say that because, in the middle of all those details, is a simple phrase "just as the Lord had commanded Moses." All of those details were important because they were commanded by God. It is not as though the craftsmen could have changed their minds and disregarded the instructions from God. They followed every single detail God had given them

God gave them great detail on the tabernacle and He gives us detail on how to live as well. So, are you willing to live life God's way, or are you going to ignore God's instructions on how to live? The craftsmen of Israel were willing to follow God's instruction and build His way. If you will do the same, your life will be one of beauty just like the tabernacle was.

February 14th

Exodus 39:32-40:38; Numbers 9:15-23. "Time to Go Again"

Pastor David Curtis wrote, "In our first seven years of marriage, my wife Kristi and I had seven different addresses. We would often make jokes about being part nomadic or having the "year-and-a-half itch." However, through those years and all the moves, one thing was consistent – it was always our decision when we moved.

As you read today, that was not necessarily the case for the Israelites. How would you like it if every day you woke up and had to check if the cloud had moved to know if you were leaving or staying? It didn't matter how much you liked your current spot, if the cloud was moving, it was time to go. I would imagine that many of us would begin to complain and grumble if we had to live like that. And yet in a way we do live this way. If you are at all concerned with being in God's will and He says "go," then you will go.

Are you willing to follow God's direction? If God were to say "go," would you go? How will you go? Will you complain and grumble or will you go joyfully, knowing that God is leading you?

February 15th

Numbers 7:1-89. "A Living and Holy Sacrifice"

Over the course of twelve days the twelve tribes of Israel gave their gifts of dedication for the tabernacle. You probably noticed that all twelve gifts were identical. To me this is a remarkable thing. Bible Commentator Matthew Henry notes that this points to the "equal share" that each tribe had in the tabernacle and altar. I am sure that it was tempting to those tribes with greater resources to out-give the other tribes. And yet none of them did.

Under the Old Covenant, all people came to God through the system of sacrifices. Today, under the New Covenant, all people come to God through the one sacrifice of Jesus Christ (John 14:6).

The tribes gave their dedication offerings in recognition of the importance of the tabernacle. So, what is an appropriate offering for us to give in recognition of Jesus? Romans 12:1-2 says that we are to give our whole life as a "living and holy sacrifice." Now that is an offering that truly shows we all have equal share in the sacrifice of Christ for our salvation.

February 16th

Numbers 8:1-9:14; Leviticus 1-3. "Willing to Believe"

There were numerous types of sacrifices in the Old Covenant system of worship. In our modern mindset, we might wonder why all these sacrifices were necessary. It is difficult for us to relate to and understand this system of worship and forgiveness that God had ordained. However, there is a connection between their receiving of forgiveness and our receiving of forgiveness, and that connection is Christ.

Leviticus 1:4 says that a man was to "lay your hand on its head so the Lord will accept it as your substitute, thus making atonement for you." Why would killing an animal while placing a hand on its head atone for sins?

As people, we generally want to make up for our mistakes. We also want to attempt to earn God's favor and forgiveness. However, this is impossible for we cannot repay the debt we owe to Christ. Forgiveness is only received by a willingness to believe according to God's system, whether that is belief that God would forgive based on an Old Testament sacrifice, or if it is trusting in Christ's sacrifice for us today.

February 17th

Leviticus 4-6. "Seeking Forgiveness"

Is it possible to sin without knowing it? Absolutely. Many times, when we sin against another person, we may not be aware of it for some time. And sometimes no one else is aware either. The instructions regarding the sin offering we read today were to be followed "when they became aware of their sin" (4:14; 23; 28; 5:5; 17). God does not expect us to seek forgiveness for sins we are unaware of. However, how we respond to the realization of sin in our life is critical to our spiritual health. In the Old Testament they were to bring a sin offering in order to seek the Lord's forgiveness.

For the New Testament believer, the command is still to seek forgiveness. 1 John 1:9 tells us that "if we confess our sins to him, he is faithful and just to forgive us and to cleanse us from every wrong." When you become aware of sin, are you willing to seek forgiveness from the Lord? What about seeking forgiveness from a person you may have sinned against?

February 18th

Leviticus 7-8. "Worship with a Willing Heart"

The theme that has been running through this entire week is a willingness to do things God's way. Worship for Israel was very detailed. God had directed through Moses how they were to worship Him.

As Christians and members of the new covenant, we do not have this amount of detail from the Lord for our worship services. At best we have some principles in the New Testament and the model of the first century church in the book of Acts. Even though the amount of detail differs, the need for a willingness to worship God according to His way remains.

In your worship, is it more about God or more about your wants and needs? Are your preferences in worship more important than God's desires? What are you doing to cultivate a willingness to do things God's

way? Spend some time with God today, as Moses did, asking Him to show you where you need to submit more to His way.

Week 8

February 19 - February 25

Leviticus 9-26

We are in the heart of Leviticus this week and holiness is the topic. Now, I've got a confession to make, and perhaps you can relate to what I'm going to tell you. The first few times I took on reading through the Bible, when I would get to the book of Leviticus I would accomplish some of the fastest speed reading you could ever imagine. As you go through the book you read about rules for cleansing, rules for food, rules for priests, and so on. Regardless of my initial reaction, there is a theme that runs through the book that is perhaps more essential and impactful to my everyday life than maybe the themes in many of the other books.

The theme is holiness. Prayerfully, as you read this book you will see something that relates very directly to yourself, and that is that God desires that His people are holy and pursuing holiness. "For I am the LORD your God. You must consecrate yourselves and be holy, because I am holy... For I, the LORD, am the one who brought you up from the land of Egypt, that I might be your God. Therefore, you must be holy because I am holy." (Lev. 11:44-45).

February 19th

Leviticus 9-11. "Fear is Respect"

Since the start of Leviticus, we have been reading very specific rules for the priests concerning offerings. Chapters eight and nine were discussing their ordination ceremony. It was an elaborate time of dedicating themselves to the service of God.

They were the intercessors for the people, and it was a position only available to the descendants of Aaron. For Nadab and Abihu, perhaps some of this went to their head. Pride may have been a factor in their sin (10:1-2). Alcohol may have been an issue (10:8-9). Complacency was possibly an issue, as they really did not care to follow the rules about where the fire and the incense came from. But, one thing that most certainly was a factor was their disrespect for the Almighty God.

I have a problem with Christians who say, "We really don't need to fear God. We just need to respect Him." The character of the Holy One, Judge and Creator demands something more than respect. "He will be glorified before all the people" (10:3).



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February 20th

Leviticus 12-14:32. "Vitamin Be One"

This section covers some things that are kind of unpleasant just to read about. But, amazingly, it all goes back to the theme of Leviticus—holiness.

I have read historical accounts of the physical health of the Israelites compared to other nations of their time and area. The Israelites were far healthier. Their birthrate was higher. The longevity and health of the nation just seemed much stronger. Why? The rules.

There are so many directives concerning purification procedures for water and food, contaminated materials, circumventing contagious diseases, etc. Again, we are reminded of the fact that God's rules have purpose. God wants holy people set apart for Him. Yet, in addition to being the Almighty God He is also their Protector. God takes care of His people even through a series of rules designed to protect them from disease and sickness.

It is this kind of reminder that we need to prompt us to remember that God's intentions and purpose are far more arranged than our short-term vision would let us think.

February 21st

Leviticus 14:33-16:34. "Covering is Not a Cure"

Once each year the Israelites would confess their sins, and the high priest would enter the Most Holy Place of the tabernacle (and temple later) to make atonement for them as a nation. This was called the Day of Atonement, and it was obviously, one of the most important days of the year.

The ceremony had very specific rules that the high priest was to follow. The animals had to meet certain standards. The process was to symbolize certain things as it followed a very rigid procedure. There was a great deal of blood spilled out and sprinkled at the front of the Ark of Covenant. And, understand this, it had to be performed each year—it was temporary.

Atonement is only a bandage and not a cure. Atone means "to cover." Their sins were just being "covered" up each year, yet it all looked forward to a perfect sacrifice that would remedy that problem.

Forgive means "to cancel." Jesus Christ's sacrifice made forgiveness possible. Prayerfully, we never take it for granted.

February 22nd

Leviticus 17-19. "Be Holy Because Your Lord Is"

The thought of exactly how to be holy has suffered from many false concepts. In some circles, holiness is equated with a long list of "don'ts." For others, holiness means a particular style of dress or mannerisms. And for still others, it may mean an unattainable perfection.

A word study reveals that to be holy is to be morally blameless. It is to be separated from sin and consecrated to God. A holy life is one lived in conformity to the moral precepts of the Bible and in contrast to the sinful ways of the world.

Jerry Bridges wrote, "Surely God has not commanded us to be holy without providing the means to be holy. The privilege of being holy is yours, and the decision and responsibility to be holy is yours. If you make that decision, you will experience the fullness of joy which Christ has promised to those who walk in obedience to Him."

"...seek to live a clean and holy life, for those who are not holy will not see the Lord" (Hebrews 12:14).

February 23rd

Leviticus 20-22. "Calling Sin 'Sin'"

Homosexuality. Bestiality. Adultery. Incest. These are terms that when mentioned can bring a look of disgust or shock upon our face. Are we allowed to talk of such things? Are we allowed to say such things are wrong, violently wrong?

We are being inundated from our culture with the idea that we should not stand and loudly label certain things as sin. We are taught that inwardly you may believe what you would like, but don't outwardly express your disdain for moral depravation.

We're tutored into reasoning that black and white standards are gone and gray is the norm. Yet, God's Word has never looked very gray to me.

Furthermore, we must understand that calling sin what it is, will be what leads us to the salvation of God. Until we understand our need for salvation, we will not be looking for it. Paul said, "I would not have known what sin was except through the law" (Rom. 7:7). "For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life through Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom. 6:23).

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February 24th

Leviticus 23-25:23. "Refocus"

Israel was instructed to remember seven specific holidays each year. Some festivals lasted one week and others just one day. But each holiday represented something important: Passover reminded them of God's deliverance from Egypt, Unleavened Bread reminded them of their new way of life, First fruits reminded them of God's provision, and so forth down the list.

Apart from reminders, God's established holidays also provided rest and renewal. God felt so strongly about the importance of each of these that He also established a Sabbath day of rest each week.

Rest. It is vital for us physically in order to maintain what we need to do.

Renewal. It is vital for us emotionally as sometimes our joy is replaced with drudgery as we carry on.

Reminder. We need these things spiritually as we refocus on a variety of items; our gratitude to God; our life's perspective; and, our fellowship with our Creator.

Your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 6:19), so keep each area of your life healthy.

February 25th

Leviticus 25:24-26:46. "Blessed by God"

"...anyone who believes in Jesus Christ will never be disappointed" (2 Peter 2:6).

In chapter 26 God promises a long list of blessings if the Israelites obey Him. Their harvests will be plentiful, they will live securely, He will live among them, and on and on.

However, He also says that they will receive a long list of punishments if they disobey Him. Their enemies will eat their crops, their land will be devastated, they will die in slavery, and so forth.

When we live in obedience to God, what kind of blessings will we receive? Does God give you peace? Does your conviction give you direction? Do His promises give you hope?

How often do you consider the blessings of God? Have you ever seriously tried to count them "one by one" as that old song suggests? I would challenge you to list as many as you can. Embark on proving the truth of Proverbs 10:6; "The godly are showered."

Week 9

February 26 - March 4

Leviticus 27; Numbers 1-18

The theme for this week is sacrifice. Recently you have read much on the various sacrifices that the Israelites were to perform in their worship of the Lord. This week we are going to explore what it means for us to sacrifice. One of the key verses that will be brought up this week is Romans 12:1-2:

“And so, dear brothers and sisters, I plead with you to give your bodies to God. Let them be a living and holy sacrifice - the kind He will accept. When you think of what he has done for you, is this too much to ask? Don't copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will know what God wants you to do, and you will know how good and pleasing and perfect his will really is.”

May you, as you read this week, ponder the ways in which your life can be a living and holy sacrifice.

February 26th

Leviticus 27; Numbers 1. "The High Cost of Sacrifice"

The last chapter of Leviticus is concerned with redeeming that which was dedicated to the Lord. The act of redemption was a major part of life for the Israelites. For the 21st century Christian it is not something we often think about. When is the last time you heard someone talk about redeeming? If anything, we use the word to speak of getting even which is not the biblical meaning.

Redemption is an important concept for us though, because if you are in Christ then you have been redeemed (Titus 2:13-14). You may have noticed the cost involved with redeeming in this chapter. If someone or something is going to be redeemed there is always a cost.

So, if we are redeemed and if there is always a cost associated with redemption, then how are we to pay the cost? Fortunately, for you and me, Jesus paid the cost for our redemption (1 Peter 1:18-19). It is a cost far beyond what we could afford.

February 27th

Numbers 2-3. "Sacrificing Our Freedom"

As I reflect on the responsibilities given to the Levites, I am rather overwhelmed. Could you imagine being responsible for taking care of the one place where the true God could be worshipped? Wow! Then I think about the fact that they didn't aspire to this, but that the Lord chose them and they were born into it. Their whole purpose in life was the proper care and operation of the tabernacle.

Now, this is not all that different than it is for us today. Like the Levites, we have been chosen by God and then given a purpose in life. We do not inherit this based on our genealogy, but we are born into it, for every believer is born of the Spirit (John 3:5). The Levites were instructed as to what their purpose was – they didn't get to choose. In the same way, God directs and gives each believer significance and purpose. This is what I mean by sacrificing our freedom. As chosen people, we are not free to declare the purpose for our life. Our purpose, one that will bring real meaning and significance, comes from above.

February 28th Day 59

Numbers 4-5. "Sacrifice of Fellowship"

In the instructions that the Lord gave to Israel through Moses, purity was greatly emphasized. There were a number of reasons for this, and the one given in this passage is because the Lord dwelled in their camp.

Praise God that we live under a covenant of grace and not one of law as the Israelites did. And yet, even though we are called to grace, we cannot ignore the need for purity. God demanded purity because He dwelt among Israel. God now, through His Spirit, dwells in the life of every believer and in the community of believers as a collective whole. His expectation is still purity in the lives of believers and in the community of believers. As a new creation, we are made pure by the blood of Christ, and we maintain purity by confessing our sins (1 John 1:9). Unfortunately, some within the community of faith stop practicing personal confession and knowingly and willingly engage in sin, thus defiling the church. As with Israel, the church must take action to remove those who defile the community (1 Cor. 5:5). However, we must not forget that once purity is restored, through forgiveness and grace, fellowship is also to be restored.

March 1st Day 60

Numbers 6:1-27; 10:1-36. "Dedicated to Sacrifice"

The Nazirite vow was a special way for an Israelite to dedicate one's self to the Lord, and he knew that it came with certain restrictions. We even see this practiced by the Apostle Paul who shaved his head because of a vow (Acts 18:18).

Not every Israelite would make a Nazirite vow, but every believer who is indwelt by the Holy Spirit is already dedicated to the Lord. We do not operate with a list of restrictions like one who has taken a Nazirite vow. In fact, we operate with a higher standard. Romans 12:1 says that we are to be a living and holy sacrifice. We show our dedication by not copying the ways of the world. We are then to be transformed by the renewing of our minds. This is different than being the same person with some additional rules. It is a change of the entire person. When we come to faith in Jesus it is more than a ticket to Heaven. It is dedicating our whole life to the Lord. Have you truly dedicated your whole life to the Lord?

March 2nd

Numbers 11-13. "Whining and Complaining"

I have overseen a few short-term mission trips with teenagers, and it has been my experience that the most important rule for keeping the group together and focused is that there is no complaining. Anytime you choose to follow the Lord's leading there will be some form of sacrifice associated with it. Whining or complaining communicates an unwillingness to make that sacrifice.

It is obvious here that many of the Israelites and the foreigners who were with them had reached their limit of personal sacrifice and had begun to complain. They were prepared to return to slavery in Egypt because the sacrifice was too great.

Returning to slavery may sound silly to us. Personal freedom is worth the sacrifice, isn't it? While this may be true, how often are we tempted to return to being slaves to sin because the sacrifice of following Christ is too great? As you follow Christ, remember his sacrifice, and what he gave up to secure your salvation. – *David Curtis*

March 3rd

Numbers 14-15. "Missed Blessings"

The report from the spies truly tested if Israel trusted God for their protection. Already struggling with the level of sacrifice expected of them, they decided the prospect of engaging the inhabitants of the Promised Land wasn't worth it. The people ignored the fact that the Lord was with them (Num. 14:9).

You might find it easy to criticize their lack of faith as I often have. The harsh reality is that we sometimes do the very same thing. We size up a situation and decide the cost is too great, and instead of trusting in the Lord's protection and provision, we make a fear-based decision and miss out on God's blessings.

Why are we prone to fear? The Apostle John tells us that perfect love casts out all fear (1 John 4:18). As broken yet redeemed people our love for God is being perfected. As this process continues fear is diminished and love will increase. As God's faithful love continues to work in our lives, our love for Him grows, and our willingness to sacrifice and follow Him grows as well.

March 4th

Numbers 16-18. "Rebellion of Korah"

God's justice is not often talked about in our churches. We would much rather talk about His love and mercy and grace. The story of Korah, Dathan and Abiram is a vivid reminder that our God is a just God who cannot let sin go unpunished. These men were challenging the leadership of Moses and Aaron, and worse, they were in rebellion to the Lord.

For me, the difficult part of this passage is that the families were punished as well. This is an illustration of God's very own description of himself in Exodus 34:7, "I will show unfailing love to many thousands by forgiving every kind of sin and rebellion. Even so I do not leave sin unpunished, but I punish the children for the sins of their parents to the third and fourth generations."

As unfair as it may seem, we see the impact parental sin has on children lived out every day. Some will walk away from the Lord because of the sins of their parents. To those who are living with the impact of a parent's sin, know that there is grace available in Jesus to break that bondage of sin.



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Week 10

March 5 - March 11

Numbers 19-36

This week we wrap up the book of Numbers. For each of these seven days you will be reminded of God's Perspective. God's perspective has to do with His purpose, His plans, His discernment, His assessment, and the like.

We are often guilty of letting our human reasoning try to evaluate God's decisions. As we read the next few days of God's detailed plans for Israel, His purpose in discipline, and His motives for rules, we will come to understand the futility in trying to outguess God. Instead we should take great pleasure in our God who has a perfect perspective.

March 5th

Numbers 19-21. "Rationalizing"

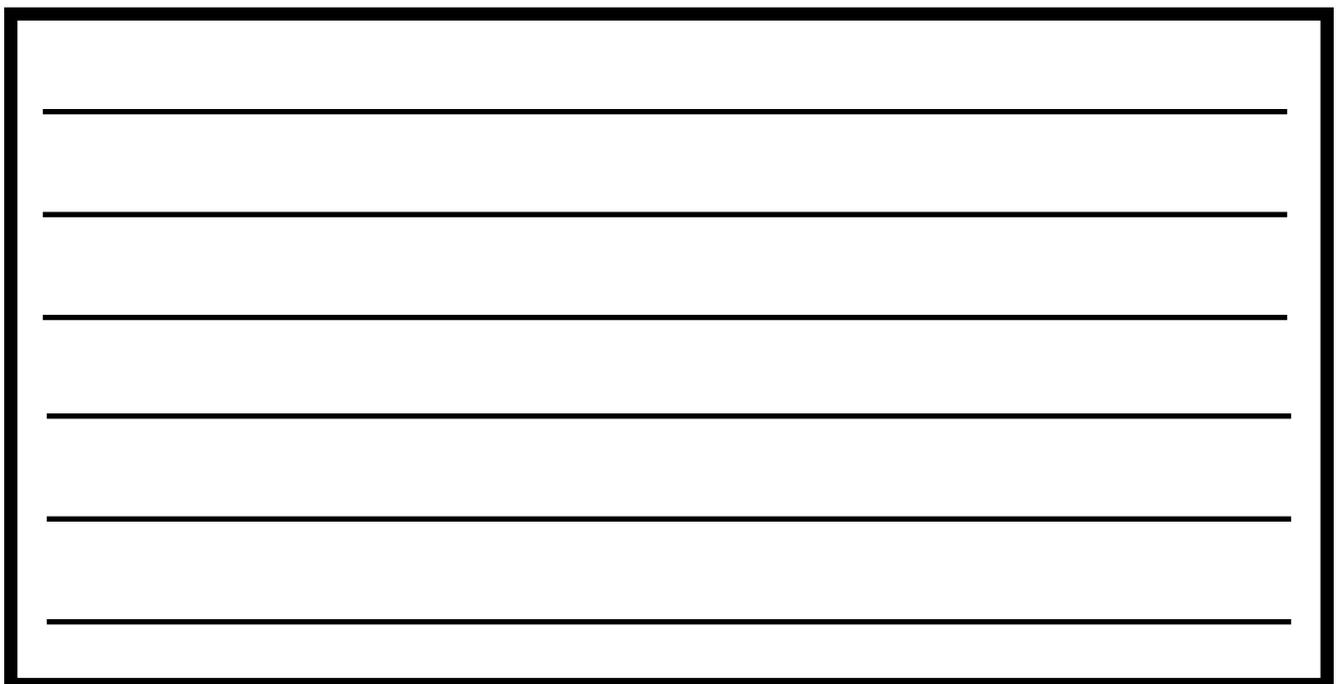
Is that fair? Moses has been antagonized by these people for 39 years. He has just buried his sister, Miriam. All he does is hit a rock to silence the complaints, and next... Moses is in serious trouble. His punishment meant he would not enter the Promised Land.

Isn't that the way we often read this passage? Don't we often try to justify the situation? In actuality, we may not fully understand the situation.

In this instance, Moses was the leader, and example. Moses was also told by God exactly what to do. "Take the staff"—most likely the budding staff of Aaron the priest from the Ark of the Covenant. "Command the rock"—which even the word for "rock" is different than the one used in the Exodus 17 passage (where striking the rock was what God wanted).

The emphasis of Exodus 17 was judgment, foreshadowing the smitten Christ on the cross. The emphasis of Numbers 20 was on priestly work, foreshadowing the exalted Christ.

May we take following the determined commands of God's seriously.



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March 6th

Numbers 22-24. "Your Treasure Is Where Your Heart Is"

In today's passage Balaam looks pretty good on the outside. However, we are reminded that "the heart reflects the person" (Prov. 27:19).

As we continue reading Scripture, we find that Balaam's heart was far from right. Balaam was guilty of leading others astray (2 Pet. 2:14-15), and willing to do anything for money (Jude 11), and responsible for tripping up others to sin (Rev. 2:14).

In the very next chapter, 25, we will read of how Moab seduced Israel to defile themselves before God. Apparently, this was the result of Balaam's suggestion. When we get to chapter 31, we will see that not only did Balaam advise Moab of this, but he also moved into Moab. Balaam took allegiance with the enemies of God's people, and died at God's hand there as well.

Balaam knew God's power and even heard His voice. Yet, his heart did not yield. His heart was not softened toward the God he heard. The only personal changes Balaam was ready to make were those that would expand his pocketbook. What's in your *heart*?

March 7th

Numbers 25-26. "Counted with Whom"

Perhaps it's a baseball cap, sweatshirt, bumper sticker, or something else we utilize that gives evidence to the fact that we are identified with the winning team. We love to be part of the winning team.

If you can only be counted with one group which one will it be? Therein lies the conundrum. Human nature, being what it is, generally would prefer to be counted with each popular group. Yet that's not possible.

Do you want to be numbered with God's elect? It will mean persecution (2 Tim. 3:12). It will mean being disliked by the world (Matt. 10:22; John 15:18; 17:14).

Yet, because of the hope eternity holds for us, as well as the outstanding benefits even now, such as peace and contentment, we would still choose to be counted with God's elect.

Conversely, here is an amazing thought: because of Christ's love for us "He was counted among those who were rebels" (Luke 22:37). Unjustly (yet prophetically—Isa. 53:12), in order for us to be counted with Him, Christ was identified as the One crucified between the transgressors taking on our sins.

March 8th

Numbers 27-29. "Grandma's Fudge"

Try to recall one of your favorite aromas. It has to be a smell that was more than just sweet, but also comforting. For me it was Grandma's fudge.

Grandma made the best fudge, which we would drizzle on our vanilla ice cream (actually I would make every attempt to drown my ice cream in her fudge). When my brothers, sister, and I would smell Grandma's fudge on the stove we knew something special was coming. And, it was more than just the wonderful fudge; it was Grandma showing us her love.

Today's passage describes regular offerings to the Lord. Yet, a phrase that appears in nearly every paragraph is that it would be "very pleasing to the LORD." In the Hebrew this phrase conjures up the description of something pleasant, delightful, sweet, and yet also comforting, or restful. Meaning, this is more than something that smells good, it creates an emotion of satisfaction.

Now, apply this to our worship of our Lord. In order to be very pleasing it must be genuine, sincere, deliberate, careful, acceptable, appropriate, and transparent.

March 9th

Numbers 30-31. "Pinky Swear"

Do you ever remember a day when your childhood friends made you cross your heart, and then make sure your fingers weren't crossed, and then they would finally believe your words were true?

Some grown-ups apparently need the same prodding. Jesus condemned the Pharisees of declaring their pledge wasn't good if they swore by the Temple and not by the gold in the Temple, or if they swore by the altar instead of by the gift on the altar (Matt. 23:16-18).

In Jesus' Sermon on the Mount He directs us to forget swearing "by God" or "by Heaven" or whatever else, but instead just let your "Yes" and "No" be enough (Matt. 5:33-37).

God knows the damage broken promises can bring. We see it every day; broken marriage vows, broken pledges of purity, broken financial oaths, and broken promises. God wants us to avoid unnecessary pain in our personal life, in our family life, in our church, or our business, by being people of our word.

We can rest in the fact that God keeps His promises and His Word is truth.

March 10th

Numbers 32-33. "God and Me"

My parents still live in the same home I grew up in. My children will not be able to say the same thing. We have moved several times, but nothing compared to the list in chapter 33. The Israelites wandered in the wilderness from place to place to place. From verses 5-49 a variety of locations are listed. Yet, what caught my eye most was the word in verse four and verse 50; "LORD."

Before and after: they were surrounded by the LORD's presence. In all their moves the LORD was with them. I can say the same thing with confidence. Some of our moves have taken us far from family. Some of our moves have taken us into difficult situations. Yet, in every move God has been with us, clearly.

The thought is not as shocking as it is humbling. Because of God's power I know it would not be challenging at all for Him to be with me. But because of His love He wants to be with me.

March 11th

Numbers 34-36. "God's View"

Envision the most analytical person you know (it may be you—it's not me). Everything has a place and everything is in its place. Everything is planned out and scheduled right down to the minute.

The chapters today remind us that God had things extremely planned out. God was meticulously concerned with and involved in the distribution of the Promised Land. God had specific instructions as to where the boundaries would be; what the portions would look like; how certain cities would function; and what property rules would entail.

Our God has not changed over the years. God has a plan for us as He did for Israel. It is good to be the child of a God who has a plan, free from chaos and coincidence.

It's reassuring to read words like; "I know the plans I have for you," says the LORD" (Jer. 29:11); "You chart the path ahead of me" (Ps. 139:3); "the LORD determines our steps" (Prov. 16:9).

God's perspective is as far as the heavens are from the earth different than ours (Is. 55:9).

Week 11

March 12 - March 18

Deuteronomy 1-25

First, you are doing great in your reading! Keep up the good work and you will be rewarded. Romans 10:17 reminds us that our faith will be strengthened as we read and hear God's Word.

During this week you will read over two thirds of Deuteronomy. Some of it will be repetitive to portions of Exodus and Leviticus. This is where the name for the book comes from. In Greek *deutero* means second, and *nomos* means law, therefore the name Deuteronomy means second law or second giving of the law.

And our theme for this week is New Beginnings, for as Moses reiterates the law, Israel is on the verge of a grand new beginning in the Promised Land.

March 12th

Deuteronomy 1:1-3:20. "Remembering the Past"

The first three chapters of Deuteronomy recap the last forty years of wilderness wanderings. The whole book is Moses' final message to Israel and, in this opening section, his purpose is to remind them of how they got to this point.

Remembering our past is an important part of moving forward into the future. For Israel, remembering what God had done was essential. When Israel forgot the mighty deeds God had done in rescuing them out of Egypt, His provision in the wilderness, and His placement of them in the Promised Land; then Israel would stray from their covenant relationship with Him.

Remembering is important for us too. Christians can forget how lost in sin we were before receiving Christ. This forgetfulness is dangerous because it can develop within us a sense of entitlement to God's grace. Then we begin to see ourselves as righteous when, without the work of Christ, our righteousness is like filthy rags. Rather, if we can remember how sinful we truly are, then we will see God's grace as the unmerited favor that it is.

March 13th

Deuteronomy 3:21-5:33. "Whom He Loves He Disciplines"

Deuteronomy 4:26-31 foreshadows the future collapse of Israel and subsequent captivity in Babylon. God's covenant faithfulness toward Israel is so great that He does not abandon them even when they are in violation of the covenant. What a comfort it is to know that God does not abandon those whom He loves. And yet even though He does not abandon, He does discipline those whom He loves. So, what does discipline from the Lord look like?

I recognize that I have allowed my body to get out of shape. So, in response, I have begun to again discipline myself to train my body through exercise at the gym. This is what James speaks of when he says that "When our faith is tested, your endurance has a chance to grow. So let it grow, for when your endurance is fully developed, you will be strong in character and ready for anything" (James 1:3-4). God's discipline of us is through various trials in order to build up our spiritual endurance or our faith and trust in Him. Will you submit to God's discipline and allow it to accomplish a beautiful work in your life? - *David Curtis*

March 14th

Deuteronomy 6-9. "Living by God's Grace"

God's grace is a wonderful and beautiful gift. Deuteronomy 9:4-6 is a picture for us of God's gracious gift. The Promised Land for Israel was God's blessed gift to His chosen people. And it is for us a foreshadowing of our future in Heaven. Israel in the Promised Land was God's chosen people living in a 'perfect' land, with God Himself dwelling among them in the tabernacle.

What we notice in Deuteronomy 9:4-6 is that God didn't place Israel in this land because they earned it, but rather God was carrying out His promise to His chosen people.

God's grace works in the same way for us. We have not earned the right to receive God's grace. It is God's choice to extend grace to those who come to Him in faith.

We experience a new beginning when we come to faith in Jesus Christ. It is a life that is begun through God's grace, it is lived in God's grace and it is culminated by God's grace. You may acknowledge that you received new life through God's grace, but are you living by God's grace, or are you now trying to earn His grace through works and following manmade rules?

March 15th

Deuteronomy 10-12. "Place of Worship"

Why was God so concerned with having a centralized location for worship? I think that there were two main reasons for this. First, the sacrificial system foreshadowed the coming sacrifice of Christ and having the sacrifices performed in a central location made it less likely for changes or variations to take place which would cause it to lose this great meaning.

Second, was the role of community. Having a centralized place for worship brought an aspect of community that would be lost if everyone was able to worship at their own home.

Community is important for us as well. While Jesus declared that there is no longer one and only one place for worship (John 4:21), the need and value of worship in community is still present (Hebrews 10:25). Without community we risk isolation and discouragement in our Christian lives. We also miss out on the biblical instruction and correction that comes from our elders and the accountability that is present in community. Are you valuing the community of faith and its role in your life?

March 16th

Deuteronomy 13:1-16:17. "Canceling of Debts"

Every seven years Israel was to have a fresh start or a new beginning financially. It was not a total reversal of someone's financial outlook, but it was an opportunity for them to have a fresh start. This was accomplished in two ways: the first was the canceling of financial debts that a fellow Israelite had incurred. The second was granting of freedom to anyone who had willingly entered into servanthood.

Why would God place this provision in His law? The first reason is that God was demonstrating that all of Israel's wealth (Leviticus 25:23) and their very lives ultimately belonged to Him (Leviticus 25:55). Because God "owned" the land and they owed their lives to him as their redeemer, it was within His right to place these provisions on them. A second reason, I think, was to reinforce the concepts of forgiveness and redemption. This process that would occur every seven years was a picture of God's grace and forgiveness of sin. How do you view your possessions and your very life? Will you be willing to view them as belonging to God, the Author and Sustainer of life?

March 17th

Deuteronomy 16:18-21:9. "Wisdom does not Guarantee Obedience"

Deuteronomy 17:14-20 outlines the guidelines for the future kings of Israel. If you are familiar with the history of Israel, then you know that most of them failed to live up to this standard. In fact, if you look at 1 Kings 10:14-11:13 you will see that one king, Solomon, disobeyed all three of the prohibitions given to Israelite kings in verses 16 and 17.

Now, why was it that Solomon, the wisest man on earth (1 Kings 4:29-34) and author of the majority of Proverbs, was unable to obey the Lord in these areas? The answer isn't so much in what Solomon did, but rather in what he didn't do. Deuteronomy 17:18-20 instructs us that regular study of God's law would enable the king to "learn to fear the Lord his God by obeying all the terms of this law" (Deuteronomy 17:19).

It was the absence of this regular time to study God's Word that led to pride in Solomon to the point where he ignored a direct warning (1 Kings 11:10) from God. So, wisdom does not guarantee obedience. Rather, regular time studying and submitting to God's Word puts us in the best position to obey Him.

March 18th

Deuteronomy 21:10-25:19. "Random Acts of Kindness"

Today's reading was full of a variety of laws and regulations for Israel to do when they entered the Promised Land. All of these laws were important for them to remember as they prepared to cross the Jordan River and experience a new beginning.

As I read through this passage, a seemingly insignificant command really jumped out at me. In Deuteronomy 22:1-4 we see the command to not ignore a neighbor who needs help. There's a principle here for helping others that continues to apply today for we see this principle at work in the New Testament as well. In James 2:15-16 we are told that words of blessing without meeting a real physical need will not accomplish anything.

Then in Matthew 25:31-46, Jesus adds to this principle by saying that when you minister to the needs of others, you are ultimately ministering to the Lord Himself. And if you ignore these needs, then you are refusing to help the Lord. Are you willing to help meet other's needs, or will you be found pretending not to see?

Week 12

March 19 - March 25

Deuteronomy 26-34; Joshua 1-12:6; 1 Chronicles 2:7; Psalm 90

In each of these various passages there is a constant theme: Obedience. There are illustrations for us as to what obedience produces, and in turn, what disobedience produces.

There are also lessons on leadership, lessons on communication, lessons on consequences and their "ripple effect," and lessons on the sovereignty of God.

In its entirety, it produces a week truly focusing on the impact of our choices, and describing the necessity for those choices being in-line with God's desires and instructions.

March 19th

Deuteronomy 26-29:1, "Blessings and Curses"

The late John Vernon McGee once mentioned the difference between people who are "woefully ignorant" and those who are "willfully ignorant." There are some who do not yet know the truth, and there are others who know it but reject it.

Today's passage describes the curses for the willfully ignorant. These are the consequences for those who willfully disobey God's word.

It is similar to God telling them not to touch the hot stove, but they do anyway, and He told them exactly what they would feel. The commands are in place for their protection, physically and spiritually.

On the other side, there are blessings for obedience. "If you fully obey the LORD your God" (Dt. 28:1) in all areas (generosity, raising children, worshipping God alone, honoring parents, honesty, etc.) then you will be blessed in all areas.

To walk in the peace and favor of God is a noticeable blessing. We should also keep in mind that God's blessings for us are not limited to our lifetime on earth.

March 20th

Deuteronomy 29:2-31:29. "True to Your Promise"

In this passage are written Moses' last words. More than just words, they were challenges for the people. Moses petitioned Israel to commit to following God. He reminded them they had made a covenant with God; a contract to obey Him.

When you consider a relationship with God today, do you think of it as casual or compelling? Would you consider your actions incidental or intentional?

When we accept the salvation of God, we surrender our life to God. We surrender our will as we yield to His. We commit to Him everything we are and everything we have. It is not a passive relationship, but an active one.

God's call for obedience from His people rings as true today as it did ages ago. "The LORD your God will delight in you if you obey His voice and keep the commands and laws written in this Book of the Law, and if you turn to the LORD your God with all your heart and soul" (Dt. 30:10).

March 21st

Deuteronomy 31:30-32:52; Psalm 90. "Songs of Obedience"

Music plays an amazing part in our life. We listen to it as we drive, as we relax at home, as we watch a movie and it plays in the background. We hum melodies as we work, and we worship through music each week.

I have found myself sitting in a restaurant singing the words to a song playing over the speaker that I have not heard in 20 years, and even then, I did not think I sang it that much those years ago. Words through song stick with us in a unique way. Often memorizing words come easier when accompanied with music. God knows the power of song.

God told Moses to write down the words to the song and teach it to the Israelites. That very day, in immediate obedience, Moses wrote the words and taught Israel the song (Dt. 31:22).

The songs of Moses were effective ways of reminding Israel of the power of God and their history with God. The songs prayerfully encourage us to walk closely with God, our Rock. And may our songs be heard by others.

March 22nd

Deuteronomy 33-34; Joshua 1-2. "Leadership Transitions"

"Moses, the man of God" (Dt. 33:1). "Moses, the servant of the LORD" (34:5). "Israel mourned 30 days for Moses" (34:8). "There has never been another prophet like Moses, whom the LORD knew face to face" (34:10). "The LORD sent Moses to perform all the miraculous signs and wonders in the land of Egypt against Pharaoh" (34:11). "It was through Moses that the LORD demonstrated his mighty power and terrifying acts" (34:12).

Joshua must have realized the enormity of the position handed over to him after the death of Moses. Perhaps at times he thought, "This is a tough act to follow."

I believe some of this is apparent as you read the first nine verses of Joshua after he has taken his new position of leadership. It is filled with words of encouragement from the LORD.

Joshua was prepared. He had been Moses' personal aide for 40 years. He was one of only two living eyewitnesses to everything surrounding the exodus from Egypt. He always had a great confidence in God's ability to accomplish what He said. And, God had appointed Joshua.

March 23rd

Joshua 3-6. "Admiring God's Handiwork"

Although I was a small child, I remember listening to a conversation my grandpa was having with a man. "It's been said," the man hypothesized, "that the depth of the Red Sea where Israel crossed was only two inches deep." Grandpa replied, "Well, praise the Lord, God could drown a whole army in two inches of water."

The miracle of Israel crossing the Jordan (ch. 3) has been explained by some as only a natural phenomenon like a mudslide. Others have said that the fall of Jericho (ch. 6) could be explained with a natural phenomenon such as an earthquake.

I believe we waste our time when we spend more time trying to explain how God precisely accomplishes His miraculous tasks, and less time being astounded at God's incredible power. We know God's plan is being carried out regardless of the manner. But what concerns me are the small hidden ways we retract some of the credit from God, somehow attributing to Him just a little less of the awe and wonderment.

March 24th

Joshua 7-9; 1 Chronicles 2:7. "Repercussions of Our Sins"

Thirty-six men died for the sin of Achan, not to mention the death of his family. Achan disobeyed, and stole plunder that had been set apart for the LORD.

In fact, his actions and the disaster he brought on Israel are recorded in the book of the Chronicles, one thousand years after it happened. Not only did the sins of Achan affect others, but it became his legacy.

I remember hearing Dr. James Cecy ask those at a large gathering to consider how many people would be affected if you chose to sin by having an adulterous affair. People started writing down some of the obvious names within their close circle, but then he stated, "When you get to 300 let me know."

How many could your sin affect? Could it even affect children not yet born? Quite possibly.

It's not just adultery or plundering from God, but cheating, lying, and any other area in which we choose not to follow God's rules. Disobeying God may damage more than we can imagine.

March 25th

Joshua 10:1-12:6. "Lessons Learned"

Joshua's list of conquests is quite impressive. But as you read the list you see they were truly God's conquests. Time and again you read of how "the LORD fought for Israel."

The land was promised for Israel, but the inhabitants chose to stay and fight. God brought judgment on the wicked and fought for His chosen. Eventually, "the land finally had rest from war" (11:23).

The primary reason things went well for Israel was because "Joshua did as he was told, carefully obeying all of the LORD's instructions" (11:15).

Aside from the lessons of obedience there are other things for us to recap. Often times Joshua and Israel made memorials to the LORD. We regularly need reminding of certain things. This passage reminds us of the facts that, only with God's help do we win our battles; God is our protection and refuge; God's chosen will ultimately win; God has plans for us which are for "good and not for disaster, to give you a future and a hope" (Jer. 29:11).



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Week 13

March 26 - April 1

Joshua 12:7-24:33; Judges 1:1-6:40; 1 Chronicles 6:54-81

The theme for this week is “living as foreigners.” In John 17:14, Jesus says that we who are His followers are not of this world. We are going to explore some of the ways in which Israel’s early years living in the Promised Land parallels our experience of living as God’s children in a broken and sinful world that is not our home.

March 26th

Joshua 12:7–15:19. "Slaying Giants"

45 years after giving a positive report on the Promised Land, Caleb finally has his opportunity to conquer the land that God had promised to him (Numbers 14:24). In chapter 14 Caleb senses his opportunity to ask permission to take this land. It is not a simple task, though, since the Anakites (a race of giants) live there. However, Caleb's faith at 85 years old is still as strong as it was at 40, and he knows he will conquer if the Lord is with him.

Caleb did not fear the giants that stood between him and God's blessings. He knew that his Lord is a mighty warrior and greater than the Anakites.

What are the 'giants' in your life that must be defeated in order for you to experience the fullness of God's blessing? Maybe it is lust or pride or selfishness that has you defeated. Caleb had faith that when the Lord was with him there was no enemy too great. We can approach our 'giants' in the same way.

March 27th

Joshua 15:20–17:18. "Contentment"

In Joshua 17:14 – 18, the tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh, who are descended from Joseph, come to Joshua to complain about the amount of land they have received. To me it seems as though Joshua is very considerate in his response, giving them a couple of options and then encouraging them to drive out the remaining Canaanites in order to receive more land.

I don't think my response would have been as understanding as Joshua's. When it comes to receiving God's blessing it seems rather presumptuous to complain about the amount that God gives. This attitude represents a lack of contentment with God's provision and blessing. Even though this world is not our home, God's blessings and provision in this world are very real. Do you sometimes find yourself ill content and complain to God regarding his provision for you? If so, remember these two things: first, as co-heirs with Christ, our full inheritance is not in this life but in the life to come; and second, God's provision in this life is real and is fully sufficient for all our needs.

March 28th

Joshua 18:1–19:48. "Future Blessing"

Right now, you and I are living as foreigners or aliens in this world. We long for the day when our Savior will call us home. The Israelites taking possession of the Promised Land can be viewed as a picture of our future entrance into Heaven. Their time in the wilderness then would be parallel to our time in this broken and fallen world. Their crossing of the Jordan River the image of Christian baptism, and then the receiving of the Promised Land is like our receiving of God's blessings in Heaven.

In today's reading we see how the remaining tribes of Israel receive their allotment of land. It was not based on their requests or wishes, but it was solely based on God's guiding of their casting lots.

As I ponder how this parallels the blessings God has in store for us, his children, I realize three truths. First, I will not be able to tell God what blessing or reward I want. Second, the decision to bless is entirely the Lord's sovereign choice. And third, no matter what blessing the Lord gives, it will be absolutely amazing and perfect in every way.

March 29th

Joshua 19:49-21:45; 1 Chronicles 6:54-81. "The Merciful and Gracious God"

Our God is a god of justice and righteousness who cannot allow sin to go unpunished. This has been very evident in the readings of the law where we see God's high standards of holiness and moral living. However, our God is also "the merciful and gracious God." He is "slow to anger and rich in unfailing love and faithfulness" (Exodus 34:6). I think that the concept of the cities of refuge is a wonderful example of these character traits of God.

In the Noahic Covenant in Genesis 9, God declares that anyone who commits murder must be killed (Genesis 9:5b-6). Now in Joshua 20 we see God exercising grace and compassion on those who have killed unintentionally.

As Christian brothers and sisters we continue to live with a sin nature that creeps up on us now and then. Fortunately, the Merciful and Gracious God who established the cities of refuge is that same God whom we can go to for grace and forgiveness when we sin.

March 30th

Joshua 22-24. "In the World, not of the World"

"I have given them your word. And the world hates them because they do not belong to the world, just as I do not. I do not ask You to take them out of the world, but to keep them from the evil one." – John 17:14-15

The Israelites failed to fully wipe out the Canaanites from the land. Thus, the survivors of these nations were living amongst the Israelites. Joshua warns them in 23:12 to avoid marrying any of these survivors because they would be a snare and a trap, making it difficult for Israel to follow God.

As children of God who are in the world but not of the world, we face similar difficulty. The relationships that we form with people, both Christians and non-Christians alike, greatly impact our life. The more intimate the relationship, the more impact it will have which is why Joshua knew to warn the Israelites not to intermarry.

Because we live in this world as foreigners, we must exercise wisdom in the formation of our relationships. Consider your relationships. How are you currently being influenced by these relationships?



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March 31st

Judges 1:1-3:30. "The Next Generation"

I do not know a great deal about my ethnic heritage. In recent years my mother has become involved in much genealogical research which has provided limited knowledge. Now I know that my heritage is mainly European, but somewhere down the line the distinctiveness of that European heritage was lost. Now I don't think this was intentional, it simply wasn't handed down or taught to the next generation. The simple truth is that, if someone living as a foreigner doesn't teach their culture to the next generation, then it will be lost.

Remembering that we are living as aliens in this world, it is imperative that we teach our faith to the next generation. According to Judges 2:10, Israel failed to do so, in spite of the command Moses had given them in Deuteronomy 6:1-9.

So, what are you doing to ensure that our faith is not lost and the next generation is not absorbed into the rest of the culture? Tell your story; tell of what God has done for you. Don't leave it to someone else. Don't let the next generation forget what a mighty God we serve.

-David Curtis

April 1st

Judges 3:31-6:40. "Waiting for a Sign"

When Gideon received his calling from the Lord, three times he asked for a sign to reassure himself that God was truly with him. Three times! Why would Gideon put the Lord to this kind of test? Does he doubt God and his promises or does he doubt himself?

You know sometimes, I find it very easy to criticize Gideon, but I know that if you and I are honest, we are sometimes just like him. We doubt God's calling and purpose in our lives.

So, how can you know God's will for your life? First of all, read scripture, for God's word reveals His will; "Always be joyful. Keep on praying. No matter what happens, always be thankful, for this is God's will for you who belong to Christ Jesus." (1 Thess. 5:16-18). Second is to trust God at His Word; "In all your ways acknowledge Him, and he will make your paths straight" (Prov.3:6 NIV).

Don't be like Gideon, wasting time looking and waiting for a sign. Rather, read God's word and live according to it, and then you can be confident that you are living according to His will and purpose for your life.

Week 14

April 2 - April 8

Judges 7-25; Ruth 1-4; 1 Samuel 1:1-8; 1 Chronicles 2:9-55; 4:1-23

After reading through these passages, the results of my brainstorming leads to a theme that runs along the lines of; big things with little people, impressive with unimpressive, imposing with unimposing, splendid with simple, or heroic undertakings by humble people.

These passages address the fact that God can use the most unassuming person to accomplish all He has in mind. An individual does not need a long list of impressive credentials, terrific looks or great strength, but merely a heart willing to serve and follow God (and of course a person filled with the Spirit of God). May you be encouraged by this truth.

April 2nd

Judges 7:1-9:21. "Little Gideon's Big God"

God gave Gideon a tremendous task: defeat the Midianites. Gideon asked how he—the weakest of the family from the weakest clan—could save anyone (6:15). The LORD emphasizes the point by even making Gideon's army look rather weak.

The Midianites numbered 135,000 strong. Gideon's army numbered 32,000 at its peak. Then 22,000 went home when Gideon allowed any of the frightened to leave. Next was the test for how they drank water (just another way of God thinning out the group), and finally only 300 men were left.

OK, what about weapons? It is possible that the men had swords, but the "weapons" listed for each man was a horn, a clay pot, and a torch. Three hundred men armed with pots led by an unfamiliar man who was first found hiding from the enemy (6:11), conquered a well-trained world power army of 135,000.

In the end no one could say the armies of Midian were conquered because of powerful warriors, or well-trained leaders, or the most modern weaponry. It could only be said that God saved Israel. God left no doubt.

April 3rd

Judges 9:22-12:7. "Submissive Examples"

Throughout the book of Judges we are introduced to often unfamiliar people whom God used to bring peace to Israel. We will read of twelve men and women referred to as the judges who bring deliverance to God's people.

It was less that they were gifted, pure, or special, as they were willing to be used by God. The achievements of those submissive to God should stir our hearts to the same.

The story of Jephthah is an intriguing one. An illegitimate son; born of a prostitute; rejected by his family; led a band of rebels; led an army against the Ammonites; and thoroughly defeated them.

Jephthah made a rash vow to the LORD which meant the sacrifice of his only child, his daughter. Although we do not know all the particulars, we do know that this can be analogous with a figure of Christ the great sacrifice: Christ was of unspotted purity and innocence, as she a chaste virgin; He was devoted to death by his Father, and so made an anathema for us; He submitted Himself, as she did, to His Father's will.

April 4th

Judges 12:8-15:20. "Potential"

Here is the story of a man known for his astounding strength, yet, in the same breath also known for his weaknesses. He battled pride and sensuality; he broke his vow and God's laws; he trusted the wrong people; and did not use his gifts and abilities wisely. He was not the wisest of men, but God used him to accomplish His purpose.

Samson had a miraculous start to life and tremendous potential. There is indeed a long list of things he could have done better. I know that the same was said of my life at times. Perhaps the same was said of you. As disheartening as this story could be to us, we could look at it another way: God can use a person of faith in spite of his or her weaknesses.

I don't know about you, but I find that encouraging. God can use me now, as I am. Paul declared, "I have not reached perfection. But I keep working toward that day when I will finally be all that Christ Jesus saved me for and wants me to be" (Phil. 3:12).

April 5th

Judges 16-18. "Finishing Well"

Samson's life did not seem to start or continue as one characterized by faith. To the contrary, he seemed to be self-absorbed and only concerned with the present. Eventually, his choices caught up with him and Samson found himself blind, in chains, pushing the wheel to grind grain in Gaza, the same place he had amazingly carried off the city's gates.

We don't know exactly how long he was enslaved, but obviously long enough for his hair to grow back, and yet more importantly long enough for him to do some serious thinking. I am sure he thought through his life, the choices he made, and the opportunities God had set before him to serve Him and help His people.

The Philistines falsely assumed their god and their power was in charge as they mocked Samson (16:24). Samson prayed to God. God heard and answered. God never leaves us.

In his final victory Samson destroyed more enemies than he had in his entire lifetime. Samson finished well. Samson's faith was chronicled with others in the "Hall of Faith" section of Hebrews 11 (v. 32).

April 6th

Judges 19-21. "Think BEFORE It Is Done"

Here is something to consider. Imagine attending a marriage enrichment seminar and the speaker asks each person to list as many people as they can that would be affected by your having an extramarital affair.

Whether you've thought it through or not, you could literally affect the lives of hundreds in the present and future if you chose to commit adultery.

Sin is not a private affair. Your sin (any sin) will affect others. The passage today is a strong reminder of that fact.

This sin should have been dealt with appropriately and promptly, but it was not. Instead it escalated into a tribal war. In the end, 65,000 soldiers lay dead, and women and children from the surrounding towns in addition to that.

The principle of poor choices affecting many is true of us as well. Unfortunately, we don't often think things through very well in advance. Yet that is what the truly mature thinker does. Maturity is the ability to weigh the consequences before the action. And if the actions are immoral, remember the consequences may be immeasurable.

April 7th

Ruth 1:1-4:12. "Not Overlooked"

The book of Ruth is deeply admired by many for its literary style. It is a beautiful story of love and devotion.

Ruth is an amazing young woman of tremendous character. She has displayed kindness and loyalty to Naomi as she leaves behind the security of her own land, the familiarity of her own customs, the simplicity of her own religion, the refuge of her own family and friends, and everything she has known. She vows she will "not allow anything but death to separate us" (1:17).

Ruth humbly goes to work in the field for Naomi. Ruth wants the best for Naomi, and she works to accomplish that. Ruth's life is full of integrity and God recognizes it as He provides for her in a wonderful way.

Ruth came to Bethlehem as a poor widow, and even worse a despised Moabite. Yet she becomes prosperous through the marriage to Boaz. She also becomes the great-grandmother to the great King David. Furthermore, she is listed in the lineage of Jesus Christ (Matt. 1:5). God honors the humble servant.

April 8th

Ruth 4:13-22; 1 Samuel 1:1-8; 1 Chronicles 2:9-55; 4:1-23. "Unfamiliar Names"

Professional golfer, Karen Permezel, hails from Yackandandah, Australia. Finding that name to be a mouthful, writers sometimes ask Permezel where the town is located. Permezel is happy to be of assistance. "It's near Mount Murrumbidgee, not far from Tangambalanga," she replies. (Sports Illustrated)

Today's passages list off plenty of names for us. Some of those names we've never read before in Scripture and may not read of again. Several of those mentioned did great things and walked with the LORD wholeheartedly, and yet much of their life may not be elaborated on. Consider the names you would have if you listed every member of your genealogy in the past 200 years. Although you may have a long list of names you would not have the tremendous deeds and characteristics of many on that list.

Many less-known people have done marvelous things and have lived exemplary lives. If the tradeoff is receiving the praise of men here on Earth or instead receiving the rewards of God in Heaven (Matthew 6:1,4,5,18), I am sure we would take the latter.

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Week 15

April 9 - April 15

1 Chronicles 9:35-39; Psalm 34, 59

The theme for this week is integrity. This week's readings will cover the last of the judges, Eli and Samuel. Following those two leaders we will meet the first two kings of Israel, Saul and David. All four of these men learned the importance of integrity through their experiences.

Integrity is something that we all can struggle with from time to time. Integrity is something that can be easily lost, but is not so easy to regain without God's help. As the four men we will read about, they learn it is absolutely essential to being a leader in God's kingdom.

April 9th Day 99

1 Samuel 1:9-4:11. "A Legacy of Integrity"

To say the least, Eli's sons were lacking integrity. They disrespected the Lord's offerings (2:12-17), carried on immoral sexual relationships with the young women serving at the tabernacle (12:22), and they did not honor or listen to their father (12:25). I think we are safe to say that, somewhere along the way, Eli dropped the ball as their father and as a priest in authority at the temple.

Why is integrity so essential? At the close of 2006, our nation mourned the loss of President Gerald Ford. As people talked about him and his accomplishments, the one thing that was mentioned most often was his integrity. He may not have been the greatest leader, or accomplished as much as other presidents, but he stood out because of his integrity.

Our integrity, or lack of, leaves a lasting impression on the people around us, especially our families. "The godly walk with integrity; blessed are their children after them" (Proverbs 20:7). Are you living a life of integrity? What kind of legacy are you leaving behind?

April 10th Day 100

1 Samuel 4:12-8:22. "Leadership Requires Integrity"

Samuel was a man of God and a good leader for Israel. However, for all that he did right, he failed in one area. He did not learn from the mistake of his predecessor, Eli. 1 Samuel 8:1-3 reveals that Samuel's sons were lacking in integrity, much the same way that Eli's sons were. We then see this lack of integrity result in Israel demanding a king to rule over them.

When it comes to leadership, integrity or personal character is what gives you the trust of the people. According to Christian leadership expert John Maxwell, "Trust is the foundation of leadership...People will forgive occasional mistakes based on ability. But they won't trust someone who has slips in character."

Israel could not trust Samuel's sons, Joel and Abijah, so their opportunity to lead the nation was taken away. How is your character? Would those who know you best say that you are a person of integrity? Fortunately, God is able and willing to work in your life and help you grow in this area if you ask for His help.

April 11th

1 Samuel 9-12. "Integrity Restored"

In 1 Samuel 8:6-9 the Lord reveals to Samuel that Israel was ultimately rejecting God Himself by asking for a king. In 12:16-19 Samuel reminds the people of their wrongdoing in asking for a king and then uses a sign to reveal to them the level of God's anger.

Certainly, the people did wrong in asking for a king, but Samuel makes it clear that God had not abandoned them as a result of their wickedness. Rather Samuel shared with them that God was willing to restore the integrity of the nation; "...make sure now that you worship the LORD with all your heart and that you don't turn your back on Him in any way...The Lord will not abandon His chosen people" (12:20b, 22a).

The same God that called Israel back and restored the integrity of the nation is the same God that we serve today. So, readers take courage that all is not lost when your integrity is compromised. The invitation to return to following the LORD is there for us the same way it was for Israel. Are you willing to humble yourself and return to following God so He can restore your integrity?

April 12th

1 Samuel 13-14; 1 Chronicles 9:35-39. "Taking Matters Into Our Own Hands"

Can you picture Saul in the situation described in 1 Samuel 13? He had gathered Israel's troops to battle the Philistines, but once they got a glimpse of the Philistine army, they were full of fear. Sensing the fear in his army, Saul becomes anxious and comes to the conclusion that the offerings to the Lord must be offered. However, Samuel has not arrived when Saul was expecting him. Thus, Saul takes matters into his own hands and violates the Lord's command by assuming the priestly function.

Saul's lack of integrity in this matter provides us with a three-part lesson:

1) Basing our decision on fear does not bring glory to God, for perfect love (trust) casts out fear.

2) Our timing is not always the same as God's timing. Samuel was coming, Saul just lacked the patience.

3) Obedience is far more important to God than sacrifice or, for us, you could say it is more important than public worship.

April 13th

1 Samuel 15:1-17:31. "Blame-Shifting 101"

Saul was caught red-handed. He had again disobeyed the Lord and was confronted by Samuel for his actions. His response to Samuel's confrontation was worthy of an Academy Award. In verses 15 and 21 Saul declares that 'the people' are the ones who spared the animals, and then he further justifies the sin by adding the spiritual benefit of sacrificing the animals to the Lord. It takes Saul three times before he admits to Samuel his wrongdoing.

You do not have to be perfect in order to maintain integrity. This is what the discipline of confession is for. Saul was unwilling to admit his sin and to ask for forgiveness. A person of integrity does the exact opposite. David was a prime example of this. David was not perfect, but when he was confronted by Nathan the prophet about his affair with Bathsheba and murder of her husband Uriah, he confessed immediately. Both Saul and David made mistakes just like you and I. Are we going to respond like Saul, denying the sin and blaming others? Or will we respond like David with a soft heart that is quick to confess?

April 14th

1 Samuel 17:32-19:24; Psalm 59. "Crying Out to the Lord"

David never did wrong against Saul, but he was constantly the object of Saul's jealousy. Saul made multiple attempts to kill David or to have him killed by others. However, we recognize that David was innocent in all of this and never lost his integrity. So why the constant attacks? Why did David have to call out to the Lord for help and protection when he was innocent?

The reality is that innocence and integrity don't always protect us from personal attacks and accusations from people. Our innocence and personal integrity will eventually come under attack as no result of our own.

How are we to respond to such attacks? David did not take the opportunity to exact his revenge against Saul (1 Samuel 24:1-7), but rather allowed the Lord to take care of His enemies. He called out to the One who judges rightly to deliver him out of the situation.

May you, like David, seek God first when your innocence and integrity come under attack.

April 15th

1 Samuel 20-21; Psalm 34. "Promises Kept"

Jonathan and David had a special friendship. Chapter 20 gives us a little insight into how close the two were. Unlike his father, Jonathan was not jealous for the throne of Israel, but recognized that the Lord was with David. Thus, as part of their covenant of friendship, Jonathan asked David to continue to show "faithful love" to his descendants even if Jonathan died. David accepted this responsibility as part of their covenant.

Have you ever made a promise without thinking the consequences through? I think all of us as parents have done this at some point. So, how many of our promises are we to keep? If the Lord is the standard for righteousness, then we are to keep them all, for "the LORD is faithful to all His promises" (Psalm 145:13 NIV).

What did David do about the promise he made to Jonathan? 2 Samuel 9 tells us that David, in fact, kept his promise to Jonathan by showing kindness to his son, Mephibosheth.

Are you willing to keep your promises like David did? What about when no one is watching? Do you still keep your promises then?

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Week 16

April 16 - April 22

1 Samuel 22-31; 2 Samuel 1:1-6:11; 23:8-39; 1 Chronicles 3:1-4; 9:40-14:17;
Psalm 52,54,56,57,142

The passages this week deal with David's introduction as king. Although David had been anointed by Samuel sometime earlier to be Israel's next king, he never rushed God's timing. From David's youth he knew God had a plan and purpose for everything. David respected and protected God's anointed—King Saul (although some had hoped he would take the matter into his own hands and rush it).

David led well in spite of some very difficult times. Knowing God had a plan helped David through the rough times, and it can do the same for us.

April 16th

1 Samuel 22; 23:1-12; 1 Chronicles 12:8-18; Psalm 52, 57, 142. "Rough Start"

Consider everything that has transpired up to this point: David has been anointed king. He has battled giants and Philistines. He has been the object of King Saul's jealousy. He has been pursued by King Saul seeking to kill him. His friends and family have all been threatened by Saul, yet Saul is God's leader for the time. Now, 85 priests, their families, and their livestock have all been murdered because of Saul's hatred toward David.

If it were me, I think I would be asking for time to rethink that whole "anointing" incident.

The Psalms David wrote were the songs he penned as he journaled the thoughts of his heart. David "cried out" the LORD. David "poured out" his concerns to God. David was "overwhelmed." David asked for "help." David felt the pressures of this new position God had placed him in.

These Psalms also express the fact that David knew God had a plan, and it's evident in his comments like; "God will fulfill His purpose for me"; "He will send help from Heaven"; "My heart is confident in you, O LORD."

April 17th

1 Samuel 23:13-29; 24:1-25:44; Psalm 54. "Providential Conclusions"

The passage today describes three unfortunate encounters that had providential conclusions.

In the first situation the men of Ziph turned David and his men's location over to Saul, yet God providentially sent Saul on another urgent task, which provided the opportunity for David and his men to escape.

In the second incident, Saul and an army of 3,000 searched the hills of En Gedi for David, and were so close that Saul actually went into the cave the men were hiding in. However, because David spared Saul's life, Saul in turn spared his and stopped his pursuit.

On the third occasion, David and his men needed sustenance and they asked Nabal for it. Although Nabal owed it to them (customary and protection) he refused to give anything to David. However, Nabal's wife, Abigail, intervened and provided for David's army.

We have a great advantage here in being able to read the endings, but often we find ourselves in a difficult spot and wonder how it could ever turn out for good. Be confident in God's plan as David was.

April 18th

1 Samuel 26-29; 1 Chronicles 12:1-7,19; Psalm 56. "Battle Lines"

The Philistines, David, and Saul, had all geared up for war. David was fighting guerrilla warfare style with the brutal tribes of Geshurites, Girzites and Amalekites. The Philistines entered battle fiercely with enormous numbers (28:5). Saul seemed uncertain and consulted a medium from Endor to offer consultation concerning the war.

The history of war describes numerous strategies and techniques: Frontal assaults, ambushes, offensive, defensive, short range, long range, etc.

The word "battle" occurs several hundred times in Scripture. In contrast to the more common physical encounters, many times the word is descriptive of spiritual battles.

How do you enter your battles? Are you geared up and ready, or doubtful and uncertain? What are your tactics? How prepared are you for the battles the world and Satan will throw your way?

The Apostle Paul gives us a few tactical tips to prepare us. He tells us to be armed with the armor of God—truth, righteousness, sharing Good News, faith, salvation, and the Word of God (Eph. 6:13), and with the instruction of the Word and godly direction (1 Tim. 1:18).

April 19th

1 Samuel 30-31; 2 Samuel 1:1-27; 4:4; 1 Chronicles 9:40-44; 10:1-14; 12:20-22. "Painful Experiences"

Years have passed since David was anointed king by Samuel. Those years have been spent running from King Saul, the very one he would succeed. So, when David gets the news Saul has died, is his response joy, excitement and relief? No. Quite the contrary.

David mourned Saul's death. His sorrow was genuine and intense. So much so that all of his men mourned with him over the death of Saul and Jonathan.

David, who was a master of the sword, was also a master of the pen. The man who wrote so many psalms now composed a funeral song for Saul and Jonathan.

David could have responded with a critical self-righteous attitude thinking Saul got what he deserved, but he did not. And instead of joy he lamented deeply. David knew God was the true judge. He also knew that Saul was God's anointed. David respected authority. He felt compassion. He knew pain and loss.

Although he is not yet officially king, David is maturing rapidly through experiences. God takes us through experiences with the intent of maturing and growing us into something great and genuine.

April 20th

2 Samuel 2:1-3:5; 23:8-39; 1 Chronicles 3:1-4a; 11:10-47. "Mighty Men "

Young Billy earned his blue belt in judo. One day Billy gave the class bully a bloody nose. When asked which judo technique Billy had used, he replied, "I stuck out my foot and tripped him." That's probably more my style, and it would most definitely NOT earn me a spot with "David's 30 mighty men." The weakest of these guys could take on 100 by himself and the strongest could take on 1,000.

These men fought valiantly. Some of the exploits include; single-handedly defeating 800 warriors, holding back an entire army, destroying giants, and chasing a lion into a pit and killing it on the snowy ground.

You would have to feel pretty secure being surrounded by men like these. Yet, what I find most impressive is not their strength but their loyalty. They literally stood by David's side through anything (2 Sam. 23:9-10 says Eleazar stood by David's side defeating the Philistines after the Israelite army ran away).

One of the men on the list was so loyal to David it cost him his life (Uriah).

April 21st

2 Samuel 3:6-4:12. "Vindicate Vindictiveness"

Instead of David being able to rely on Joab to pave the way to a unified kingdom he has to prevent a civil war due to Joab's actions.

King David had found himself in a unique position. Multiple times now he has had men—in the name of loyalty—murder the innocent. Had loyalty merely become an excuse for revenge and murder?

David was dealing with some strong-willed people. David had to remain true and rule with discipline. These men illustrated well the human tendency to justify our actions.

I have to confess, I am guilty of the same response often. I find myself doing something out-of-line, questionable, or not-by-the-book, and then later I will find myself justifying why I did it. How pathetic!

Does the end justify the means or are the means as judged as the end? Truly the bottom line engages the entire process. Your character is defined by your consistent actions. "Every job is a self-portrait of the person who did it. Autograph your work with excellence."

April 22nd

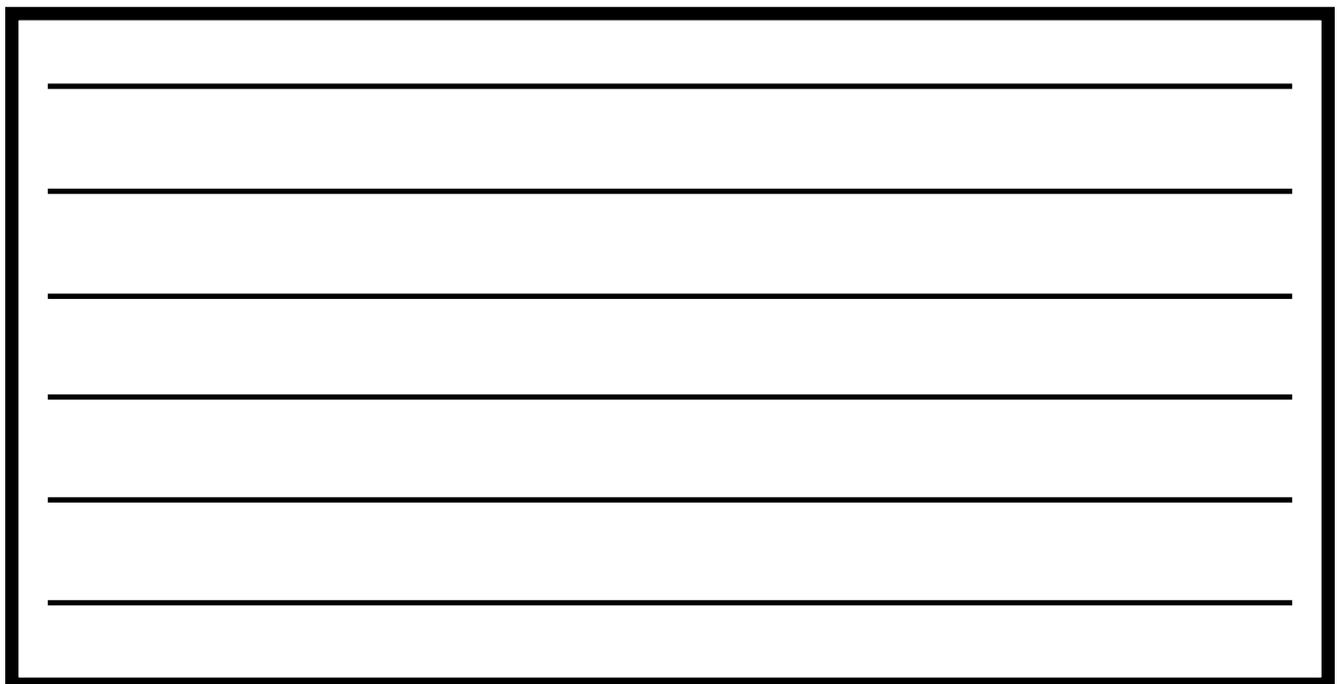
2 Samuel 5:1-13,17-25; 6:1-11; 1 Chronicles 3:4b; 11:1-9; 12:23-40; 13:1-14; 14:1-2,8-17. "Resolute Leader"

Four hundred years earlier the Israelites had been told to absolutely subjugate the Promised Land, yet it was never completely accomplished. David has been working to remedy that fault.

David knew God had a reason for asking the Israelites to carry out this task and he had seen the results of it not taking place. He knew the land had to be "cleaned-up" from the enemies influence and presence for several reasons. One would be the constant threat of the nearby enemy. Another benefit to a land their own was the unity which could be much easier to achieve. Furthermore, the land of mixed religion only hindered the Israelites walk with God. The presence of false gods made an enormous negative impact on the commitment of Israel toward God.

David took his responsibilities of leadership very seriously and in turn made a tremendous impact on the positive history of Israel. President Harry Truman said, "Men make history and not the other way round. In periods where there is no leadership, society stands still."

What kind of leader are you?



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Week 17

April 23 - April 29

2 Samuel 5:14-16; 6:12-19:30; 1 Chronicles 3:5-9; 6:16-48, 50-53; 14:3-7; 15:1-20:3; Psalms 3, 51, 60, 63

The theme for this week is sin. I know it is not very glamorous and not so fun to think about, but it is a reality that we all live with. This week's readings have us right in the heart of David's kingship. We will see him at his highest point and his lowest point during this week.

Some of the topics we will think about are judging, depravity, confession, forgiveness, consequences and death. Because of our broken nature, sin permeates our lives. We live with the impact of sin all around us. I hope that through the devotionals and Bible reading this week, you will have a better handle on how to manage the impact of sin in your life.

April 23rd

2 Samuel 6:12-23; 1 Chronicles 15-16. "Quick Judgments"

"Do not judge, or you too will be judged. For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you" (Matthew 7:1-2).

Making judgments about others comes natural to human nature; broken, fallen, sinful human nature that is. While, as Christians, we are not to ignore sin in the lives of our brothers and sisters, this action is always to be done in love (Eph. 4:15), aiming towards repentance (Gal. 6:1), and after proper self-reflection (Matt. 7:3-5).

In today's reading we see David's wife, Michal, make a quick judgment against David on an issue that did not involve sin. Unhappy with how David chose to worship the Lord before the Ark, she condemns David for this action.

These are the types of judgments that scripture teaches are not for us to make. When we pass judgments on others' actions that are not clearly defined as sin by scripture, we are usurping God's role as the righteous judge and ruler over all humanity. Instead of judging, we are to leave room for God to work.

April 24th

2 Samuel 7:1-8:14; 1 Chronicles 17:1-18:13; Psalm 60. "Turtle Syndrome"

"For we are not fighting against people made of flesh and blood, but against the evil rulers and authorities of the unseen world, against those mighty powers of darkness who rule this world, and against wicked spirits in the heavenly realms." (Ephesians 6:12).

In writing Psalm 60, David is crying out to the Lord for help against the enemies that he is battling with. David makes the statement in verse 11 that "all human help is useless."

This statement is especially true for the battle we face as Christians, for as Eph. 6:12 so clearly states, our battle is a spiritual one. In the spiritual battle that all people face, human help is indeed useless because of the turtle syndrome. Turtles are incapable of helping themselves if they are placed on their backs and, without outside help, they will die. We people are the same. Without outside help or someone to intervene, we will die. Fortunately, Jesus intervened and "died once to defeat sin, and now He lives for the glory of God" (Rom. 6:10).

April 25th

2 Samuel 8:15-10:19; 1 Chronicles 6:16-48, 50-53; 18:14-19:19. "Grace for All"

The devotional from April 15th was about how David fulfilled his covenant promise to Jonathan by showing kindness to his son, Mephibosheth. Today, we have been reminded of this act in the reading. As we think about this today, we are going to consider David's treatment of Mephibosheth in light of God's treatment of us.

Mephibosheth had done nothing to deserve the kindness that David showed to him. It was an undeserved gift. Mephibosheth was the benefactor of David's decision to fulfill his commitment to Jonathan.

God is not contractually or morally bound to save anyone. Based on our actions, we are all deserving of His judgment. For our sake, God has chosen to extend grace to all who come to faith in Jesus Christ. "God saved you by His special favor when you believed. And you can't take credit for this; it is a gift from God. Salvation is not a reward for the good things we have done, so none of us can boast about it (Ephesians 2:8-9). – D.C.

April 26th

2 Samuel 5:14-16; 11:1-12:25; 1 Chronicles 3:5-9; 14:3-7; 20:1; Psalm 51.
"Confession"

"If we confess our sins to Him, He is faithful and just to forgive us and to cleanse us from every wrong" (1 John 1:9).

King David sinned. It wasn't just a simple sin, but a messy one of lust, sexual immorality, deception and murder. It was the kind of thing that anyone would look at and agree was wrong. How is it that a man who did all of this can still be referred to as a man after God's own heart in the New Testament (Acts 13:22)?

Confession.

David was not perfect and neither was Saul. However, the way that each responded to being confronted for their sins was markedly different. Saul was defensive and blaming others, but David responded with a soft heart and quickly confessed.

Practicing regular confession is a key element to a healthy relationship with Christ. How do you respond to the realization that you have erred in some way? Remember David's words in Psalm 51:17, "The sacrifice you want is a broken spirit. A broken and repentant heart, O God, you will not despise."

April 27th

2 Samuel 12:26-14:33; 1 Chronicles 20:2-3. "Real Consequences"

"Don't be deceived, God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows" (Galatians 6:7).

David loved the Lord, but he also made his share of mistakes. Even though he was quick to confess his sin, that did not remove the consequences for his sin (2 Samuel 12:14).

Now, from this point on, David's kingship takes a downhill turn especially within his family. As is apparent from today's reading, David was no longer in control of his sons and had failed to instill in them a fear of the Lord. David's mistakes were catching up to him, not just his sin with Bathsheba, but other sins related to fathering and mentoring his sons were having an impact now.

Sin has real consequences. While we cannot blame our sin for everything in life, much of the pain and grief we experience results from our own sinful choices and actions. Are you living with the consequences of past sin? Pray and ask God for strength and wisdom to deal with those consequences appropriately.

April 28th

2 Samuel 15:1-17:14. "Quick to Forgive"

We have all been there. We are at our lowest moment and someone says or does something to make it even worse. This must have been how David felt as he was fleeing Jerusalem and endured the insult from Shimei. How tempting it must have been to let Abishai kill Shimei. However, David exercises self-control and humility in not retaliating against Shimei. Not only did David exercise restraint at this moment, but he practiced forgiveness when Shimei met him at the Jordan River as David returned to Jerusalem (2 Samuel 19:18b-23).

How do you respond when you are wronged? Jesus forgave those who put him on the cross (Luke 23:34). Stephen forgave those who stoned him (Acts 7:60). Scripture teaches us that there is a connection between receiving forgiveness and extending forgiveness (Luke 6:37; Mark 11:25; Matt. 6:15).

So how do you feel about forgiveness? Are you willing to forgive like David and others did? Would you rather take revenge and even the score? Do you trust in God's ability to judge rightly and work it out according to His will when you are wronged?

April 29th

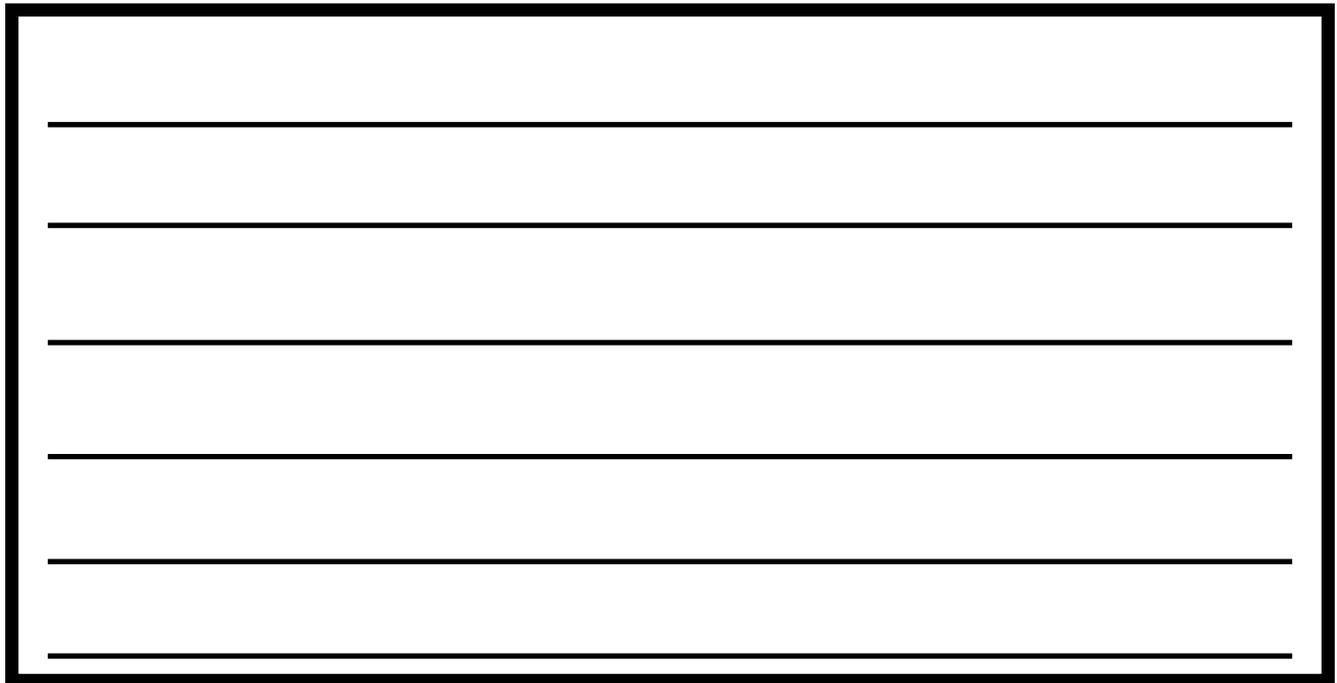
2 Samuel 17:15-19:30; Psalms 3, 63. "Death Results from Sin"

"When Adam sinned, sin entered the entire human race. Adam's sin brought death, so death spread to everyone, for everyone sinned. Yes, people sinned even before the law was given. And though there was no law to break, since it had not yet been given, they all died anyway..." (Romans 5:12-14a).

Absalom's death was tragic and unnecessary. It deeply impacted his father, David, as is obvious from the narrative. Had either David or Absalom made some different choices, this tragedy could have been avoided.

The reality is that this instance of death and pain is representative of human life and history. Death was not a part of God's perfect creation. Rather, death was introduced into the human race as a result of Adam's sin. Death is wrong and this is why we grieve when it happens.

The hope that we have in Christ is because He defeated sin and death through His redemptive work on the cross (Col. 2:13-15).



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Week 18

April 30 - May 6

2 Samuel 19:1-23:7; 24:1-25; 1 Kings 1:1-2:12; 1 Chronicles 20:4-29:22;
29:26-30; Psalm 4-9,11,18

“Vision is looking at life through the lens of God’s eye.” – Charles Swindoll

It is natural and understandable that we most often view things from a human outlook instead of “through the lens of God’s eye.” However, it is amazing when we are able to view things from God’s angle. Perhaps what is most amazing is the enormous difference between how we perceive something and how God sees it. There is often a remarkable twist and noticeable difference between the two. God’s intentions and purpose are exciting to observe. This week’s theme has much to do with our unique view of things.

April 30th

2 Samuel 19:31-21:22; Psalm 7; 1 Chronicles 20:4-8. "Highs and Lows"

In *A Tale of Two Cities*, Charles Dickens wrote, "It was the best of times, it was the worst of times..." David's life as king had many similarities. A great time would come followed by a grueling time.

David was anointed as king, and that was followed by Saul trying to kill him so he wouldn't be king. David would conquer one army only later to have another army take his family captive. David was honored with the loyalty of mighty men, but later returned the favor with murder. David experienced the joy of children but later felt the sorrow of a child bent on destroying his kingdom.

Even in today's passage we see both extremes. In chapter 19, David is returning to Jerusalem, the city he had to escape from earlier. The rebellion has been stopped. As he heads home, King David shows mercy to Shimei who had cursed him earlier. He shows kindness to Mephibosheth and also honors faithful Barzillai. Yet, before David even gets home another revolt springs up.

If you can relate to highs and lows remember our Sovereign God gives strength to the weary.

May 1st

2 Samuel 22; Psalm 18. "Divine Descriptors"

David was truly gifted with the pen. He had the ability to poetically phrase commanding statements. He had a wonderful vocabulary that expounded his capacity to describe experiences and people.

Another large part of his writing gift was his awareness of God's working in his life. He was constantly aware of God's hand in each of his experiences.

What kind of song would you write about God? What experiences would you record that God has taken you through? What descriptions would you have of God?

As I read through this song, I focused on just the descriptions of God's character that David recorded. I would encourage you to read through this list as a prayer and meditate on the phenomenal qualities of our wonderful God. My rock, fortress, savior, protector, shield, strength, salvation, stronghold, high tower, one worthy of praise, one who listens, all-powerful, high above, mighty, controls and commands creation, rescuer, deliverer, expresses emotions of delight over us, rewarder, judge, lawgiver, faithful, possesses integrity, pure, watchful, light, perfect, true, alive, and exalted!

May 2nd

2 Samuel 24; 1 Chronicles 21-22. "Perspectives"

I appreciate the balance we receive by having the opportunity to read the same story from two passages. The two accounts prove the trustworthiness of the incident, and yet it also provides different perspectives.

Today's reading starts off with an example of varying perspective. One account leads us to believe God tempted David, but the other account clearly says Satan tempted David. It provides us with a clear illustration of the original Hebrew writers' perspectives. They did not always distinguish between primary and secondary causes. In other words, if God allowed Satan to tempt David, to them it was as if God did it.

Continuing with attention to perspective; David chose to sin even though Joab (of all people) knew it was wrong. And furthermore, from this story we learn the value which God places on the intentions of the heart. It is obvious that a census was not a sinful event. The problem God had with David's decision stemmed from David's pride. Bear in mind, our motives and not the action itself may contain the sin.

May 3rd

1 Chronicles 23-25. "Priests"

The duties of the priests were specific. The qualifications and responsibilities were detailed and established by God. It was a temporary fix until the permanent solution came.

The earthly high priest entered the Most Holy Place year after year to offer blood not his own, but that of an animal. He would offer the sacrifices time after time which never removed the sin. Jesus Christ did not have to die again and again, but came once for all time, to remove the power of sin forever by His perfect sacrificial death for us. Not only is Jesus the perfect sacrifice, but He is also our High Priest. Everything about His priesthood is superior and final (see the book of Hebrews).

Has the idea of Jesus Christ being the only High Priest been well accepted through the years? In the Gospels the "priests" were instrumental in the crucifixion of Christ (Matt. 27). There are various religions today which still hold high priestly offices, and they will continue to do so until they fully comprehend all Christ accomplished. Although, *Revelation* uses the term "priests" for all believers, we have but One High Priest.

May 4th

1 Chronicles 26-28. "Order"

These chapters are describing great organization and preparation. There are people placed in charge of music, finances, priestly duties, gatekeeping, record keeping, administration, judging, baking, and so forth.

There are several lessons here for us. One would be the charge that David placed before each person; "Do your job in honor of the LORD" (22:17-19). The second lesson given to us is a reminder, that every person is necessary. God created us with different gifts so that we could all serve in a variety of ways. The third lesson has to do with showing us the value of being prepared.

As William Barclay said, "To be a person of faith does not mean you are not a person who plans." We need to remember the Revolutionary War saying, "Trust in God, but keep your powder dry." George Washington wrote, "To be prepared for war is one of the most effectual means of preserving peace."

Being prepared in this life is beneficial. In the parable of the ten bridesmaids (Matt. 25) we learn that being prepared for eternity is the most important.

May 5th

1 Kings 1; 1 Chronicles 29:1-22. "Inactive"

It is almost possible to read this passage and assume that King David, now rich in years, was unaware of what was taking place. Bathsheba inquires of him whom he intended to make the next king. Nathan inquired similarly.

However, Bathsheba and Nathan do acknowledge that David is aware of the fact that his son, Adonijah, was crowning himself king. Furthermore, we learn that David "had never disciplined Adonijah at any time, even by asking him, 'What are you doing?'" (1:6).

There were many who remained loyal to David. God's intended future king was not Adonijah. David knew these facts, but did not act upon them. Zadok, Benaiah, Nathan, Bathsheba, and many others also knew these facts. David needed to be confronted and challenged to act.

For whatever reason (perhaps age, laziness, complacency, or being overwhelmed) David took no action until confronted. If we are the inactive one, prayerfully someone will come encourage us to get up and get to the Lord's work. Or, perhaps we may be the one to encourage the stationary to rise up (1 Thes. 5:14).

May 6th

2 Samuel 23:1-7; 1 Kings 2:1-12; 1 Chronicles 29:26-30; Psalm 4-6,8,9,11.
"Final Thoughts"

David left a rich history. He was an amazing leader and powerful soldier. His life was committed to God in such a way that he was described by God as a man after His own heart (1 Sam. 13:14).

At 70, David left words of advice and experience for Solomon and many others. David had learned many lessons, and he expresses many of these in his last words.

David acknowledges the fact that it was God, and only God, who gave him the position of king over Israel. David thanks the Lord for the blessings and recognizes God's hand in all his life. He also emphasizes God's eternal, true, gracious, and righteous nature. Additionally, David recognizes the certainty of death.

David reminds his son of the importance of following the commands of the Lord, and assures him that life will be much better if he obeys God's laws. David knew firsthand that God forgives sin but the consequences still remain. David also left Solomon with several names of those whose actions assumed certain consequences.

What would your last words emphasize?

Week 19

May 7 - May 13

Psalms 12-17, 19-32, 35-41, 53, 55, 58, 61-62, 64-70, 86, 101

When I was in seminary, one of my professors challenged us with this question: how can the ancient prayers written in the psalms to God, be God's Word to us today? The answer, I propose to you, is that the psalms are prophetically the prayers of Jesus, the Messiah Himself. I know this may be a different way of understanding the psalms for you, but I believe that there is sufficient biblical evidence to support this.

So, as you read through the psalms this week, I hope you enjoy some insights into the life of the Messiah by reading through the prayers of the Messiah. – *David Curtis*

May 7th

Psalms 12-17; 19-21. "Joy of the Messiah"

Psalm 16 is a fitting start to our study in the Psalms this week. If you read Peter's sermon on the day of Pentecost, you will discover that Peter quotes verse 8-11 of this psalm in Acts 2:25-28. Peter then goes on to declare that David was not writing of himself, but rather of the coming Messiah. However, we recognize that the whole psalm is in the first person, so logically we conclude all of it to prophetically be the words of the Messiah Himself.

As I read through the rest of this psalm, I am encouraged by verse three, "The godly people in the land are my true heroes! I take pleasure in them!" Have you ever considered that living a godly life is a source of joy for Jesus?

Not that living a godly life is possible on our own, but rather because of Jesus' death and resurrection we are then able to live godly lives. No wonder it brings Him joy to see us living a godly life. It is one of the reasons He died. His joy is in seeing our lives reflect the benefit of His sacrifice. May you bring joy to God by living a godly life through the power of Christ who is in you.

May 8th

Psalms 22-26. "At the End of your Rope"

Psalm 22 is another psalm of David or the beloved one and, once again, it is prophetically speaking of the Messiah. This psalm is so interconnected in the life of the Messiah that the first line was spoken by Jesus as He hung on the cross.

The four gospel accounts give us information on the details of Jesus' crucifixion, but Psalm 22 allows us to enter into His emotions as He hung on the cross. And as we look, we see an overwhelming trust in the Father's will and a dependence upon Him for deliverance.

You may be wondering, how does this relate to me? Remember that Jesus possessed full humanity, including emotions and free will. The crucifixion was when Jesus was at His lowest point. He was physically, emotionally, psychologically and spiritually drained. He was dying a criminal's death having done nothing wrong, and yet we see Him continuing to praise the Father and trust in Him. How do you respond when you are at your lowest? Will you still trust and praise God when all hope seems lost?



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May 9th

Psalms 27-32. "Imprecatory Psalms"

Psalm 28 is what Bible scholars call an imprecatory psalm. This is because the psalmist asks God to judge the wicked and the enemies of the righteous. Some have been troubled by the presence of such psalms. They wonder how a God of love and grace could receive such a request. Will God really act in response to this request?

Today I am challenging you to think differently about this psalm and others like it. If these psalms are prophetically the words or prayers of the Messiah, then it changes their message, the reason being that Jesus came for the purpose of taking the punishment for the sins of mankind. Thus Jesus, in praying these imprecatory psalms, actually prayed for God's judgment and wrath to come and then willingly became the object of that judgment and wrath on our behalf.

Because of Jesus, these imprecatory psalms are no longer messages of condemnation and judgment, but rather of grace and love, for "He personally carried away our sins in His own body on the cross so we can be dead to sin and live for what is right. You have been healed by his wounds" (1 Peter 2:24)

May 10th

Psalms 35-38. "Mistreatment"

Have you ever considered the treatment that Jesus received from those He came to save? I think Psalm 35:11-14 provides insight into how He felt and increases our understanding of the mistreatment He received. The ones He has prayed for, fasted for, and grieved over are now rejoicing because of the trouble He is now in.

A striking example of this is in Luke 19:41 when Jesus wept over the city of Jerusalem. He wept, not just because He knew the city would be destroyed, but also because of their sin and rebelliousness. Later the same crowd that Jesus wept for was yelling, "Crucify Him" (Luke 23:21).

His mistreatment was obvious, but He did not retaliate. Rather, we see in this psalm and the gospels that He trusted His fate and the fate of those mistreating Him to a holy and righteous God.

How do you respond to mistreatment? Remember what Paul wrote, "Dear friends, never avenge yourselves. Leave that to God. For it is written, 'I will take vengeance, I will repay those who deserve it,' says the Lord." (Romans 12:19)

May 11th

Psalms 39-41, 53, 55, 58. "Doing God's Will"

Have you ever struggled to do God's will? You know what I am talking about; those situations where what you should do is very apparent and yet you still rebel and choose to sin.

Jesus never had that kind of experience, for He always followed God's will.

Psalm 40:6-8 declares that Jesus delights to do the Father's will. These verses are also quoted in Hebrews in reference to Jesus coming to do the will of the Father. Also, in Jesus' own declaration of His purpose in John 6:38 he said, "I have come down from heaven to do the will of God who sent me, not to do what I want."

Everything that Jesus did in His earthly ministry was to carry out the will of the Father in His life. Jesus spent time with His Father in prayer and solitude, He submitted to His Father, He exercised compassion on people, He knew the Scriptures and taught them to others, and He resisted temptation. Much of what Jesus did is also God's will for us, so if you desire to know God's will for your life, you need not look farther than how Jesus lived His life.

May 12th

Psalms 61-62, 64-67. "Overwhelmed"

Have you ever felt overwhelmed with life? Have you ever felt distant from God and troubled? If so, don't be alarmed. We have all been there, every person, including Jesus. The first four verses of Psalm 61 seem to indicate that Jesus experienced these emotions as well.

The very fact that Jesus experienced these emotions tells me that our experience of them is not always because of our sin. While sometimes it is our sin that leads us to a sense of despair, it never was for His personal sin that Jesus felt this way since He was without sin. Rather, it was because He was dwelling in a broken world and living among broken people that Jesus experienced these low moments.

So, what are we to do when we, who live in this same broken world among broken people, are overwhelmed? I see three things from this psalm that we can do:

- 1) Cry out to God for help
- 2) Trust in Him for shelter and protection
- 3) Respond with praise and thanksgiving

Is this your practice when you are overwhelmed by this world?

May 13th

Psalms 68-70; 86, 101. "Dealing with Guilt and Shame"

In reading Psalm 69 today you probably made many direct connections to the life of Jesus. Verse 9 was quoted by the apostle John (John 2:17) and verse 21 was fulfilled with Jesus on the cross (John 19:29).

How can we, though, connect verse 5 to Jesus since it indicates that the Messiah was guilty of sin; and yet Scripture is clear that Jesus never sinned. Paul explains this mystery in 2 Cor. 5:21; "God made Him who had no sin to be sin for us." Jesus became sin for the entire world, experiencing the guilt and shame of all those sins. This psalm reveals what it was like for Jesus to take on these sins?

He cries out for salvation (vs. 1-4)

He feels shame and humiliation (5-8)

He is scoffed at, mocked and gossiped about (9-12)

He expresses faith in God's ability to deliver (13-18)

He recognizes that comfort is not available from men (19-21)

He calls for judgment on the unrighteous (22-28)

He pleads for salvation (29)

He expresses faith in God and praises His name (30-36)

How do you respond to the guilt and shame of sin?

Week 20

May 14 - May 20

1 Kings 2:13-3:15; 1 Chronicles 29:23-25; 2 Chronicles 1:1-13; Psalm 50,73-83,88-89,103,108-110,122,124,131,133,138-141,143-145

This week I read an article by a woman who had been keeping a journal for 20 years. She said it seemed natural for her to continue when her father suffered a major stroke. She described the benefits of her journaling during the five years she cared for her father until his death. She observed, her daily entries provided her with perspective and a unique sustenance.

I must admit I am not the most faithful, but I see many benefits to journaling. Within this week's passages, we will see how it benefited Solomon as he keeps records of people and situations (and later writes 3,000 proverbs and 1,005 songs). We will read of men whose responsibility it was to record the blessings and actions of God for the people of Israel. We will read David's journaling as he uses words to worship God meditatively.

May 14th

Psalm 103, 108-110, 122, 124. "Like Painting a Sunset"

While painting a sunset I use various colors to bring out an accurate illustration of the real thing. In a similar fashion, David uses various descriptions to illustrate the real thing. David writes of God's love, strength, compassion, and more. Yet, he adds still more dimension to the illustration by adding examples of His love, strength, compassion, or whatever the focus.

The quality of an artistic piece is determined by its "depth." Whether it's sculpture, paint, or song, a greater piece has greater depth. That is the element that David continues to add to the word pictures of God.

For instance, as he describes the love of God in Psalm 103, he tells us what God does for us and how that illustrates His love: "He forgives, He fills my life with good things, He will not constantly accuse us, He does not deal with us as we deserve, He understands our weaknesses," etc.

David did the same thing for illustrating God's strength in Psalm 108.

From your personal experiences, what elements of depth could you add to one of God's characteristics?

May 15th

Psalm 131, 133, 138-141, 143. "Encouragement in the Psalms"

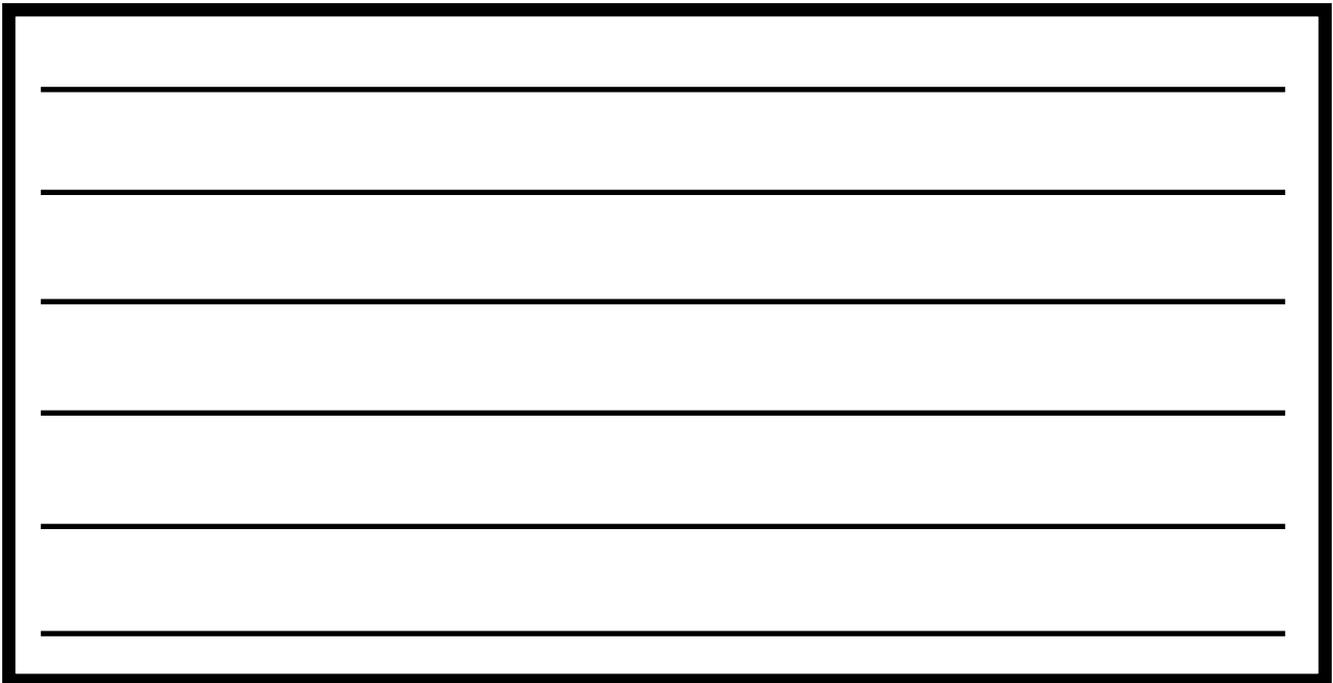
The collection of psalms today provides tremendous encouragement for each of us. After reading through these psalms I found myself feeling a bit guilty for the times I ever question God's involvement in my life. These psalms remind us of God's presence, protection and provision.

And again David expounds on God's qualities: Psalm 131—because of God's perfect nature we can trust Him and therefore find contentment, 133—because of God's plan for unity harmony can be found, 138—because God hears and answers our prayers we find encouragement and strength, 139—because God sees all, knows all, is present everywhere and is all powerful we can find confidence in knowing God's plan for our life is perfect, 140—because God provides deliverance and protection we can find assurance for the future, 141—because God cares and wants to help us we can trust Him to be our refuge, 143—because ofd, I would highly recommend reading thoughtfully through these psalms (I especially love 139).

May 16th

Psalm 88-89, 144-145. "Musical Tunes"

The psalms today reflect the journals of three men. The first, Psalm 88, reminds us of several things; one would be the variety of emotions each man is experiencing. Heman describes a despairing heart. Furthermore, his purpose is unique in that it is purely a cry to the Lord in desperation. Whereas, Ethan's psalm describes more the historical events of David's reign. And David's two psalms are expressions of complete praise. Another item to note about Psalm 88 is that it is "to be sung to the tune of..." There are several psalms which acknowledge a musical quality. The English word "psalms" itself is a transliteration of the Greek title of the book which is "sacred songs sung to musical accompaniment." It came from the Greek word meaning "striking a string," or "playing a stringed instrument." You can't escape from music in the Psalms. They are the music, the lyrics for the hymns of ancient Israel. It can't be emphasized strongly enough, the importance of music in worship and in the life of the church.



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May 17th

Psalm 50, 73-74. "Leading Worship"

Today—and for the next three days—we will be reading "Psalms of Asaph." Asaph and his sons, who worked under his direction, were given orders by King David to "proclaim God's messages to the accompaniment of harps, lyres, and cymbals" (see 1 Chronicles 6:31-39; 15:16-17; 25:1-2).

Numerous Levites were given various responsibilities as it pertained to worship. Asaph's responsibility was to proclaim God's messages. That does not necessarily mean he wrote each of the psalms with his name attached to them, although he may have. He may have collected various songs or documents he adapted for proclaiming God's word. Regardless, the words were expressions from his heart which he believed were appropriate words for the people.

All of that sounds very similar to the responsibilities certain individuals have in our churches today who lead us in worship. It is important, and has been for thousands of years that we have those who direct us to sing words proclaiming God's messages. Furthermore, it is important we have those who contribute with offering thanks and praise, and those who play instruments with that purpose.

May 18th

Psalm 75-78. "Expressions of the Psalms"

Years ago, Dr. Ron Allen visited the church I was at to speak on the Old Testament. Dr. Allen is the senior professor of Bible exposition at Dallas Theological Seminary. One of his favorite topics is the Psalms.

Of all the books in the Old Testament, the Book of Psalms is the one most loved by the family of God. Within the Psalms we find expression to our deepest thoughts of reverence for God, our most excited joy in knowing Him, and our darkest terror in those moments we feel cut off from Him. In the Psalms we have it all: music, wisdom, beauty, truth, theology, experience, emotion, and expression."

Once again, we are reminded of the depth of the psalms. Some people only turn to the Psalms in moments of distress or devotion. Some people turn to them for a quick expression of worship. Only few explore them deeply, even as you are now. Appreciate the depth of the Psalms.

May 19th

Psalm 79-82. "Recorded Variety"

Although all four psalms come from the same individual, there is yet great variety in their contents. The first two psalms are reflections of the nation. The third psalm is a spiritual reminder on a holiday. The last psalm refers to God, the righteous Judge.

What are some of the characteristics of journals? Providing you have journaled, if you were to look through your journal entries you may find great variety. But, then again, perhaps you tend to only journal when you are discouraged, or conversely when you are excited about something that took place. What keeps the Psalms distinct from our personal journals lies in their purpose. The authorship of the Psalms is from individuals inspired by God to record what they did for the glory of God and the benefit of others. The Psalms maintain historical accuracy, biblical consistency, theological purity, transparent confession, poetic beauty, and authentic worship.

What we are learning to appreciate about the depth of the Psalms I would pray we would

do so with their variety. God has given us Psalms that touch our life no matter where we are at.

May 20th

1 Kings 2:13-3:15; 1 Chronicles 29:23-25; 2 Chronicles 1:1-13; Psalm 83.

“Wheels of Justice”

Justice is one of the topics addressed today. The passages in Kings and Chronicles describe the justice Solomon laid forth. His justice was fair and took into consideration the counsel of his father, David. It was also necessary in order to prevent chaos from coming.

Martin Luther King, Jr. said, “True peace is not merely the absence of tension: it is the presence of justice.” Psalm 83 focuses on how God brings justice to the enemies of His people. God’s justice is fair, pure, and certain.

“Though the mills of God grind slowly, yet they grind exceedingly small.

Though with patience He stands waiting, with exactness He grinds all”

(Friedrich Von Logau, 1650).

The wheels of justice don’t always turn at the speed we would like. In fact, sometimes we may wonder if God’s wheels went flat. It is a wonderful thing that God’s wheels turn as they do and not at our speed. His wheels are turning, but what a blessing that He is so patient (see 2 Peter 3:9).

Week 21

May 21 - May 27

1 Kings 3:16-10:29; 2 Chronicles 1:14-9:28; Psalms 72, 127; Proverbs 1-4

This week's reading covers the early part of Solomon's reign over Israel. During this time Solomon accomplished many great things, leaving a tremendous legacy. He built the temple and a massive palace compound in Jerusalem. He also built storage cities and outposts for the defending Israel.

Because of the legacy that Solomon left we are going to look at what it means to build a legacy. A legacy is far more than what we accomplish in our careers. It involves choices that we make and things that we value. I hope that, through this week, you are encouraged to evaluate your life and the legacy that you are currently building and the legacy that you desire to leave.

May 21st

1 Kings 3:16-28; 5:1-6:38; 2 Chronicles 2:1-3:14. "Temple Building"

If ever anyone had everything going for them it was Solomon. He was the King of Israel during the peak of the nation's prosperity. He was wealthy and possessed wisdom beyond compare and, on top of all that, he was chosen by God to build the temple in Jerusalem. Other than his role as one of the authors of Scripture, Solomon's building of the temple was the biggest part of the legacy he left. I say this because of the significance that the temple played in the worship of God.

For us, as New Testament believers, the concept of temple is different. We no longer worship a God who dwells in a temple (Acts 7:48, 17:24); rather, He dwells inside the individual believer (1 Cor. 3:16). So, even though it is different, the importance of the temple is still very real. Paul emphasizes the need for holiness and care for the body (1 Cor. 6:20).

Solomon built a majestic temple leaving quite the legacy. What kind of legacy will your temple leave? What will people say about your life when you're gone?

May 22nd

1 Kings 7; 2 Chronicles 3:15-4:22. "Temple vs. Palace"

Solomon did many great things and was a good king for a while, but as you will discover from your reading this week, not everything he did was right. In chapter 7 of 1 Kings we read the details of the palace compound that Solomon built for himself. Now certainly the temple of the Lord was impressive, but the palace of the Forest of Lebanon described in 7:2-5 was over four times the size of the temple alone.

At this point in his reign as king, Solomon is still following the Lord closely, but the amount of effort and material that went into building his own palace compared to the temple indicate to me the direction that Solomon's heart is really going. Whose legacy is he more concerned with, his own or the Lord he serves?

Or maybe I should ask you that same question. Are you more concerned with the legacy of your temple (your life: body, soul, mind and spirit); or are you more concerned with the legacy of your palace (your earthly treasures: house, cars, toys, etc.)?

Remember the words of Jesus, "for where your treasure is, there your heart will be also" (Matthew 6:21).

May 23rd

1 Kings 8:1-53; 2 Chronicles 5-6. "Messiah's Temple"

In part of Solomon's address to the people of Israel, he refers to the Davidic covenant. Solomon recognizes that he has fulfilled the portion of the covenant that says one of David's descendants will build the Lord's temple. However, what Solomon did not know was that this prophetic statement in 2 Sam. 7:12-14 was not only fulfilled by Solomon, but would ultimately be fulfilled by the Messiah.

In the last two days we have emphasized the individual role each of us has as a temple of the Holy Spirit. The New Testament also teaches us that the Church is collectively a temple whose foundation is Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 3:11).

This temple established by Jesus is being continually built upon by those who have put their faith in Christ (1 Cor. 3:10-16). When we are doing the Lord's work, we are building onto this temple. Paul speaks of building with gold, silver and jewels which will last, or building with wood, hay and straw which will be burned up. So how are you building onto the temple? Will your works of service last and be rewarded?

May 24th

1 Kings 8:54-9:14; 2 Chronicles 7. "Legacy of a Father"

Solomon received a great legacy from his father David and he had an opportunity to pass it on to his son Rehoboam but failed. Here is a story about a father who chose to pass on a legacy:

"I need you," was all his wife had to say for the successful traveling evangelist to come home. Their sixteen-year-old son was pushing his limits and his father knew what he had to do. Canceling the rest of his speaking engagements, he accepted a call to pastor a small church in another state.

For two years he served that church and mentored his son until he went off to college. After his son left, the father attempted to return to his evangelistic ministry, but quickly learned that he was no longer in demand as a speaker. Indeed, the decision to go home had come at a great price.

But because he had made the tough decision and went home to focus on his family, years later his son would begin a ministry known as Focus on the Family. James Dobson is the product of his father, James Dobson Sr. [Excerpt from the book *King Me* by Steve Farrar]

May 25th

1 Kings 9:15-10:29; 2 Chronicles 1:14-17; 8:1-9:28. "Legacy of Obedience"

"The king must not build up a large stable of horses for himself, and he must never send his people to Egypt to buy horses there, for the Lord has told you, 'You must never return to Egypt.' The king must not take many wives for himself, because they will lead him away from the Lord. And he must not accumulate vast amounts of wealth in silver and gold for himself." – *Deuteronomy 17:14-17*

Solomon, Solomon, Solomon. In spite of all the good that Solomon did, he neglected to follow the Lord's instructions for a king. So instead of leaving a legacy of obedience to the Lord, he left a legacy of following his own path and fulfilling his own desires. It is a legacy that will result in disaster for his son, Rehoboam.

What kind of legacy are you leaving for those who follow after you? Is it one of obedience or one of defiance? Think about it –you just can't leave a legacy of loving God without obeying His commandments for, "loving God means keeping His commandments" (1 John 5:3).

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May 26th

1 Kings 4:1-34; Psalms 72, 127. "An Eternal Legacy"

Solomon was a prolific writer. 1 Kings 4:32 tells us that he wrote 3,000 proverbs and 1,005 songs. What a legacy, right? Well, yes, that is until much of that was lost. What we have remaining of Solomon's writings is that which was inspired by God and was incorporated into the word of God. So ultimately Solomon's legacy was dependent upon the eternal Word of God.

I think that this is instructive to us as we consider the legacy we will leave behind. Much of what we will accomplish or produce will either end up lost or forgotten. I am not trying to depress you; I just want to give you a reality check. As with Solomon, only that which we do that involves eternal things will truly last. Awards, accolades, stuff, money, these things will all pass away. It is what we do in and for people that will truly build our legacy.

Will the legacy of your life be sold in a garage sale, or lost in a fire some day? How sad that would be if it were true?

Follow the example of Jesus and pour your time and energy into the people around you. If you do, you will not be disappointed and the impact of your life will not be forgotten.

May 27th

Proverbs 1:1-4:27. "Acquiring Wisdom"

As a father of three children, I think often about the legacy that I am building within my own family. Proverbs 4 provides us with some good lessons on how to build and leave a meaningful legacy. This proverb demonstrates that wisdom is so interconnected with legacy building that, without it, we are in danger of leaving a negative or destructive legacy that will cause pain in the generations to come.

So, if wisdom is so important, where does it come from? Scripture reveals a number of sources of wisdom and today I want to encourage you to consider five of them:

- 1) Wisdom comes from the Lord (Prov. 2:6; James 1:5).
- 2) Wisdom comes from seeking other's counsel (Prov. 13:10).
- 3) Wisdom comes from receiving the Lord's discipline (Prov. 19:20).
- 4) Wisdom comes from obeying the Lord (Prov. 4:4-5).
- 5) Wisdom comes from observing God's creation (Prov. 6:6).

If you want to leave a legacy that is a blessing to your family, then acquire wisdom. – David Curtis

Week 22

May 28 - June 3

Proverbs 5-24

It is a joy to read the Proverbs. Sometimes you find yourself laughing at the candid way a proverb is written, and yet other times you find yourself stopping to consider the truth behind what was just shared.

A proverb is a short saying to express a truth. Therefore, it should not be surprising that in this week's passage you will read the words "wisdom" or "wise" almost 100 times. What is surprising is how wisdom is defined.

May 28th

Proverbs 5-7. "Charming Deception"

I watched a documentary on the animals living in the arid deserts of Africa. One of the predators was a snake. In the big open desert it's hard to chase something down to eat, so God provided this snake with a trick. It buries itself, that is all but the tip of its tail. The tail sticking up looks like a blade of grass. A small curious (or hungry) animal will come up to that attractive blade of grass only to be promptly met by the swift bite of a snake. We can think of things that could look appealing to the eye but fatal to the body. Like an alluring poisonous drink or attractive blade of grass the immoral person attracts their prey.

More important than understanding the wiles of the immoral is identifying our best strategy to avoid situations like that. Solomon has several suggestions:

- 1) Don't let the attractiveness fool you, 5:3-4,
- 2) Count the cost, 6:26-35,
- 3) Commit yourself to your spouse, 5:15,18,
- 4) Run, stay away, 5:8,
- 5) Heed the instruction of others, 5:1; 6:20; 7:1-3,24.

May 29th

Proverbs 8-10. "It's More Than Brains"

Wisdom is described in these chapters as that which; is Contrasted by immorality, folly and foolishness; Fears the LORD; Is excellent and right; Speaks truth and hates deception; Has good judgment; Knows where to discover knowledge and discernment; Hates pride, arrogance, corruption, perverted speech, and evil; Rewards with gifts better than pure gold; Was created by the LORD before anything else was created and was yet part of the creation process; and, Will add years to your life.

It is obvious that wisdom is something more than just intelligence. It has the qualities of godliness. Knowing this helps us understand wisdom's benefits. As Solomon continues to describe the "wise" in the chapters ahead it will be apparent he is not defining those with a high IQ or multiple doctorates, but those who perceive things through the eyes of God.

My grandpa was a wise man, though not in degrees or academic accolades. The Word of God poured through his veins and thoughts in such a way that everything was measured against the standard of God's instruction. Look to God's Word for any answer.

May 30th

Proverbs 11-13. "Life-Giving Fruit"

In today's chapters wisdom is associated with humility; with one who listens to advice; with not making a show of knowledge; accepting parent's discipline; giving good advice; and thinking before acting.

As much as I enjoy the idea of elaborating on each of these, there is one characteristic of wisdom listed in chapter 11 that I enjoy more. Verse 30 tells us that "The godly are like trees that bear life-giving fruit, and those who save lives are wise." I appreciate the balance and perspective of other translations. For instance, this proverb in the NIV reads, "The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life, and he who wins souls is wise." A wise, godly man is producing life-giving fruit. His actions are imparting something that leads others to life. And what could be wiser than leading someone to life?

What kind of fruit are you generating? What are the qualities of your life? Are your actions producing something that leads others to life? And, what value have you placed on leading others to life? Choose wisely.

May 31st

Proverbs 14-16. "WQ"

"Wise men talk because they have something to say; fools, because they have to say something." –Plato

There are definitely certain characteristics that make a statement. As Solomon continues to describe the wise there are two words that stand out; "witness" and "work." "Witness" encompasses the qualities of the wise. They are pleasant, gentle, thoughtful, careful, humble individuals who think before they talk. And, as we learned yesterday, they pursue godly things.

Now, "work" describes the things they are involved in on a more physical basis. They build and build up, plan, handle money well, increase in learning, seek advice, and other various pursuits. They are actively involved in good viable things.

From these descriptions we are again reminded that true wisdom is displayed more externally than internally. The true measurement of our life is where the passion of heart takes us. It's concerned with how we act (witness) and what we do (work). Perhaps we should focus less on IQ (intelligence quotient) and more on WQ (wise quotient).

June 1st

Proverbs 17-19. "Parental Wisdom"

I counted at least seven proverbs pertaining to children in these three chapters. Several describe the pain a parent can experience when their child is on the road to folly. A few others explain the benefits of discipline. There was one, far more uplifting, although I believe a few teenagers would take exception, which read: "parents are the pride of their children" (17:6). In fact, Mark Twain illustrated my point when he wrote, "When I was a boy of fourteen, my father was so ignorant I could hardly stand to have the old man around. But when I got to be twenty-one, I was astonished at how much the old man had learned in seven years."

Parenting is definitely one of those things that go better with wisdom. Wisdom is something every parent wants more of. It seems to come too slowly. Wisdom has a great deal to do with experience, and experience comes with time. Texas Bix Bender wrote, "Good judgment comes from experience, and a lot of that comes from bad judgment."

June 2nd

Proverbs 20-22:16. "Dangerous Business"

I enjoy reading quotes by Will Rogers, a great social humorist. One of his comments on chitchat was, "Live that you wouldn't be ashamed to sell the family parrot to the town gossip."

In our society we have a lot of jokes and quips about gossip. We've had various comic television series' for years that have a character portraying a nosey neighbor or town gossip. The unfortunate thing is that we have somehow missed the serious perception God takes of gossip. It is not a light, frivolous activity. Romans 1:29 lists gossip as a wickedness associated with other wrongs as serious as murder. Gossip is described in today's passage as harmful and deceitful. Back a few chapters (16:28), we were told that "gossip separates the best of friends." Today we are informed that, "A gossip tells secrets, so don't hang around with someone who talks too much" (20:19). We are warned not to listen to it, and we are warned not to do it. "If you keep your mouth shut, you will stay out of trouble" (21:23).

June 3rd

Proverbs 22:17-24:34. "Attaining Wisdom"

Repeatedly we are told to listen to the words of direction, and apply our heart, and heed the teaching, and stay attune to instruction. The emphasis would be hard to miss.

"Apply your heart to instruction." Many times, I can rush by a phrase like that and miss out on some of its meaning. I often need to slow down and acquire some clarity. For example, the word "apply" seems pretty simple—or does it? If I apply something, I put it on. I cover something else. I do more than just agree with it, I prioritize it. I become affected by it and concerned with it. I will put it to work and employ its use.

What about the word "heart"? This is a reference to the center and source of our life, emotions and affections. It encompasses our passions, directions, motives, and desires.

What about "instruction"? In this case it would be best for us to define "instruction" from the passage, which has been frequently summed up, as those things which reveal godly wisdom. Cover your life with God's Word.

Week 23

June 4 - 10

Song of Songs 1-8; Ecclesiastes 1-12; 1 Kings 11:1-17:7;
2 Chronicles 9:29-17:19

The theme for this week is simplicity. This concept is brought out especially in the book of Ecclesiastes. We are not looking at simplicity as the ultimate goal of life during this week, for bringing pleasure to God is our greatest purpose. Rather, we are studying and thinking about simplicity because of the many connections that exist between obediently following God, making wise decisions and living a simple life. *-David Curtis*

June 4th

Song of Songs 1-8. "Rejoice in the Wife of Your Youth"

God created sex (Gen 2:24-25) and blesses it in the proper context of a committed, loving marriage relationship. This book is a beautiful description of the intimate relationship that takes place between a husband and a wife.

Many have wondered how Solomon, the author of this book, could have written such a beautiful love poem considering his 700 wives and 300 concubines. It is most likely written about his relationship with his first wife, the daughter of Pharaoh. The playfulness and intimacy they share is reflective of a simpler time in Solomon's reign before the building projects and rapid expansion of his wealth and influence. Solomon had it all – God's blessing, money, wisdom, power, influence and women. And yet the more he had, the worse his relationship with God became.

Many lives have been complicated and painfully compounded as a result of extramarital affairs. Not only is it an obedience issue, it makes for a far simpler life if we heed Proverbs 5:18, "Let your wife be a fountain of blessing for you. Rejoice in the wife of your youth."

June 5th

1 Kings 11:1-43; 2 Chronicles 9:29-31; Ecclesiastes 1:1-11. "Simple Faith"

Solomon inherited a peaceful kingdom from his father David. Early in his reign Solomon and his people enjoyed living in peace (1 Kings 4:24-25). In all his wisdom, Solomon did not realize that the success of his Kingdom and the peace that he and his people enjoyed was dependent upon his obedience to the Lord.

As we read today, Solomon's life and reign as king became increasingly more complicated as his heart wandered from the Lord. He was constantly building new and different shrines and altars as he attempted to keep his many wives happy. Then there were the political issues and the Lord raised up different adversaries to Solomon.

Instead of chasing religion like Solomon, we ought to be more like the blind man in John 9, who experienced healing at the hands (and spit) of Jesus. When he was questioned about the one who healed him, he said, "I don't know whether he is a sinner, but I know this; I was blind, and now I can see" (John 9:25).

June 6th

Ecclesiastes 1:12-6:12. "Man in the Mirror"

The book of Ecclesiastes is filled with numerous observations about how life tends to work in general. Written by Solomon towards the end of his life, it is a reflection on much of what he has learned. Solomon lived a far from simple life and, in this book, he recounts some of his attempts to enjoy life.

Why does life have to be so complicated? The main reason life gets complicated is because of the person staring back at you in the mirror. Like Solomon we strive after money, power, career success, pleasure and knowledge in our efforts to bring meaning to our lives.

Rather than pursuing these avenues, we are to find our meaning and purpose in God. God is the one who establishes our purpose and destiny (Eccl. 6:10). We are to fear God (3:14; 5:7) and enjoy the benefits of the work he has for us to do (3:13; 5:12).

Are you fighting against God in your life? Are you striving for those things that do not satisfy? Try simplifying your life. Tell that person in the mirror that God is in control and you will find meaning and purpose in Him.

June 7th

Ecclesiastes 7:1-11: 6. "The Best Things in Life are Free"

Have you ever had a chance to sit on the beach and enjoy the sunset? Another sight that I really enjoy is to watch the sunrise over the alfalfa fields of the high desert in the fall with the cool air of a frosty morning surrounding me. Of course, these sights pale in comparison to that of my young daughter's smile.

In writing Ecclesiastes, Solomon makes it clear that enjoying the simple things in life is okay, and I think it even brings pleasure to God. In the second half of this book we read that we can enjoy prosperity (7:14), eating (8:15), drinking (8:15), life (8:15) and marriage (9:9).

Life is something that is meant to be enjoyed. It is a gift from God and it is a desire of God to see His children enjoying His gift. We are still living in God's creation and He is still that author and sustainer of life even though the world has been tainted by sin. Remember, "Whatever is good and perfect comes to us from God above, who created all Heaven's lights..." (James 1:17).

June 8th

Ecclesiastes 11:7-12:14; 1 Kings 12:1-33; 2 Chronicles 10:1-11:17. "Honor God in Your Youth"

I have a problem. You may very well have the same problem. I often find myself thinking that it will be easier to honor God and make Him more of a priority in my life down the road. If I can just survive until some day in the future, life will be better and easier, right? Not necessarily.

The older I get the more I realize that if I don't make the changes now, I probably won't do it in the future.

Solomon exhorts his readers to "Honor God in your youth" (Eccl. 12:1). We are not to wait until we are older to take God seriously, but rather we are to do it today.

A while back, my wife and I enjoyed the movie *The Last Holiday*. In that movie, the lead character made a decision to enjoy life and start working towards her dreams. As you can imagine, her life changed drastically and she finally truly enjoyed her life.

It took a doctor's report that she was dying in order to change her life. What will it take for you to really start living today? When will you make God and His perfect will for your life a priority?

June 9th

1 Kings 13:1-15:15, 25-34; 2 Chronicles 11:18-15:19. "Simplicity is not Guaranteed"

We have been thinking some this week about the connection between obediently following God and living a simple life. While it is true that our own sin often complicates life, it is not the only reason why life can be difficult and complicated. It is no small thing to live a simple life that results from making wise choices.

Sometimes life is difficult, not because of any fault of our own, but because of the decisions of those around us. In 1 Kings 15 we read of two different kings of Judah, Abijam and Asa. One of them, Abijam, was not right with God; the other, Asa, remained faithful to the LORD throughout his life. In spite of this difference we read that both of these kings dealt with constant wars with Israel during their reigns. So even though he walked with God, Asa experienced the same political difficulties as Abijam. In fact, when you think about it, doing what is right and walking with God can sometimes make life more complicated, not simpler. May you have the courage to walk with God regardless of how difficult life may become.

June 10th

1 Kings 15:16-24; 16:1-17:7; 2 Chronicles 16:1-17:19. "Cost of Success"

"If you just ignored your family you would have time to get it all done."

As I thought about this comment my wife jokingly made to me as we talked about the disheveled state of our van, I realized that she was right. I could accomplish a lot more in life by ignoring all of the people that I cared the most about. And in reality, many people achieve success by this method, but at what cost.

Today you read a brief statement about the man who rebuilt Jericho. Certainly, it must have been a proud accomplishment for him. The only downside was that it resulted in the death of two sons because of the curses spoken by Joshua son of Nun (Josh. 16:34).

Achieving success in life is a driving force for many people. However, at what point do the costs associated with that success become too great. We may not cause someone to lose their life because of our success, but if we ignore loved ones or neglect relationships, the pain and hurt we can cause is immeasurable.

Week 24

June 11 - 17

1 Kings 17:8-22:53; 2 Kings 1:1-10:31; 2 Chronicles 18:1-22:9

This week's passage describes God speaking in a variety of rather powerful ways (fire from Heaven, famine, etc.). However, Elijah discovered God's typical approach: God spoke in a quiet whisper. As you read these passages you may be convicted and/or enlightened as you consider how you listen for God's voice.

June 11th

1 Kings 17:8-20:22. "His Whispers"

I can't imagine too many ways God could have spoken louder than He did on Mt. Carmel. "Immediately the fire of the LORD flashed down from Heaven and burned up the young bull, the wood, the stones, and the dust. It even licked up all the water in the ditch!" (18:38). It wasn't a thunder storm. There was not a cloud in the sky. In fact, only after that event, and following Elijah's prayer, did a cloud even appear. Then, after three years of drought God spoke in a torrential rain.

The wicked Jezebel vowed to kill Elijah, who ran away discouraged and depressed. Elijah cried out his frustrations to God, who then told Elijah to stand on the mountain as He passed by. A mighty windstorm hit the mountain, but the LORD was not in the wind. Then there was an earthquake, but the LORD was not in the earthquake. Then there was a fire, but the LORD was not in the fire. Next was the sound of a gentle whisper. That's where the LORD came. Listen to His whispers.

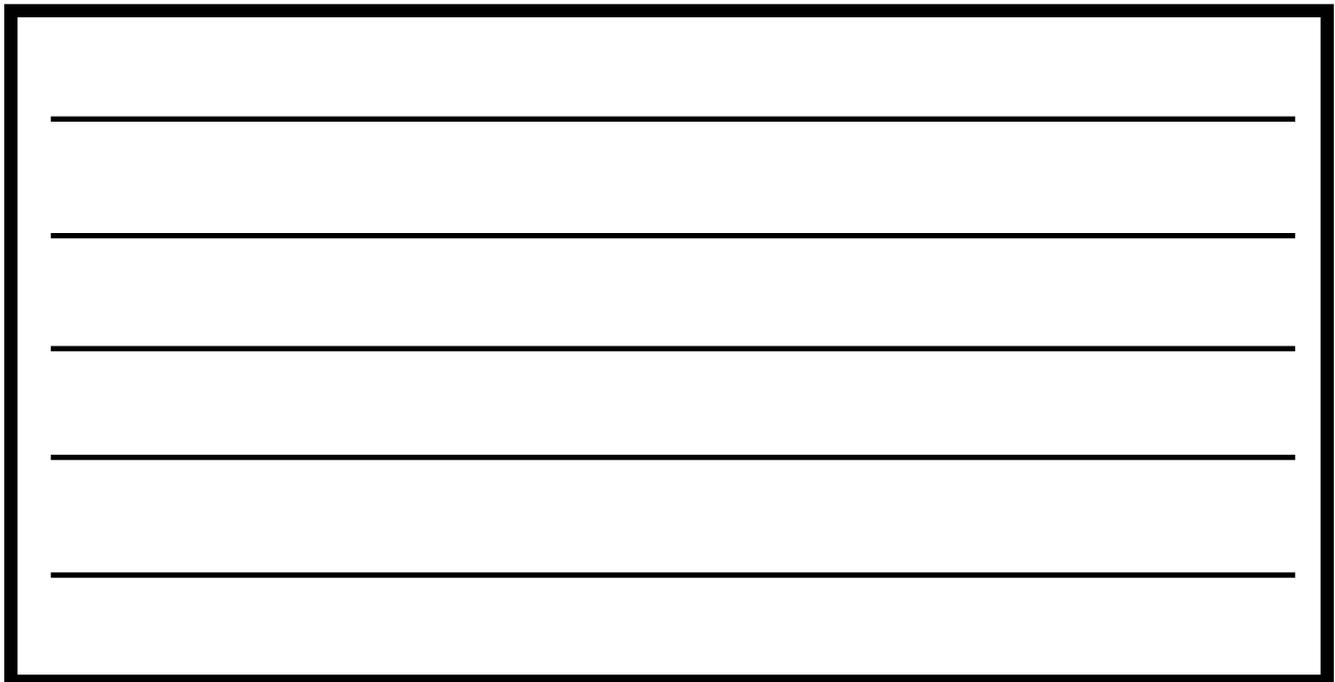
June 12th

1 Kings 20:23-22:9; 2 Chronicles 18:1-8. "Listening Amidst the Noise"

Jehoshaphat was listed as "a good king, but..." He fell short in seeing things through to the end. He did not completely destroy idolatry in Judah. He did not think through the long-term results of his decisions; be it allying with a wicked king, or allying his son in marriage to a wicked king. His poor decisions resulted in mediocrity as a parent and a king.

However, he is to be commended for how he sought the desire of the LORD regarding the decision to go to battle against the Arameans. Jehoshaphat wanted to hear from God and recognized that Ahab's prophets were not of God. Ahab also knew there was a difference. In fact, Ahab recognized that often the messages from God's prophets were different than that of his idol-worshipping prophets.

Although the noise of 400 erroneous prophets was loud around him Jehoshaphat wanted to hear even just one quiet voice from God. How well do you recognize God's voice and His message? Does the noise of the world get in the way?



A large rectangular box with a thick black border, containing five horizontal lines for writing.

June 13th

1 Kings 22:10-40, 51-53; 2 Chronicles 18:9-20:30. "Unpopular Proclamation"

After reading today's passage, the bottom line has to be; "Sometimes people don't like to hear what the Lord has to say." Micaiah's prophetic messages from the Lord always irritated King Ahab. In fact, he hated Micaiah for it. There was never any "good news" for Ahab (no doubt something that would support his evil acts).

Ahab's wicked prophets told Micaiah what he should say; only that which would agree with and make Ahab happy. The evil prophet, Zedekiah, danced around with iron horns pretending to have a message for Ahab. He also hated Micaiah's message and slapped him across the face. Ahab then had Micaiah put in prison, and fed nothing but bread and water. And we never read whether or not he ever got out of prison.

When you listen for God's voice are you hearing the exhorting and the encouragement? Do you listen to the convicting as you would the comforting? Or, how are you at heeding God's word even when it's not the most popular opinion or comfortable answer?

June 14th

1 Kings 22:41-50; 2 Kings 1:1-18; 3:1-27; 8:16-22; 2 Chronicles 20:31-37; 21:1-7. "What If He's Too Quiet?"

God had been put on the back burner.

Ahaziah, Ahab's son, barely made it over one year reigning as king. After falling in his palace, he was seriously injured. So, he sent messengers to the temple of Baal-zebub. This god was thought to possess supernatural power and the power of prophecy. Needless to say, that idea didn't work. Instead, the Almighty God of Israel who truly possesses supernatural powers and the power of prophecy sent a message through His messenger, Elijah.

God's message to King Ahaziah was one of condemnation for choosing to seek answers from idols, from gods who could not do a single thing. Ahaziah ignored God and looked elsewhere.

It's obvious Ahaziah chose foolishly to look elsewhere for answers. However, I was pondering the times we may have the tendency to look elsewhere for answers. I'd ask you to ponder this: If God is quiet do you look elsewhere? We may not have put Him on the back burner, but if we don't hear from Him quickly do we look somewhere else?

June 15th

2 Kings 2:1-25; 4:1-44. "What Do You Hear Him Say?"

A wealthy woman from Shunem sensed Elisha had a need and then took it to the next step and met that need. There are several wonderful attributes displayed in her life. First, in discerning a need she had to be sensitive and open to the hardships of others. She was obviously a person of compassion and grace. Secondly, she was obedient and responsive to the will and desires of God. Third, she was willing to spend time and money to meet other's needs. There is an enormous difference between sensing someone's needs and meeting their needs. James says it well, "Suppose you see a brother or sister who needs food or clothing, and you say, "Well, good-bye and God bless you; stay warm and eat well"—but then you don't give that person any food or clothing. What good does that do?" (2:15-16).

Obviously, she also exercised hospitality and generosity, but beyond that she looked for ways to serve and help. Although God asks it of each of us, we may not do so as freely as we should.

June 16th

2 Kings 5:1-8:15. "Hoping for the Loud"

Have you ever expected God to answer a certain way only to find out He answered differently? Naaman was angry when the answer he expected to hear from God's prophet came back differently. In fact, Naaman's officers confronted him on this point. They asked him why he was only looking for a loud and great reply, and not willing to listen to the simple and quiet response.

In this case, the result was the same, as far as healing goes, but the spiritual result was something deeper and greater. Naaman came away from the experience "know(ing) at last that there is no God in all the world except in Israel." He also vowed to "never again offer any burnt offerings or sacrifices to any other god except the LORD."

There may be something glamorous or sensational about a loud and great response from the Lord. Yet, for that very reason, it may be why God chooses to respond more often in a quiet and simple way. In humility may we hear God's quiet voice.

June 17th

2 Kings 8:23-10:31; 2 Chronicles 21:8-22:9. "Obedient Conspiracy"

Jehu was anointed by Elijah and Elisha and sent forth to destroy the family of the evil King Ahab. He did so, obediently and faithfully. He destroyed the idols and priests of Baal.

In the end God told him he had done fairly well in doing what he was asked, but he "did not obey...with all his heart." He was a bit careless in what he did. He also worshipped the golden idols of many years earlier.

He was God's instrument, but not His servant. In fact, his fault was that he "was devoted to God only to the point that obedience served his own interests" (Life Application).

Selective listening makes for selective obedience. There are people today that believe we should be obedient to God because of what we can get out of it. Should we only obey because we will receive a reward for our obedience? Do we only contemplate tithing, evangelism, serving, and even Heaven as a means to a personal reward? Where do personal interests fit into your obedience?

Week 25

June 18 - 24

2 Kings 10:32-15:29; 15:32-16:9; 2 Chronicles 22:10-28:15; Isaiah 6:1-11:16;
Amos 1-9; Jonah 1-4; Micah 1:1-16

This week's theme is the fear of the Lord. This is an often puzzling subject and can be difficult to fully comprehend. God loves us and we love Him in return, and yet we are also supposed to fear Him. Sometimes this fear is a sense of awe and respect because of the holiness of God and the fact that He is so vastly different than we are. Sometimes this fear of God is because, as the sovereign Lord, He is the one who judges our actions and thoughts and has the power and authority to save and to condemn at the same time. -D.C.

June 18th

2 Kings 10:32-12:16; 2 Chronicles 22:10-24:22. "Learned Helplessness"

At lunch today I had to do a little maintenance on our home computer that my wife uses for work. I suggested to her that she begin to solve these problems without my help. She promptly declared that, as long as I was around, she didn't need to; she had a 'learned helplessness' when it came to our computer.

King Joash took the throne when he was seven years old. I wonder if his early ascension didn't develop in him a learned helplessness. As a child he surely had been taught, if not just told, what to do by Jehoiada. He never developed an ability to think independently. Joash remained fully dependent upon the input and influence of others around him as is clear from his departure from the Lord following Jehoiada's death.

Do you suffer from a spiritual learned helplessness? May you fear the Lord and may your faith mature that you will "no longer be like children, forever changing our minds about what we believe because someone has told us something different or because someone has cleverly lied to us and made the lie sound like the truth" (Eph. 4:14).

June 19th

2 Kings 12:17-13:11, 14-25; 2 Chronicles 24:23-27. "Why Fear God?"

"Have no fear, have no fear, said the cat in the hat." I read that line today at lunch in the book I was reading to my daughter. As I was reading it, I thought about our theme this week and the subsequent mess that the cat in the hat made. Fortunately for the children in the story, the cat cleaned up his mess, but life doesn't always play out like a Dr. Seuss book.

Today we read about more kings over God's people that made one mess after the other. The idolatry they allowed showed a total lack of fear towards the LORD. What do we see as a result of this lack of fear? We see the consequence of incurring God's judgment. Both Joash, king of Judah (2 Chr. 24:24), and Jehoahaz, king of Israel (2 Kings 13:2-3), invited God's judgment on their people because they didn't fear God and practiced idolatry.

So why should we fear God? We fear God because He is the one who judges our actions (Eccl. 12:13-14). We fear God because of the consequences that result when our actions invite His judgment.

June 20th

2 Kings 13:12-13; 14:1-27; 15:1-5; 2 Chronicles 25:1-26:21; Jonah 1-4. "Too Familiar"

We are all very familiar with the story of Jonah; it is after all a whale of a tale. Sorry, I know – bad joke. But seriously, I encourage you to look at the story with a fresh perspective and consider for me, if you will, the use of irony in this historical story.

Jonah, a prophet of God should model a proper fear of God. And yet, as you may have noticed, the sailors and the wicked Ninevites demonstrated more fear of God than Jonah. How can this be? How can people who do not know God as well as Jonah does, demonstrate more fear than Jonah would?

One possible explanation that I would have for this is familiarity. Jonah was far more familiar with the Lord than was anyone else in the story. I think this curse of familiarity can happen to anyone who has known the Lord for a long time. We can grow so accustomed to His grace and forgiveness that we forget about His wrath and justice in dealing with sin.

May you fear God like someone who is encountering Him for the first time.

June 21st

Amos 1-6. "Declared Righteous"

I want you to think of that one person or that particular group of people that you know for certain deserves God's judgment.

For God's people that would have been the surrounding nations against whom Amos declared God's judgment. How popular Amos' message must have been as he spoke of the very thing God's people wanted to hear. And then that all changed as God turned His focus toward His own people declaring judgment against their wickedness.

Through Amos, Israel and Judah learned that you cannot pray for God's judgment on sin and not be included in the process. This is because God does not show favoritism in his judgments (Rom. 2:11).

So why are we to fear God? We do not fear God because He is some kind of vindictive or cruel deity. Rather, we fear him because He is just in His judgments and cannot allow sin to go unpunished.

Faith in Christ does not spare us from God's judgment, for all men will be judged (Matt. 16:27). But our faith allows us to be declared righteous because of Christ's atoning sacrifice in spite of our being judged guilty.

June 22nd

2 Kings 14:28-29; 15:6-29; 2 Chronicles 26:22-23; Isaiah 6:1-13; Amos 7:1-9:5. "Fear of Santa"

Like many kids, my son had a paralyzing fear of Santa Clause when he was younger. I find this phenomenon very curious since there is nothing about this character, even if he were real, that is to be truly feared. The worst he could do would be to give you coal in your stocking instead of toys.

The fear Isaiah experienced when he encountered the LORD was a more legitimate fear, I believe. Certainly, Isaiah was familiar with God's declaration to Moses that no one may see God and live (Ex. 33:20).

Why is it that we observe so few people who exhibit a genuine fear of God? It is directly related to how they view God. Isaiah feared God when he saw Him for who He really is. People who view God more like a divine Santa Clause find that there is nothing to fear. They believe that God is merely a kind, loving, benevolent being who can only withhold gifts, not bring judgment.

May you come to a full understanding of who God is and realize that it is right to fear God.

June 23rd

2 Kings 15:32-16:9; 2 Chronicles 27:1-28:15; Isaiah 7:1-25; Micah 1:1-16.

"Testing God"

"Do not test the Lord your God" (Matt. 4:7).

While in the wilderness, Jesus quoted the above verse from Deuteronomy 6:16. His purpose in quoting it was to fend off the temptation from Satan. Satan wanted Jesus to test God's promise of protection (Psalm 91:11-12).

In Isaiah 7, King Ahaz is in a similar situation. God has promised him protection from his enemies (Isa. 7:3-9) and then invites Ahaz to ask for the most difficult sign possible (Isa.7:10-11). Now we know from the historical narratives in Kings and Chronicles that Ahaz was not righteous. So, I am surprised by his response of refusing to ask for a sign. He actually demonstrates a proper fear of the Lord in this instance.

If you were in Ahaz' shoes, what would you have done?

Someone who fears the Lord also knows what it means to trust in the Lord. When we ask God for a sign to confirm His word, we reveal a lack of faith and trust in that word.

May you learn to trust God at His word each and every day.

June 24th

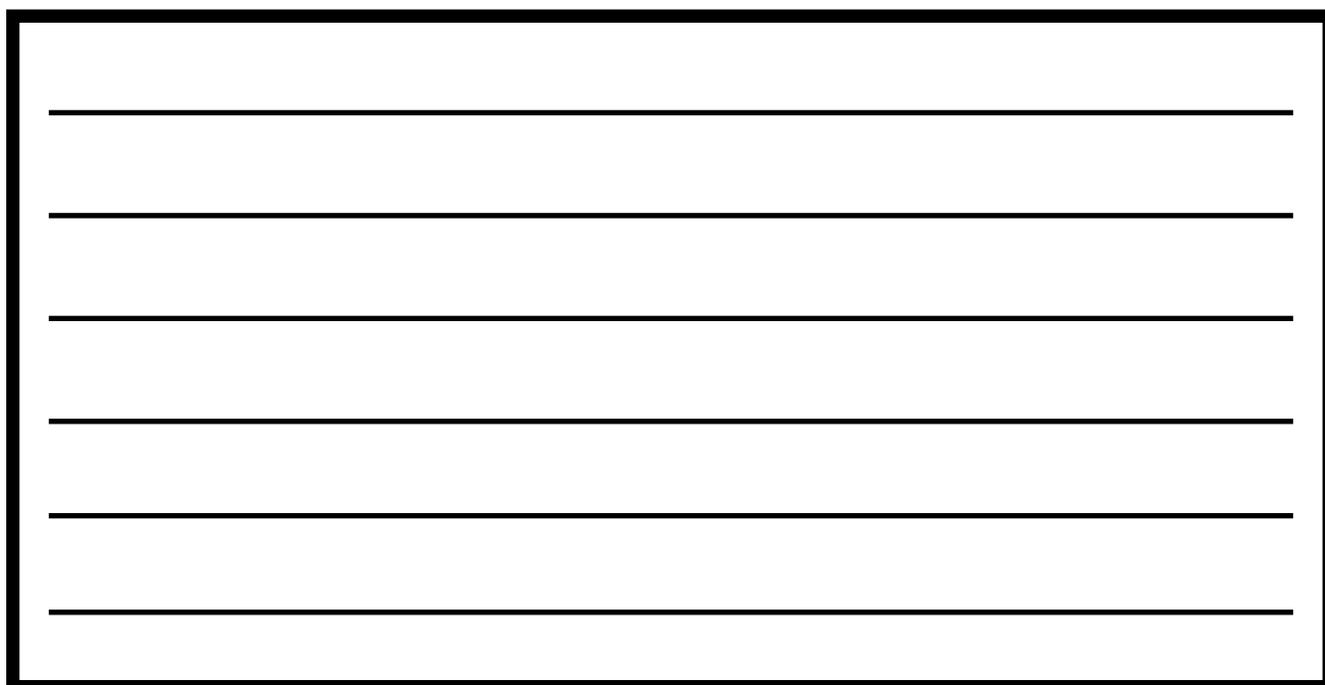
Isaiah 8:1-11:16. "No Fear"

There is something about refusing to show fear that is a rite of passage for boys as they seek to become men. I remember wanting to have a persona of having no fear in high school so badly that I wore shirts that even said "No Fear" on them.

Isaiah was told in chapter 8:11-14 that he was to only fear the LORD Almighty. This message holds true for us today as well. If we fear God we don't need to fear anything else, including death, for Jesus has conquered death.

I often hear Christians speak of what they fear might happen. They tell me of how they fear our country is falling apart; or they fear that the church is selling out; or they fear that their rights are being eroded. Instead of constantly fearing these things, why don't we try to trust God and His word?

God's word tells us that in our faith we have victory through Jesus (1 Cor. 15:57; 1 John 5:4). Jesus, the eternal Word, declared that, "I will build My church; and the gates of Hades will not overpower it." (Matt. 16:18). In addition, Revelation 20:11-15 tells us that God will ultimately triumph and remove sin and death. Fear God and nothing else!



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Week 26

June 25 - July 1

2 Kings 15:30-31; 16:10-20; 17:1-18:12; 2 Chronicles 28:16-31:21; Isaiah 1-5; 12-17, 28; Hosea 1-14

Faithfulness is the theme of the week. We will see illustrations of God's faithfulness to us and the people's faithfulness to Him. We will also read vivid real-life examples of what it means to be unfaithful. We will see what God thinks of being unfaithful, and we will also see how He responds to it (believe it or not, faithfully—both in love and judgment).

June 25th

2 Kings 15:30-31; 16:10-18; 17:1-4; 18:1-8; 2 Chronicles 28:16-25; 29:1-2; Isaiah 12:1-6; 17:1-14; Hosea 1:1-2:13. "Faithful Expressions"

Isaiah 12 describes songs of praise sung on a specific day (v. 1, 4), the day when the Messiah rules the earth. Obviously, we look forward to that day with great anticipation and we will no doubt sing God's praises, but what about days other than that? Do we have as many reasons to praise the Lord now as we would then?

Isaiah describes the Lord as One who provides comfort and salvation, the source of my strength and the reason for my song, and the One who "has done wonderful things". What has the Lord done for you? Do you faithfully recognize each of God's blessings?

But Isaiah didn't leave it there. He added another dimension to it. He said that if we feel that way about the Lord, we should thank Him, praise His name, "tell the world what He has done" and "make known His praise around the world."

Why wait until then? Practice praising Him now. Express your gratitude daily. Tell others of the greatness of God.

June 26th

Hosea 2:14-8:14. "Faithful Love"

I performed a wedding ceremony a few weeks ago and not once were there promises of unfaithfulness. In fact, I've never been to a wedding where a couple vowed to be unfaithful. Yet Hosea knew his wife, Gomer, would be unfaithful. God had told the prophet this and had told him why. Hosea's life was a living love story and illustration of Israel's love story with their God.

Hosea's letter is addressed to Israel as it describes their sin and rejection of God. They turned from Him and vowed devotion to idols. They committed spiritual adultery.

Hosea was instructed to bring his wife back again from her unfaithfulness and love her. And the next sentence tells us how God does the same; "For the LORD still loves Israel even though the people have turned to other gods, offering them choice gifts" (3:1).

God is never unfaithful to us. He never trades in His love for us on someone or something else. He will never go back on His promises or change His mind, His intentions or His plans.

June 27th

Hosea 9-14. "Faithful Always"

Under Nevada state law, any county with a population of fewer than 700,000 is allowed to legalize prostitution in brothels if it so chooses (which all rural counties have had at least one legal brothel in operation at one point or another). Escort services offering sexual entertainment consume 140 pages of the Las Vegas yellow pages.

It's disturbing to even talk about prostitution. It's sad that we can pervert and degrade everything down for financial gain, and worse, justify legalizing it.

In a harsh comparison Hosea announced that Israel had been untrue to their God, "hiring themselves out like prostitutes, offering sacrifices to other gods" (9:1). In a more PC fashion, we may prefer to say "they were unfaithful," but that does not depict the severity of God's perspective. Considering the way Hosea and God describe it may help us understand the seriousness and danger in being unfaithful. "As you cannot take a day off morally and remain moral, neither can you take a day off spiritually and remain spiritual. God wants you to be entirely His, and it requires paying close attention to keep yourself fit" (Oswald Chambers).

June 28th

2 Kings 17:5-41; 18:9-12; Isaiah 1:1-20; 28:1-29. "Faithful Treatment"

Isaiah 28 closes with a wonderful poetic parable. The parable describes how a farmer deals uniquely with each crop. The farmer knows what each of his various sections of land will produce the most of a specific crop. He knows what tools will prepare the land the best. He knows what each crop will require in order to produce the highest yield.

It is apparent that this passage is dealing with discipline that Israel is about to receive. Israel is about to receive God's punishment for centuries of ignoring His rules and refusing to serve Him alone. Yet, in the parable lies the beauty of God's compassion. God's actions "will be as measured and as well-timed as a farmer's." God will take into account the vulnerability and character of Israel. He will deal with them as He knows best, so that in the end the harvest will be fruitful.

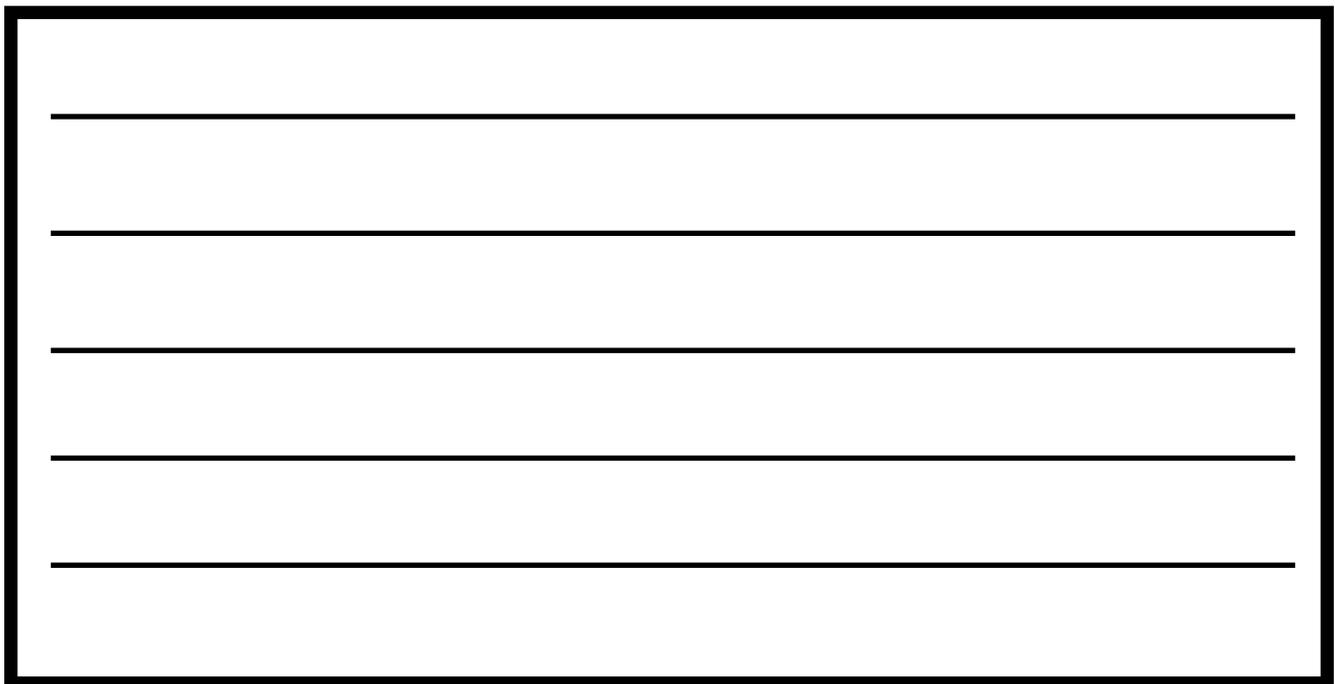
God does the same for us. He knows what we need and what we can handle. He knows how far He will need to stretch us in order to make us the most fruitful in the end.

June 29th

Isaiah 1:21-5:30. "Faithful Judgment"

"God is a judge who is perfectly fair" (Psalm 7:11a).

Today's passage testifies repeatedly of God's coming judgment. Israel and Judah were to be dealt with according to their disobedience. There are actually four things to remember as you read this passage. Number one, the judgment is warranted by the accused. Israel rejected God and everything He asked of them. Number two, the judgment is fitting to the offense. Because of Israel's rejection of God, it is appropriate that He let that choice take its course (see Rom. 1:21-32). Number three, the Judge is righteous and fair. Who are we to question the decisions and judgment of God? We all know about rules when we play a game. Rules make playing the game more enjoyable and practical. It would not make sense without them. Why do we balk at God's rules? Number four, the judgment is coming. Beyond the judgments Israel endured there is a final judgment for all people, and the duration of that sentence will be eternal. Choose wisely for there are but two options; Heaven or Hell.



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June 30th

2 Kings 16:19-20; 2 Chronicles 28:26-27; Isaiah 13-16. "Faithful Prophecies"

It is amazing to read through the passage in Isaiah as it describes the fall of Babylon and to remember that this was written a century before Babylon even became a world power. Assyria was the world power in the time of Isaiah, and Babylon is just a small part of that empire. Isaiah predicts that it will not only become a world power (which it did), but that it will also fall in such a way that it will remain desolate and uninhabited. Saddam Hussein tried for years to restore Babylon and make himself "the Nebuchadnezzar replacement".

And the prophecies didn't stop there. Isaiah continues in chapters 44 and 45 to prophesy by name who it was who would overthrow Babylon. Cyrus united the Medes and Persians and overthrew Babylon about a century after their reign as the world power.

The Medo-Persian Empire remained the world power until the Roman Empire overthrew them, which was also prophesied (very detailed in the book of Daniel).

Moral: The Bible is 100% true 100% of the time.

July 1st

2 Chronicles 29:3-31:21. "Faithful Reform"

Hezekiah's father, Ahaz, was a wicked king, as was Hezekiah's son, Manasseh. However, Hezekiah "did what was pleasing in the LORD's sight" (29:2). Hezekiah promoted reform in Judah as had not been witnessed in years. He developed a powerful prayer life and interceded for his people. He instituted civil and religious reform. He contributed generously to God's work. He aggressively removed evil influences from his life and from Judah. He reformed worship in the lives of the people. He reintroduced Passover, and rededicated the Temple.

Often our passion to reform is more in line with a failing resolution. The element missing is the heart. Reform works when the heart propels it. If our heart isn't in it, it won't last. This is confirmed by the statement at the end of chapter 31; "In all that he did in the service of the Temple of God and in his efforts to follow the law and the commands, Hezekiah sought his God wholeheartedly. As a result, he was very successful" (v. 21). As you commit to serve, obey, and grow in the Lord, make sure your heart is in it.

Week 27

July 2 - July 8

Psalms 1-2, 10, 33, 42-49, 71, 84-85, 87, 91-100, 102, 104; Proverbs 25-31

The theme this week is communication. The wisdom literature of the Proverbs and the poetry of the Psalms have much to say about how we communicate. Sometimes this communication happens internally, sometimes it happens with other people, and sometimes it happens between us and God. So much of life involves communication, so I hope that you are able to glean much from the devotionals this week.

July 2nd

Proverbs 25:1-29:27. "Flattery"

I assume you have heard of the TV show *American Idol*. Basically, the show is a singing competition. My favorite part of the show is the audition segment in the first few weeks. It never fails that a few people will audition who are poor singers, but think they are good because all their friends say they are good. Either these friends are terrible judges of musical talent, or they were saying flattering words to boost this person's self-esteem.

This is the danger of flattery. It is terribly misleading, if not entirely wrong. Proverbs tells us that flattery causes ruin (26:28), that it is a trap for people (29:5), and that it is less appreciated than frankness (28:23).

Flattery can be as subtle as it is destructive. It can be easy to justify the use of flattery as well. How bad can something we say be if it results in someone feeling better about themselves. Even though you love and care for the person that you are speaking with, the Bible tells us to speak the truth in love (Eph. 4:15), not speak a half-truth or choose to omit the truth.

Flattery may sound nice, but in the end someone will get hurt.

July 3rd

Proverbs 30:1-31:31. "Pinocchio"

Sometimes I wish that we could all be a little more like Pinocchio. Not because of the strings or being made out of wood, but because of his nose. If you recall, Pinocchio's nose gets him into all sorts of trouble because it grows when he tells a lie. In many ways, it would make life far easier if there was some easy way to tell if someone were lying.

We all know the damage that can come when we choose to lie. It is such a significant issue that Agur, the author of Proverbs 30, asked for help from the Lord to never do it.

As a parent of young children, I have learned that you do not need to teach a child to lie, rather you must teach them the importance of telling the truth. As sinful humans, we naturally lie to protect ourselves or others. We lie because we fear what might happen if we tell the truth and because, ultimately, we do not trust that God is in control.

May you come to trust that God does know the future and is in control and that you can confidently speak the truth regardless of the outcome.

July 4th

Psalm 42-46. "Silence"

"He was oppressed and treated harshly, yet He never said a word. He was led as a lamb to the slaughter. And as a sheep is silent before the shearers, He did not open his mouth." (Isaiah 53:7)

Why was Jesus able to be silent in the midst of the mistreatment and accusations He faced? Confidence. Jesus was confident in the fact that His Father was working out His perfect plan of redemption. He did not feel compelled to fight back or argue with His accusers because he knew his Father was in control.

Silence is a sign of assurance and confidence and strength. As it says in Psalm 46:10, "Be silent, and know that I am God." What does it mean to know that He is God? It means to know who God truly is, the sovereign almighty, all-knowing God whose plans are never frustrated and whose will is always accomplished. Silence demonstrates a genuine trust in God. God does not need a multiplicity of words to defend Himself or to reveal Himself in this world.

May you learn that sometimes the very best response to God is in the form of silence.

July 5th

Psalm 47-49; 84-85, 87. "Listening"

"My dear brothers and sisters, be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to get angry." (James 1:19)

A while back, I watched a TV program about how children learn the grammatical structures of language by listening to the people speaking around them. This got me thinking, because, before we can ever learn to speak, we can already listen. In fact, we can listen and distinguish voices while still in the womb.

So, if listening is such a natural and easy thing to do, except for the hearing impaired, why is it that once we start speaking, we listen so poorly? Why else would James feel led to write the verse above if in actuality we didn't practice the opposite? So many times, I find myself rushing to judgments or giving my input or trying to offer solutions when all I really need to do is just listen.

Is it out of pure laziness that we don't listen, or is it a deeper spiritual reason that we don't listen, like pride or rebelliousness? The reasons for not listening may be as many as the times that we fail to do so.

July 6th

Psalm 1-2, 10, 33, 71, 91. "Boasting"

"As for me, God forbid that I should boast about anything except the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. Because of that cross, my interest in this world died long ago, and the world's interest in me is also long dead." – Galatians 6:14

In making the above statement, the Apostle Paul sets the standard regarding boasting quite high. This stands in stark contrast to the words of the psalmist in Psalm 10:3 about how the wicked people brag about their evil desires.

What is it about boasting or bragging that creates a problem in our lives? Could it be that it isn't so much the boasting itself, but rather that boasting is a symptom of a deeper issue, pride? When you look at the surrounding verses in Psalm 10, you will notice that the psalmist indeed connects boasting and pride. Paul also connects these two traits in two separate lists of vices or sinful tendencies of mankind (Rom. 1:30; 2 Tim. 3:2).

Are you struggling with boasting? Let me first encourage you to examine your heart for pride. Second, allow me to remind you that every good and perfect thing in your life is from God so, really, your boasting is pointless (James 1:17).

July 7th

Psalm 92-97. "Thanksgiving"

"Gratitude is a vaccine, an antitoxin, and an antiseptic." – John Henry Jowett

Yesterday we thought about boasting and pride. One way to approach reducing our tendency towards boasting is to respond with gratitude. As Pastor Jowett so aptly noted, gratitude is good medicine especially towards pride which leads to boastfulness.

We have all seen this difference in the professional athletes of the 21st century. Those who are truly thankful for their opportunity and God-given talent do not boast of their personal exploits.

Thankfulness should be a constant theme of our lives. The Apostle Paul wrote, "no matter what happens, always be thankful" (1 Thess. 5:18). The psalmist in our readings today has declared that it is "good to give thanks to the Lord" (92:1), and that we are to "come before Him with thanksgiving" (95:2). Clearly, thanksgiving should be a significant component of our relationship with the Lord.

How else are we to respond and approach the One who has done so much for us?

July 8th

Psalm 98-100, 102, 104. "The Power of the Spoken Word"

"The tongue is mightier than the blade" – Euripides, Greek poet ca. 5th century B.C.

The power of the spoken word is often under-appreciated. The tongue, or our speech, can do much damage, oftentimes without our planning it or even our awareness of it at the time. James compares the potential for damage by the tongue to a small spark in a forest (James 3:5). We are all familiar with cases where someone's reputation is damaged or their career is ruined because they said the wrong thing. There is a tremendous power in the spoken word. This is also true of God, who spoke creation into existence (Psalm 104:7). We also see this in Jesus, who was able to speak healing directly into people's lives (Luke 7:1-10).

So why do we struggle so mightily with taming our tongues? Why do we so often hurt people with our words? It is because speech is permanent and conversation is often spontaneous. Unlike the written word which can be edited, the spoken word is raw and cannot be taken back.

May your speech be filled with grace (Colossians 4:6).



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Week 28

July 9 - July 15

Psalms 105-107, 111-121, 123, 125-126, 128-130, 132, 134-136, 146-150

The theme for this week is worship. This week will finish off our time in the Psalms (except for Psalm 137). Since the focus of this week's devotionals are praise, I felt it was appropriate to ask Tom Garo, my former Director of Worship at Faith Baptist Church to share his perspective. I hope you thoroughly enjoy considering the various aspects of worship that will be discussed.

July 9th

Psalms 105-106. "Thoughts on Worship"

This week, as we read through the last 50 Psalms, there are a number of thoughts that we will cover and ponder a bit. Other topics may stand out as well. I encourage you to jot down those themes or ideas that strike a chord with you and pray about what the Lord may be revealing to you. During the next six days we will cover these topics:

Praise – What is Godly praise? How should we praise and how did David praise God?

Worship – Is true worship just something we do on Sunday?

Demonstrative Worship – What does worship look like throughout the Scriptures? How do we show God our worship?

Remembering – Never forgetting what the Lord has done for us, with us, and in us.

Conversational or Continual Prayer, Asking God – What did David ask for? What did he talk to the Most High about? Was he meek or bold?

As you read through the Psalms, how would you answer these questions?

July 10th

Psalms 107, 111-114. "Praise"

As we read through the Psalms, one recurring, overwhelming theme is evident – "Praise." The phrase "Praise the Lord" is in the Psalms over fifty times and over one hundred times throughout the Bible. Through good times and bad, whether in the valleys or on the mountain tops, "Praise the Lord" resounds.

The thought that God is worthy of our praise is true and timeless no matter what we are feeling or what condition we might find ourselves in. David, when enduring troubles untold, knew who God was and what He was capable of. Through the Psalms, he declares the greatness of God over and over again. It seems David never had to be reminded of the majesty of God. He continually offered praise in all of his circumstances. When on high serving as King, or hiding in a cave and fearing for his life, David offered limitless praise.

Like David, we too need to praise God, regardless of our circumstances. It is simply that God is GOD and we are to fall at His feet and offer Him praise. Regardless of the blessings or the trials of this life... God is GOD and worthy to be praised. Amen?

July 11th

Psalms 115-118. "Demonstrative Worship"

As we read through the Psalms, we see there are many ways to express our worship to God. We see His people face down and on their knees before Him, as well as standing with arms out and hands lifted high, singing to the heavens.

As humans, one of the ways we communicate best is with body language. It's quite easy to read someone's mood simply by observing them. Feelings of sorrow look quite different than those of joy and happiness. For example, at a ball game the winning team's expressions and actions are quite different from those of the losing teams. Certainly, a football game is not a worship service, but it does contain many of the same elements of a worship service. We see loyalty and a sense of community that bring us together in the same place and at the same time. There are even coffee and snacks... maybe it's not so different after all! Of course, the object of our attention is the true distinction. How much more involved should we be when worshiping the God of the universe than when at a football game? Tomorrow we will look at the Scriptures for some answers.

July 12th

Psalm 119. "Demonstrative Worship, Part II"

The scriptures give us much direction on the posture and heart attitude of praise and worship. Here are just a few:

Exodus 33:10 Standing
Psalm 95:6 Kneeling
Mark 14:35 Falling to the ground
Heb. 13:15 Sacrifice, fruit of the lips
1 Tim. 2:8 Lifting holy hands
Psalm 141:2 Lifting up of hands
Psalm 47:1 Clapping
1 Chron.15:29 Dancing
Ezra 3:11 Shouting
Acts 16:25 Singing

Please take the time to read these passages today. There are, of course, many more than space permits.

The Psalms and the rest of the scriptures continually extol the intrinsic worth of God through demonstrative acts of worship. As we read through these verses, it is evident that these things are the external signs of true worship.

July 13th

Psalm s 120-121, 123, 125-126. "Remembering"

"People need to be reminded more often that they need to be instructed"
– *Mere Christianity*, by C. S. Lewis

As we read through Psalm 105 and 106 we discover that C. S. Lewis's quote, while contemplative, is certainly not an original thought. We may find it odd that, along with the prayers and songs that David offers up to the Lord, there suddenly seems to be a history lesson thrown in for good measure! It may seem oddly out of place, but we can soon see the direction David is going. It is certainly true that the Psalm reminds us what the Lord had done for the Israelites some 400 years prior to David's reign. He is also offering this Psalm as a reminder to his readers that the Almighty God can be trusted and is faithful to His word through the generations. The record of what the Lord has done in other peoples' lives strengthens our hope and restores our faith.

How great a heritage we could leave behind by recording those great works that Almighty God has done in our lives today! As you read about what the Lord has done for others in the Bible, be sure to leave behind a record of what the Lord as done for you!

July 14th

Psalms 128-130, 132, 134-135. "Praying"

Another continuing theme of the Psalms is that of prayer. I believe we view prayer somewhat differently than David did. David comes before the throne with a boldness that seems today to be somewhat presumptuous. The things that he chooses to pray about are much different also. We tend to pray for things that personally do not involve us as much. We will pray for the sick or those who are going through a particularly bad time. We seem to always put others first in our prayers. Of course, I think this is good and right to an extent, but I wonder if at times we are taking the focus off of ourselves and our own personal relationship with God by continually thrusting the center of attention on someone or something else?

David's prayer life was predominantly about himself. He simply talked (we call it prayer) to God about everything in his life. God wants us to continually talk with Him about all the things going on in our lives. From the rising of the sun till the time it goes down again, talk to the Lord. The name of the Lord shall be praised!

July 15th

Psalms 136, 146-150. "Worship"

I know how to worship. We all do. Here's my first experience with worship. A 1970 Pontiac GTO –yeah, baby!

I loved that car. I mean, I really loved that car. I was in high school and that car was everything to me, and I cherished it. I adored it. I used to just sit in the leather bucket seats and admire its magnificent craftsmanship. I washed and waxed it nearly every day. Keeping that car looking good was my mission in life. I even broke up with a girl because she wrote "wash me" in the dust on the back of my car! (Some things just can't be tolerated ;) I loved to read the owner's manual each night before bed. I knew every square inch of that car and I was proud to let people know it. I think it's fair to say I worshiped that car. Of course, that was long ago...

David knew how to worship also. The difference between his worship and my own is obvious. David worshipped the only recipient that is truly worthy of our worship, the God of the universe. David loved, adored, cherished and knew his God inside and out. He knew very much about God and he enjoyed sharing what he knew with others. How much do you worship God?

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Week 29

July 16 - July 22

2 Kings 18:13-20:19; 2 Chronicles 32:1-31; Isaiah 18:1-27:13; 29:1-39:8;
Micah 2:1-7:20

Our theme for the week is salvation. There are a number of different topics related to salvation that we are going to look at. My prayer is that, by the end of the week, you will be rejoicing even more in the salvation that we have in Christ.

July 16th

Isaiah 18:1-23:18. "Saved from the Penalty of Sin"

Judgment, Judgment, Judgment. Five chapters of judgment. Judgment is not a pretty thing to look at or encounter or even to think about. However, it is an important part of who God is. Judgment is God's reaction or response to man's sin and rebelliousness and, as the verse above indicates, the judgment or penalty for that sin is death.

This is where the need for salvation comes in. It is because, on our own, we stand before God condemned or judged in our sin. This salvation I speak of today is the first level or primary experience of salvation in that we are saved from the penalty of sin. We experience or will experience salvation on two other levels, which we will discuss later in the week.

This experience of being saved from the penalty of sin is often what we think of when we talk about being saved. It is in this salvation that comes by faith in Christ that we experience a regeneration of life and an adoption into the family of God, becoming co-heirs with Jesus.

July 17th

Isaiah 24:1-27:13; 29:1-24. "Free Gift of Salvation"

"God saved you by His special favor when you believed. And you can't take credit for this; it is a gift from God. Salvation is not a reward for the good things we have done, so none of us can boast about it" – Ephesians 2:8-9

I was once asked how I respond to God for His gift of salvation, considering that not everyone will receive that gift. I think that the gratitude and joy expressed in Isaiah 25:9 sums it up well. There is nothing more and nothing less that can be done in response to God's salvation than to just praise Him. You cannot claim credit for your salvation, for you did not earn it. And it is not that your faith is greater than the next person, for the faith to believe is from God Himself (John 6:44, 65).

Any time you find yourself feeling proud and satisfied about your faith when standing before God, instead of feeling humble and gracious, that is an attitude that should be repented of. The only right response toward our salvation is one of worship and gratitude for the free gift that God has given us.

July 18th

Isaiah 30:1-33:24. "Salvation is in Christ Alone"

"Jesus said to him, 'I am the way, and the truth, and the life, no one comes to the Father but through Me.'" – John 14:6

In today's reading, Isaiah warns God's people about relying on outside help for their salvation. Israel as a small nation was weak at this point in history because of civil war and rebelliousness toward God. It was tempting to rely on Egypt's help in battling the Assyrians instead of relying solely on the Lord.

These international relationships and the need for Israel as a nation to rely on the Lord (Isa. 31:1) is representative of our need to rely on the Lord for our own salvation.

Our salvation is based in the Lord and our standing as righteous before Him is because of the work of Christ and His imputed righteousness in our life. However, many times we attempt to attain righteousness through our own efforts. Any time we add lists of dos and don'ts to our relationship with God, it makes our faith about earning righteousness.

May you begin to see your salvation as complete in the work of Christ, and that you cannot do more than He has already done.

Day 200 – July 19th

Isaiah 34:1-35:10; Micah 2:1-5:15. "License to Sin?"

"Well then, should we keep on sinning so that God can show us more and more kindness and forgiveness? Of course not! Since we have died to sin, how can we continue to live in it?" – Romans 6:1-2

In the days that Micah prophesied, Israel was proud and arrogant of their standing before the Lord. They had ignored the need for obedience and holiness and had relied on their position as God's covenant people. They believed they could act however they wanted without any consequences because the Lord had chosen Jerusalem as His dwelling place (3:11).

A false understanding of grace and our assurance of salvation can lead us into a similar way of living. However, Paul makes it clear in the above verse that grace is not a license to sin but, on the contrary, the new man in Christ is to have nothing to do with sin and is to live by righteousness.

This is not to say that we must be perfect or that our salvation or sanctification is totally based on our obedience and holiness. Rather, the way in which we live is not a means to righteousness, but rather is in response to the great salvation we have in Christ.

July 20th

2 Kings 18:13-37; 2 Chronicles 32:1-8; Isaiah 36:1-22; Micah 6:1-7:20.

"Foolishness of the Cross"

Recently I watched an episode of Nightline, in which they moderated a debate between Christians and atheists. The atheists in the debate worked hard at making the Christian gospel sound foolish. Of course, this would come as no surprise to the Apostle Paul who declared in his own day that the message of the cross, the gospel, was foolishness to those who don't believe (1 Cor. 1:18).

This dynamic seems to parallel the scene that is taking place in 2 Kings 18 and Isaiah 36. King Sennacherib's representative mocks the idea of trusting in the Lord for Jerusalem's deliverance. Even in the Old Testament, those who did not know the Lord were unable to comprehend His power to save and deliver His people.

Do not be surprised when you are mocked or scorned for trusting in Jesus for your salvation. Do not respond harshly, but rather may you "live wisely among those who are not Christians, and make the most of every opportunity (Col. 4:5).

July 21st

2 Kings 19:1-37; 2 Chronicles 32:9-23; Isaiah 37:1-38. "Saved from the Power of Sin"

"You have died with Christ, and He has set you free from the evil powers of this world." – Colossians 2:20

Today we have read the magnificent account of how God responded to the faith of Hezekiah and Isaiah and delivered Jerusalem from the armies of the Assyrians. While nothing is too difficult for God (Jer. 32:17), the defeat of the Assyrian army was no small thing. The Assyrians were the dominant nation in the region at that time. The army they had amassed was over 185,000 troops, and they had already taken the northern territory of Israel into captivity. To say the least, the Assyrians were powerful and had every reason to be in control of Jerusalem except for the intervention of the Lord.

In a similar way, sin has power and control in the lives of people. It is only when someone experiences salvation from the Lord through faith in Christ Jesus

that they are set free from this power. And not only that, but every time we choose obedience instead of sin we are saved from the power of sin.

July 22nd

2 Kings 20:1-19; 2 Chronicles 32:24-31; Isaiah 38:1-39:8. "Saved from the Presence of Sin"

"He will remove all their sorrows, and there will be no more death or sorrow or crying or pain. For the old world and its evils are gone forever." – Revelation 21:4

Hezekiah's poem (Isaiah 38:10-20) is a beautiful response of praise to the healing that he experienced from the Lord. In verse 17, I think we see a foreshadowing of the experience we will have when God totally does away with sin and death.

This is the third level of our salvation experience. Not only are we saved from the penalty and the power of sin, but we will also be saved from the presence of sin. And it is at that point that we will no longer have to deal with the curse of sin, for that will have been done away with and all things will be made new.

What it will be like when that curse is lifted is impossible to fully know. But what we can know is the hope of salvation that comes from knowing Jesus Christ.

May you with great anticipation long for that day when we will finally experience the fullness of our salvation.

Week 30

July 23 - July 29

2 Kings 20:20-22:2; 2 Chronicles 32:32-34:7; Isaiah 40-66;
Jeremiah 1:1-2:22

"If a man had half as much foresight as he has twice as much hindsight, he'd be a lot better off." –Robert J. Burdette

The theme of the week is primarily that of learning from the past, although there is a great deal of looking to the future as well. As you explore what learning from the past really means, you will need to discover the place for proper perspectives and earnest applications. It is truly a journey we are on, so may we learn as we go.

July 23rd

Isaiah 40:1-44:5. "Learning Lessons Through Time"

From chapter 40 of Isaiah on to the end of the book you will read of specific events to take place several centuries into the future. Isaiah will describe the Babylonian captivity of Judah and then Judah's release from 70 years of captivity (almost 200 years after Isaiah prophesies). Isaiah prophesies the fall of the Babylonian empire, and its method. Isaiah also details the coming and suffering of Jesus Christ (700 years later).

Isaiah's message no doubt exhorts the hearers to follow after God and turn from disobedience. The miracle of looking ahead to what the future holds gives obvious credence to that fact. Yet so does the ability to look back. At one point he condemns the idols people honored, and asked, "Can those things tell us what happened long ago or what the future holds? ...They are less than nothing and can do nothing at all" (41:22-24). Humans have more ability than that. In the next chapter the people are criticized for "not applying the lessons from the past" (v. 23). Learn from the lessons of time.

July 24th

Isaiah 44:6-48:11. "What is Your I Focused On?"

"You can always recognize an egotist by the gleam in his I." That "I" can get us in a lot of trouble. The center of pride is "I". Ignore begins with "I".

We can get in trouble ignoring something pride keeps us from following. In chapter 48, verse three, God tells the people, "Time and again I warned you about what was going to happen in the future. Then suddenly I took action, and all my predictions came true. I know how stubborn and obstinate you are."

Once more it has been made clear to us that we can learn from the past, and moreover we had better heed what God says about the future. Furthermore, don't let "I" get in the way. We have the natural tendency to get wrapped up with "I". We buy and achieve to make "I" look good, but it is possible

that an obsession with “I” could pave the way to one day allowing “disaster to overtake us suddenly” (47:11).

May the gleam in your I be for your Savior.

July 25th

Isaiah 48:12-52:12. “Who’s Forsaking Who”

“Be strong and courageous! ...the LORD your God will go ahead of you. He will neither fail you nor forsake you” (Deut. 31:6). Joshua and the Hebrews who were about to enter the Promised Land found great comfort in those words.

After floating around in the ark for a year I would imagine Noah could have wondered if God had forgotten about them. After 70 years in captivity apparently some of the Jews felt God had forgotten about them (prophetically declared). God’s reply was, “Never! Can a mother forget her nursing child? Can she feel no love for a child she has borne? But even if that were possible, I would not forget you! See, I have written your name on my hand” (49:15).

Will God forsake us? No. Can it feel as though He has? Yes, but it’s not coming from His direction. Perhaps the feeling comes from discipline we are enduring like the Jews, or from a lack of patience and trouble resting in God’s timing, or most likely from the fact that we have put God on a back burner.

July 26th

Isaiah 52:13-57:21. “Old Testament Gospel”

From 52:13 to the end of chapter 53 nearly every verse has a prophetic statement of Jesus Christ and the suffering He was to endure. It is central to the passage from chapter 40 to the end. The section is broken up into five stanzas of three verses each. The passage is quoted more frequently in the New Testament than any other Old Testament passage. In fact, it is often referred to as the “gospel” in the Old Testament.

The Hebrews anticipated a messianic (anointed) deliverer coming to save them from their enemies. Generally, they felt He would come in the figure of a great political ruler. Therefore, passages such as this one in Isaiah tended to be ignored. The concept of a suffering Servant Messiah was one they would rather overlook.

Jesus perfectly fulfilled all the prophecies of the Messiah. Still, there is something somber to be reminded of His suffering. Let the written descriptions

become a visual description. Don't allow the words to let you miss the image, the pain, the humility, the rejection, the injustice, the price, the love, the sacrifice, etc.

July 27th

Isaiah 58:1-63:14. "The Right Time"

A sign over a clock in school read, "Time will pass. Will you?"

Many of this week's passages have been providing us with unique perspectives on time, past and future. Yet at the close of chapter 60 we have one of the best statements about time: "I, the LORD, will bring it all to pass at the right time." It's not just the aspect of perfect timing, but it is also the facet of the perfect controller, the LORD. Man will not bring it to pass at the perfect time. Neither creation nor chance will bring it to pass at the right time. Only God can bring it to pass at the right time, and only God knows what to bring and how to bring it to pass at the right time.

There is a "right time" for everything, whether it is for us personally this week or for all of mankind 1,000 years from now. Although I may have my struggles from time to time with impatience or discontentment, I truly am genuinely glad to know God has the timing for everything all figured out.

July 28th

2 Kings 20:20-21; 2 Chronicles 32:32-33; Isaiah 63:15-66:24. "Looking In"

"How ignorant can they be?" I can read passages day after day that describe how people mess up, everyone from a king to a common Israelite. Seemingly one minute they will see the hand of God in a powerful way and then two sentences later they have totally turned the wrong way. There are two things I need to remind myself of. One, from one sentence to the next you could have a gap of 20 years. Perhaps not overnight, but in time each of us have the capacity to become more complacent and less committed. The second thing I need to be aware of and evaluating is my personal walk. Do I have rebellious or spiritually ignorant tendencies? Am I negligent in feeding the hungry, working for justice, obeying God's Word, caring for the poor, or serving

wholeheartedly? Do I faithfully stand with a humble and contrite heart, trembling at the Lord's word? (see Isa. 66:2)

If God chose to dedicate a section of Scripture to describing your life how would it read?

July 29th

2 Kings 21:1-22:2; 2 Chronicles 33:1-34:7; Jeremiah 1:1-2:22. "How Bad is Your Past?"

How bad is your past? Is it as ugly as Manasseh's? He led the nation of Judah to do more evil than even the pagan nations were guilty of. He built pagan altars everywhere, even inside the Temple. He worshipped everything from stars to idols. He practiced sorcery, divination, and witchcraft, and consulted with mediums and psychics. He even sacrificed his own sons in the fire. I doubt your past was that bad.

It took capture by the enemy to reduce Manasseh's pride. The Assyrians put a ring through his nose, bound him in chains, and led him away. While a prisoner, "in deep distress," he cried out humbly to God. "He prayed, the Lord listened to him and was moved by his request for help. So, the Lord let him return to Jerusalem and to his kingdom" (2 Chr. 33:13).

If God can forgive the past sins of Manasseh, there is no doubt that he can forgive anyone. Don't become so guilt-ridden that you fail to come to the One who has the power to heal and forgive anyone.

Week 31

July 30 - August 5

2 Kings 22:3-24:4; 2 Chronicles 34:8-36:5; Jeremiah 2:23-6:30; 22:1-23; chs. 25-26, 36, 45-48; Nahum 1-3; Habakkuk 1-3; Zephaniah 1-3

This week's theme has to do with the justice and wrath of God. Charles Swindoll wrote the following;

Surely this phrase, "the wrath of God," is greatly misunderstood. Many, invariably think of some sort of peeved deity, a kind of cosmic, terrible-tempered Mr. Bang, who indulges in violent, uncontrolled displays of temper when human beings do not do what they ought to do. But such a concept only reveals the limitations of our understanding. The Bible never deals with the wrath of God that way. According to the Scriptures, the wrath of God is God's moral integrity. When man refuses to yield himself to God, he creates certain conditions, not only for himself but for others as well, which God has ordained for harm. It is God who makes evil result in sorrow, heartache, injustice, and despair. It is God's way of saying to man, "Now look, you must face the truth. You were made for Me. If you decide that you don't want Me, then you will have to bear the consequences." The absence of God is destructive to human life. That absence is God's wrath. And God cannot withhold it. In His moral integrity, He insists

that these things should occur as a result of our disobedience. He sets man's sin and His wrath in the same frame. (*Living Above the Level of Mediocrity*)

July 30th

Jeremiah 2:23-5:19. "Catch Me, Now!"

When I was three-years-old our family was playing in the swimming pool at the trailer court where we lived. My dad was in the pool catching me as I jumped from the side. This continued for quite some time until my dad started playing with my younger brother. Dad had told me he was going to play with Tim, and had warned me not to jump. But there I was, and he had his back to me, but somehow, I still figured he would catch me if I jumped in. He didn't... but fortunately a long-armed friend was there to pull me up from the bottom of the pool. When I came up, I was mad. My dad had abandoned me to die a horrible death (at least that was my perspective).

That's the kind of perspective that Israel had. "Why do you accuse Me of doing wrong? You are the ones who have rebelled, says the LORD" (2:29). We often get mad at God because He doesn't continue to catch us even though we may not be obeying.

July 31st

2 Kings 22:3-20; 2 Chronicles 34:8-28; Jeremiah 5:20-6:30. "Rewarded Repentance"

The scroll containing the Book of the Law was found in the Temple and read to King Josiah. After hearing the words, Josiah humbled himself before God in sorrow and repentance and tore his clothing and wept. His immediate response had a bearing on God's response. Josiah pleaded with the high priest to speak to the LORD on behalf of himself and the entire nation. Josiah instantly knew that the nation had not followed the LORD and His Word for many generations, and that God's wrath had been poured out against them as a result.

The Lord told Josiah that because of how he responded He would not bring disaster to him or the nation during his reign. It's important to note that

Josiah didn't recline after hearing that and breathe a sigh of relief. No, instead he summoned the nation—every leader, priest and commoner—to come to the Temple and listen to the words of the Book of the Law. He pledged to obey every word in it, and asked the nation to make a similar pledge. How does God's Word affect you?

August 1st

2 Kings 23:1-28; 2 Chronicles 34:29-35:19; Nahum 1-3. "His Wrath"

"When God saw that the Ninevites from Assyria had put a stop to their evil ways, he had mercy on them and didn't carry out the destruction he had planned." That is a quote from the book of Jonah 100 years before Nahum, and 150 before the fall of Nineveh and Assyria. Jonah had preached the gospel to the 120,000 who lived in the city and they repented.

The Assyrians were a great but evil empire, but things changed for a time, long enough for God to temporarily put off his judgment. Yet after the passing of a generation or two they returned to their evil ways, and were in fact the tool God used to conquer Israel in 722 BC. Assyria was a proud and wicked empire and Nahum prophesied that God's wrath was about to bring about their destruction, but listen to how Nahum describes God's justice; "The LORD is slow to get angry, but his power is great, and he never lets the guilty go unpunished" (1:3). It's slow but sure, great but direct, severe but fair.

August 2nd

Habakkuk 1-3; Zephaniah 1:1-2:7. "Questions and Answers"

Imagine the opportunity to physically sit across from God and ask Him questions. Many times, I've yearned for that kind of opportunity. Habakkuk is describing that kind of situation, via a vision.

Habakkuk asks God if He's even been listening to his calls for help. Habakkuk asks God if He's aware of all the sin and violence taking place in Judah. God answers with a yes, and that He is sending the Babylonians to punish Judah. I don't think Habakkuk liked the answer he got because his next questions were asking God why He would not protect and help Judah. That's often typical of us—sometimes we don't like the answer we get.

The majority of the first chapter contains the questions Habakkuk asked God, and the second chapter contains God's answers and what He will also do to Babylon. In the third chapter Habakkuk concludes the book with a prayer of

triumph. His questions were answered and he rejoices in his new understanding of God's love, power, and sovereignty. Through faith and trust may our appreciation of God grow each day.

August 3rd

2 Kings 23:29-30; 2 Chronicles 35:20-27; Jeremiah 47-48; Zephaniah 2:8-3:20.
"My Decision"

Zephaniah's prophetic message contains words of warning and judgment for Judah if they don't repent and humble themselves before God. It also contains words of judgment against the enemies of Judah. By the end of the book a powerful message of hope becomes very clear. God is watching out for His people and in the end they will be brought home and restored before the LORD.

However, in the midst of this message there is a small unassuming phrase that represents the core of this week's theme. God has been discussing His plans in the prior passage and then He makes the comment in the middle of 3:8, "For it is My decision to..." Although some people may think that sounds insensitive, I find it reassuring. The God of creation who can see to the end of time has everything under control and His plan will not be changed by our mortal short-sighted wishes to see something different. It is His decision. Trust Him with whatever you are struggling through right now.

August 4th

2 Kings 23:31-24:4; 2 Chronicles 36:1-5; Jeremiah 22:1-23; 25:1-14; 26:1-24. "It's in the Application"

Jeremiah 26 elaborates on the evil of King Jehoiakim and the nation at that time. The prophet Jeremiah does exactly as God asks of him and stands before the leaders announcing the judgment of God if they do not change. For their wickedness God was to destroy the temple at Shiloh. But what was the response after Jeremiah shared the message? "Kill him!" they shouted, and the people mobbed him. They threatened him and accused him of being a traitor, a capital offense.

Jeremiah reminded them that if they repented God would not bring about this disaster, but if they killed him it would only prove their evil. Some of the old

men remembered how King Hezekiah had listened to a prophet and his kingdom was saved from disaster after they repented. So, they let Jeremiah go. But they missed the point! They let Jeremiah live but they did not change, they did not repent. And within a very short amount of time they were conquered by Babylon. Lesson: Don't miss the point. Apply things personally.

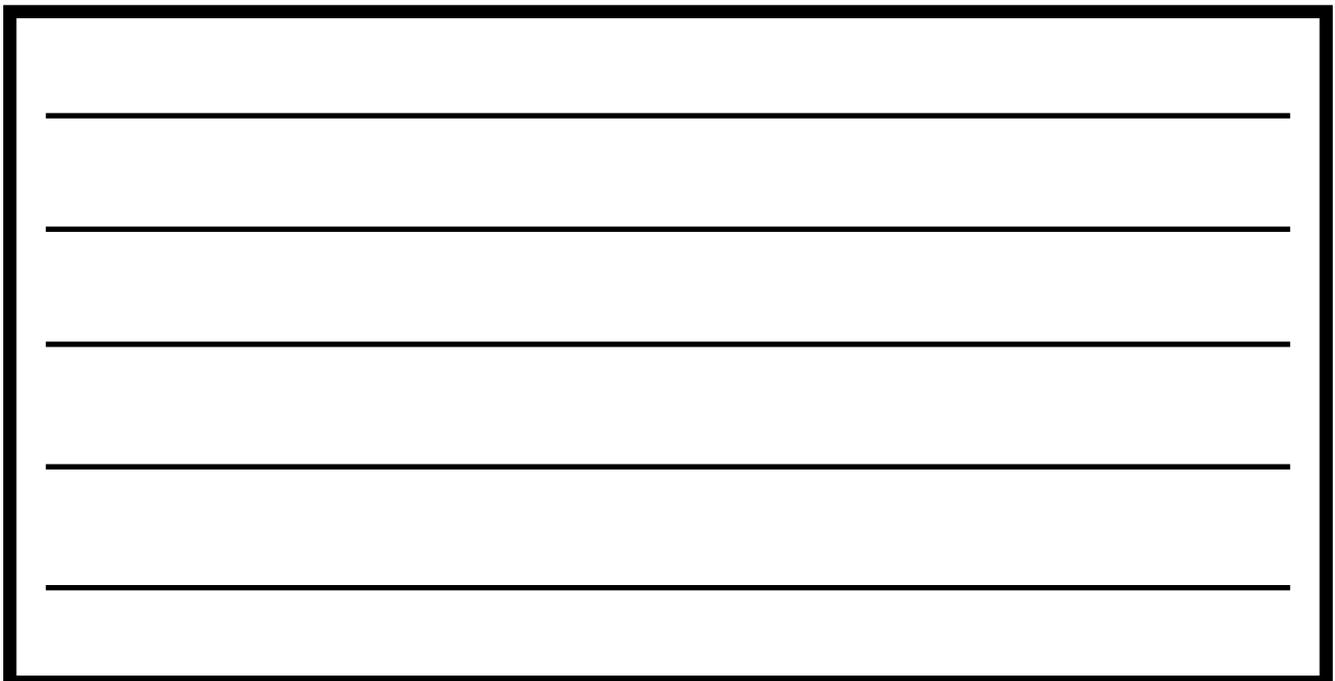
August 5th

Jeremiah 25:15-38; 36:1-32; 45:1-46:28. "The Purpose of His Wrath"

"...The cup of anger from the LORD..." (Jer. 25:17)

If we were to make a list of what brings about God's wrath what would it contain? In our reading up to this point here are some of the items we have read that have brought about His wrath: Apostasy (2 Chr. 34:24-25), Sympathy with evil (Lev. 10:1-6), Unfaithfulness (Josh. 22:20), Provocations (2 Kings 23:26), Fellowship with evil (2 Chr. 19:2), Mockery (2 Chr. 36:16), Idolatry (Judg. 2:111-14; Ps. 78:58-59), Intermarriage (Ezra 10:10-14), Profaning the Sabbath (Neh. 13:18), Speaking against God (Ps. 78:19-21), Sin (Num. 32:10-15), Unbelief (Ps. 78:21-22), Error (2 Sam. 6:7), Disobedience (Josh. 7:1, 11-12).

God's wrath appears when His desires are ignored, yet even in that there is purpose. "According to the Scriptures, the wrath of God is God's moral integrity." His wrath is that attempt to bring man back on course when he takes a dangerous path. Though God's wrath is powerful and great it is also slow, fair, and just.



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Week 32

August 6 - August 12

2 Kings 24:5-9; 2 Chronicles 36:6-9; Jeremiah 7-20; 22:24-24:10; 29:1-31:14;
49:1-33; Daniel 1-3

As a pastor I have often been reminded of the power and effectiveness of a fitting illustration. As a student I am reminded of this principle time and again. My capacity to learn, retain and understand things increases with illustrations. As you read Scripture it is very apparent that God is aware of that tendency in us. He is always using illustrations and word pictures, or just simply showing us how to do something. For example; Jesus called out to them, "Come, follow me, and *I will show you* how to fish for people!" (Mark 1:17)

The reading passages this week will each focus on a specific illustration, object lesson or visual aid.

August 6th

Jeremiah 19-20; Daniel 1. "Better or Broken"

Smash! Bang! Crack! No, it's not the scenes from a Batman series fight. It's the sound of a large clay jar being shattered as it's thrown to the ground.

In the preceding chapter Jeremiah is at the pottery shop and a lesson is given concerning the potter and the clay, but now the illustration is made with the finished product, something unable to reshape. God evidently thought the Israelites were missing some of the seriousness and finality to Jeremiah's repeated message of coming judgment, so God lays out this outline for him to follow; first, present the peoples sins, next, raise and smash the clay jar you bought, then, inform the people that this will happen to them!

It was a powerful message and one would like to think it produced tremendous results. In reality the result was a beating and prison time for Jeremiah. The message obviously struck some chord of conviction. I warned someone about a direction in life they were headed and recently found that they ignored the warning and are suffering the consequences. Cultivate a soft heart to hear God's words.

August 7th

Jeremiah 7:1-8:3; Daniel 2-3. "Idols and Images"

The image of Daniel two is that of a statue with various layers representing various world empires. However, a rock representing God's kingdom crushed the entire statue. King Nebuchadnezzar concludes that if his portion of the image in the dream was the head of gold which represented a limited time period then why not make an entire statue of gold representing a timeless empire. He then commanded the people to bow to that. Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego would not bow down to the image or what the image represented—a defiance against God's plan.

God frequently commands us not to surrender to idols. Why? What harm is there in bowing to a golden image? Daniels friends knew the whole picture. We tend to think of an image, but it's much larger than that. If we surrender to anything other than God, we have made a statement about our lack of trust or

faith in His plan and power. Other than an image (idol), what do you have the potential of surrendering to? (e.g. complacency, greed, a desire for status—popularity in the community, wealth, the one people listen to, etc.)

August 8th

Jeremiah 8:4-11:23. "A Broken Heart"

"Do not be afraid of showing your affection. Be warm and tender, thoughtful and affectionate. Men are more helped by sympathy, than by service; love is more than money, and a kind word will give more pleasure than a present." - John Lubbock (1834-1913)

The illustration today is that of a broken heart (8:18). We know what that depicts. It's not really broken, but it really hurts. Jeremiah witnessed the sorrow of his nation and Jeremiah felt their sorrow as though it was his own. Judah had turned from God and was reaping the penalty. Although he knew the reason for it, Jeremiah still had compassion for the suffering.

Sympathy and compassion are attributes every Christian should possess. Halford Luccock, defined sympathy as "your pain in my heart." How genuinely do you feel the pain of others? When was the last time you wept over someone?

"Sympathy is a virtue unknown in nature." - Paul Eipper (1891-1964)

"Next to love, sympathy is the divinest passion of the human heart." - Edmund Burke (1729-1797)

August 9th

Jeremiah 12-15. "Clean Linen"

Jeremiah, being a priest, was familiar with linen as it was the material of which the priests' garments were made. The belt was worn close to the skin. The linen belt was to be representative of an intimate relationship between God and Judah (13:11).

But then Jeremiah is instructed to bury it, then come back after a long time and recover it. By then the belt was ruined. It illustrated how Judah, after leaving the care of God, would come to ruin.

This is true of all people. There is a passage in Romans, chapter one, which describes the same process; "Yes, they knew God, but they wouldn't worship Him... their minds became dark... So God let them go ahead and do what their hearts desired. As a result they did vile and degrading things... That is why God abandoned them to their shameful desires..."

If we turn away from the One who can keep us clean should we be surprised if we get dirty? A life walking away from an intimate relationship with the Savior will only lead to ruin.

August 10th

Jeremiah 16, 17, 18, 35. "Turning Clay"

I remember my first experiences at the potter's wheel. It wasn't safe to be anywhere near me. With the centrifugal force of the wheel, a chunk of clay can fly a long way. Of course, even if something did stay on the wheel it didn't mean it was going to look good. Some of the things I first turned were too thick, and others too thin, and some were so warped that people just assumed they were abstract art (and I never told them otherwise).

I restarted and reformed so many pieces that were not turning right or just didn't look right. Sometimes the clay itself would be too dry. Sometimes it would have hidden air pockets (which don't last through the fire).

A lot of things can happen while you're working clay, but I have never had my clay tell me what it wanted or didn't want. God is the potter and we are the

clay. Don't rebel against that but embrace it. Surrender to God's plans for your life. Let God shape you now so that you will not harden the wrong way (consider the next chapter talking about the jar Jeremiah shattered).

August 11th

2 Kings 24:5-9; 2 Chronicles 36:6-9; Jeremiah 22:24-23:32; 49:1-33. "Judging the Shepherds"

"Dear brothers and sisters, not many of you should become teachers in the church, for we who teach will be judged by God with greater strictness" (James 3:1).

James knew there was nothing wrong with aspiring to teach but he was fully aware of an additional responsibility that came with the position. James had read these same passages we are reading today. He knew how the life of a leader could affect others. God made that very clear in the passages today. God accused the present leaders of Judah with leading God's flock to destruction and abandonment (Jer. 23:2). Therefore, He declares; "I will send disaster upon the leaders of my people—the shepherds of my sheep—for they have destroyed and scattered the very ones they were expected to care for."

God expects us to be serious with the gifts and positions he has given to each of us. There is nothing flippant about the way God bestows things upon us, nor in the way He expects us to act. He has entrusted each us with something special. How are you tending what He has entrusted to you?

August 12th

Jeremiah 23:33-24:10; 29:1-31:14. "Spoiled due to lack of Discipline"

"Spoiled children are more tolerated in homes than spoiled food."

I read this quote and thought of the illustration in chapter 24 of the two baskets. One is filled with good figs, and the other is filled with spoiled figs that could not be eaten. God then explains what each basket of figs is representing. The good figs represent those Judeans who go through the discipline and will return to the land. The spoiled figs represent those Judeans who ran from the discipline. Neither group was better at the beginning, but in the end, discipline was to refine them (Jer. 21:9).

We describe a spoiled child as a manipulative, unpleasant youth who lacks discipline. Spoiled figs are here analogous of the same predicament, yet with adults. None of us appreciate receiving discipline at the time (Heb. 12:11), and on the flip side, it's often uncomfortable to have to discipline others (e.g. our children). Discipline from God proves His love for us (see Heb. 12). Don't be discouraged when God corrects you. "He corrects those He loves, just as a father corrects a child in whom he delights" (Prov. 3:11-12).



A large rectangular box with a thick black border, containing five horizontal lines for writing.

Week 33

August 13 - August 19

2 Kings 24:10-20; 1 Chronicles 3:10-16; 2 Chronicles 36:10-14; Jeremiah 27:1-28:17; 31:15-40, 37:13-38:28; 51:15-52:3a; Ezekiel 1:1-16:63

The reading for this week will deal with Israel in exile. While there are still some who remain in Jerusalem, the main shift of the Scriptures has been on those who are living in exile in Babylon. Particularly we see this in Ezekiel, whose ministry was directly to God's people living in exile. Because they were dark days for God's people, both those left in Jerusalem and those in exile, there is a recurring theme of hope that we will be looking at this week.

August 13th

Jeremiah 31:15-40; 49:34-51:14. "New Covenant"

The days in which Jeremiah ministered were certainly dark days. Judah as a nation was falling apart and God's covenant people, the Israelites, had essentially abandoned God at this point. However, as you read today, because of God's faithfulness there is still hope.

Jeremiah 31:31-34 delivers the promise of a new covenant. It is the covenant that Jesus spoke of during the last supper (Matt. 26:28). It is the covenant that was sealed with the shed blood of Christ. And it is this passage from Jeremiah that was quoted by the author of Hebrews as he contrasted the new and the old covenants (Heb. 8:8-12)

It is a better covenant (Heb. 8:6) because it involves an internal change. Instead of being focused on external obedience and works, Jeremiah says that God will write His word on their hearts. We, as members of this new and better covenant, have the word of God emblazoned on our hearts through the ministry of the Holy Spirit.

It was this promise of a future covenant that gave hope to the faithful few in Jeremiah's day and it continues to give us hope as well.

August 14th

2 Kings 24:10-20; 1 Chronicles 3:10-16; 2 Chronicles 36:10-14; Jeremiah 37:1-10; 51:15-58; 52:1-3a. "False Hope"

Ever since the kingdom of Israel became divided under Rehoboam (1 Kings 12), the kings of both Israel and Judah led God's people through a downward spiral of idolatry and disobedience. This had resulted in Israel no longer being a major player on the world political scene as it had been under David and Solomon. We see in Jeremiah 37 that the only relief Israel had from the Babylonians was when Egypt threatened to attack. While this gave Judah some hope, Jeremiah was quick to point out that trusting in Egypt was a false hope.

False hope can be quite devastating. As we see in the Old Testament, anytime God's people trusted anyone or anything other than the Lord, it resulted in a false hope. I think this is a key lesson for us to glean from the Old Testament. Anytime we trust someone other than the Lord, including ourselves, for our salvation or for the strength to battle temptation, it will result in tragedy.

August 15th

Jeremiah 37:11-38:28; Ezekiel 1:1- 3:15. "God's Omnipresence"

Leaving home for an unfamiliar world can indeed be a frightening experience. It will be an experience that will be repeated thousands of times in the coming weeks by young men and women heading off to college. For the Christian, it is helpful and comforting to know that God is there with you in that new and different place.

This is also a truth that God's people who were living in exile in Babylon needed to know. Because the Jewish system of worship was centered around the temple in Jerusalem as the dwelling place of the Lord, it was especially difficult for these exiles to understand that God is omnipresent and is not limited to a single physical location. The vision Ezekiel received served to accomplish just that. The wheels moving in every direction speaks to God's ability to be present in every situation everywhere.

All of us have that place where God feels especially present and that place where we always feel like we are home. However, we can know and have confidence that, no matter where we are, God will be present with us and our relationship with Him is not dependent upon a location or building.

August 16th

Jeremiah 27:1-28:17; 51:59-64; Ezekiel 3:16-4:17. "Hope Springs Eternal"

Those of you who know me, know that I love baseball. The game is a wonderful gift from God, in my opinion. Someone once said that the great thing about baseball (professional baseball that is) is that every team goes into the season knowing they will win sixty games and lose sixty games and the rest of them are up for grabs. This gives each team hope in Spring Training.

Ezekiel received a similar statement of hope in 3:27. The Lord told Ezekiel that, when he delivers a message from the Lord, "some will listen, but some will ignore you." What a comfort and hope to know that some will listen.

We too can share in that hope and comfort Ezekiel had when we share the gospel message. Scripture teaches us that God indeed has elected some to believe in Him. So, while everyone with whom we share the gospel may not repent and believe, we can have the confidence that some will. And since we do not know whom God has elected, we are to obediently move forward with the command to preach the word, knowing that some will believe. – *David Curtis*

August 17th

Ezekiel 5:1-9:11. "That's Not a Threat, It's a Promise"

"For I am the LORD! What I threaten always happens." – Ezekiel 12:25

Ezekiel paints a very bleak picture for the fate of God's people. But for those who have been reading the Scriptures closely, it should come as no surprise, because Moses informed Israel as to what would happen if they refused to listen to the Lord (Deuteronomy 28:15-68). Even though God is pouring out His judgment on Israel, there is hope in knowing that He is fulfilling His promises by doing so. This is because there is more to God's promises in Deuteronomy than just words of destruction. Two chapters later in Deuteronomy 30:1-10, Moses prophesies concerning God's promise of restoration when those who remain repent and return to the Lord.

While many of us make idle threats, the Lord doesn't. His promises are real and trustworthy. Reading about God fulfilling His promise of judgment reinforces our hope of salvation and the promises that we have in Christ.

August 18th

Ezekiel 10:1-13:23. "Personal Relationship"

At the start of this week, we read about the coming of the new covenant in Jeremiah 31:31-34. In God's expression of hope to Israel through the prophet Ezekiel, we read more details of the coming covenant (Ezekiel 11:14-21). As part of the new covenant, God will do a heart transplant in His people, removing the old heart of stone and replacing it with a heart of flesh that obeys God. This is a picture of what happens in the lives of Christians today. When we come to faith in Christ, God regenerates that life and puts in them a new heart and his Holy Spirit, who now enables them to follow God.

Another element of the new covenant mentioned in this passage is the emphasis on personal relationship with God. "Then they will truly be My people, and I will be their God" (11:20b). While Israel belonged to God as His covenant people, whom He had redeemed, under the new covenant the personal connection we have with the Lord is stronger because of the Holy Spirit, who indwells each believer.

August 19th

Ezekiel 14:1-16:63. "Righteousness of Christ"

"All our righteous acts are like filthy rags" – Isaiah 64:6

In Ezekiel 14, the Lord patiently reveals to His people that they have no hope of avoiding His judgments. The point that He is repeatedly making is that your righteousness cannot save you from God's judgment. He further strengthens the point by declaring that even the righteousness of Noah, Daniel and Job would not spare the people of judgment. This statement rings true for us as well because our righteousness is not sufficient to save us in the face of God's judgment.

Praise be to God that the story does not end there, for we have a glorious hope in our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Because of the life, death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus we can, through faith, have His righteousness credited to our account. This is the only way we can know and experience the hope of salvation. Attempting to avoid God's wrath by our own righteousness is as futile for us today as it was in Ezekiel's day.



Week 34

August 20 - August 26

2 Kings 24:20b-25:21; 2 Chronicles 36:15-21; Jeremiah 21, 32-34, 39; 40:1-6; 52:3b-27; Lamentations 1; Ezekiel 17-28; 29:1-16; 30:20-31:18

We just spent the weekend with longtime friends who have fully restored the home he grew up in. It is a beautiful place on a tremendous piece of property. They could tell you firsthand of the work, planning and money spent to tackle such a project. He now has a plethora of new stories about planning departments, architects, permits, unrealistic estimates, and on and on.

There may well be a downside to restoring anything (work, money, etc.), but there is also an upside, and that is the finished project. God offers restoration (reconciliation, salvation and forgiveness) to us, and in a similar way

there was a downside. A tremendous cost was necessary; the death of His Son, Jesus Christ.

As you read this week's passages, note the emphasis on various aspects of restoration.

August 20th

Ezekiel 17-19. "Hope at the End of the Trial"

Adolph Hitler was an avid believer in astrology and consulted with his special astrologist before making any decisions. One day in consulting with him, Hitler asked, "On what day will I die?" "You will die on a Jewish holiday," replied the astrologist. "How can you be so sure of that?" asked Hitler. "Any day you die will be a Jewish holiday," replied the astrologist.

As we continue reading through the books of the prophets, we will frequently be hearing warnings of coming judgment for Israel. Yet there are statements of hope sprinkled throughout the passages that we dare not miss. They are wonderful words of inspiration, promise and hope. In today's passage Ezekiel prophesies of judgment and then ends with words of hope: And the Sovereign LORD says, "I will take a tender shoot from the top of a tall cedar and I will plant it on the top of Israel's highest mountain. It will become a noble cedar..." (17:22).

Occasionally the time of hope is many years away (like this passage referring to the time of the Messiah), but hope is nonetheless there. There *is* hope.

August 21st

Ezekiel 20:1-22:16. "Preventing Decay"

One of the aspects of the dictionary definition for “restore” is “to recover from ruin or decay.” The importance of that spiritually is enormous. Restoration is expressed throughout Scripture, and the facet of its recovering something from decay is foundational. We are ruined and decaying because of sin, and we need the salvation that Jesus Christ offers. Even as believers, each day we must strive to walk in the Spirit and not in the flesh. We need to avoid following the desires of our old sinful nature (Gal. 5). If we choose to go down that road we will be in need of some restoration. In today’s passage the people were in need of a purging, a cleaning (20:38). And even at that, there was hope in the end. God said, “When I bring you home from exile, you will be as pleasing to me as an offering of perfumed incense” (20:41). God cleanses thoroughly.

“Wash me clean from my guilt. Purify me from my sin... Purify me from my sins, and I will be clean; wash me, and I will be whiter than snow.” Psalm 51:2, 7

August 22nd

2 Kings 24:20b-25:2; Jeremiah 39:1; 52:3b-5; Ezekiel 22:17-24:14. “In the Cooking Pot”

Have you ever felt like you were in the “cooking pot”? In the 1987 AFC Championship football game between Cleveland and Denver, Ernest Byner fumbled the ball just as he got ready to score a touchdown. That mistake cost the Cleveland Browns the championship, a trip to the Super Bowl and is what most people remember about Ernest Byner. Even though Ernest Byner had an otherwise stellar fourteen-year career in the NFL and was ranked 16th on the all-time rushing list, many angry Cleveland fans will not forget the “infamous fumble.” His fumble ruined an otherwise impressive performance, as he finished the game with 67 rushing yards, 7 receptions for 120 yards, and 2 touchdowns.

When you’re in the “cooking pot” you wish you could do things over. No one felt that more than Judah. They were under siege for 2 ½ years. If they could back up the clock for a do-over they would. But they had ignored the warnings cried out for years by God’s prophets. Maybe not from a fumble, but most of the time we wind up in the “cooking pot” we have gone there willfully.

August 23rd

Jeremiah 21, 34; Ezekiel 24:15-25:17; 29:1-16; 30:20-31:18. “Crime but No Time?”

Picture the familiar scene: A wrong has been done, a punishment must be made, and the offender is suddenly sorry. It is possible to apologize for getting caught and not for the offense. This was the case with King Zedekiah. He had been warned time and again of God's coming judgment if he would not change. Now the judgment came and suddenly he wanted it taken away. He requested of Jeremiah, "Please ask the LORD to help me... perhaps He will do this for me... and this..." (21:2). He did not admit his sin. He was only sorry for getting caught and having to reap the penalty of which he had been warned often. And then he suggests a few things the Lord could do.

Make it personal as you consider three of the factors in that situation: Have you been guilty of expecting God to get you out of the trouble you put yourself into? Is it easier to ignore God's warnings when things are going well? Is it possible to just use God when it's to our advantage?

August 24th

Jeremiah 32-33; Ezekiel 26:1-14. "Fully Restored"

God's encouraging words of restoration came in the form of promise to Israel. His promises of restoration were part of His plan for Israel. It's important for us to remember that His plan covers everything; the beginning, middle, and end.

His restoration is not haphazard. I can think of some building projects I've been involved in that were not thought through. For instance, a building restoration is a well-planned process. First, you must know the original state or condition of the building. Second, you must know the full extent of decay/disrepair of the current condition. Third, having an accurate picture allows you to know the true cost for the restoration project. Final, after the price is paid and the work completed; the building is once again the beautiful building it was originally created to be.

God had a plan from the beginning concerning Christ's restoration of the kingdom (see Acts 3:21). God also had a plan concerning our restoration: "He has reconciled you to Himself through the death of Christ in His physical body. As a result... you are holy and blameless as you stand before Him without a single fault" (Col. 1:22).

August 25th

2 Kings 25:3-7; Jeremiah 39:2-10; 52:6-11; Ezekiel 26:15-28:26. "Restoration Prophecies"

Bible prophets often spoke of a future restoration of the land of Israel. Many of those prophets lived during times in which their homeland was being conquered and destroyed by a succession of ancient empires. Today, we can see with our own eyes what some of those prophets saw with theirs—the current restoration of Israel—a nation that until 1948 had not been a united and sovereign nation for nearly 3,000 years. Perfect restoration will not come until Christ's return.

Below is a partial list of prophecies concerning the restoration of Israel as a nation: Is. 27:12-13, restore Jews; Is. 35:1-2, restoration of Israel; Is. 43:5-6, worldwide return; Jer. 32:44, Jews buy back land; Ez. 4:3-6, Israel re-established; Ez. 11:17, Israel as their country; Ez. 20:34, Jews return; Ez. 22:14-15, Jews scattered; Ez. 34:13, return to "their own land"; Ez. 36:8-10, restored and repopulated; Ez. 36:11, prosperity; Ez. 36:24, re-gathered; Ez. 36:33-35, rebuilt and resettled; Ez. 37:10-14, brought back to life; Ez. 37:15-19, a united people; Ez. 37:21-22, re-established; Joel 2:22, become prosperous land; Amos 9:11, 13, rebuilt; Amos 9:14-15, regain control; Mic. 7:8-11, rise again; Zech. 8:12, again fruitful.

August 26th

2 Kings 25:8-21; 2 Chronicles 36:15-21; Jeremiah 39:11-40:6; 52:12-27; Lamentations 1. "Time's Up!"

"The LORD, the God of their ancestors, repeatedly sent his prophets to warn them, for he had compassion on his people and his Temple. But the people mocked these messengers of God and despised their words. They scoffed at the prophets until the LORD's anger could no longer be restrained and there was no remedy" (2 Chron. 36:15-16).

Contrary to what many think, the Lord's patience does have a limit. Peter noted, "The Lord isn't really being slow about his promise... No, he is being patient for your sake. He does not want anyone to perish, so he is giving more time... But the day of the Lord will come as unexpectedly as a thief..." (2 Pet. 3:9-10).

Restoration is a beautiful thing, but there will be a time when its offer runs out. You can't rely on waiting until the last minute of your life to get things in order. You may not have that opportunity. The same will be true for mankind historically. There will be a day when the whistle blows, when the trumpet calls. Don't wait too long to receive God's promise of restoration, reconciliation and salvation.



Week 35

August 27 - September 2

2 Kings 25:22-26; 1 Chronicles 4:24-5:26; 6:3b-15, 49; 7:1-8:28; Psalm 137;
Jeremiah 40:7-44:30; 52:28-30; Lamentations 2:1-5:22; Ezekiel 32:1-39:29;
Obadiah

The reality of the exile has set in, and life as the Israelites knew it is gone. They are now living with the consequences of their idolatry and disobedience to the Lord's covenant. Thus, our theme for this week is consequences. Whether we want to admit it or not, we all live with consequences. As we will discover, some consequences are good and some are bad, and all of them are real.

August 27th

Lamentations 2:1-4:22. "Spoiled Children"

"Why should we, mere humans, complain when we are punished for our sins?" – Lamentations 3:39

A sign of maturity in the process of human cognitive and emotional development is the ability to accept consequences for our actions. As a parent of young children, I am fully aware that this is an ability that children must learn as opposed to being born with it.

In the reading today it seems as though the nation of Israel is still learning this lesson. Like a spoiled child who has never been disciplined, Israel responded to the Lord with shock and dismay that He would pour out His anger on them.

In the New Testament, Peter picks up on this theme in 1 Peter 2:20-21. Peter says that you will be rewarded for suffering if you suffer for doing good. However, if we suffer for doing wrong there is no reward.

We all must deal with the consequences for our actions. It doesn't matter if we were right or wrong, every action will bring about some consequence.

– *David Curtis*

August 28th

2 Kings 25:22-26; Jeremiah 40:7-41:18; Lamentations 5:1-22; Obadiah.

"Compassionate Response"

When hurricane Katrina leveled the gulf coast and nearly destroyed the entire city of New Orleans, I heard someone comment on how they felt the city was being judged because of the excessive sin it promotes. Now, I do not pretend to know why God allowed that hurricane and the massive damage that resulted, but I do know that it is not our position to sit back and gloat or to pass judgment even if God is using the disaster to judge or discipline.

This was precisely what Edom did to Israel when God's judgment was carried out by King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon. Because Edom refused to act with compassion towards Israel, God communicated His judgment on them through Obadiah.

So, even if someone is enduring consequences brought on by their own actions, our response is still to extend compassion and mercy.

August 29th

Jeremiah 42:1-44:30; Ezekiel 33:21-33. "Seeking Wisdom"

"The way of a fool seems right to him, but a wise man listens to advice" – Proverbs 12:15 (NIV)

Have you ever found yourself asking for advice and yet you have already concluded in your mind what you think should be done? This is precisely the situation that the leaders of Israel were in. When Jeremiah gave the answer from the Lord, they concluded that Jeremiah must be lying since it didn't match what they thought the Lord would say.

Seeking wisdom and counsel does absolutely no good if you don't listen to it. Routinely we are instructed in Proverbs to seek and listen to counsel.

While none of us can know exactly what the future will hold, it seems that a principle in life is that you will suffer consequences if you ignore wise counsel. It was true for Solomon's son Rehoboam who lost control of 10 of the 12 tribes of Israel because he ignored wise counsel. It was true for the remnant of Israel who ignored Jeremiah and suffered their fate in Egypt.

August 30th

Ezekiel 34:1-36:38. "Forgiveness"

Forgiveness is a really curious thing. All this week we have been thinking about consequences in life. Now, forgiveness is like the exact opposite of consequences. When we are forgiven, the one who forgives decides not to

bring about potential consequences against us. For example, some insurance companies offer what is called accident forgiveness. It used to be a guarantee that your rates would go up if you were in an accident, but if you have accident forgiveness, you don't have to face that consequence.

While Israel did endure consequences and discipline from the Lord for their actions, they did eventually experience restoration. The restoration was based on God's sovereign decision to forgive and to bless His people on account of His covenant faithfulness. It wasn't as if their consequences had changed because they had changed.

In the same way, we can experience forgiveness for our sins because of Jesus' atoning death on the cross. Because of God's sovereign decision to forgive and extend grace, we are freed from the guilt and consequences associated with our sin.

August 31st

Ezekiel 32:1-16; 37:1-39:29. "Taking the Good with the Bad"

In the movie, *It's a Wonderful Life*, the lead character George Bailey, played by James Stewart, makes the statement that he wished he had never been born. Those of you who know the movie know that George was given a glimpse of what his family, friends and whole town would have been like if he had not been born. Even though George Bailey hadn't led a charmed life or accomplished all he had hoped for, he had made a difference in many lives. He realized that life was in fact worth living and was given the opportunity to make things right.

That movie strikes a chord with all of us because we all wonder at times if our life has amounted to anything, if it would change the world if we weren't there.

As we think about consequences, we must recognize that they come in both good and bad varieties, that even the smallest action can be used by God to bring about a positive consequence in someone else's life. If you ever doubt the significance of your life, just think of George Bailey and the lesson he learned.

September 1st

1 Chronicles 4:24-5:17; Psalm 137; Jeremiah 52:28-30; Ezekiel 32:17-33:20.
"Failed Watchmen"

Before the invention of modern fire suppression systems, it was required for a hotel of significant size to employ a watchman during the night hours to alert guests in the case of fire. One such hotel in Omaha, Nebraska had a fire on January 23, 1911, and the watchmen failed to notify the guests of the fire. Therefore, a guest who was forced to use a rope fire escape sued the hotel because of injuries resulting from his escape. The case went to the U.S. Supreme Court where the court upheld the decision to hold the hotel responsible for its negligence in alerting the guests to the fire.

Ezekiel was given a similar charge by God, a responsibility to warn people of God's judgment. It is important to note that Ezekiel wasn't responsible for the peoples' response to his warning; he was merely responsible, as the watchmen, for sounding the warning itself.

The same is true for our sharing the gospel of Jesus Christ. We are not responsible for the consequences one faces for rejecting the gospel, but we are responsible for delivering the message.

September 2nd

1 Chronicles 5:18; 6:3b-15, 49; 7:1 – 8:28. “News of Record”

In our town, the paper has a section called News of Record, which reports every 911 incident and arrests or violations of the law. When appropriate, the names of those involved are listed in the paper. You would think that, because people in this town know they will face public humiliation for breaking the law, even traffic laws, there wouldn't be much to print; however, the section never seems to shrink.

So, the thought occurred to me that merely knowing about the consequences of our actions is not sufficient to prevent us from engaging in destructive or sinful behavior. While it is true that knowledge of the consequences can be a strong deterrent, many of us will choose to sin in spite of those consequences.

God's people diligently studied the Scriptures and knew about the warnings in Deuteronomy regarding the consequences they would face for covenant unfaithfulness, but that didn't stop them from abandoning the Lord.

May you recognize the consequences of your actions before you are forced to endure them.



Week 36

September 3 - September 9

2 Kings 25:27-30; 1 Chronicles 3:17-24; 8:29-9:1a; 2 Chronicles 36:22-23; Ezra 1:1-4:5; Jeremiah 52:31-34; Ezekiel 29:17-30:19; 40-48; Daniel 4-9;

After Jesus healed the paralytic Luke noted that, "Everyone was gripped with great wonder and awe, and they praised God, exclaiming, "We have seen amazing things today!" (5:26). I am impacted that way when I consider the way

God worked through His prophets and some of the tasks and miracles that were performed. The section this week focuses on visions, prophecies and interpretations, and not just seeing the display of the visions but the fulfillment of the visions.

September 3rd

1 Chronicles 8:29-9:1a; Ezekiel 40:1-37; Daniel 4. "Sincere God Sightings"

'Nezzar had a dream that terrified him. None of his "professionals" could interpret it for him. Then Daniel showed up. Daniel knew he could interpret the dream that no one else could. Was he proud? No. In fact, Daniel's reaction to the dream was that he was greatly astonished and perplexed for quite awhile and his thoughts terrified him (4:19). Although this was the ruler responsible for the captivity and destruction of his people Daniel had genuine compassion for him. Daniel had obviously forgiven the king and was now deeply concerned about his physical and spiritual welfare.

What did Daniel believe about the validity of the dream's interpretation? Did Daniel doubt the truthfulness of the interpretation? He was "terrified" because he knew its fulfillment was coming. The visions these prophets experienced were very real. They knew fulfillment was a guarantee which made it all the more powerful. Daniel describes his reaction during one vision; "My strength left me, my face grew deathly pale, and I felt very weak. When I heard him speak, I fainted and lay there with my face to the ground" (10:8).

September 4th

Ezekiel 40:38-43:27. "Always Fulfilled"

The visions God provided for His prophets varied in some degree as to their figurative or literal fulfillments, but their fulfillment itself was never in question. Ezekiel had a vision of the Temple that contained incredible detail. The only question that arises has to do with the time of its complete fulfillment. Was it the Temple Zerubbabel should have built or a Temple to be built during the millennial reign of Christ? However, there is also a symbolic possibility referring to the worship and reign of God (described as perfect honor and absolute holiness—43:9-12).

How much faith do you have in the fulfillment of future events? In hindsight we can observe the perfect fulfillment of hundreds of prophecies concerning Jesus Christ, but to look ahead can we believe every other prophecy will be perfectly fulfilled? Prayerfully you answer a resounding Yes. Rom. 15:4, “the Scriptures give us hope and encouragement as we wait patiently for God’s promises to be fulfilled.” Rev. 10:7, “God’s mysterious plan will be fulfilled.” Rev. 17:17, “the words of God will be fulfilled.”

September 5th

Ezekiel 44-46. “Dirty Faces”

Ezekiel’s vision reminds him of who is to be allowed in the Temple and how they must treat the privilege. Ezekiel was being reminded of the seriousness of entering into God’s Temple. He was made aware of the rules of admission, conduct and dress.

I appreciate reading Ezekiel’s response to seeing God’s glory fill the Temple. It says he fell to the ground with his face in the dirt (44:4). Ezekiel knew the magnitude of what he witnessed, even in a vision. He also knew the significance of God laying down the rules. God did not want His people to forget who was allowed in His Temple and how they were to handle entering into His presence. Those who were allowed into God’s presence were only those who had been circumcised in heart and flesh, in other words, only those who had entirely committed their life to Him (44:9). The Apostle Paul tells us that as believers our bodies are the Temple of God where His Spirit lives (1 Cor. 3 & 6). Have you come to take that for granted or does the thought of that make you fall to the ground with your face in the dirt?

September 6th

2 Kings 25:27-30; Jeremiah 52:31-34; Ezekiel 29:17-30:19; 47:1-48:35. "Fishing the Dead Sea"

With the exception of a rare torrential rain, the Mojave River is always dry. Seeing a fisherman reel in a fish on the bank of that river would be just as amazing as seeing one caught on the Dead Sea. The Dead Sea, 1,300 feet below sea level has many salt pillars at its south end. The Sea is 5-6 times saltier than our ocean, nearly 30% salt. In other words, if you let a cup of water evaporate, eventually almost 1/3 of it would still be full of just salty mineral. It's a fun body of water to float in. You start floating straight up and down before you get to your waist. The downside is that for health reasons you can't stay in it longer than about 15 minutes. Needless to say, there are no fish in it. So, to hear that one day fishermen will stand along its bank catching fish (47:10), well, that describes a miraculous transformation.

Is God in the business of miraculous transformations? Yes, and every one of us are examples of it.

September 7th

Daniel 5, 7-8. "Oh, To Be a Prophet"

King Belshazzar offered to reward Daniel greatly with purple robes of honor, gold chains and a promotion to the third highest in the kingdom just for interpreting the writing on the wall (5:16). Daniel's reputation preceded him. People knew he could do it. He could have opened a little shop called "Divine Daniel's" and have made quite the living interpreting people's dreams. Instead we read that Daniel told the king to "Keep your gifts."

Daniel was God's instrument to the people of his day. God gave Daniel visions explaining the future. Before you conclude, "Oh, that sounds great being a prophet!" let me remind you of some of Daniel's feelings from his visions in chapters seven and eight: "I, Daniel, was troubled by all I had seen, and my visions terrified me" (7:15). "I was terrified by my thoughts and my face was pale with fear" (7:28). "I became so terrified that I fell to the ground" (8:17). "Then I was overcome and lay sick for several days... I was greatly troubled by the vision" (8:27). Take God's words and work seriously.

September 8th

1 Chronicles 3:17-19a; 2 Chronicles 36:22-23; Ezra 1; Daniel 6, 9. "Praying Powerfully"

People who knew Daniel knew that he was a man who prayed fervently. He prayed three times each day and regularly gave thanks to God. We are not let in on the details of what exactly he prayed for and about each time, that is with the exception of one instance in chapter nine.

The situation on Daniel's mind in chapter nine was the soon conclusion of the Israelites 70-year captivity. Because of the prophetic words recorded by the prophet Jeremiah, Daniel knew his people would soon be returning home. And what did it prompt Daniel to do? "I turned to the Lord God and pleaded with Him in prayer and fasting. I wore sackcloth and sprinkled myself with ashes. I prayed to the LORD my God and confessed..." Within the next five paragraphs I counted over two dozen times Daniel uses the word "we," "us" or "our." Daniel identified himself as part of an entire nation who needed to confess their sins to God. Daniel looked inside first. Daniel's plea was answered (see 9:20-23). How committed are you to pray, and how well do you do at it?

September 9th

1 Chronicles 3:19b-24; Ezra 2:1-4:5. "How Big is Our God?"

It's fascinating to review the fulfillment of a prophecy. Isaiah (chs. 44,45,48) prophesied that God would use a man named Cyrus to guarantee the return of Israel's remnant and that Jerusalem and the Temple would be rebuilt. That was 150 years before Cyrus was even born! Now in 538 BC Cyrus releases the captives. What an exciting day it had to be as 50,000 Israelites headed home. That would be a wonderful event to remember and celebrate.

The Israelites celebrated the Festival of Shelters shortly after they settled in. What kind of things do we celebrate? Do we celebrate fulfillments to prophecy? We celebrate the birth and the resurrection of Christ, definite fulfillments to prophecy.

Part of celebrating God making good on a promise is the wonder of the fulfillment. How big does God have to be to make a vision or prophecy come true? How powerful does He have to be to make things come to pass in His specific timing? How compassionate does He have to be to care about bringing things to pass for our good? Are you gripped in wonder and awe of God?

Week 37

September 10 - September 16

Ezra 4:6 --8:36; Esther 1:1-10:3; Daniel 10:1-12:13; Haggai
1:1-2:23; Zechariah 1:1-14:21

This week's theme is on courage. In the readings this week, we will read about the courage of people like Esther and Mordecai whose actions saved the Jewish people. We will also examine the courage of the Jews who began to return to Jerusalem after the time of captivity to rebuild the temple of the Lord.
-D. Curtis

September 10th

Daniel 10:1-12:13; Ezra 4:24-5:1; Haggai 1:1-15. "Courage to Change"

In the past few years I have watched Dr. Phil on a number of occasions. I appreciate his bluntness and what I call "dr-phil-isms." One of my favorite "isms" is when he asks his guest "how's that working for ya?" Having read Haggai again, I realize that he didn't come up with the question. Apparently, God used that question as an effective tool to show His people that they were not meeting His standard (Hag. 1:5, 7).

This question is a tool to help someone see the deficiency in their own actions. Once that objective has been accomplished, the real work of change begins. Zerubbabel and the remnant of God's people responded in obedience and had the courage to change.

We all will realize at some point that either our actions, beliefs or thoughts will need to be changed because they are in conflict with God's will. The question you are faced with is, do you have the courage to change? To make a change requires admitting mistakes and humbling ourselves to see that God's way is best.

May you have the courage to do just that.

September 11th

Ezra 5:2; Haggai 2:1-23; Zechariah 1:1-5:11. "Ghosts of the Past"

I don't know what it is about human nature that makes us nostalgic. I have observed that in just about every area of life, there is something about 'how it used to be' that we view as better. And as we read in Haggai, this can be a discouragement to us in the present.

As the people began to rebuild the temple in Jerusalem, they soon realized that it would not be nearly as impressive as the temple Solomon built. Instead of disregarding that fact, the Lord acknowledged it (Hag. 2:2-3) and then encouraged the people to press on in spite of that fact (2:4-5). His message was, that regardless of how less impressive a building it was, the people were to continue on in the building of it.

No matter what task God has given you to do, whether it is business, ministry, family, whatever it is, you are to take courage and do it regardless of how much better or more successful the past may have been.

May you take courage and fulfill your tasks, knowing that God is with you.

September 12th

Ezra 5:3-6:14a; Zechariah 6:1-8:23. "Surprising Support"

Support and encouragement can come from many different sources and sometimes it can be a little surprising to us. I would imagine that God's people experienced some anxiety and discouragement when the governors of neighboring provinces began to investigate the work they were doing on the temple. There was no guarantee that Darius would honor the edict of the Babylonian King Cyrus, who had gone before him.

However, God saw fit to encourage His people by showing that King Darius fully supported them and included instruction for the governors in the area to support the effort.

It can be very encouraging when our efforts are validated by those who are in authority over us. I am sure that you have experienced this kind of encouragement from parents, teachers or bosses in your life. So, the question is, when was the last time you encouraged someone who has to answer to you?

May you be a surprising source of encouragement for someone today.

September 13th

Zechariah 9:1-14:21. "Day of the Lord"

We are all familiar with the concept of a doomsday prophet, who attempts to strike fear in the hearts of people to bring about repentance today. I remember first seeing them as a child in such movies as Ghostbusters and Superman.

Well, today I want you to consider the possibility that courage is also an appropriate response to the coming events in the Day of the Lord. How is it that a description of those events can be an encouragement to us? It is only because of the victory that we have in Jesus.

Zechariah 14:9 says, "And the Lord will be king over all the earth. On that day there will be one Lord—His name alone will be worshiped." Wow! Now that is something to get excited about. What an encouraging picture. The Lord reigning on earth and He will be the only one receiving praise and worship from His creation. I don't know about you, but that seems far more encouraging to me than the political corruption and idolatry that I see in the world today.

September 14th

Ezra 4:6; 6:14b-22; Esther 1:1-4:17. "Courage from Above"

On March 11, 2007, Morgan Tsvangirai, founder of Zimbabwe's *Movement for Democratic Change*, was forced to cancel a prayer meeting because the attendees were in grave danger from riot police. Tsvangirai himself was beaten and jailed later when he attempted to visit the 40-some supporters who were arrested at the prayer gathering. Reflecting on that experience, Tsvangirai said, "Far from killing my spirit, the scars they brutally inflicted on me have re-energized me..."

For men like Tsvangirai and Mordecai, whom we read about today, the courage to stand against oppression and persecution does not merely come from one's own internal fortitude. Rather, it is in God that they find the courage to take a stand when governing authorities are in conflict with God's will.

When you face potential persecution or humiliation for your Christian faith, may you have the courage of Mordecai, who stood up to Haaman, or of Peter and John who stood up to the Sanhedrin (Acts 5:29).

September 15th

Esther 5:1-10:3. "Independence Day"

A few years ago, there was a movie titled *Independence Day*. Having an affection for action-adventure movies, I thoroughly enjoyed the movie. One of my favorite scenes is when the President, played by Bill Pullman, encourages a rag-tag band of fighter pilots who were about to face an invading alien force. Speaking to a group who faced certain death and the potential destruction of the human race, he inspired them to victory.

Facing a similar fate of total destruction and annihilation because one man didn't like the Jews, God's people had lost hope. That is until they received the king's edict from the hand of Mordecai, giving them permission and encouraging them to band together and defend themselves.

Mordecai was an encourager. He encouraged Esther to take full advantage of her station as Queen of Persia to help her people. Then he encouraged his people to defend themselves in the face of certain destruction.

May you, like Mordecai, encourage the people around you.

September 16th

Ezra 4:7-23; 7:1-8:36. "Adopted by God"

"If God is for us, who can ever be against us?" – Romans 8:31b

Three times in the seventh chapter of Ezra, the text says "the gracious hand" of the Lord was upon Ezra. Also in 7:28, Ezra states that this was a great source of encouragement for him in knowing that the hand of the Lord was on him.

There is a similar source of encouragement for us today as New Testament believers and partakers of a new and better covenant. Paul picks up on this theme in Romans 8:31. As believers who have been adopted into God's family (Rom. 8:15), we share in His treasures (Rom. 8:17) for we are co-heirs with Christ.

So, take courage, believer! As one who is now adopted by God, know that there is nothing that can separate you from His love (Rom. 8:35). There is no greater source of joy or encouragement for us than to know that the One who created us has also redeemed us and has secured our salvation.



Week 38

September 17 - September 23

1 Chronicles 9:1b-34; Ezra 9-10; Nehemiah 1-13; Joel 1-3; Malachi 1-4

“Think of—

Stepping on shore, and finding it Heaven!

Of taking hold of a hand, and finding it God’s hand.

Of breathing a new air, and finding it celestial air.

Of feeling invigorated, and finding it immortality.

Of passing from storm and tempest to an unknown calm.

Of waking up, and finding it Home.”

--Hazel Felleman

This week's passages describe a period after the exiles have returned home. Interestingly, Christians today are also referred to as exiles, strangers, aliens and sojourners. Heb. 11:13, "All these died in faith, without receiving the promises, but having seen them and having welcomed them from a distance, and having confessed that they were strangers and exiles on the earth." Like the Israelites, we will one day complete our days of travel and return home.

September 17th

Ezra 9-10; Nehemiah 1-2. "Thinking of Home"

From the chapters in Ezra we read that he wept. From the chapters in Nehemiah we read that he also wept. It was not just Ezra and Nehemiah that wept but the people as well. Ezra and the people wept over their sins. Nehemiah wept over the trouble and condition of Jerusalem. All of these prayers were due to an emotional connection they had with their home. And more than their home, Israel was also that spiritual connection with God: A spiritually healthy Israel meant a spiritually healthy relationship with God. Ezra, Nehemiah and the people wanted everything about their home to be just right and everything about their relationship with the Father of that home to be just right.

Fellow believer, because of Christ you have a clear title to a bit of property. Perhaps you've had it for a few years. You have to walk through a valley of deep shadow before you arrive there, but when you do... How does the way you live now display your anticipation of arriving home and seeing your Father?

September 18th

Nehemiah 3:1-7:3. "Working Together"

Nehemiah, like Daniel held a prominent position in the kingdom where he had been exiled, but he was burdened for a need at home in Jerusalem. He had a plan for rebuilding the wall around the city which "God had up in his heart" (2:11). Nehemiah organized an enormous undertaking. Men, women, and those from every profession worked together to fortify their home. In doing so they encountered opposition from the enemy. In spite of the resistance the wall was completed in good time and the opposition was silenced.

The church is described as a body with many different parts working together with a common purpose. God has put the body together and asks for "harmony among the members, so that all the members care for each other equally" (1 Cor. 12:25). "God's men and women, joined together for special tasks, can solve huge problems and accomplish great goals. Don't let the size of a task or the length of time needed to accomplish it keep you from doing it. With God's help it can be done" (L.App.).

September 19th

Nehemiah 7:4-8:12. "Starting Off Right"

Often we appreciate something more when we go without it for a time. When the people returned home they took it seriously. They took advantage of a fresh start and made the best of it. Their response to getting serious about their relationship with God through the reading of His Word was terrific. "All the people assembled together as one person... and they asked Ezra the scribe to bring out the Book of the Law of Moses, which the LORD had given for Israel to obey... from early morning until noon and read aloud to everyone who could understand. All the people paid close attention... when they saw him open the book, they all rose to their feet. Then Ezra praised the LORD... all the people chanted, "Amen!"... they bowed and worshiped the LORD with their faces to the ground... The Levites read from the Book and clearly explained the meaning of what was being read... All the people had been weeping as they listened to the words of the law."

Paul told Timothy to "focus on reading the Scriptures to the church" (1 Tim. 4:13).

September 20th

Nehemiah 8:13-10:39. "Balance"

Today's passage is a continuation of the people's commitment to start things right. God's Word continued to be read. It was then followed by the people confessing their sins to one another. Then they stood praising the Lord for who He is and what He has done. Following that they made vows of obedience to the Lord.

That is a great process for us to follow and in that order. It starts with reading and studying God's Word. In that we learn of God's desires and of our position before Him. Confession amongst one another is done with a sincere transparent heart. Worship takes place after our heart is bared and pure before God. As we worship we are reminded of God's power and provisions. We then understand our place before Him and vow to follow and obey.

As you reflect on your typical process you may discover you have it backwards, or are maybe missing some steps, or focus much more on one phase than the others. We should do our best to stay as balanced as possible.

September 21st

1 Chronicles 9:1b-34; Nehemiah 11:1-12:26. "Imagine"

Robert Louis Stevenson wrote, "To arrive is better than to travel hopefully." I can't imagine the joy as the exiles arrived and occupied Jerusalem. They were essentially POW's in a foreign land for 70 years and now they had returned home. Can you imagine that kind of delight? It is more than just delight. It is security, rest, peace, comfort, relief, etc.

Can you imagine what it will be like when you go Home? Or maybe I should ask do you imagine what it will be like. God wants us to think about Home. Col. 3:1-2, "Since you have been raised to new life with Christ, set your sights on the realities of heaven, where Christ sits in the place of honor at God's right hand. Think about the things of heaven, not the things of earth" (Col. 3:1-2). "And the enemies of the cross of Christ think only about this life here on earth. But we are citizens of heaven, where the Lord Jesus Christ lives. And we are eagerly waiting for him to return as our Savior" (Phil. 3:19-20).

September 22nd

Nehemiah 5:14-19; 12:27-13:31; Malachi 1:1-2:9. "If You Can't Beat Them... Infiltrate"

"If you can't beat them join them." This was apparently Tobiah's motto. Early in the book of Nehemiah we read of the opposition that had to be dealt with while the wall was being rebuilt. That strong opposition came from two men, Tobiah and Sanballat. The wall was rebuilt in spite of their constant resistance. Yet, now Tobiah found an inside lead.

Eliashib the priest had a close relationship with Tobiah, even by relation. Not only had Tobiah been an opponent but he was also an Ammonite which meant he was never to be allowed in the Temple, but now he was living in one of the rooms in the Temple normally set aside to store tithes and other offerings.

And it shouldn't come as a surprise that all this was done while Nehemiah was away. We've read enough about Nehemiah and his "take charge" kind of attitude that it's not surprising that when he showed up he "threw all of Tobiah's things out."

Don't let little things sneak into your life that have no place there.

September 23rd

Joel 1-3; Malachi 2:10-4:6. "Opening the Windows of Heaven"

Many believe that once we become a Christian we can just float along; because they believe, they are convinced that in Heaven we will all receive the same generic stamp of approval. That is not the case. Your eternal destination is based on your belief, but how you spend eternity is reflective of how you lived on earth. Even the actions of believers will be judged (see 2 Cor. 5:10).

As Jesus taught the Beatitudes, known as the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus made clear certain rewards for "doing." In Luke 6:23 Jesus declared that "a great reward awaits you in Heaven." He is not describing a reward for believing but a reward for doing. The topic of rewards in Heaven is also mentioned in Matt. 16:27, "He will reward each according to his works," and Matt. 19:21, "You will have treasure in Heaven," and Luke 14:14, "You will be blessed...for you shall be repaid at the resurrection."

The passage in Malachi three describes the actions of what our heart really feels. My Grandpa believed; "You can't out-give God." Think beyond the temporary and material to the eternal. You will receive if you give.



Week 39

September 24 - September 30

Matthew 1:1-4:25; 8:1-4, 14-17; 9:1-17; Mark 1:1-2:22; Luke 1:1 - 5:39; John 1:1-4:45

The theme for this week is 'Beholding the Son.' Like Simeon, who rejoiced when he was finally able to see the Messiah, may you rejoice as you encounter the Messiah in the Scriptures this week. From His birth to the temptation in the wilderness to the start of His public ministry, this week will set the table for the remainder of the gospels. -D.C.

September 24th

Matthew 1:1-17; Mark 1:1; Luke 1:1-38; 3:23b-38; John 1:1-18. "Searching out the Truth"

"In today's fast-paced world, it is easy to become overwhelmed and compromise the time that we spend studying the Bible." –Jess Wenick

As we begin reading the New Testament, we jump right into Matthew and what I like to call the "father of" Chapter. Upon first reading, some may say that this chapter could just as easily be left out or that they find it boring or insignificant. Nothing could be further from the truth. I believe Luke 1:3 clears this misconception up rather quickly, "Therefore, since I myself have carefully investigated everything from the beginning..." Luke thought it wise to investigate events and accounts before he would allow them to even be written. The family tree of Jesus has been considered accurate and true since it was written some two thousand years ago. We need to be like the Bereans, who in Acts 17, were said to have "noble character" because of their passion for searching out the truth in the scriptures. Spending time searching out the truths of the scriptures is quite possibly your greatest asset.

September 25th

Matthew 1:18-25; Luke 1:39-2:40. "Strength from the Spirit"

As I read through today's readings, a couple of things stand out. How amazingly difficult it must have been for Joseph and Mary to show their faces in public; the humiliation they must have faced on a daily basis, and the strength that they received from the Holy Spirit to endure.

As Mary and Joseph were traveling to Bethlehem from Nazareth to register for the national census, they would have met a large number of people on their journey. Can you imagine how their conversations must have gone?

"Hi there, I'm Joseph and this is my wife Mary. Pregnant? Why, yes she is. Just a few more months and we will have a bouncing baby um... Savior ...uh.. Am I the Father?... well, I am, sort of, or at least I'm going to be.. See, the Holy Spirit is the baby's father! Hey, where you guys going?"

God asks us to do some really tough things in this world and, regardless of the circumstances and by the power of the Holy Spirit, He always gives us the strength to get through it. All we have to do is ask!

September 26th

Matthew 2:1-3:17; Mark 1:2-11; Luke 2:41-Luke 3:22. "Fruits of Repentance"

A voice of one calling in the desert, Prepare the way of the Lord...

We all know who this guy was – John the Baptist, a kind of earthy guy that was living off of locusts and wild honey and ran around in a camel hair robe. This is what most people think of when we read about John the Baptist. But oddly enough, God chose to use him for His kingdom, regardless of his appearance or quirky eating habits. We read in Luke that there were large crowds of people coming out to be baptized by him and to listen to him speak. Even though he is most known for his baptisms, his words had an even greater impact on the lives of those who would listen. Luke 3:11-14 is an excellent example of his point-blank approach to preaching. There were many people asking what the fruits of true repentance are. He answers them with an example for each case. When you take the time to read through them, you will see examples from many walks of life. But all of them have one thing in common, charity. If one were to ask what the fruits of true repentance are? Charity.

September 27th

Matthew 4:1-11; Mark 1:12-13; Luke 4:1-15; John 1:19-2:25. "For it is written..."

Temptation. What a terrible sounding word. The word sounds as if we have already given in. Sometimes we think the battle is already lost just because we were tempted. But that is not true, is it? We lose the battle only when we give in to temptation. Temptation comes to all people of all ages of all genders and of all colors. Temptation is Satan using the world and all the things in it to entice us, to captivate us, to cause our disobedience and to cause us to take our eyes off the goal, even if only for a moment. Even our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ was tempted; in fact, He was tempted many times! I love the way Jesus handled temptation. It's not just that He didn't give in; it's that He fought back. You see, Jesus is a warrior. Jesus knows how to fight and Jesus knows how to win. He used the awesome power of the Scriptures to do His fighting. What a great lesson to show us how we can fight those same temptations. Fight your temptations with scripture and be victorious. Use the power God has given us in His word to fend off temptation.

September 28th

Luke 3:19-20; John 3:1-4:45. "Becoming Less"

"He must become greater; I must become less."

Wow, I love that verse. If I could choose just one scripture verse to summarize the purpose of my own existence here on the earth, that would be it. Upon first examination, it seems rather simple. God deserves greatness; in fact, there is only one person truly entitled to greatness and that person is Almighty God. It's the last half of the verse that's really tough. "I must become less"! How does that work? How do we become less so that God can become greater? I believe John the Baptist is a very good example. John had large numbers of people coming to hear him preach. It would have been quite easy for him to get caught up in his own greatness and shift the focus off of Jesus and on to himself. John was able to stay focused and he continually pointed to the one greater than himself. Exalting Jesus was the purpose of John's ministry. Throughout John's life and his eventual death, he never failed to point people to Jesus. The result? He became less and Jesus became greater.

September 29th

Matthew 4:12-25; 8:14-17; Mark 1:14-39; Luke 3:23a; 4:16-44; John 4:46-54.

"Jesus Heals Many"

The caption at the top of a chapter in Matthew 8 says "Jesus Heals Many;" then again in the book of Mark and also in the book of Luke. All of these books give the same account of Jesus healing the sick. What the books don't say is that they all were saved and lived good Christian lives as a result. There are verses that say that "many" were saved, but not "all" were saved. This causes me to take pause. If I were a man with leprosy and was taken to Jesus and was cured, would it be enough to cause me to commit my life to Him? I would like to think so. But there is a big difference between being grateful for a physical healing, and calling the One that healed you Lord. I wonder how many of the people Christ healed developed the kind of faith that Christ desired. How many people looked at Christ and only saw a "Genie in a bottle?" And then I wonder how many people today come to Christ only for what they can get from Him. When you look at all the great things the Lord has done for you, do you give Him a simple nod, tell Him thanks and wave goodbye, or do you bow at His feet and call Him LORD?

September 30th

Matthew 8:1-4; 9:1-17; Mark 1:40-2:22; Luke 5:1-39. "Learning from Jesus"

Jesus used many different approaches to teaching during His ministry. Jesus related to the people He was ministering to by using stories and symbolism that was meaningful to them during that time. We see parables and short stories, illustrations, scripture references and even miracles. I think it's safe to say that Jesus used all the resources at His disposal to help people understand His teaching.

We see the same idea in our church services. Songs of praise, scripture reading, illustrations and short stories fill our worship services.

So, do you know where I'm going with this? How about the way we approach those we are trying to minister to? Do you have a pocket-full of ideas that you are prepared to use? Maybe you could buy a book or CD and ask the Lord who might be able to use them. Have a short story ready about your personal testimony or a particularly hard time you have gone through, memorize your favorite scripture verse and share it with someone. The next time you're in prayer, ask the Lord to show you ways to minister to those He brings into your life.



Week 40

October 1 - October 7

Matthew 5-7; 8:5-13,23-34; 9:18-26; 11:1-13:52; Mark 2:23-5:43 Luke 6-8; John 5

This week's theme has to do with what Jesus taught. The Beatitudes, the entire Sermon on the Mount, the majority of His parables and a wide variety of other topics are included in what Jesus teaches in these passages. Yet more than just the elements of *what* is taught is the significance of remembering *who* taught. Jesus is the perfect Teacher and therefore His teachings are perfect.

October 1st

Matthew 12:1-21; Mark 2:23-3:6; Luke 6:1-11 John 5. "Liar, Lunatic or Lord"

After reading passages like today's you can picture the Pharisees following Jesus around every minute just looking for some fault. The only accusations they ever had with Him were the result of their own misinterpreted mess of self-justifying rules. In the end they had to make up lies with false witnesses to try to accuse Jesus of anything.

In John, chapter five, Jesus presents His own legal case to support His claims. He presents fact, testimony, witnesses, etc. His claim was that He was who He said He was. He claimed to be the Son of God, equal with God and honored as God. The Pharisees understood exactly what He was saying and "tried all the more to kill Him." They were fully aware, as we should be, that there are only two options; either you believe Him and what He claimed, or you accuse Him of blasphemy. Which option have you chosen? Remember, there is not another option as some want to claim (i.e. good person).

October 2nd

Matthew 5:1-6:4; Mark 3:7-19; Luke 6:12-36. "Searching for Happiness"

Would you like to know how to experience hope, joy and happiness? The Beatitudes (Mt. 5 & Lk. 6) tell us how. The first thing to note is that we will never get anywhere in our search for true happiness until we give up trying to find it by our own efforts and receive it instead as God's free gift. God is the source of all spiritual blessings. "Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father" (James 1:17).

The first effect the Beatitudes have on those who understand them is to turn our minds to God. In fact, each beatitude portrays a picture of Jesus. He displayed each of these attributes for us. According to Him the way to happiness is found in a poverty of spirit, in a character marked by humility, meekness, purity and mercy, and in a hunger and thirst for righteousness, peace and justice. Jesus lived them, and because He did, we too can find happiness.

October 3rd

Matthew 6:5-7:29; Luke 6:37-49. "Submitting to Others"

Think of what today's passage teaches us about submission: Submit to the Father in prayer; Submit to the words and direction of Jesus; Display submission through forgiveness, fasting, and treating others as you would have them treat you. Often we do well with the first items but not the last. We may struggle with forgiving others. We may find ourselves guilty of gossiping about someone or criticizing them. D. L. Moody once said, "There are thousands of families that could easily be reached if we had thousands of Christians going to them and entering into sympathy with their sorrows. That is what they want."

How are you submitting your life and surrendering your time and emotions for the families around you? Is there room to improve? Are you truly ready to put the love of Christ into practice and commit yourself to give others time, resources if they need it, a listening ear, a tongue that is tied tight when it comes to saying anything inappropriate, and a heart that is genuinely concerned and always ready to forgive?

October 4th

Matthew 8:5-13; 11:1-30; Luke 7. "Their Faith"

Jesus gives us a short commentary on the faith of three individuals in today's reading. First, we read of the Roman officer who had the faith that Jesus could just "say the word" from wherever He was and his servant would be healed. Jesus said He had not seen faith like that in all of Israel. Second, we meet John the Baptist who preached the coming of the Messiah and was harshly persecuted and martyred for it. Jesus said John was greater than any who had ever lived. Third we are introduced to a woman with an immoral past who anointed the feet of Jesus with a very valuable jar of perfume. She continuously kissed His feet and wiped His feet with her hair as her tears fell. Jesus said she understood more about salvation, forgiveness and gratitude than the self-righteous Pharisees sitting with Him.

The lesson for us today reminds us that faith is something we live out and display in what we do. What would Jesus say of your faith?

October 5th

Matthew 12:22-13:9; Mark 3:20-4:20; Luke 8:1-8, 19-21. "A Heart Search"

"Your walk talks and your talk talks, but your walk talks louder than your talk talks." Jesus went beyond just saying good things. He went beyond just saying He was equal with God. Jesus also did good things. He also did things which displayed His power. But to many of the unbelieving it wasn't enough: "Teacher, we want you to show us a miraculous sign to prove that you are from God" (Mt. 12:38), as if He had not already done enough. Up to this point He had turned water to wine, healed the sick, the lame, the leper, the paralyzed, cast out demons, and even raised a boy from the dead.

The Pharisees had already made a decision in their heart. I pray your heart is open to Jesus. It probably isn't if you are looking for more miracles and waiting for more evidence than the birth, death and resurrection of Jesus. "If you look for Him with all your heart you will find Him." (Deut. 4:29)

October 6th

Matthew 8:23-27; 13:10-52; Mark 4:21-41; Luke 8:9-18, 22-25. "Teachable Spirit"

Dad says to his son, "You better get ready. The bus will be here in a minute to pick you up and take you to Sunday School." His son asked, "Did you go to Sunday School when you were a boy?" Dad replied, "Yes I did." The boy said as he was getting dressed, "It probably won't do me any good either!"

Either you're teachable or you're not. Jesus explained, "To those who are open to my teaching, more understanding will be given... but to those who are not listening..." The disciples around Jesus had things explained to them far more than anyone else. Although there were, I'm sure times Jesus shook his head, His disciples were teachable. That teachable spirit (soft heart and open eyes and ears) may take time to prove itself. The son in the paragraph above came to the conclusion that his dad was not too teachable. The disciples authenticated their teachable spirit years later. Their growth took them from students to teachers.

October 7th

Matthew 8:28-34; 9:18-26; Mark 5; Luke 8:26-56. "Living Out What You Believe"

What do you know about faith? Most often people tend to make some kind of emotionally active connection with descriptions like "hope." However, today's passage makes a physically active connection.

She had been hemorrhaging for 12 years with no hope in sight, but then she heard about Jesus. She believed that if she could just touch his clothing she would be healed. She made her way through the mob, came up behind Him, touched His robe and was immediately healed. Jesus said that her faith had healed her. The Greek word for "healed" actually means "saved." In this case both physical healing and spiritual salvation are meant. She was healed when she touched Him, but Jesus said her faith caused the cure. Faith involved action. The book of James reminds us that "faith shows itself." Faith shows itself with action. How do you put your faith into action? What in your life demonstrates to others your faith in Jesus Christ?



Week 41

October 8 - October 14

Matthew 8:18-22; 9:27-10:42; 14-18; Mark 6-9; Luke 9; John 6:1- 8:20

The theme for this week is authenticity. As you read about the life that Jesus lived, I hope you are able to see how authentic He was in His dealings with the people around Him. Whether they were friend or foe, He did not deceive or mislead anyone and always acted authentic. *-David Curtis*

October 8th

Matthew 9:27-10:42; 13:53-58; Mark 6:1-13; Luke 9:1-6. "A Heart for the Lost"

If you love only those who love you, what good is that? Even corrupt tax collectors do that much. – Matthew 5:46

In the gospel of Matthew, right before Jesus sends out the 12 disciples, He told His disciples to ask the Lord to send more workers to gather the harvest. In that passage (Matthew 9:35-38), Jesus reveals to the disciples His heart for the lost. As He taught and healed among the people, His heart was genuinely burdened for those people whom He described as a sheep without a shepherd.

A heart for the lost is not easily feigned. This is because the lost are not going to be receptive to the message of Jesus, or the messenger for that matter, most of the time. It is so easy to love those with whom we are comfortable. What about those who have hurt you or persecute you? A heart for the lost means that we must respond with grace and mercy to those who don't deserve it, but desperately need it.

May you, like Jesus, have an authentic heart for the lost.

October 9th

Matthew 14:1-36; Mark 6:14-56; Luke 9:7-17; John 6:1-21. "Peer Pressure"

The court of public opinion is a powerful force, especially for those who live and work in the political arena. When you read about Herod's dealings with John the Baptist, you quickly realize that this court of public opinion, or more commonly known as peer pressure, has been influential for 2,000 years.

Peer pressure can make authentic living very challenging. Authentic living can be understood as remaining true to one's own character when faced with external pressures. When faced with the external pressures, Herod gave up John's life in spite of his genuine respect for him. Jesus too was confronted with a variety of pressures from both his followers and adversaries. However, unlike Herod, Jesus' actions were always consistent with His character. In John 6:15 we read that He turned down the opportunity to lead a political coup, choosing instead to remain true to His commitment to do the will of His Father who sent Him (John 8:28-29).

May you, like Jesus, be able to live authentically in the face of peer pressure.

October 10th

Matthew 15:1-20; Mark 7:1-23; John 6:22-71. "A Changed Heart"

"The purpose of my instruction is that all the Christians there would be filled with love that comes from a pure heart, a clear conscience, and sincere faith." – 1 Timothy 1:5

Jesus turned the religious system of first century Judaism on its ear. He was able to look through their traditions and recognize that they were attempting to gain acceptance before God by following extensive lists of rules and regulations governing their external behavior.

Living an authentic life for the Christian means that our heart and our actions must match. To practice the externals of religion without a heart that has been changed by God does not make us acceptable before God.

Our acceptance before God is dependent entirely upon the change of heart that occurs when we trust in Christ for forgiveness and salvation. It is this step of faith that allows the Holy Spirit to change us so that our actions will be born out of a heart that beats for God.

October 11th

Matthew 15:21-16:12; Mark 7:24-8:21. "Simple Faith"

I have long struggled with the overabundance of denominations that we have within Christianity. Certainly, there have been valid reasons involved that led to some of these divisions. Taking a stand on issues such as the deity of Christ or salvation by grace alone through faith alone is never wrong.

That being said, I am often bothered by the attitudes that I sometimes encounter as a result of denominationalism. Accusing someone of not being truly saved because of a disagreement on a secondary or tertiary theological issue is not our place and yet it happens. I hear some accuse people of other denominations of having an insufficient view of God because they are not five-point Calvinists.

Jesus didn't give the Gentile woman a theological pop quiz to see if she had all the right answers. He recognized her faith, as simple as it may have been, and accepted her for it. Like the thief on the cross, this woman's salvation was not dependent upon right theology, but an authentic faith in the right One.

October 12th

Matthew 16:13-17:13; Mark 8:22-9:13; Luke 9:18-36. "Transparency"

Jesus modeled transparency to us in how He lived His life. Jesus opened himself up to His disciples and allowed them to know certain things about Him and His purpose. I do think that it is important to note that He was more transparent with some of his disciples (Peter, James, and John) than He was with the rest.

Part of living an authentic Christian life is the practice of transparency with a trusted brother or sister in Christ. Like Jesus, we need not be as transparent with all as we are with some. Transparency involves giving someone else a window into our soul where our deepest thoughts and emotions lie. Transparency leads to authenticity because, when we allow others to know us fully, we can no longer fool them with our external behavior. They know when we're faking it because they know the real us.

Like an overhead transparency that is revealed when the light is switched on, may your life become transparent when you encounter the light of Christ.

October 13th

Matthew 17:14-18:35; Mark 9:14-50; Luke 9:37-50. "Humility"

“Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and He will lift you up.” – James 4:10

In 1973, Senator John C. Stennis was mugged and shot outside his home. When Senator Mark Hatfield received word of the incident he drove straight to the hospital. Upon arriving, he observed that the hospital staff was overwhelmed with the high volume of incoming calls. Spying an empty switchboard, Hatfield sat down and helped field calls through the night and into the next morning.

It was genuine humility that led Senator Hatfield to assist the hospital staff that night. He was unwilling to view himself as too important to do the mundane task of answering the phone.

Authenticity leads to humility, because when we are willing to see ourselves as we truly are, we learn that we have no greater intrinsic value than the next person. Understanding this lesson allows us to fulfill the command to consider others as more important than ourselves (Phil. 2:3).

October 14th

Matthew 8:18-22; Luke 9:51-62; John 7:1-8:20. “Awareness of Sin”

F.B. Meyer has been credited with saying that “when we see a brother or sister in sin, there are two things we do not know. First, we do not know how hard he or she tried not to sin. And second, we do not know the power of the force that assailed him or her. We also do not know what we would have done in the same circumstance.”

Judging someone in haste, and without full knowledge or consideration of the facts, generates tremendous hurt and damage. Jesus knew this full well when He extended grace to the woman caught in adultery in John 8.

Authentic Christian living requires an awareness of sin in our life. I believe that the more aware we are of our sin and our propensity to repeatedly sin that we are less likely to judge others who are caught in sin. It is those among us who assume that their struggle with sin is done that are often the ones who are so quick to judge. We all must remember that we are all sinners who are equally in need of grace and mercy from a holy and just God.



Week 42

October 15 - October 21

Matthew 19; Mark 10:1-31; Luke 10:-18:30; John 8:21-11:57

I was reading something today that described a disciple of Christ as one who follows behind Him with head bowed low wearing a long dark robe. That may display some kind of reverence, but I'm not sure it displays the passion and joy a disciple of Christ should have. This week's passages will describe various

aspects of what it means to be a believer/disciple of Christ and how that plays out daily in our lives.

October 15th

Luke 10:1-11:13; John 8:21-59. "Disciple Disposition"

Today's passages describe the character of a disciple of Christ. One of the first things we read is that a disciple of Christ is one who is willing to go where God asks with a message God gives. A disciple is obedient and submissive. They are also a tool God uses to bring the good news to others. Secondly, we read that a disciple of Christ is in love with the Lord with all their heart, soul, strength and mind—that pretty much covers everything. The disciple is also to love their neighbor, and love them as the Samaritan who felt pity on another hurting person who was not even of the same race. He cared for the man and even provided the money for further care. Thirdly, a disciple is also a person of prayer. Their prayers are sincere and fervent.

Each of those three characteristics display a committed relationship with God. Everything they do is because of their love and reverence for their Lord. Does everything you do display that love?

October 16th

Luke 11:14-12:34. "Money and Hypocrites"

It is interesting how instruction concerning both money and hypocrisy come up in the same chapter (Lk. 12). Jesus discussed the topic of money more often than Heaven. Money is such an enormous part of our lives. It is in front of us daily at work, at the store and at home. It can get to a point where it consumes our thoughts as we think of what we could do with more of it. It has the potential of realigning our priorities and shifting our focus from where it should be. This is where the potential for hypocrisy is greatly increased. I have met many "disciples of Christ" who have been guilty of hypocrisy as they fell prey to greed, coveting or other detours incurred by money. If you are godly in church but at work you don't pay an employee as you should, they will soon conclude you have a problem with hypocrisy. If you say you love God but you're not willing to share with the poor you have a problem with hypocrisy.

October 17th

Luke 12:35-13:21; John 9. "Be Ready"

I love the way this passage starts out, "Be dressed for service and well prepared..." My dad retired from the airlines, and when I was young we would get an occasional special treat in the form of an airplane flight. As an employee's family we were required to dress up a little. I remember dressing in a nice button up and slacks before the flight. I didn't regret it a bit because I knew it meant something special was coming.

It should be exciting for us to get dressed and prepared for something special and extraordinary. And not only should we want to be prepared because of our excitement about Christ's coming because it is something special and extraordinary, but we are also encouraged to be prepared because there will be a reward in it. Jesus says, "There will be special favor for those who are ready and waiting for his return... whenever he comes, there will be special favor for his servants who are ready!" Be ready because something special is coming!

October 18th

Luke 13:22-14:24; John 10. "Like Sheep"

Things to know about sheep: Ranked as one of the most helpless animals on the earth; Have a number of enemies; No protection like a dog with sharp teeth or a deer with a fast foot, or a bee with a sharp stinger, or a skunk that can drive away any beast with his smell; It is not adapt at sensing danger; They are very easily frightened; They like to wander away from the flock, and have a terrible sense of direction when they get far away, but they will follow one another anywhere (even off a cliff).

Do we need a shepherd? Oh yes. But far more than just having a shepherd present is our need to listen to our Shepherd. The "true sheep" (10:8) are those who follow the good Shepherd and recognize His voice and listen to His voice. Do you recognize the good Shepherd's voice? I don't know that we will ever experience all of the benefits of knowing the good Shepherd. There are advantages today and 1,000 years from today for those who recognize His voice.

October 19th

Luke 14:25-17:10; John 11:1-37. "Weigh the Cost"

What will it cost to purchase that product? What will it cost to build that? What will it cost to speed through that school zone and get a ticket? What will it cost to go to war? Whether small or large items, we wisely weigh the cost first. Have you ever sat down and listed the pros and cons of a decision you are about to make? It's good to consider the advantages and disadvantages of a decision.

The beginning of today's passage clearly informs us that there is a cost associated with being a disciple of Christ. Jesus made the following statements to the crowd following Him: "Love Me more than your parents," "Carry your cross," "Follow Me," and "Give up everything for Me." He then concluded those words with the statement, "Don't begin until you count the cost." There are obvious advantages to being a disciple of Christ, but Jesus said there are things you may consider a disadvantage in being a disciple (cost, sacrifice, surrender, persecution, etc.). If you don't think being a disciple has cost you anything maybe you should explore your depth of submission.

October 20th

Luke 17:11-18:8; John 11:38-57. "Genuinely Grateful"

Out of ten lepers who were healed by Jesus only one came back to thank Him. Jesus even wondered about the other nine who were healed from the most awful skin disease imaginable. And then the one who came back was the foreigner, the Samaritan. Upon coming back, the Samaritan found out the importance of thanks and discovered that his faith had made him well.

Only grateful Christians grow! The magnitude of understanding the importance of this aspect is terrific. A professing disciple of Christ who is not truly grateful for God's forgiveness will struggle with guilt and also have difficulty forgiving others. A professing disciple of Christ who is not truly grateful for God's grace will never understand true humility. A professing disciple of Christ who is not truly grateful for God's purpose will never truly rest in the place God has presently placed him/her. A professing disciple of Christ who is not truly grateful for God's love... God's discipline... I could continue to add things to this list that a disciple needs to be genuinely grateful for if they are to grow.

October 21st

Matthew 19; Mark 10:1-31; Luke 18:9-30. "Sincerity Reflects Humility"

Another feature of a faithful disciple of Christ is sincerity. The story Jesus tells in today's reading was told "to some who had great self-confidence and they scorned everyone else." One, a religious leader stands to pray, and what a prayer, even condemning everyone else and lifting himself up with a long list of credentials. The second, a despised tax collector, prays with his head bowed low in humility and reverence asking sorrowfully for mercy from God for his sin. He bared his heart. Jesus said the tax collector was the one who went home justified before God, and He then goes on to say the proud will be humbled and the humbled will be honored.

Therefore, a disciple of Christ who comes before the Lord (and others) transparent, genuine, authentic, sincere and honest will be the one who also reveals true humility. Why? Because the thing that keeps us from being transparent, genuine, authentic, sincere and honest is pride.



Week 43

October 22 - October 28

Matthew 20-25; 26:6-13; Mark 10:32-13:37; 14:3-9; Luke 18:31-21:38; John 12

The theme this week is grace. And as you may be able to tell, I had the lyrics to the wonderful hymn, *Amazing Grace*, running through my head as I wrote these devotional thoughts for you this week. Grace is a multi-faceted

concept in Scripture and I hope that you thoroughly enjoy considering how God's grace impacts our lives, both as human beings in children and redeemed members of God's family. – *David Curtis*

October 22nd

Matthew 20:1-34; Mark 10:32-52; Luke 18:31-19:27. "Spiritually Blind"

"I once was lost, but now am found, was blind, but now I see" – Amazing Grace

The beggar Bartimaeus received the gift of sight in today's reading. While Mark is the only gospel that names the beggar, all three of them consistently show that the original request was for mercy. Why the connection between mercy and the receiving of sight? I think it is because the healing not only involved a physical need, but a spiritual one as well.

Without God's intervention in our lives, we are spiritually blind and lack an awareness of our sin and we do not see our need for God. Until the Holy Spirit opens ones' eyes to his or her spiritual need, they will not come to God for forgiveness and grace.

In His ministry, Jesus restored physical sight, but more importantly, He also restored spiritual sight. The Spirit continues on in this ministry, and our role is to direct those in whom the Spirit is working to the light of Christ that they might follow him as did Bartimaeus.

October 23rd

Matthew 21:1-11; 26:6-13; Mark 11:1-11; 14:3-9; Luke 19:28-44; John 12:1-36.
"Saving Grace"

Jesus never hid the truth of His purpose here on earth. Time and time again He predicted His death to His disciples, and yet they continually struggled to understand. In comparing His death to a kernel of wheat (John 12:24), Jesus makes it clear that His death will bring about new life for many. This is what the Apostle Paul meant when he said, "For God made Christ who never sinned, to be the offering for our sin, so that we could be made right with God through Christ" (2 Corinthians 5:21). Jesus was able to serve as the perfect sacrifice making full atonement once and for all for the sins of mankind (Hebrews 10:12).

This sacrifice is what allows God the Father to extend saving grace to all who come to Him in faith for the forgiveness of their sins. As John said in 1 John 2:2, "He is the sacrifice for our sins. He takes away not only our sins, but the sins of all the world."

It is an irony that should cause us all to be humbled, that the horrific death that Jesus endured on the cross was the very event that allows for the beauty of saving grace in our lives.

October 24th

Matthew 21:12-27; Mark 11:12-33; Luke 19:45-20:8; John 12:37-50. "Fears Relieved"

The construction of the Golden Gate Bridge had fallen behind schedule because of a number of workers who had fallen to their deaths. Engineers and administrators could find no solution to the costly delays. Eventually, in spite of the enormous cost, a giant net was installed to catch those who might accidentally fall. After it was installed, progress on the project was hardly interrupted. A worker or two fell into the net, but were saved. Ultimately, all the time lost to fear was regained by replacing fear with faith in the net.

Knowing that we need not be perfect in order to avoid judgment removes a great fear for the one who understands grace. Grace is what allowed the tax collectors and prostitutes (Matthew 21:31) of Jesus' day to be saved. The Pharisees, on the other hand, lived in constant fear of the law.

Like the workers on the bridge who no longer feared death resulting from a misstep, the Christian no longer fears the eternal judgment of God for a misstep.

October 25th

Matthew 21:28-22:33; Mark 12:1-27; Luke 20:9-40. "Grace Rejected"

Matthew 22:1-14 is the parable of the Great Feast. The parable illustrates how, because of the rejection of the Messiah by the Jews, God's grace is then made available to the Gentiles. As I read this story, I find it remarkable that one of the guests would show up for the feast without the customary apparel. I would think that the gratitude of even being invited to take part in the festivities would result in the appropriate response by this particular guest.

The parallels in this story to the human predicament we face are clearly seen. All around us are people who are rejecting God's invitation to enter into relationship with him. Hearing the call of grace, they reject the notion of their need for salvation assuming that their own righteousness is sufficient. Like the out-of-place wedding guest, they refuse to clothe themselves with the righteousness of Christ that comes by faith. Instead, they reject God's grace, trusting in their own righteousness which, in the eyes of God, is like filthy rags.

October 26th

Matthew 22:34-23:39; Mark 12:28-44; Luke 20:41-21:4. "Generous Grace"

"He who gives what he would as readily throw away, gives without generosity; for the essence of generosity is in self-sacrifice." – Sir Henry Taylor

As Jesus and His disciples sat and observed the giving practices of those who came to the temple to worship, Jesus seized a teachable moment when the widow dropped in two small coins (Mark 12:42). In that moment, we see the principle of proportionate giving at work.

As Jesus noted, even though the rich individuals gave more money, the gift of the widow was considered far greater in the eyes of God because of her sacrifice.

Aren't you glad that, in God's greatest gift to us, He did not limit Himself to a small portion of His grace, but rather made the ultimate sacrifice in sending Jesus to die on the cross. God is truly generous with His grace, giving it to all who might come to Him. There are no restrictions, no qualifications, no prerequisites. There is only free grace that is offered generously.

Day 300 – October 27th

Matthew 24:1-35; Mark 13:1-31; Luke 21:5-33. "Efficacious Grace"

"'Tis grace hath brought me safe thus far, and grace will lead me home." – *Amazing Grace* by John Newton

In Jesus' description of the time of tribulation, He mentions that there will be attempts "to deceive, if possible, even God's chosen ones" (Matthew 24:24; Mark 13:22). This statement by Jesus gets me thinking about the role that God's grace plays in bringing about our salvation. As the words to *Amazing Grace* declare, "grace will lead me home." How true.

God's grace is efficacious in our lives, meaning that it will produce its desired effect in our lives once it has been given by God himself. Simply put, when someone is saved by God's grace through faith (Eph. 2:8-9), that grace will absolutely guarantee their salvation. "And this is the will of God, that I should not lose even one of all those He has given me, but that I should raise them to eternal life at the last day" (John 6:39).

May you stand confident in God's grace, knowing that it will indeed lead you home.

October 28th

Matthew 24:36-25:46; Mark 13:32-37; Luke 21:34-38. "Cheap Grace"

"Cheap grace is grace without discipleship, grace without the cross, grace without Jesus Christ, living and incarnate." – Dietrich Bonhoeffer

In illustrating the Kingdom of Heaven, Jesus told a story about three servants. This story teaches us about the appropriate response to God's grace. To receive God's grace and never change your life, actions, or behaviors is to be like the third servant, to not receive God's grace at all. This is what the great German theologian Bonhoeffer called cheap grace.

The Apostle Paul was accused of promoting cheap grace by the Jewish believers who wanted the Gentile believers to follow the law. In Romans 6:1-2, Paul sets the story straight, "Well then, should we keep on sinning so that God can show us more and more kindness and forgiveness? Of course not! Since we have died to sin, how can we continue to live in it? The invitation to receive God's grace includes an expectation to take up your cross and follow Jesus (Matt. 10:38)

A large rectangular box with a thick black border, containing seven horizontal lines for writing.

Week 44

October 29 - November 4

Matthew 26:1-5; 26:14-27:56; Mark 14:1-2; 14:10-15:41; Luke 22:1-23:49; John 13:1-19:37

We don't have to read this week's passages to realize the strong opposition to God present in the world today. The hatred for and rejection of Jesus Christ

and the Gospel is evident in so many places. This week's readings concern the last hours of Jesus' life on earth. One of the aspects that stand out and what we will focus on has to do with the opposition to Christ, and not solely directed to Christ but also His disciples.

October 29th

Matthew 26:1-5,14-30; Mark 14:1-2,10-26; Luke 22:1-30; John 13:18-30.

"Betrayal"

"All our experience with history should teach us, when we look back, how badly human wisdom is betrayed when it relies on itself." –Martin Luther

That's an interesting quote as you reflect on today's passage. God is betrayed when we rely solely on our human wisdom. The religious leaders of Jesus' day were guilty of this, which, in essence, became a double betrayal. The first betrayal was against the life of Jesus Christ. We learn that the, "Leading priests and teachers of religious law were still looking for an opportunity to capture Jesus secretly and put Him to death." The tool they found to accomplish their purpose was a greedy Judas, a follower of Christ. A truly betrayal can only come from one close to you.

The second betrayal came in the form of rejecting God. As the religious leaders planned and schemed, they also grew more self-reliant and independent from God. Through experience the Apostle Paul gave wise

counsel, “we stopped relying on ourselves and learned to rely only on God, who raises the dead.” (2 Cor. 1:9)

October 30th

Matthew 26:31-35; Mark 14:27-31; Luke 22:31-38; John 13:31-15:17. “Ground Up”

Today’s passage in Luke 22 fascinates me. Satan wanted to grind up Peter and the other disciples “like wheat.” Satan wanted them destroyed. Jesus comforts Peter by telling him that his faith would falter but he would not be destroyed. In fact, his faith would later be recharged and he would “strengthen and build up his brothers.” Peter thought he was ready right then to take on the world and its prince of darkness, but unfortunately, Jesus cautioned that he was not ready and would even deny Christ. Jesus then informs the disciples that things would become more dangerous and difficult than it had been up to that point. They wouldn’t go out with the Gospel as unhindered as they had been before. Moreover, they would be considered “rebels” and “transgressors.” They were to face danger and hatred just for following Jesus. But one thing to remember is that the sifting God allowed the men to endure strengthened their

faith and truly emboldened them in every difficult situation they faced in the future.

October 31st

John 15:18-17:26. "Hated"

"A Christian may esteem it as one evidence of his piety that he is hated by wicked men. Often most decided evidence is given that a man is the friend of God by the opposition excited against him by the [worldly]." --Albert Barnes, late 1800's Bible scholar.

It settles a little uneasy to hear that someone hates you. A little confrontation is bad enough, but hatred... and then to hear why... because "Jesus chose us" and because it hates Him. And then to take it a step further, Jesus told His disciples that they would be persecuted and killed by those who "think they are doing God a service."

Did all this daunting news scare off the disciples? Did hatred and persecution deter Jesus from the work He set out to do? No, and I'm eternally grateful that it did not keep Him from His task. Personally, we need this exhortation to press on despite persecution and hatred. Instead of discouraging us, prayerfully persecution will do just the opposite.

November 1st

Matthew 26:36-56; Mark 14:32-52; Luke 22:39-53; John 18:1-24. "Betrayed with a Kiss"

We need to be reminded of the character of Judas: By his own choice he betrayed God's Son into the hands of soldiers (Lk. 22:48), he was a thief (John 12:6), Jesus knew that Judas' life of evil would not change (John 6:70), Judas' betrayal of Jesus was part of God's sovereign plan (Ps. 41:9; Zech. 11:12-13; Matt. 20:18; 26:20-25; Acts 1:16,20), and in the end he committed suicide instead of seeking forgiveness.

In those days a kiss was a welcome and sign of respect and affection. Judas' intent was not hidden. In fact, Jesus reprimands him for using such a signal. This sign of friendship and affection was employed with a base and wicked purpose. Yet here is some food for thought; have you ever been guilty of your external gesture not matching your internal intent or feeling? There is nothing worse than feigned love. Don't be guilty of pretending to love God or

pretending to love anyone else. As with Judas, your true intent will not be hidden from God.

November 2nd

Matthew 26:57-27:10; Mark 14:53-15:1; Luke 22:54-71; John 18:25-27.

“Undeserved”

The scenes displaying the hours of Jesus’ trials and beatings leading up to the crucifixion in “The Passion of the Christ” movie tore at my heart. I wept, feeling that it just wasn’t fair. He shouldn’t have had to go through what He did. The religious leaders who hated Jesus so strongly found people to lie about Him, but they couldn’t even agree with one another. Instead of throwing it out of court it just escalated into a greater fiasco. People spit on Him and blindfolded Him and beat Him in the face. Our next two day’s readings will expound on more of His suffering as it led up to His crucifixion.

The opposition could not have been stronger, and no one could have been less deserving. The fact that He did not deserve what He went through is the very foundation of the Gospel message. Faultless Jesus went to the cross for our faults. He didn’t deserve it and He could have avoided it, but He did it for us who needed to make atonement so crucially.

November 3rd

Matthew 27:11-31; Mark 15:2-20; Luke 23:1-25; John 18:28-19:16. “Responses to the Gospel”

There are two ways people deal with Jesus and the Gospel, and in this passage there are two statements that stand out describing both. One has to do with Pilate thinking he can just wash his hands of his responsibilities, and the second has to do with the Jews and their children being willing to take the responsibility for Christ’s death (Matt. 27:24-25).

Pilate felt that a ceremonial hand-washing and verbal statement declaring his innocence would relieve him from any responsibility. However, as magistrate he was bound to free an innocent man, but he was swayed by the crowd and still led Jesus to His execution. Pilate’s response is similar to those who believe the message of Christ dying for our sins is for someone else while they themselves believe they are not guilty.

The Jews called down vengeance even to their children, and it came. In less than 40 years, millions perished as their city was overthrown. Even to this day they live scattered and persecuted. Their response to Jesus and the Gospel was alike those who maintain they will take my chances.

November 4th

Matthew 27:32-56; Mark 15:21-41; Luke 23:26-49; John 19:17-37. "At the Cross"

"[God] cancelled the record that contained the charges against us. He took it and destroyed it by nailing it to Christ's cross. In this way, God disarmed the evil rulers and authorities. He shamed them publicly by his victory over them on the cross of Christ" (Col. 2:14,15).

This week's devotional theme has concentrated on the opposition to Jesus Christ. He did nothing wrong, but was hated by more people. The height of opposition was apparent at the cross. Yet at the cross He paid our debts, but still instead of gratitude He received rejection. However, as the verse above reminds us, Jesus was victorious none the less. He accomplished what He set out to do. He conquered death as He promised. He sits now at the right hand of the Father still interceding for us. His work on the cross was permanent, once for all. He interceded for us then and still intercedes. God, through Jesus Christ, reveals His love for us on a regular basis (Rom. 5:8).

Week 45

November 5 - November 11

Matthew 27:57-28:20; Mark 15:42-16:20; Luke 23:50-24:53; John 19:38-21:25;
Acts 1-9

The theme for this week is community. As we transition from reading about the life and ministry of Jesus to the formation of the early church, we will explore some elements of the community that were so crucial to the spreading of the gospel. I hope that each of you is connected right now to a nurturing Christian community that encourages your faith and strengthens your relationship with Jesus. God designed us to work and function as a part of community and not as lone rangers. *-David Curtis*

November 5th

Matthew 27:57-28:15; Mark 15:42-16:13; Luke 23:50-24:12; John 19:38-20:18.
"Variety"

What do two rich politicians, two uneducated fishermen, and a woman who had been demon-possessed have in common? They were all followers of Jesus. The community of faith brings together a wide variety of people. The very word "community" can be thought of in two different concepts: common and unity. What creates community is having something in common in spite of differences. Community can be based on zip code, workplace, political affiliation or, in this case, religious affiliation.

The beautiful thing about community is that there is so much variety within community. Two people can be opposites in every aspect except for one thing, and that can be enough to create community. The community of believers in

the first century came from different geographical, political and religious backgrounds. The Church today is really no different in this respect; from the Chinese pastor sitting in jail, to the African believer struggling in poverty, to the American Christian who takes God's blessings for granted, we all have a faith in Christ that unites us.

November 6th

Matthew 28:16-20; Mark 16:12-18; Luke 24:13-49; John 20:19- 21:25. "One Baptism"

The last two years I've had the privilege of leading students from our church on a mission trip to Mexico. Both times I have been able to participate in a baptismal service with our sister church. What a blessing it has been to baptize some of our Spanish-speaking brothers and sisters. This experience has impressed upon me the common unity we have with Christians who speak a different language. Last year, after a couple of times of hearing our translator, Paul, translate my declaration of their baptism, I began to, with some difficulty, baptize them in Spanish.

I realized that it did not matter what language I was speaking in performing the baptism. I was baptizing a child of God and recognizing their membership

into the universal Church. For no matter where or when Christian baptism takes place, “we are all one body, we have the same Spirit, and we have all been called to the same glorious future. There is only one Lord, one faith, one baptism, and there is only one God and Father, who is over us all and in us all and living through us all” (Eph. 4:4-6).

November 7th

Mark 16:19-20; Luke 24:50-53; Acts 1:1-2:47. “Relationship”

While it is indeed true that it only takes one commonality to generate community, it is also true that community without relationship will die.

Like many couples who get married young, my wife and I lived in a number of apartment complexes during our first couple of years of marriage. Because of our proximity to the other residents, we were a community, but one that lacked relationship. Because of the lack of relationship, the community was of no benefit to us. We now own a home in a quiet neighborhood where we know all of our neighbors by first names. This neighborhood is a far more fulfilling community because of the relationships we enjoy.

In the early days of the church, the believers met together often (Acts 1:14; 2:44). This practice developed the relationships that led to mutual sharing and

more satisfying and fulfilling relationships with the Lord. Developing community requires relationship and relationship requires communication.

May you experience genuine Christian community that flows out of authentic relationships.

November 8th

Acts 3:1-5:42. "Unity"

In January 2007, the International Bulletin of Missionary Research reported that there are now 39,000 Christian denominations today and they project that number to increase to 55,000 by the year 2025. 39,000 denominations! This staggering report makes it hard to believe that the early Christians "were of one heart and mind" (Acts 4:32).

I wonder how it is that the church went from this close-knit group of believers to the highly fractured and often dysfunctional group that we are today. Jesus even prayed for our unity (John 17:21), and yet here we are 2,000 years later, Jesus' prayer going unanswered.

I think the cause of all of this disunity is that we don't always keep the main thing, the main thing. Hebrews 12:2 says that we are to keep our eyes on Jesus. This has to do with our focus as individual believers, but also as the church. When we take our focus off Jesus and the unity we have in Him, then disunity develops and the community of faith is fractured.

May you keep your focus on Jesus.

November 9th

Acts 6:1-8:1a. "Conflict"

As a community grows and develops, it will inevitably change as the needs and demands of the people change, resulting in conflict. In Acts 6, the church was growing rapidly and the first recorded conflict occurs. I think that it is instructive to us, how the church handled this early conflict. There are five distinct steps that were taken that brought a positive solution out of the conflict:

- 1) The conflict was not ignored, but acknowledged by the leadership (6:2).
- 2) The community was involved in the solution (6:3).
- 3) The decision of the leadership was accepted by the community (6:5).
- 4) The ministry of prayer was involved (6:6).
- 5) The gospel continued to expand (6:7).

I am not intending to give you a full explanation of conflict management today. But I do hope that you catch the spirit with which the early church handled this conflict. Remember, if a community is growing, then conflict will arise. It is when a community has become stagnant that there is a lack of conflict.

November 10th

Acts 8:1b-9:43. "Risk Taking"

Community can be very messy because it involves people who are unique and come with baggage. The New Testament church was no exception to this rule by any stretch of the imagination. In Acts chapter 9, we see that the church in Jerusalem was unwilling to accept Saul into the community of believers. The risk was too great in their mind and Saul had too much baggage in his background. However, every person that accepts the Lord and seeks to be involved with a church comes with some history and baggage, and fortunately Barnabas believed that the risk was worth taking.

We do not get to pick and choose who God intends to save and include in the church. If we did, the church would end up being a boring collection of people who walk, talk and think alike. Instead, because of God's infinite wisdom, the church includes people of different backgrounds, nationalities, experiences, education and personalities. This can make our relationships messy and it will always be risky to open up to new people.

November 11th

Acts 10:1-12:5. "Playing Favorites"

"If you give special attention and a good seat to the rich person, but say to the poor one, 'You can stand over there, or else sit on the floor' –doesn't this discrimination show that you are guided by wrong motives?" – James 2:3-4

In the reading today, Peter's vision makes it abundantly clear that the gospel of Jesus Christ is for all people regardless of race, creed, gender or any other category that we use to define groups of people. There is no external issue in people's lives that makes them unacceptable to God. It is only our personal sin and our sin nature that makes us unacceptable before a holy God. And there is no sin that cannot be forgiven when we come to Christian faith.

The result of this reality is that we all have the same standing before God. So, if this is true, why do we play favorites in the community of faith? This is what James (2:2-4) warned us against.

So, who do you play favorites with? Who do you choose to ignore at church? If God says that they are of infinite value (Luke 12:28), why would you treat them as if they are of no value?



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Week 46

November 12 - November 18

Acts 12:6-19:20; 1 Corinthians 1-3; Galatians 1-6; 1 Thessalonians 1-5; 2 Thessalonians 1-3

One of the themes that run throughout this week's passage is that of speaking boldly. The theme is interwoven through a variety of subjects. We have examples of those who spoke the gospel boldly. We have examples of those who confronted others boldly. We have examples of those who boldly had to tackle some difficult issues. I know you will be encouraged and/or exhorted in some area of your life as you read these passages.

November 12th

Acts 12:6-14:20. "Speaking Boldly"

There are some astounding things that take place in today's passage: Peter's escape from prison, Barnabas and Paul are commissioned and sent out, Paul chastises the sorcerer and the people of Lystra nearly murdered Paul. Yet running through all those stories is the evidence of men boldly on fire for the Lord. In the face of danger, imprisonment, ridicule and death they still spoke the truth boldly. In fact, the phrases "spoke out boldly" and "preaching boldly" even appear in the text (13:46; 14:3).

The apostle Paul made a request of the church in Ephesus that had to do with boldness; "Pray on my behalf, that utterance may be given to me in the

opening of my mouth, to make known with boldness the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains; that in proclaiming it I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak" (Eph. 6.19-20). The phrase that interests me is the last, "as I ought to speak." The obvious question is if that is how we should speak the gospel, are we doing so?

November 13th

Acts 14:21-28; Galatians 1:1-3:23. "Confrontation"

Several years ago, at a very large public meeting I challenged the speaker on a point he had made. He spoke about unity and then publicly condemned another member of the group with an accusation that was false. The parents of the accused couple were hurt and left. I felt compelled to say something. I didn't want to confront one of my peers, but I stood and asked him to clarify his purpose and support his allegation. Following the meeting I heard from some who supported what I said and others who did not.

Peter was guilty of saying one thing and doing another. At the public meeting he sided with a group of Judaizers who taught that conditions were to be added to salvation. Paul disagreed and during the public meeting challenged Peter. Since Peter's stance affected everyone at the meeting Paul felt a public statement among the same group was necessary. The issue was not the love Peter had for the Lord or the love Paul had for Peter, yet sometimes we need to confront others with the truth.

November 14th

Acts 15:1-21; Galatians 3:24-6:18. "Conflict Resolution"

Paul and Barnabas "argued forcefully and at length" with a believer teaching other believers something they felt was wrong. As leaders, Paul and Barnabas were obligated to confront those who taught Christians a false teaching. Disciples of Christ must get to a point where they can discern the truth, but if that is not happening then the shepherd or mature leader must step in and protect the other brothers and sisters from deception. There will be times this reaches a point of conflict and the passage in Acts 15 reveals how the church in Antioch and Jerusalem resolved conflict. The group of leaders met together to first communicate openly in order to clarify the argument. Their

conversation was productive. Their attitude was one of genuine concern with regard to one another and the topic. Peter, whom had just been confronted by Paul on the very topic being discussed, stood to testify how he had previously believed in error. James stood later and summarized the reports and drew up the decision as he quoted from the books of Amos and Isaiah.

November 15th

Acts 15:22-17:15. "Unpopular Decisions"

Without a doubt we know that Christ is the head of the church and our true Shepherd. Yet we also know that He has appointed some as elders and deacons. As we read yesterday, these are to meet together to ensure that truth is sought and godly direction is kept. As an issue emerges, they look to God and His Word and then make a decision they abide by and in turn expect the congregation to abide by (Acts 15:25; 16:4). I can tell you that this is a great responsibility and not to be taken lightly (James 3:1). I can also tell you that their decisions don't always make everyone happy. Over the years I have even seen some elders put off making a decision because they knew someone would have a complaint concerning it. Fortunately, that is not the case with the majority I have served with. They carry out the task before them humbly submitting before God. Do we have the same response? Do we humbly submit to those in leadership?

November 16th

Acts 17:16-18:3; 1 Thessalonians 1:1-5:11. "Ready to Explain"

"If you are asked about your Christian hope, always be ready to explain it" (1 Peter 3:15)

Years ago, I stood on Mars Hill at the Areopagus and thought of today's passage from Acts. Paul walked around Athens, Greece, as he waited for Silas and Timothy. But as he walked, he tried to observe the culture. He noticed what they valued, prioritized, believed, etc. As he was there he "went to the synagogue to debate with the Jews and the God-fearing Gentiles, and he spoke daily in the public square to all who happened to be there. He also had a

debate with some of the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers.” Some people then took Paul to the Council of Philosophers so they could hear more.

I was once invited to a family’s home for dinner, but what I didn’t know was that they had invited their neighbors and others in order for all of them to ask me questions about God, church, the Christian life, and many other things. When given an opportunity to talk about your Christian hope will you be ready to explain it?

November 17th

Acts 18:4-23; 1 Thessalonians 5:12-28; 2 Thessalonians 1-3. “The Power of More”

Paul visited Corinth which even surpassed Athens in importance at the time. According to what he wrote later, he arrived there “in weakness, timid and trembling” (1 Cor. 2:3). On one hand Corinth, Greece, was a refined, splendid and educated place. But on the other hand, it was better known for its wickedness and immorality. The temple to Aphrodite was built on the large hill behind the city and it housed an enormous number of religious prostitutes.

Corinth was a great ministry opportunity but it was also a great challenge. Paul apparently felt alone in his endeavor as God encouraged him with the words, “Don’t be afraid! Speak out! Don’t be silent! For I am with you, and no one will harm you because many people here in this city belong to me” (Acts 18:9-10). Elijah the prophet needed the same encouragement. He felt he was alone until God informed him otherwise: “You are not the only one left. I have 7,000 others who have never bowed down to Baal!” (1 Kings 19:18; Rom. 11:4). There is boldness and encouragement in fellowship.

November 18th

Acts 18:24-19:20; 1 Corinthians 1:1-3:23. “Bold Encouragement”

Apollos was on fire for the Lord. He knew the Scriptures well and was a gifted speaker. However, he didn’t have the whole story. He knew the story from the Old Testament up through John the Baptist’s message. More than likely he was encouraging people to prepare for the coming Messiah. Priscilla and Aquila were mature believers who could sense the passion and heart of Apollos. They saw his potential but also knew he needed some instruction. As Apollos heard about Jesus, he no doubt saw Scripture come alive. With this knowledge the church at Ephesus sent him west with great recommendations

and “he proved to be of great benefit” in evangelizing others. In fact, his new message, using the Scriptures, was fresh and beautiful; “The Messiah you are looking for is Jesus.”

Each party demonstrated boldness. Apollos continued preaching the gospel boldly. And, with a certain degree of boldness and compassion Priscilla and Aquila “took Apollos aside and explained the way of God more accurately,” and in doing so they changed the lives of many through the changed life and message of Apollos.



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Week 47

November 19 - November 25

Acts 19:21-20:3; Romans 1:1-8:17; 1 Corinthians 4-16

The theme for this week is submission. I know that this concept can be very challenging to many of you because it does not fit the American cultural value system. However, the need for submission is a Biblical expectation in the life of the Christian. This week will trace more of Paul's missionary journeys, specifically his third journey and a couple of the letters that he wrote while on that journey. May you be challenged and encouraged this week as you consider the need for submission in your life.

November 19th

1 Corinthians 4:1-7:40. "Authority"

“Obey your spiritual leaders and do what they say. Their work is to watch over your souls, and they know they are accountable to God. Give them reason to do this joyfully and not with sorrow. That would certainly not be for your benefit.” – Hebrews 13:17

Paul’s instructions in 1 Corinthians 5 may seem rather harsh, but based on the above verse, we know that Paul is accountable to God for the sake of the church. So, Paul is submitting to God’s authority and is then asking the church to submit to the authority given to him by God. The same is true today of the pastors and elders, whom God has placed in the church.

Sometimes I find a resistance in people to submit to the spiritual authority of pastors and elders in the church. I think that this stems from an unwillingness to accept their authority as actually God’s authority being exercised through them.

Are you willing to submit to the authorities (spiritual, paternal, political) that God has placed over you?

November 20th

1 Corinthians 8:1-11:1. “Weaker Brother”

I have a pastor friend who told me about how he chose not to watch the horse races at the Oregon State Fair one year because they allowed gambling. His concern was that a Christian brother or sister who struggled with gambling might see him entering or exiting the horse arena and assume he gambled and then be encouraged to violate their own conscience and place bets on the races.

This friend of mine was willing to give up his freedom in Christ to watch the races, with his daughters who love horses no less, because he had a genuine concern for his fellow believer.

Unfortunately, 1 Corinthians 8 is often abused by legalistic Christians attempting to curtail the exercising of genuine Christian freedom. No one can force you to give up your freedom as a believer; however, when you know that your actions will seriously lead a fellow believer into temptation, it is your responsibility to submit to Scripture and give up your freedom in that area.

May you never be a stumbling block to the growth of your brothers and sisters in Christ.

November 21st

1 Corinthians 11:2-13:13. "Body Life"

“...you will submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.” – Ephesians 5:21

The Church, like our bodies, is a complicated living organism made up of different parts. When all the parts are working together in harmony, it's a beautiful thing to watch. A church that works well together is like watching Tiger Woods hit a golf ball. Every part of his body works together for the singular purpose of hitting the ball towards the hole. A dysfunctional church is like when I hit a golf ball, hoping that some of the parts will work together towards the objective. It's not a pretty sight.

For the Church to work as intended, the various people involved must submit to one another. It takes a working-together of those involved for it to function. Agendas and petty differences must be laid aside to focus on the primary objective.

Paul's point in 1 Corinthians 12:12-27 is that every member of the body is equally valuable, important and needed to make the body function. Are you willing to see yourself, including your preferences and unique personality, as one among equals?

November 22nd

1 Corinthians 14-15. “Orderly Worship”

If we all were to share every thought that occurred to us during our worship services, it would be rather chaotic. This problem was precisely what Paul was instructing the church toward in 1 Cor. 14:26-40. He wasn't passing judgments on particular gifts or groups of people. His goal was "that everything is done properly and in order" (14:40).

To ensure that worship was orderly, Paul called for submission regarding certain issues in the Church. The submission he called for took on different forms. You were to be silent if there were enough people to share already, you had to wait your turn, and you were to be silent if there was no one to interpret when needed (14:27). Distracting questions were to be asked at a later time (14:35). Messages were subject to evaluation (14:29). No one message was more important than any other (14:30).

The opposite of submission – arrogance – makes it impossible to follow Paul's instructions. Without submission, church services would be chaos. Are you willing to submit to Paul's instructions to avoid confusion in the worship of our Lord and Savior?

November 23rd

Acts 19:21-20:3; Romans 1:1-32; 1 Corinthians 16:1-24. "God's Plan"

"The epistle to the Romans is widely regarded as the most significant of Paul's letters...Romans stands alone in the massiveness of its thought and the power it has released in history through its testimony to the gospel..." – D.G. Miller (ISBE)

God's plans are truly amazing. Because of the money Paul had collected for the believers in Jerusalem, Paul's desire to go to Rome would have to wait until he returned to Jerusalem. When he realized this, he decided to write to the church in Rome while in Corinth. If it had not been for these circumstances, Paul may have never penned the epistle to the Romans. It is hard to imagine the New Testament without this wonderful book.

Paul is a wonderful example of submitting to God's plan and timing in his life. It is not that Paul sat around and waited for God to reveal every detail of his plan. No, Paul was a man of action, but he was always willing to lay aside his own plans and desires to accomplish God's plan.

November 24th

Romans 2-4. "Justified by Faith"

In explaining justification by faith, Charles Ryrie once said, "Imagine a man before a judge who has been given the choice of paying a \$100 fine or serving 90 days in jail. He doesn't have any money, but he does have a family that depends on him. He tells such a heart-rending story that those present, including the judge, collect \$99.95 to help pay the fine. Even though they are only five cents short, the judge orders the bailiff to take the man to jail. Dejected, he walks out of the courtroom, thrusting his hands deep into his pockets where he finds a nickel! Elated, he rushes back into the courtroom and slaps it on the bar before the judge, declaring "I'm free, I'm free!" In his mind, what saved him? The \$99.95, or the five cents.

If we did anything to merit our salvation, we would be forever boasting about it in Heaven. The fact is, we could do nothing so Jesus paid it all.

Because we are justified by faith, we must recognize that we've done nothing to secure our salvation. We must submit to God's plan rather than try to add to the finished work of Christ Jesus.

November 25th

Romans 5:1-8:17. "Submitting to Temptation"

"But remember that the temptations that come into your life are no different from what others experience. And God is faithful. He will keep the temptation from becoming so strong that you can't stand up against it. When you are tempted, he will show you a way out so that you will not give into it." – 1 Corinthians 10:13

The Apostle Paul knew that the doctrine of salvation by grace through faith apart from the law would be difficult for Jewish believers to accept. They would accuse Paul of being soft on sin, and that grace actually encourages sinful living. Knowing this, Paul addressed their concerns in Romans 6, making it clear that the Christian has died to sin and has a new life in Christ. This is balanced by Romans 7:14-25, when Paul discusses the reality of the struggle against sin that every believer endures.

The issue is really one of daily submission. We must daily submit to God's will and consider ourselves dead to sin (6:11). Otherwise, we'll find ourselves submitting to temptation and doing the very thing we hate (7:15).

Week 48

November 26 - December 2

Acts 20:7-21:36; Romans 8:18-16:27; 2 Corinthians 1-13

This was an interesting week to find a theme in, but I continued to come across one word that stood out in several passages. The word “all” appears in this section nearly 100 times. “All” can be used a variety of ways; as an adjective referring to “the whole number or amount of or every one of a class; or, “completely given to or absorbed by; the greatest possible, every, any, nothing but, only.” Or, as an adverb referring to a “complete degree or to the full or entire extent.” Watch for the variety of ways this word will be used.

November 26th

Romans 8:18-10:21. “Salvation for All”

“Anyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved” (Rom. 10:13). Can we really say “anyone?” Well, God says race doesn’t matter. “Jew and non-Jew are the same in this respect.” Money apparently doesn’t help. Economic status doesn’t matter. But how about the intellectually astute individual? Or the trained priest? Education and vocation don’t matter. What about tradition? No. In fact, sometimes it just seems to get in the way. What about the right denomination? Ooh, that’s a tough one. No. Not even mentioned. In fact, those who were concerned about following Paul or Apollos just seemed to be missing the point. So, what matters?

If we try to add anything to the simplicity of what is mentioned here we miss the point. The most powerful thing about this passage is that salvation has been made available to every one of us. Each of us stand just as guilty, just as lost, just as filthy, sinful and destitute before the Holy God, but He intervened. Confess that Jesus is Lord and believe that God raised Him from the dead... that’s what matters.

November 27th

Romans 11-14. “Mercy for All”

"God was merciful to you instead" (11:30b). This is a powerful passage. Mercy became available to those of us who are not Jews only because the Jews refused it (11:30). God then decided to offer it to us—although Israel still remains the chosen—and once that decision was made, He would not go back on it (11:29). If you don't fully appreciate this then you may not fully understand mercy. Mercy is defined as "leniency shown to a guilty person."

A mother once approached Napoleon seeking a pardon for her son. The emperor replied that the young man had committed a certain offense twice and justice demanded death. "But I don't ask for justice," the mother explained. "I plead for mercy."

"But your son does not deserve mercy," Napoleon replied. "Sir," the woman cried, "it would not be mercy if he deserved it, and mercy is all I ask for." "Well, then," the emperor said, "I will have mercy." And he spared the woman's son.

"Oh, what a wonderful God we have! How great are his riches and wisdom and knowledge!" (11:33a)

November 28th

Romans 15-16; 2 Corinthians 1:1-2:4. "All Comfort for All"

A little girl came home from a neighbor's house where her little friend had died. "Why did you go?" questioned her father. "To comfort her mother," said the child. "What could you do to comfort her?" "I climbed into her lap and cried with her."

It's not just that God comforts all, but He comforts us in all our troubles (2 Cor. 1), and then beyond that there is purpose to what we endure. On the other side of trouble and being comforted by God we are better equipped to comfort and encourage others.

How can we offer comfort to others? Use the Word of God. Ps. 119:52, "I meditate on your age-old regulations. O LORD, they comfort me." Just our presence can be very powerful. Job 2:11, "When three of Job's friends heard of the tragedy he had suffered, they got together and traveled from their homes to comfort and console him." Unfortunately, seven days later they felt the need to explain why. We can't always offer that. Be sincere and thoughtful, Job 21:34, "How can your empty clichés comfort me? All your explanations are lies!"

November 29th

2 Corinthians 2:5-6:13. "All for God"

Remember little Shirley Temple? Following her childhood movie career, she went on to hold several diplomatic posts, serving as the U.S. delegate to many international conferences and summits. She was appointed a delegate to the United Nations by President Richard Nixon in 1969. She was appointed United States Ambassador to Ghana (1974–76). In 1976, she became the first female Chief of Protocol of the United States. She also served as United States Ambassador to Czechoslovakia (1989–92).

An ambassador is a diplomatic official accredited to a foreign sovereign or government, or to an international organization, to serve as the official representative of his or her own country. Ambassadors from the United States currently serve 196 host countries, over one dozen international organizations, two ambassadors for crimes and over one dozen senior diplomatic representatives.

Do you know that you are an ambassador? You are Christ's ambassador (5:20) to this foreign soil that is not your true home. Take this position as seriously as God meant for you to. "We serve God whether people honor us or despise us, whether they slander us or praise us." (6:8)

November 30th

2 Corinthians 6:14-10:18. "All or Nothing"

Today's passage contains several "all or nothing" kind of statements concerning a variety of topics. Were you looking for them as you read? For instance, what about relationships in chapter six? Partnerships are limited to just Christians or just non-Christians, never mixing the two. A believing spouse will find he/she has very little in common with a non-believing spouse. What about repentance in chapter seven? Repentance can't be half-hearted. Paul illustrates it with someone who feels sorrow in getting caught but not repenting and it still leads to death (v. 8-10). What about generous stewardship in chapters eight and nine? Perhaps a lack of generous stewardship reflects a lack of fully understanding "how full of love and kindness our Lord Jesus Christ was. Though he was very rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that by his poverty he could make you rich" (8:9). "You will be glorifying God through your generous gifts" (9:13). And what about consistency in chapter ten? Paul defends his apostolic authority on God's calling and, without bragging, also on his personal track record (v. 8).

December 1st

Acts 20:7-12; 2 Corinthians 11-13. "All the Time"

There are a couple of statements in Second Corinthians 13 that I latched onto. One statement appears in verse eight, "stand for the truth at all times." That is a terrific word of exhortation for every believer. It provides clarity and purpose for what we are involved in. The other statement is in verse five, "Examine yourselves to see if your faith is really genuine. Test yourselves. If you cannot tell that Jesus Christ is among you, it means you have failed the test." If you pause long enough to examine what you are involved in, and then beyond that to examine your faith, you will learn much about your relationship with Christ.

I believe there are many who could stand to take this test more often and more honestly. Jesus says there will be many on the day their eternal destiny is determined who will say, "But Lord, I did this and that..." and Jesus will say "I never knew you." Are you due for a spiritual checkup? Are you increasingly aware of Christ's presence and power in your life? Are you actively seeking to grow closer to Him?

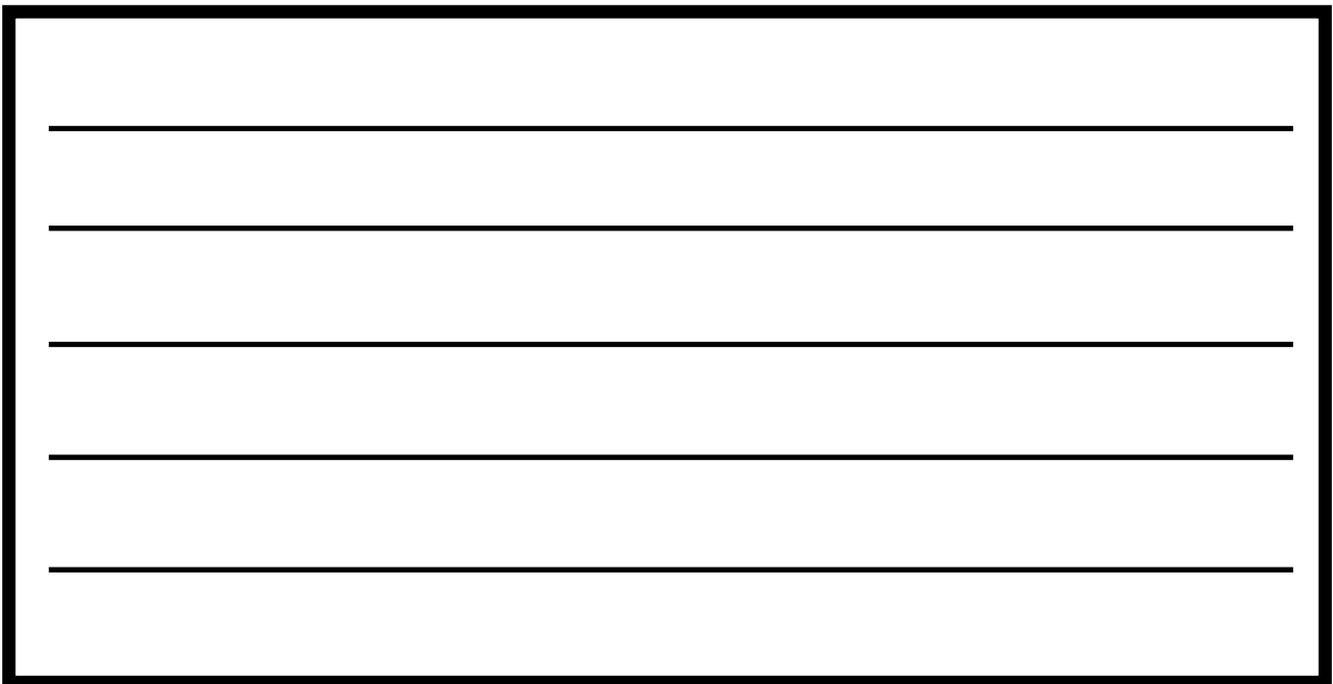
December 2nd

Acts 20:13-21:36. "Worth Nothing at All"

What makes life valuable: Good health, good self-esteem, having children, being married, being financially secure, being attractive or having lots of friends?

We have been reading about the Apostle Paul's life, his conversion, his missionary journeys, his hardships, etc. Paul had a resume' that would impress most everyone, but did it impress him? Not a bit. In fact, he considered it rubbish and loss compared to knowing Christ Jesus as his Lord (see Philippians 3). Paul emphasizes the same point here in Acts 20:24, "But my life is worth nothing unless I use it for doing the work assigned me by the Lord Jesus—the work of telling others the Good News about God's wonderful kindness and love."

How do you measure the worth of your life? Does life's value increase as you add things to it? Does it increase as you get more from it? Paul stressed its worth as he put into it, not took from it. What is "the work assigned you by the Lord Jesus?" Do you find worth in accomplishing it?



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Week 49

December 3 - December 9

Acts 21:37-28:31; Ephesians; Colossians

The theme for this week is the providence of God. While there are a number of different nuances to this theological concept, the devotionals are going to focus primarily on His care for you. We will observe God's providential care in the Apostle Paul's life and also consider ways that God providentially cares for you, His child. – *David Curtis*

December 3rd

Acts 21:37-23:35. "Coincidence? I Think Not!"

We don't even know his name, but the role he played in Paul's ministry was as significant as any other. He was Paul's nephew, and he just happened to be in the right place at the right time. Was it merely coincidental that this young man overheard the plot to assassinate Paul, or was it divine providence and part of God's plan in Paul's life and the life of his nephew?

Now, because this story is recorded in the Bible, it may be easier for you to see and acknowledge God's providential role. So, then I have to ask, "Do you acknowledge God's providential role in your life as well?" You may never be a famous missionary like the Apostle Paul, but that does not diminish God's love and care for you, nor is His plan for your life any less significant. Concerning God's plan and care for our lives, King David wrote, "Every moment was laid out before a single day had passed." (Psalm 139:16)

May you learn to acknowledge God's providential care as His plans for your life unfold.

December 4th

Acts 24:1-26:31. "Rescue"

"So you see, the Lord knows how to rescue godly people from their trials..."
(2 Peter 2:9a)

The citizens of Feldkrich, Austria, didn't know what to do. Napoleon's army was preparing to attack. It was Easter morning and a council was summoned to the church to decide what to do.

The pastor rose and said, "Friends we have been counting on our own strength, and apparently that has failed. As this is the day of our Lord's Resurrection, let us just ring the bells, have our services as usual, and leave the matter in His hands. We know only our weakness and not the power of God to defend us." The council accepted his plan and the church bells rang. The enemy, hearing the sudden peal, concluded that the Austrian army had arrived during the night to defend the town. Before the service ended, the enemy broke camp and left.

Do you trust in God's strength for your protection and in His providential care for your life, or do you trust in your own strength? May you know the power of God to rescue and defend you when trials come.

December 5th

Acts 27:1-44. "Calm in the Storm"

"Sometimes he calms the storm, sometimes he calms his child." – Scott Krippayne

The text doesn't necessarily mention it, but I think that it is a fair assumption that Paul and his companions prayed for a safe journey on this voyage to Rome. So why was it that they encountered such a strong and terrible storm? Because God's plan was never to give Paul an easy journey, but rather to care for and use Paul in the midst of the storm.

You see, the providence of God is not like a get-out-of-jail-free card. God does not guarantee His children an easy life, but He does promise that He will always be with us (Matthew 28:20). In fact, sometimes God is even the one who brings the trials into our life in order to accomplish His plans and purposes in us and through us. Like with the Apostle Paul, God will not remove all the storms from your life, but He will use you in the midst of those storms.

Don't ask God to remove the trials and difficulties of life. Rather, ask Him for strength in the midst of it all.

December 6th

Acts 28:1-31; Ephesians 1:1-2:22. "Greatness of Christ"

As I sit in my office and write, I am reminded that it is Veteran's Day and I am supposed to be appreciating the sacrifices made by American soldiers and the freedoms I enjoy as a result. Now don't get me wrong, I appreciate all that very much, but what bothers me are those individuals who are trusting in their citizenship as Americans more than the providential care of the God who created them and loves them.

Paul declared that Christ "is far above any ruler or authority or power or leader or anything else in this world or in the world to come" (Ephesians 1:21). Wow! History has shown us that kingdoms and nations come and go. What would happen to your faith if the United States of America no longer existed? Would all hope for the gospel and our salvation be lost? Absolutely not! Christ is far greater than any one nation.

May you remember that, "The grass withers, and the flowers fall away. But the Word of the Lord will last forever" (1 Peter 1:24b-25a). God's providence will always be there.

December 7th

Ephesians 3:1-5:14. "Strength in Numbers"

A while back, I was watching a documentary with my father-in-law on life in the ocean. A fascinating program, it was amazing to see how the schools of fish would swim circles in groups as tightly as possible to defend themselves against predators. On their own, these fish have no defense against these predators, but as a group they can survive with minimal casualties.

As I think about this phenomenon in nature, I see a clear connection with how the church functions as an instrument of God's care for the believer. On our own, Christians can become lost, confused and vulnerable to spiritual attack.

However, God, in His infinite wisdom, has given us the community of faith, His Church, for our spiritual protection. He gives us pastors and teachers who instruct us in the truth of God's Word; elders who care for us and watch over us; and ministries which afford us the opportunity to serve and meet people's needs.

May you come to see your involvement in a church, not as a burden, but as a means for God to care for your needs.

December 8th

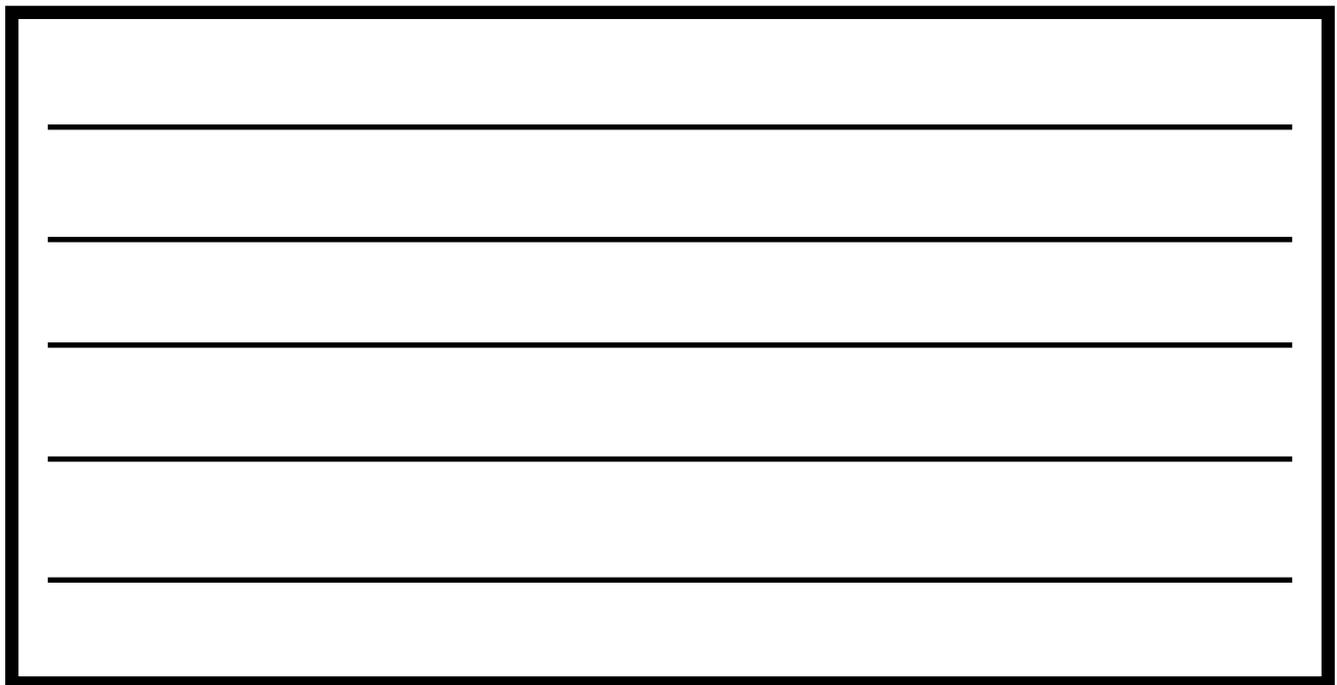
Ephesians 5:15-6:23; Colossians 1:1-23. "Armor of God"

The truth that God providentially cares for His people does not guarantee that God will supernaturally intervene in our lives when trouble hits. It also doesn't mean that God will violate our own free will just to protect us in a given situation.

We have to own some responsibility for our lives and our actions. Often times I think that God's providence is a combination of appropriate actions taken by a sovereign God, and the utilization of resources made available to us by that same God.

This is where the illustration of the armor of God (Ephesians 6:13-17) comes into play. God, in His divine providence, has given spiritual resources for us in spiritual battles. It is inappropriate and actually quite arrogant for Christians to assume that God's providence means an easy life without having to prepare for spiritual battle.

May you see God's invitation to put on spiritual armor as one way in which He cares for you.



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December 9th

Colossians 1:24-4:18. "Marriage"

Recently I took some Jr. High students to a retreat. Our speaker was a single youth pastor from Washington named James. During one of the breaks in between sessions, James and I were talking about life and ministry and the subject of marriage came up. James mentioned that he feels that God uses marriage for the purpose of sanctification in our life. I agreed with his statement, and still do.

Marriage has brought about significant spiritual growth in my life, and not just that, I believe that my wife Kristi is a gift from God and is part of His providential care for me. I can't begin to count the times I have benefited from her insight and wisdom.

As a pastor, most people see me as an organized, thoughtful, and put-together individual. However, the reality is that without Kristi in my life, I am disorganized, thoughtless and basically a complete train wreck.

May you grow to see, as I have, that sometimes God's care for you is expressed by the relationships that He brings into your life. Thank you, Kristi. I Love you. – *David Curtis*

Week 50

December 10 - December 16

Philippians 1-4; 1 Timothy 1-6; 2 Timothy 1:1-4:18; Titus 1-3; Philemon; James 1-5

This week's passage focuses our attention on instruction, teaching and the power of the spoken word. The tongue has the power of life and death (Prov. 18:21). People have risen or fallen because of their spoken word. People have won or lost, have conquered or been defeated in life, have prospered or stagnated depending on their spoken word. People have achieved great things or nothing in life because of the spoken word. We will learn the importance of discerning truth in what we hear and in making sure it is what we speak.

December 10th

Philippians 1:1-2:11; Philemon 1. "Messages and Motives"

"Whether or not their motives are pure, the fact remains that the message about Christ is being preached, so I rejoice" (Philip. 1:18).

The Apostle Paul declared his imprisonment was a tremendous opportunity to share the Gospel. With pure motives he preached the Good News of Jesus Christ. However, others preached just to build up their own reputation, and out of jealousy they used Paul's imprisonment to try to make a name for themselves. It's amazing how God can still use people and situations to bring Him glory that are truly not seeking His glory.

As with any topic, our motives should match the message we are sharing. Perhaps even more so, our motives, our reason for sharing the message of Christ should match the truth and beauty of that message. It's apparent that the beauty of the message of Christ had touched Paul's life in such a way that he had joy even while imprisoned. Does your message match your motives? Knowing that the message of Christ was being preached caused Paul to "rejoice." Does it cause you to rejoice?

December 11th

Philippians 2:12-4:23. "Shining Brightly"

The past few weeks, I have been overwhelmed by the number of people who are far more intent on pointing out what is wrong rather than looking for what is right. In this passage Paul essentially informs us that this is normal. He tells us that people will see what is wrong with your life before they see what is right. So, he informs us, "In everything you do, stay away from complaining and arguing, so that no one can speak a word of blame against you ...live clean, innocent lives ...in a dark world ...let your lives shine brightly" (2:15).

There are things we say and do that are more than just damaging to our personal testimony they are destructive within the church. Are you aware of what kind of words people speak of you or of your church family and what are you doing to make sure they are positive words? We have to practice what we preach. Paul said, "Keep putting into practice all you learned from me and

heard from me and saw me doing" (4:9). Do you have enough confidence in how you live to say that?

December 12th

James 1:1-3:18. "Speak Wisely"

In just these three chapters James has written volumes of material to consider pertinent to this week's theme—the power of the spoken word. Yet he has also addressed the quandaries lying therein. He has informed us that "those who control their tongue can also control themselves in every other way," but then, "no one can tame the tongue" (3:2,8). He also tells us that Abraham's faith was not the only thing that saved him, it was also by what he did (2:24). He adds, "Faith that doesn't show itself by good deeds is no faith at all—it is dead and useless" (2:17). He also says it is more important that we are "quick to listen and slow to speak" (1:19). By nature, we are more apt to do the opposite. And then he even starts off the letter telling us about all the good things trials bring into our life but that God doesn't tempt anyone (1:2-18). Temptations seek to create a fall, whereas trials seek to create an avenue for growth.

Perhaps the bottom line is this; if we are going to speak out let's make sure we know what we're talking about.

December 13th

James 4:1-5:20; 1 Timothy 1:1-2:15. "Prayer Spoken"

A young minister, learning that a woman from Boston who was visiting in town had been taken ill, stopped in to cheer her up. "I'd like to say a brief prayer for your recovery," he suggested. The woman responded, "That won't be necessary, young man, I'm being prayed for in Boston."

James has addressed a variety of topics relevant to the power of the spoken word. Of course, his list of topics would not be complete without mentioning prayer. To the suffering he encourages them to keep praying about it. To those who have reason to be thankful he exhorts to continually sing praises to the Lord. To those who are sick he urges them to ask the elders to pray over them. He then talks about a "prayer offered in faith." This is quite different than some who have "faith in their prayer." It may seem trivial, but a

prayer offered in faith is one that yields to God's will, whereas faith in a prayer is a belief that we will dictate how God will answer.

Prayer is our spoken word to God.

December 14th

1 Timothy 3:1-6:10. "False Teaching is a Waste of Time"

The Apostle Paul gives young Timothy a great deal of instruction concerning false teaching. Most often when we hear the term "false teaching" we think of descriptions such as "those who are teaching wrong doctrine" (1:3), "those who deny truth" (6:3), or "teachings that come from demons" (4:1). However, Paul actually spends a seemingly greater amount of time warning against those who "waste time in endless speculation over myths and spiritual genealogies" (1:4), or those who "spend their time arguing and talking foolishness" (1:6), or those who "waste time arguing over godless ideas and old wives' tales" or those who don't "spend their time and energy in training themselves for spiritual fitness" (4:7), or those who "have an unhealthy desire to quibble over the meaning of words" (6:4).

What we teach must have priority, meaning we need to spend our time and energy speaking what is of most importance. It's easy for us to get sidetracked and begin spending time reading, studying or teaching things that "don't help people live a life of faith in God (1:4) or "are not foundational for a godly life" (6:3).

December 15th

1 Timothy 6:11-21; 2 Timothy 1:1-18; Titus 1-3. "Promote Right Teaching"

The spoken word is powerful, yet to be most powerful it must ring true. It is vital that we speak and teach truth and only truth. The first portion of Titus 2 emphasizes the importance of promoting right teaching. "This is the content of our faith. Believers must be grounded in the truths of the Bible so they won't be swayed by the powerful oratory of false teachers, the possible devastation of tragic circumstances, or the pull of emotions. Learn the Bible, study theology, apply biblical principles, and do what you learn." (Life Application)

Being "grounded in the truths of the Bible" means immersing ourselves in Scripture. We must know the truth well in order to recognize the counterfeit. In the currency world, those who professionally recognize counterfeit money

spend their time studying the genuine and when a fake comes along they quickly identify it. In order to promote right teaching we must be studying Scripture. The greater devotion you expend to study, the better you will know truth and the better you will promote right teaching.

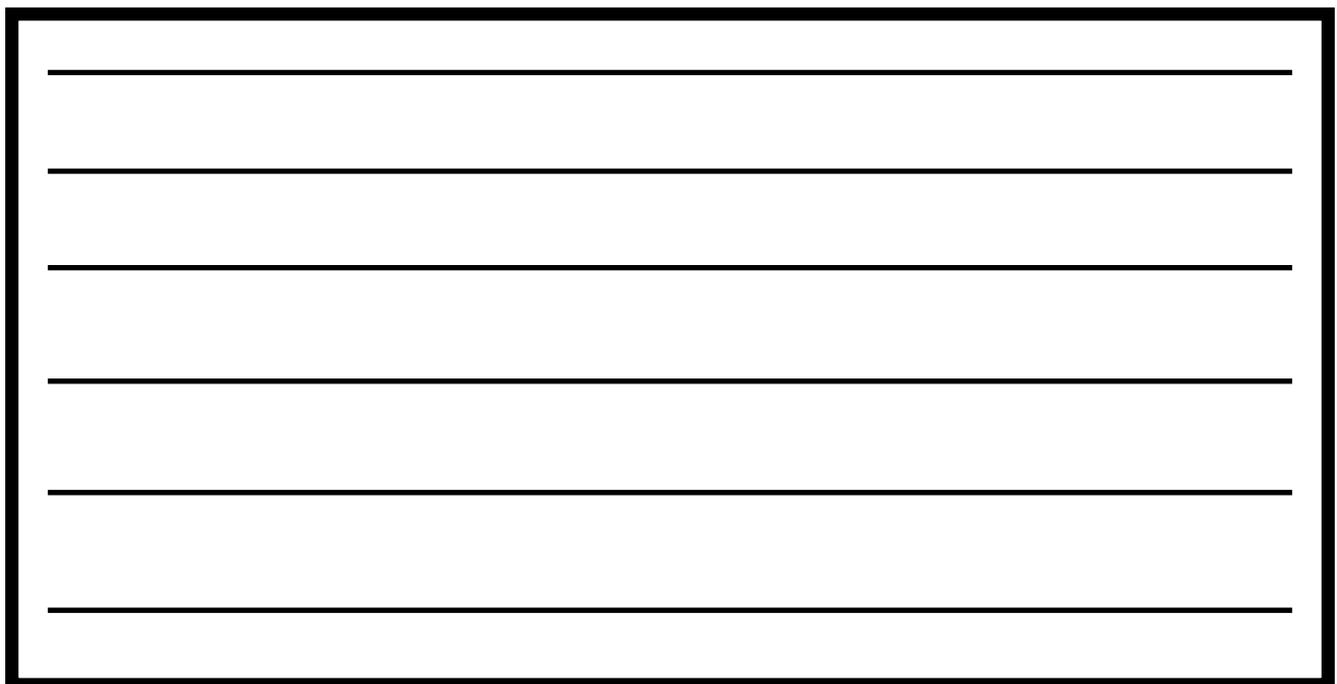
December 16th

2 Timothy 2:1-4:18. "Sending Forward the Spoken Word"

Every time I read Second Timothy I can't help but be reminded that these were Paul's last words. I can't imagine how young Timothy must have read them over and over. As Paul sat alone in the cold Roman prison waiting his execution, he knew they were his final words (4:6). It's wonderful to read Paul's conclusion; "I have fought a good fight, I have finished the race, and I have remained faithful" (4:7). Try and picture yourself at the end of life. Could you look back and know as Paul did that you had been faithful to God's call and that you had finished the race well?

Paul's spoken word had been powerful, true and honoring to God. He finished well. However, the spoken word was to live on. Paul was passing the torch. As he wrote he mentored young Timothy. Beyond that, Paul essentially mentors each of us through his teachings, words, examples, etc.

Paul's life has a way of emboldening each of us to live, speak and teach the Word of God for the glory of God.



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Week 51

December 17 - December 23

2 Timothy 4:19-22; Hebrews; 1 Peter; 2 Peter

For those of you who have been reading this devotional through the entire year, the end is almost in sight. It has been a joy to journey through the scriptures with you and to help you discover the riches that the Word of God has for you. My prayer is that your experience of reading through the entire Bible this year has been an exciting opportunity that has changed your life. When you turn the calendar to January, I hope that you will now Live the Word. James 1:22 says, "And remember, it (the word of God) is a message to obey, not just listen to. If you don't obey you are only fooling yourself." So, our theme this week, and I hope for the rest of your life, is to Live the Word. - *David Curtis*

December 17th

2 Timothy 4:19-22; Hebrews 1:1-4:13. "Living and Active"

"The word, as indicated by the words 'living and active,' must not be thought of as a static speech-act. Rather, it is a dynamic power that has the ability to effect change, both in the created order and in individual lives" – George H. Guthrie

So, what does it mean to "live the Word?" A big part of the meaning has to do with obedience. As I think about the above quote from Bible Commentator George H. Guthrie, it seems to me that every time I encounter the Word, either written or spoken, the power of God is working in and through that encounter to change my life. His Word calls me to righteous living for His sake, and at the same time convicts me of sin in my life. It isn't so much that God's word tells me to change, but that it actually brings about the change. So, then the question I have to ask is, "Will I be obedient to the changes that the Word of God is seeking to bring about in my life?"

My prayer is that spending time in the word this year hasn't been a burdensome task for you, but rather an exciting daily encounter with the living and active Word.

December 18th

Hebrews 4:14-7:28. "Listening"

"You are young only once, but you can stay immature indefinitely" – Ogden Nash

Hebrews 5:11-14 describes those Christians who are really not living the word in their daily lives. Actually, according to the author of Hebrews, not only were they not living it, they were not even listening to it (Hebrews 5:11).

This reminds me of the times when I give my children instruction. Often my instructions seem to fall on deaf ears only to receive an "I already heard you Dad," when I repeat myself. What I now know as a father, and what I hope my young children will soon learn, is that truly hearing something implies a response with appropriate action, namely obedience.

So how do you respond to your Heavenly Father? Do you attempt to ignore Him as long as possible trying to fulfill your selfish desires? Do you listen and yet choose your own path? Do you listen and yet forget to do what He has asked of you?

Remember, that to listen to the word of God without living out the word is not really listening at all.

December 19th

Hebrews 8:1-10:39. "Tattooed"

"Your body is the one thing you have ultimate control over. Tattoos are a way of committing to something permanent and stable, of recording who and what you are right now" – Anne Velliquette, academic researcher commenting on the popularity of tattoos.

It may surprise some of you to hear that I have a tattoo. You may be even more surprised when I say that I hope all of you reading this have one too. These tattoos are not anything that you would ever see on the human body. No, rather the tattoos are of a spiritual nature, for as partakers of a new and better covenant, you have the law of God written on your heart and mind (Hebrews 8:10).

When you came to faith in Christ, you committed your life to something far more permanent than some ink on your skin. You committed your life to the one who is the same yesterday, today and forever (Hebrews 13:8), and to his word, which never changes and never fails (1 Kings 8:56).

December 20th

Hebrews 11:1-12:29. "Fear Not"

For a long time, I read Hebrews 12:1-2 with fear. I had always assumed that the "cloud of witnesses" were there to judge us as believers as to whether or not we are living up to their standard. I was living a Christian life, constantly looking over my shoulder and concerned if I was doing it right all of the time.

Then one day, someone pointed out that the passage in Hebrews doesn't imply judgment, but rather encouragement. The witnesses, those people of faith mentioned in the previous chapter (Hebrews 11), are not judging or critiquing us, but rather are cheering us on and encouraging us. They have been through the fire and know what it is to live by faith.

As you think about living a life of faith or living the word, do you live it out of fear and trepidation, or out of love and encouragement? Remember that you are loved and accepted as a child of God and that "perfect love expels all fear" (1 John 4:18).

May you live the word, knowing that there are many who have gone before who are cheering you on.

December 21st

Hebrews 13:1-25; 1 Peter 1:1-2:3. "Holiness"

In the forests of Northern Europe and Asia lives a little animal called the ermine, known for his snow-white fur in winter. He instinctively protects his white coat against anything that would soil it.

Hunters take advantage of this unusual trait of the ermine. They don't set a snare to catch him, but instead they find his home, which is usually a cleft in a rock or a hollow in an old tree. They smear the entrance and interior with grime. The hunters set their dogs loose to find and chase the ermine. The frightened animal flees toward home, but doesn't enter because of the filth. Rather than soil his white coat, he is trapped by the dogs and captured while preserving his purity. For the ermine, purity is more precious than life.

“But now you must be holy in everything you do, just as God—who chose you to be his children—is holy” (1 Peter 1:15). How important is holiness to you? To live the word is to practice the pursuit of holiness. We have the living word (John 1:14) dwelling inside us (2 Cor. 11:10). This is not only what makes us holy, but it also calls us to holiness.

December 22nd

1 Peter 2:4-5:11. “Suffering”

“I have given them your word. And the world hates them because they do not belong to the world, just as I do not. I’m not asking you to take them out of the world, but to keep them safe from the evil one.” – Jesus (John 17:14-15)

For the first-century disciples, like Peter, suffering for the faith was a constant reality. It did not bother Peter that Jesus neglected to pray that his followers wouldn’t have trials. Peter had witnessed first-hand the persecution that the Lord endured. Why should it be any different for Christ’s followers? In fact, church tradition records Peter being crucified upside down, for he refused to die in the same manner as his Savior.

Did you notice 1 Peter 4:12-19? To live the word **is** to suffer. Christ’s life was marked by suffering, trials and persecution. He knew what awaited His followers. He knew the animosity of the world when confronted with the truth of the gospel.

May you come to view suffering, not as something to be avoided at all costs, but as an essential part of living the word.

December 23rd

1 Peter 5:12-14; 2 Peter 1:1-3:18. “Living by Faith”

“We may have as much of God as we will. Christ puts the key of the treasure-chamber into our hand, and bids us take all that we want. If a man is admitted into the bullion vault of a bank and told to help himself, and comes out with one cent, whose fault is it that he is poor.” – Alexander MacLaren

Have you ever found yourself stuck in your Christian life? You are trying to live for God, but you just are not getting anywhere. If you are anything like me, you have probably thought, “If I just tried a little harder, and prayed more, then I would be alright.” The problem with this thinking is that it is too focused on

you. Instead of that approach, we must turn to Christ who has “given us everything we need for living a godly life” (2 Peter 1:3).

The means to living a godly life is not found in our personal determination not to sin, but rather in our faith in Christ.

May you see that, not only are you saved by faith, but you live by faith as Christ lives in you.

Week 52

December 24 - December 31

1 John 1-5; 2 John; 3 John; Jude; Revelation 1-22

This week is Christmas and we remember the birth of a special child, Jesus Christ. In our passage this week we will focus on the children of God. We will look at what it means to be a child of God and how it affects our life now and 10,000 years from now. You have much to celebrate as you come to the end of the Bible and this year's commitment you made to walk through it. And as we think of the end, the last few day's readings will center on the end of time. Child of God, may you be encouraged by this week's passages.

December 24th

1 John 1:1-4:6. "A Child of Who?"

We are enthralled by famous people. We cherish their autographs, mementos, pictures, books, and even their children. It's something special to be the son or daughter of so-and-so. Imagine being a foster child who is one day adopted by someone famous. It would instantly make you famous.

It is an unfortunate thing but the children of God run the risk of taking their celebrated adoption for granted. You are not the child of a famous speaker, actor or politician, but a child of the God of the universe, your Heavenly Father who loves you tremendously.

Although somewhat hard to grasp but true, is that a child represents his/her parents. For instance, when the child of a prince or president makes a mess, we will soon hear about it through the media. There is a certain expectation and obligation that should attempt to be met. As a child of God we also have an obligation to live as a child of God should ("not living in spiritual darkness" 1:6, "obeying His commands" 2:4; 3:10, "loves other Christians" 2:10; 3:11, "keep themselves pure" 3:3).

December 25th

1 John 4:7-5:21; 2 John 1; 3 John 1. "What Kind of Love"

God's love for us could never be displayed greater than by what we remember at Christmas; God sending His Son.

This morning I was reading about another new world religion. It is called the Temple of Love. The followers believe all religions and peoples can unite under just the auspice of love. First John 4:8 intentionally reads "God is love" not "love is God." Our world has so perverted and misinterpreted love. It is to them something that makes the world go around and makes it all happy and right. However, the love they describe is selfish, often freeing them from any kind of

obligation or principle. God is not that kind of love. "Real love is like God, who is holy, just and perfect. If we truly know God, we will love as he does" (Life App.). So, if we are a child of God who is love what does it look like to love as He asks? God's love is holy, sacrificial and pure of motive. His love looks for ways to bring about our best; maturity, provision, protection, etc. So, as we love one another we are also to reveal that same kind of love.

December 26th

Jude 1; Revelation 1:1-2:29. "Hold Up the Light"

I am intrigued by the messages to the seven churches (Rev. 2-3). Each message has similar parts. Each message begins with an expression similar to "I know all your works." Each message also begins with an introduction describing the Lord Jesus, yet in ways as are fitting to the message. Each message also offers a promise to "everyone who is victorious" or "overcomes." Each message concludes with a sentence similar to "anyone who is willing to hear let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches." The letters contain words of warning as well as words of promise. Yet note how the churches are first described; as lamp stands (1:12,20).

David called the Lord his "lamp" (2 Sam. 22:29). God's Word is also identified as a "lamp" (Ps. 119:105). In Matthew five Jesus describes Christians as "lights" that should shine in our world. Therefore, I can't think of a better description of the church, God's people, than a "lamp stand." Perhaps an appropriate question to ask would be; how effective are we at holding high God's shining light in the world?

December 27th

Revelation 3:1-6:17. "Worship in Heaven"

I love to imagine the scene in Heaven as God is worshiped. John describes it in so many places in this passage. Try and picture some of these scenes: "Day after day and night after night they keep on saying, Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty ...they fall down and worship ...and they lay their crown before the throne and say, You are worthy, O Lord our God, to receive glory and honor and praise ...then I looked again, and I heard the singing of thousands and millions of angels around the throne ...and they sang in a mighty chorus ...then I heard

every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea. They also sang ...fell down and worshiped God and the Lamb."

Scripture describes our worship of God most often with falling down before Him or with our heads bowed. The scene we will witness will be so much beyond what we can imagine that we will surely be overwhelmed by God's glory and the scene of millions around us, all in worship of the Father.

December 28th

Revelation 7:1-10:11. "Praise God!"

Everyone needs praise for his accomplishments, but few people make the need known quite as clearly as the little boy who said to his father: "Let's play darts. I'll throw and you say 'Wonderful!'"

The visions of Revelation often describe a great multitude in heaven "too great to count" (7:9) shouting their praises to God and the Lamb (Christ). In a similar way, as the little boy throwing darts, we offer praise to God for His accomplishments, but they are not vain or empty praises as we consider who He is and what He's done.

Some Sunday mornings we've sang a song called Who Am I, by Casting Crowns. The bridge to the chorus says, "Not because of who I am, But because of what you've done. Not because of what I've done, But because of who you are."

I would encourage you to read Psalm 103. It expresses God's love for us and how what He does for us lets us know what He is really like. Just from this psalm you will have enough reasons to shout your praises to God for a very long time.

December 29th

Revelation 11:1-14:20. "Harvest Time"

Jesus said, "I assure you, those who listen to my message and believe in God who sent me have eternal life. They will never be condemned for their sins, but they have already passed from death into life" (John 5:24).

The picture at the end of Revelation 14 of Christ swinging the sharp sickle over the earth is a solemn one. At that point it will be "harvest time." In the Gospel of John, chapter four verse 35, there is a Gospel harvest explained: "The fields are white and ready to harvest." A continual harvest of people ready to be saved by the Gospel is out there waiting to hear from us. However, there is a time limit, an expiration date. And that is when this next harvest arrives; the harvest of judgment: "The harvest is the end of the age" (Matt. 13:39). For the believer this harvest takes us home. For the unbeliever it is every bit as grim as it sounds. "God will come ...with his mighty angels, in flaming fire, bringing judgment on those who don't know Him ...they will be punished with eternal destruction, forever separated from the Lord and from his glorious power" (2 Thes. 1:8-10).

December 30th

Revelation 15:1-18:24. "Babylon"

The Tenth of Tevet is one of the four fast days that commemorate dark times in Jewish history. The Tenth of Tevet marks the onset of the siege of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar, the King of Babylonia, and the beginning of the battle that ultimately destroyed Jerusalem and the Temple of Solomon, and sent the Jews into the 70-year Babylonian Exile. Saddam Hussein pronounced himself as the reincarnation of Nebuchadnezzar, and dreamed of restoring the Babylonian empire to its former size and glory. If that was his desire, God gave

him a similar outcome; driven out of his kingdom hiding in a hole. In fact, Saddam Hussein was hanged on the 9th of Tevet, the eve of the Jewish fast day.

Revelation 17 and 18 discuss the end of Babylon. Chapter 17 deals with Babylon as spiritual entity and chapter 18 deals with it as a political entity. The idea of a world religion is fast upon us as complacency and tolerance take root among us. We're afraid to even discuss the differences between a nice works-based cult and the evangelical church. Truth is truth, and compromise and tolerance only makes us vulnerable to lies.

December 31st

Revelation 19:1-22:21. "The End ...Not Really"

You have just finished reading through the entire Bible. You have read of the history of Israel, the history of the church, the account of Christ and the cross, the prophets and their devotion, instructions for believers and an enormous number of other things. Yet the ending of the book only shows us that there's more to come; an eternity more.

As Heaven dawns I'm going to have to find a new line of work. There won't be a need for pastors and evangelists in Heaven. Satan will be defeated. Sin will be no more. In fact, there will be no more tears, sorrow, death, pain, sickness, hunger, judgment or night. God's children will live forever in the presence of our Father, and of the Son and the Holy Spirit. It's a place of beauty, holiness, unity, perfection and joy. It can't get any better than that.

If you're a believer I pray you are greatly anticipating Heaven, stirred about being in the presence of our Lord, and excited about the future: We have reason to be, because we know the ending.
