

SESSION 1

THE GREATEST NAME

Leader pages on pp. 102-105

THE POINT:

THERE IS ONLY ONE GOD
AND ONLY HIS NAME
DESERVES GLORY.

ISAIAH 42:1-12

¹ "This is my servant; I strengthen him, this is my chosen one; I delight in him. I have put my Spirit on him; he will bring justice to the nations.

² He will not cry out or shout or make his voice heard in the streets.

³ He will not break a bruised reed, and he will not put out a smoldering wick; he will faithfully bring justice.

⁴ He will not grow weak or be discouraged until he has established justice on earth. The coasts and islands will wait for his instruction."

.....
⁵ This is what God, the LORD, says—who created the heavens and stretched them out, who spread out the earth and what comes from it, who gives breath to the people on it and spirit to those who walk on it—

⁶ "I am the LORD. I have called you for a righteous purpose, and I will hold you by your hand. I will watch over you, and I will appoint you to be a covenant for the people and a light to the nations,

⁷ in order to open blind eyes, to bring out prisoners from the dungeon, and those sitting in darkness from the prison house.

⁸ I am the LORD. That is my name, and I will not give my glory to another or my praise to idols.

.....
⁹ The past events have indeed happened. Now I declare new events; I announce them to you before they occur."

¹⁰ Sing a new song to the LORD; sing his praise from the ends of the earth, you who go down to the sea with all that fills it, you coasts and islands with your inhabitants.

¹¹ Let the desert and its cities shout, the settlements where Kedar dwells cry aloud. Let the inhabitants of Sela sing for joy; let them cry out from the mountaintops.

¹² **Let them give glory to the LORD and declare his praise in the coasts and islands.**

MEMORY VERSE

KEYWORDS

Justice . . . nations (v. 1)—The Servant's mission involved bringing justice not only to Israel but also to the nations. The Hebrew word translated nations can also be rendered "Gentiles."

I am the LORD (v. 8)—The designation is derived from the Hebrew verb "to be" and denotes God as the

self-existent, covenant God who acts independently of outside influences.

Glory (v. 8,12)—from a Hebrew verb meaning "to be heavy." It designates the weighty importance and the shining majesty that accompany the Lord's presence.

WHY SHOULD WE BRING GLORY TO THE NAME OF GOD?

Names are important. It's rare you see boys named Judas or hear Jezebel tossed around for possible girl names. Instead, names are chosen to inspire. Some of us inherit surnames attached to great legacies. My grandfather and father brought respect and honor to my last name through the lives they lived. More than a few times I was referred to as so and so's grandson or son. Just before leaving college, my dad told me to never forget who I was and whose name I carry.

Sometimes we don't find much attachment to our given name and are most comfortable with a nickname. Whether provided by family or friends, a good nickname is often associated with an intimately shared experience. This is what happens to the Messiah within Isaiah. The prophet Isaiah spoke of a coming "Servant." We now know that Servant by the name of Jesus. His mission was to represent God and His name accurately by bringing God honor and glory. Let's discover how Isaiah said Jesus would do this.

He Delights in Us // Isaiah 42:1-4

Isaiah 42 contains the first of four "Servant Songs" describing the coming Messiah. These songs have sometimes drawn undeserved challenges to Isaiah's authorship. Some contend Isaiah couldn't have written the book by himself. Most who hold this belief don't embrace the divine nature of prophecy. Their worldview doesn't provide space for divine foretelling. Of course, we hold the view that one man, the prophet himself wrote the entire book of Isaiah.

Isaiah is often called the prince of prophets. His tenure as prophet spanned four kings and almost sixty years dating from 740–680 BC. Because Isaiah so clearly foretells Jesus's birth, life, suffering and victory, many refer to it as the "fifth Gospel, emphasizing its deep connection to Christ's story.

"The Bible reveals two portraits of the coming Messiah: **Messiah, Son of David:** The Lion of

Judah. He would be the victorious King who conquers the enemy and rescues His people.

Messiah, Son of Man: The sacrificial Lamb of God. He would be the Suffering Servant who takes the penalty for His people.

Jewish tradition taught that one man could not fulfill both roles. Biblical history informs us otherwise. Jesus is both the Lion and the Lamb. In His first advent, He was the Lamb; in His second, He will be the Lion.

Isaiah opened this first servant song with the



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words “This is” (v. 1). The KJV uses “Behold.” It means to fix your gaze, marvel, wonder, study, notice, and consider. Think of a bride at her wedding. All eyes and attention should be upon her as she marches down the aisle.

The remainder of verse 1 reveals some characteristics of this coming Messiah:

- “Servant”: One who acts on behalf of another.
- “I strengthen him”: God will protect, direct, and supply His Servant with all He needs.
- “Chosen”: Selected since the foundation of the world.
- “I delight in him”: The Father delights in the Son before He has done anything related to the mission.
- “I have put my Spirit on him”: The Servant is personally anointed by the Lord.

Two main themes fill the rest of these verses: justice and humility. Justice is mentioned three times. The Servant will:

Bring justice to the nations (v. 1). The nations included the Gentiles as well.

Faithfully bring justice (v. 3). He will be true to the Father’s purpose for Him.

Established justice in the earth (v. 4). He will not be disheartened.

The word for justice, *mishpawt*, means “a fair judgment” or “to set things right.” The Servant is to set things right between God and all His rebellious children.

The second theme, humility, is how He will deliver this divine justice. The Servant will not cry out or shout His message in the streets for the masses. With gentleness and humility, He will carry it to those who are broken and bruised. Bruised reeds and smoldering wicks were thrown out as useless, even though they could be repaired. This justice will bring life and hope to those who have little left.

Jesus, the Servant, was to be the sacrificial lamb who bore the sins of the world. This justice will reach the coastland and the islands, or in other words, to the uttermost parts of the world. In John 17, facing His final days, Jesus expressed His sole desire was to glorify His Father. He did this perfectly and the coasts and the islands still hear of His justice.

WHAT HOPE DO THESE VERSES GIVE YOU ABOUT THE MISSION OF CHRIST?



DIGGING DEEPER A CASE FOR SITUATIONAL JUSTICE

A 2024 study argues that 74% of Black Americans feel that the justice system was designed to hold them back.² This might make it difficult for some to take God’s claim of extending biblical justice (*mishpawt*) to the ends of the earth seriously. Keep in mind the strategy laid out in Isaiah 42. The Servant has God’s Spirit even though he does not cry out (42:1–2). This situation is comparable with Moses’s encounter with Pharaoh in Exodus 5. No matter what Moses would have said, Pharaoh was not going to provide a just ruling. Pharaoh was an unjust ruler who wanted power over justice. Justice systems are only as just as those who run them. During His time on earth, Jesus didn’t lead a governmental revolution but His actions redefined justice. He challenged corrupt leaders, uplifted the poor, and fulfilled Isaiah 42 by restoring justice one life at a time.

How might you be led by the Spirit to bring about biblical justice in your sphere of influence today?



He Calls Us // Isaiah 42:5-8

Promises were made of the Servant whom Isaiah's audience was to behold. He would bring justice to the nations. Verses 5-8 are the verification, or credit check, of the promise maker.

The word Lord is the name we use in English for Yahweh, the personal name God gave His people. The structure of the Lord's announcement is:

- The Lord's credentials are revealed.
- The Lord's promises are proclaimed.
- The Lord's name is glorified.

Isaiah established the Lord's credentials as the one "who created the heavens and stretched them out, who spread out the earth and what comes from it" (v. 5). Isaiah used the phrase "stretched them out," a repeat of 40:22. That was counterintuitive, at the time the universe was believed to be static. It wasn't until the early 1920s, thanks to scientists named Einstein, Hubble, and Friedmann, that we confirmed Isaiah was right all along. The universe is expanding, or being "stretched out."

He is the One "who gives breath to the people on it and spirit to those who walk on it" (v. 5). Those words recall the creation account of Genesis 1-2, where the Lord breathed life and therefore His Spirit into the ones He molded out of the dust. These credentials verify the Promise Maker is also the Promise Keeper.

After His credentials were verified, the Lord Himself spoke to His Servant. He made specific

promises concerning the righteous purpose for which He's been called. It was a call to transform the rebellious into the righteous. Everything about the mission was "right." The right person – right time – right place – right purpose.

In verse 6, the Lord took over and spoke directly to us, promising things on which the Servant could count. With His own hand, God would hold and protect Him. The same hands that stretched out the galaxies, dug the oceans, and raised the mountains would lead Him and watch over Him.

The Lord declared that He will not share His glory or His name with anyone or anything. He alone is the One who can accomplish what He has promised: justice and salvation. Therefore, only the name Yahweh deserves glory and praise.

Jesus, the Servant, some 700 years later fulfilled these words. He opened the eyes of the blind and set the prisoner spiritually free. Because of what Jesus did, He became the covenant that reconciled God and man. This makes Peter's statement even more clear: "There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to people by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12). Only Jesus was qualified, only Jesus could do it, and only His name is worthy of praise.

HOW SHOULD WE RESPOND TO GOD'S GREAT WORK IN OUR WORLD AND IN OUR LIVES?

He Is Praiseworthy // Isaiah 42:9-12

The Lord, still speaking in verse 9, once again reminded His people why they can trust His promises. "Before they occur" (v. 9) can be translated "before they spring up," which carries the idea of a plant or grass blade breaking through the surface and suddenly appearing out of the ground. It's the result of hidden work below the surface.

No matter what the past or future events are, the truth is that what God says comes to pass. The reason they happen is because God, the Lord, is creating and shaping the future with His hands!

Isaiah closed out this section of the Servant song in a similar way to his other Servant songs—a hymn

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of praise. The purpose is to raise the audience's eyes from their current difficult circumstances and be inspired by what the Lord will do in the future.

Why a new song? For there to be a new song, there had to be an old song. Just as His people sang His praises for the things that have already taken place, there will be new songs of praise lifted for the new things that are about to spring up. Once the Lord brings justice to the nations through the Servant, there will be yet another new reason to sing praise songs to the one and only true God.

The new song is itself a foreshadowing of the day when all people from every tribe behold the Lord as the one true God. Paul wrote, "For this reason, God highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee will bow—in heaven and on earth and under the earth—and every tongue will confess that Jesus is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (Phil. 2:9-11).

This new song is a reminder that the first time the Servant came as Messiah, son of Joseph, the Lamb to reconcile, but the second time He will come as Messiah, son of David, the Lion of Judah to conquer. And He will take those of us who have trusted in Him to heaven.

HOW HAS GOD'S FAITHFULNESS PROMPTED A NEW SONG IN YOUR HEART?

DID YOU KNOW?

Sometimes nonbelievers might view God as a conceited being because He created mankind to worship Him exclusively. Verses like Isaiah 42:8 make it clear that God will not allow anyone or anything else to receive the glory that is due to Him alone. But how can a Christian affirm this while also acknowledging that being conceited is wrong and sinful? Instead, of arguing that God created mankind to worship Him exclusively, it might be better to state that God created mankind to worship "goodness." From here, one can share that Scripture clearly teaches all "goodness" comes from God alone (Psa. 16:2; Jas. 1:17-18). Thus, for mankind to worship "goodness," mankind must worship God. This is why God can boldly declare that He alone is worthy of all worship. He is the only One who can follow through on the promise of providing mankind with goodness.

Biblical Truth: "Why do you call me good?" Jesus asked him. "No one is good except God alone" (Mark 10:18).

What or who claims to provide people with something "good" but fails to follow through on the promise?

LIVE IT

How can you explain to someone how God's glory is connected to your life?

Listening to someone else's description of your life might be particularly discouraging or affirming. Reflecting on God's glory should be a natural part of the Christian life, but it might take time for us to develop habits that make people see this as a genuine part of who we are. This should not be something that we force. Instead, we should constantly seek ways to conform our actions so that they fall more in line with the actions of Christ. Here are three simple activities that can help you do this:

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- **Memorize.** Commit Philippians 2:9-11 to memory. Reflect on those words and ask God to show you how to live under His lordship each day.
- **Write.** Write a hymn, poem, or spoken word thanking the Lord for His faithfulness in the past and His promises for the future. Use what you've written in your personal worship for God's glory.
- **Encourage.** There are many bruised people in our communities. Someone you know is going through a tough time. Send this person a note of encouragement with a promise from God.

DAILY READINGS

1. WHO'S YOUR SAVIOR // ACTS 4:12

As we go through our lives, we find proxies that provide us temporary comfort, solace, and safety. We view these things as our saviors that can release us from the pressure, heartache, and harm of everyday life. As believers, we must put our hope in the salvation given to us through Jesus Christ. Acts 4:12 states, "There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name given under heaven by which we must be saved." As people of God, once we acknowledge that we'll find lasting comfort, solace, and safety. So, as you go through this week, reflect on what you've allowed to be a savior in place of the One true Savior.

Invite God to be your Savior in the areas of your life that you've allowed proxies to take hold.

2. HE IS! // ISAIAH 42:8

God's magnificent name of Yahweh has many meanings, one being "He That Is." Often, when offering gratitude to God, we immediately think about God as He relates to us. We honor God for blessing us with families and jobs and, of course, for gifting us with salvation. How often, though, do we acknowledge God for being who He is? This includes His traits, patterns, and behaviors. What do God's actions reveal about His character? To answer these questions, we must look to God's sovereignty, holiness, patience, and love toward us. Furthermore, you'll begin to see Him beyond what is given to you. This mindset births praise of God and a heart of gratitude as you begin to see His hand over your entire life.

Lord, help me to see who You are and praise your attributes.

3. TAKE A KNEE // PHILIPPIANS 2:10-11

During Medieval times, knights would pledge their unending service by kneeling before them, placing their hands between their lord's hands, promising to lay their lives for their lord and the honor of their name. Like these medieval knights, when we confess Jesus as our savior, we "take a knee" by

forfeiting our sinful nature to honor the name of God. We submit to God. When we "take a knee," we proclaim to the world that Jesus is our Lord and has authority over everything we have and every place we inhabit. In what ways will you "take a knee"?

Submitting to God proclaims Jesus's authority in our lives.

4. HAND IN HAND // ISAIAH 42:6

In the late 90s, the gospel group Trin-i-Tee 5:7 covered a classic song called "Put Your Hand in the Hand." The song challenges the listener to put their complete faith in God, and the verses emphasize just how dependable God is. After stating Jesus's purpose, Isaiah 42:6 states, "I will hold you by your hand. I will keep you." This Scripture shows God's loving character and that believers can find security in Him. John 10:28 states that followers of Christ are in God's hands, and no one will "snatch them out." Believing this in our hearts, we can put our complete trust in God, knowing that he is faithful to keep His promises. As the song says, "Put your hand in the hand of the man that stilled the water."³

We can securely put out complete faith in God, knowing that we are in His hand

5. GIVE GOD GLORY // ISAIAH 42:12

Recently, I attended a church service in my hometown. The pastor took some time during the service to honor a mother of the church, it was her 81st birthday. The pastor handed her the microphone, she said excitedly, "The Lord has been good to me every single day, and I give Him all the glory." As believers, we should strive to give God glory in everything we do. We can do this by witnessing to others about Jesus, or in other ways, like turning the other cheek when in an argument. When we give God glory through representing Him well is, by extension, testifying His character.

God help me to represent You well so that You can get the glory from my life.

Week 1 – God’s Word: One Big Story

Scripture Readings: 2 Timothy 3:16–17; Genesis 1:1; Revelation 22:20–21; Luke 24:27

The Bible is not a random collection of writings—it is one unfolding story of God’s plan for the world. Written over 1,500 years by different authors in different contexts, it carries one heartbeat: God’s love and His plan of redemption. Jesus Himself showed that all the Scriptures—from Moses to the Prophets—pointed to Him (Luke 24:27). The Bible begins with God’s creation and ends with new creation. Between those bookends is humanity’s fall, God’s covenant love, Christ’s redemption, and the ultimate hope of restoration.

SESSION 2

THE GREATEST NEED

Leader pages on pp. 106-109

THE POINT:
ONLY JESUS CAN TAKE
CARE OF OUR NEED FOR
FORGIVENESS.

LUKE 5:17-26

¹⁷ On one of those days while he was teaching, Pharisees and teachers of the law were sitting there who had come from every village of Galilee and Judea, and also from Jerusalem. And the Lord's power to heal was in him.

¹⁸ Just then some men came, carrying on a stretcher a man who was paralyzed. They tried to bring him in and set him down before him.

¹⁹ Since they could not find a way to bring him in because of the crowd, they went up on the roof and lowered him on the stretcher through the roof tiles into the middle of the crowd before Jesus.

MEMORY VERSE

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²⁰ **Seeing their faith he said, "Friend, your sins are forgiven."**

²¹ Then the scribes and the Pharisees began to think to themselves, "Who is this man who speaks blasphemies? Who can forgive sins but God alone?"

.....
²² But perceiving their thoughts, Jesus replied to them, "Why are you thinking this in your hearts?"

²³ Which is easier: to say, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Get up and walk'?

²⁴ But so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins"—he told the paralyzed man, "I tell you: Get up, take your stretcher, and go home."

²⁵ Immediately he got up before them, picked up what he had been lying on, and went home glorifying God.

²⁶ Then everyone was astounded, and they were giving glory to God. And they were filled with awe and said, "We have seen incredible things today."

KEYWORDS

Pharisees (v. 17)—Meaning "separated one." They separated themselves to the study of the law. They viewed obedience to the law as the way to God.

Your sins are forgiven (v. 20)—The form of the Greek verb rendered stresses the continuing and enduring state of this forgiveness.

Blasphemies (v. 21)—This term transliterates a Greek word meaning "to speak harm."

Son of Man (v. 24)—This verse records the first appearance of this title for Jesus in the Gospel of Luke. It occurs in connection with His authority to pronounce forgiveness.

HOW DOES JESUS MEET OUR GREATEST NEED?

Do-it-yourself, DIY. It saves you money, gives you a sense of pride and accomplishment, and is also a great learning opportunity. Sometimes it's a great idea and the best way to accomplish a task or complete a project. There are other times when DIY just won't work. Certain jobs need a specific professional, and DIY won't cut it.

In the passage we will be studying, there are some friends who had an issue that was not a DIY project. They wanted healing for a paralyzed friend. As much as they helped him, carried him, and maybe even tried to coach him to walk, it wasn't happening. In fact, what ailed their friend was greater than what they could see. Their friend needed a special one-of-a-kind professional. His name was Jesus. Only Jesus had the cure to what ailed their friend, but seeing Jesus wouldn't be as easy as they thought.

He Allowed Us To Come To Him // Luke 5:17-19

Jesus had gone viral; His reputation was growing. After returning from His wilderness temptation, even before selecting all His disciples, Jesus started teaching and healing around Galilee. This mini-tour attracted crowds. The religious elite, sick,

and social outcasts were all among the crowds that gathered to hear and witness Jesus's supernatural power and ability.

Luke opened his historical account with: "On one of those days" (v. 17). He chose those words to highlight that it was just an ordinary day, not the Sabbath, with special rules and regulations that must be kept.

Religious celebrities were in the house. Luke noted the Pharisees and teachers of the law were present. His choice of words are interesting. The celebrities were there not to learn from Jesus nor were they sick. They were just sitting there. The journey from Jerusalem was approximately 121 miles, which was at least a three-day trip. So, who were they and why were they sitting there? The religious leaders were:

- Experts in knowledge and details of Jewish legal tradition.
- Lay people, not priests.
- Promoters of a strict adherence to Mosaic law.
- Architects of tradition and practices for how the law should be applied for each generation.



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Why were these religious experts present? Experts in Mosaic law should know how important it is for someone to come to God. They should have been ushering people into His presence, but instead they were just sitting there taking spaces from people who desperately wanted to hear Jesus speak.

"Just then some men came" (v. 18). They weren't men of position, power, or even name. But they had a friend they desperately wanted to bring to Jesus.

Notice the contrast between the two groups of men. The religious leaders just sat there. The other men brought a friend in need to Jesus. The religious leaders invested or sacrificed nothing. The other men invested personal time and energy for someone else. When they encountered obstacles, they didn't give up. Unable to get their friend in front of Jesus because of the crowd, they took him to the roof and lowered him down right in front of Jesus.

The men dug through the plaster, mud, straw, and even wood beams to create an opening in which they could lower their friend to Jesus.

Consider the risk versus reward. These men took great risk in getting their friend before Jesus. They risked their:

- **Reputation.** What would people say or think? What if Jesus wouldn't heal their friend?
- **Finances.** Who would pay for the damage done to the home to get their friend to Jesus?
- **Freedom.** What if the homeowner decided to press charges for the damage done to his home?

Why did they do it? Possibly from what they had seen and heard in Jesus's Galilean tour, they genuinely believed Jesus could heal their friend. If they could just get him before Jesus, Jesus could cure him. While the Pharisees and teachers of the law sat by, not even offering their seat for those more in need, the men overcame every obstacle and got their friend to Jesus. It is so much easier to sit and watch, than to go and bring, isn't it?

C. H. Spurgeon wrote this about the men: "They need be strong, for the burden is heavy; they need be resolute, for the work will try their faith; they need be prayerful, for otherwise they labor in vain; they must be believing, or they will be utterly useless."⁴ May we be such friends ourselves.

**WHEN HAVE YOU SEEN SOMEONE'S LIFE CHANGED
THROUGH THE FAITHFULNESS OF OTHERS?**



DIGGING DEEPER DISABILITY AND DISEASE

The miracle of having our sins forgiven is the greatest miracle that God has ever done. Sometimes we might think that watching someone be healed is the best way for God to display His glory. We will then downplay the power of someone accepting Jesus as their Lord and Savior. When Jesus announced that the paralyzed man's sins were forgiven (5:20) before telling him to get up and walk (5:24), Jesus was teaching that spiritual wellness is more important than physical wellness. This does not mean God does not care about the physical. One day every Christian will have a body that will be healthy and eternal (1 Cor. 15:42–58). Until then, there will always be some mystery related to why God allows us to have certain diseases or disabilities, but we can trust that God has allowed these issues to exist for the purpose of leading us to redemption.

Can you think of a redemptive purpose for someone living with a disability or illness?

He Encourages Us To Trust Him // Luke 5:20-21

As noted earlier, the men could not cure their friend, only carry him. Only Jesus could cure what ailed him. They broke through the roof and lowered him before Jesus. Mission accomplished; their helpless friend lay there, right before Jesus. What would happen now?

The mention of Jesus “seeing their faith” (v. 20) causes us to reflect on how determined the friends were to overcome obstacles and take personal risks. Their actions demonstrated their belief that Jesus could surely cure what ailed their friend. Yet, we can’t overlook the faith of the paralyzed man. He displayed faith that the stories about Jesus were true. He displayed tremendous faith in allowing his friends to do all they could to get him before Jesus. He had enough faith in their ability [or willingness] to walk him to the roof and lower him down through the hole at the risk of being dropped. It was a cornucopia of faith that Jesus saw.

We often hear the challenge to be like these friends. Very few times have we been encouraged to identify with the paralyzed man. Should we and could we identify with him in this account? The paralyzed man recognized his need for Jesus. He was surrounded with a group of friends who cared. He wasn’t too proud to accept the help of others and trusted Jesus to heal him. Before we can display the faith of the friends, we must come



to realize that we are, or were at one time, the paralyzed man in deep need of Jesus’s touch.

What Jesus said after calling the paralyzed man a friend pushed the Pharisees over the edge and probably confused the friends peering down from the roof: “Your sins are forgiven” (v. 20). I’m sure that everyone in the place couldn’t believe what they heard. Of course, God alone can forgive sin. The religious leaders realized Jesus was making an identity statement. Since all sin is committed against God (Ps. 51:4), and since only God can forgive sin (Isa. 43:25), Jesus identified Himself as divine.

WHAT ARE SOME MISCONCEPTIONS OUR CULTURE HAS ABOUT FORGIVENESS?

He Forgives Us As We Obey Him // Luke 5:22-26

Jesus could certainly read a room. The question we often ask is: While He was on earth, did Jesus keep His omniscience? In other words, could Jesus know what others were thinking? The Bible teaches that Jesus emptied Himself when He stepped out of heaven (Phil. 2:7), but to what degree? From a human standpoint, Jesus was very intelligent, perceptive, and able to read body language and facial expressions at the very least. From the visual cues given by the religious leaders in the room, He was no doubt able to perceive they weren’t happy. His words to the paralytic man brought out their wrath and ire. Jesus most certainly knew exactly what He said would set them off. The dreaded and beautiful words: “Your sins are forgiven” (v. 23). In their eyes, this was blasphemy—claiming to do what only God could do.

Instead of just bluntly setting the record straight as to His identity, Jesus, as He often did, posed a thought-provoking question: “Which is easier: to say, ‘Your sins are forgiven’ or to say, ‘Get up and walk’?” (v. 23). The question created a conundrum for everyone in the room.

From the vantage point of visual confirmation, it was much easier for Jesus to say, “Your sins are forgiven” (Luke 5:23). One couldn’t visually confirm that the paralytic man’s sins were forgiven. So, in that sense alone it was easier. For Jesus to say,

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"Get up and walk" (v. 23) carried the risk of the paralytic man not getting up and walking away. That would have brought accusations and ridicule from all the people gathered at the home.

As always, Jesus was the smartest person in the room and light years ahead of everyone else. He wanted to send the message of who He is, and what He had the authority to do. Knowing the Pharisees' correct belief that only God could forgive sin, Jesus chose to announce His true identity through His proclamation: "The Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins" (v. 24). Jesus went third person on the group by calling Himself the Son of Man, and therefore on the same plane as God.

Jesus made His point. Luke wrote: "Everyone was astounded, and they were giving glory to God" (v. 26). As the people departed, the conversation revolved around the incredible things they had seen that day. Everyone agreed that what they witnessed was remarkable, and there's no telling how many lives would be changed as a result.

HOW MIGHT YOU ENCOURAGE A FELLOW BELIEVER WHO IS DOUBTING THAT JESUS IS THE ONLY ONE WHO CAN MEET OUR NEEDS?

DID YOU KNOW?

The transitional experiences of the Pharisees in this passage can help us learn to be patient with unbelievers that we encounter in our local environments. The Pharisees begin by just sitting there and observing (5:17). As mentioned in this study, they are simply taking up space that could be used by those who already understand who Jesus is and what he is trying to accomplish. By the conclusion of this story, the Pharisees witnessed and were also amazed (5:26). However, this does not last long. Soon they are grumbling because of Jesus's choice of disciples (5:30) and then questioning his application of the Sabbath law (6:2). Some of the Pharisees do not appear to join the faith until much later, and even then, this fact is mentioned as an aside (Acts 15:5). This should encourage us to be patient as we seek to join in the mission of God.

Biblical Truth: Jesus is the only One who can forgive us of our sin.

Are there some unbelievers in your life who might require you to be a patient witness for them to see the hope of the Gospel?

LIVE IT

How well can you empathize with people in various walks of life for the sake of sharing Christ?

In this passage, Jesus encountered three different groups of people. While they each had different reasons to want to see Jesus, they all had the same need. None of them were able to provide themselves or anyone else with the forgiveness of sins. Only Jesus can take care of our need for forgiveness. Spend some time this week reflecting on how each of these groups might have missed out on being forgiven has they allowed their own issues to distract them from Jesus.

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- **Identify with the paralytic man.** How do you identify with the paralytic man? What fears or sins paralyze you? Ask God to reveal these things and turn them over to Him and walk forward in faith.
- **Identify with the religious leaders.** In what ways are you like the religious leaders? Are there certain religious traditions that might distract you from experiencing what God is doing? Ask God to reveal these things and turn them over to Him and walk forward in faith.
- **Identify with the friends.** In what ways are you like the friends? Identify someone in your community who needs help with a physical need. Seek to identify a way that you or your church might provide for them.

DAILY READINGS

1. FORGIVEN TO FORGIVE // EPHESIANS 4:32

Forgiveness, for many, can be a very complex topic. Offense and rage can keep us from forgiving others. Coupled with bitterness and pride, unforgiveness also keeps us from looking inward. How often do we ask ourselves what can we be forgiven for? We all fall short of God's glory (Rom. 3:23). This means that as often as we are put in positions where we must forgive others, Christ is also forgiving our shortcomings. Luke 6:36 states, "Be merciful, just as your Father also is merciful." When we fall short, it is our responsibility to ask for forgiveness, and in return, being forgiven by Christ, we must forgive others. Showing the same grace God showed us.

Remembering that we are forgiven helps us forgive others.

2. GUIDING THE WAY // LUKE 5:19

Seeing someone you care about in need is difficult for many people. Compassion drives us to the desire to help in whatever way possible. In this passage of Scripture, a group of men carry their paralyzed friend to Jesus. They had so much determination that they took out part of the roof so that their friend might be healed. These men not only wanted to see their friend healed but also showed their faith in what Jesus could do. Whether by praying, having a conversation, or living righteously, guiding the ones you love to Christ exemplifies your love for them and Him. What are some ways you can guide someone close to you to Christ?

Lord, help me to show love today by guiding someone I love to You.

3. MIRACLE OF FORGIVENESS // LUKE 15:8-10

In this parable, Jesus teaches of a woman who searched for a lost coin and, when it was found, celebrated with her friends and neighbors. Jesus then elaborates, saying that even the angels

rejoice when a sinner repents (v. 10). We praise God when someone gives their life to Christ because we recognize that salvation is awesome, freeing, and precious. Salvation exemplifies the love of God through His forgiveness and the gift of eternal life. Simply put, it's a miracle! Only an all-powerful God can do what no one else can do. God empowers us to praise Him as we recognize His holiness and His love for us.

Praise God for the miracle of forgiveness!

4. RECONCILIATION DRIVES TRUST // 2 JOHN 1:6

Being reconciled with God produces gratefulness and endears us to Him. Christ's unconditional love helps us to see who we truly are—His! Knowing we are His beloved children draws us into a closer relationship with God. It drives us to trust God even deeper, realizing He has been every bit of nurturing, compassionate, and patient toward us. Our desire then shifts from proving ourselves worthy of forgiveness to submission to a most trustworthy God.

Reconciliation with God embeds our love for Him and drives us to trust him!

5. A FIXED FIGHT // PSALM 20:6-9

"Tell me, who can stand before us when we call on that great name? Jesus, Jesus, precious Jesus, we have the victory."⁵ This hymn acclaims God's inability to fail. As His children, we have access to the victory God possesses. Psalm 20:6 reads, "Now I know that the LORD gives victory to His anointed . . ." God gives us victory over death through Jesus.. His love reinforces our faith in Him and gives us the confidence to trust in our unbeatable God. Furthermore, it gives us faith to depend on Him as we recognize His divinity and our mortality. Fighting in our own strength can exhaust our hearts, minds, and bodies. But we don't have to fight alone, we can rely on Christ to fix our fight.

We can trust in God for victory through Christ over anything that we face!

Week 2 – Creation and Fall

Scripture Readings: Genesis 1–3; Psalm 8; Romans 5:12–21

God created the world in perfect order and declared it good. Humanity was made in His image, carrying dignity, purpose, and responsibility to rule over creation. The Garden was a place of blessing and fellowship. But sin entered when Adam and Eve disobeyed, and that one act introduced brokenness into every corner of creation—spiritual, relational, and physical. Even in judgment, God gave hope. Genesis 3:15 foreshadows a Savior who would crush the serpent. The rest of Scripture unfolds this promise, showing that God never abandoned His creation but moved toward it in love.

SESSION 3

THE GREATEST SIN

Leader pages on pp. 110-113

THE POINT:
THE GREATEST SIN IS
NEVER TRUSTING JESUS.

MATTHEW 12:22-32

²² Then a demon-possessed man who was blind and unable to speak was brought to him. He healed him, so that the man could both speak and see.

²³ All the crowds were astounded and said, "Could this be the Son of David?"

.....
²⁴ When the Pharisees heard this, they said, "This man drives out demons only by Beelzebul, the ruler of the demons."

²⁵ Knowing their thoughts, he told them, "Every kingdom divided against itself is headed for destruction, and no city or house divided against itself will stand.

²⁶ If Satan drives out Satan, he is divided against himself. How then will his kingdom stand?

²⁷ And if I drive out demons by Beelzebul, by whom do your sons drive them out? For this reason they will be your judges.

²⁸ If I drive out demons by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you.

²⁹ How can someone enter a strong man's house and steal his possessions unless he first ties up the strong man? Then he can plunder his house.

.....
³⁰ **Anyone who is not with me is against me, and anyone who does not gather with me scatters.**

³¹ Therefore, I tell you, people will be forgiven every sin and blasphemy, but the blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven.

³² Whoever speaks a word against the Son of Man, it will be forgiven him; but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit, it will not be forgiven him, either in this age or in the one to come.

MEMORY VERSE

KEYWORDS

Demon-possessed (v. 22)—Demons are fallen angels who joined Satan in his rebellion against God. They possess limited power and like Satan have already been defeated.

Beelzebul (vv. 24,27)—This designation for Satan appears with variant spellings in the New Testament.

The Kingdom of God (v. 28)—The expression the kingdom of God designates God's sovereign or kingly rule.

Blasphemy . . . Spirit (vv. 31-32)—Blasphemy against the Holy Spirit is the willful and permanent rejection of Jesus.

WHY IS JESUS WORTHY OF OUR TRUST?

What do the following people have in common: F. Lee Bailey, Richard “Alex” Murdaugh, Edward Snowden, Benedict Arnold, Pete Rose, Shoeless Joe Jackson, Tim Donaghy, Donald Sterling, and Ben Affleck?

The quick answer is, in one way or another, they are all controversial figures. This list includes lawyers, political figures, athletes, an NBA owner, a referee, a military hero, and even an actor. So, what do these individuals have in common beyond being controversial?

They have all, in one way or another, violated societal trust in ways that led to lifetime bans for their actions. The lawyers were disbarred for unethical practice, the athletes for gambling, the political and military figures for treason, and, yes, Ben Affleck received a lifetime ban from certain casinos for card counting while playing blackjack. Perhaps society may one day change its opinion and forgive them.

Not so with the sin Jesus described in the passage we’ll study today. Jesus addressed an astounded crowd, who had just witnessed Him miraculously cleanse a demon-possessed man. This dramatic event led to a broader conversation about sin, and one particular sin that would spark theological

debate for centuries to come. What sin could be so horrible that God would not forgive it?

We Trust His Power //

Matthew 12:22-23

Jesus had created quite a stir. The response to His teaching and miracles polarized the crowds gathered. There was heightened tension with the Pharisees because of Jesus’s growing popularity with the people. So far in Matthew 12, Jesus allowed His disciples to pick and eat grain on the Sabbath, attended synagogue services, healed a man’s withered hand in front of the Pharisees, and withdrew from the angry Pharisees and healed many from a large crowd that followed Him.

The opening word “then” implies all these events happened near each other. So, it would be safe to say that the historical account in today’s passage also happened on the same day, which again is the Sabbath.

A demon-possessed man was brought to Jesus. Not only was the man demon-possessed, but he was also blind and unable to talk. This was a miserable plight. Since he was blind, he was unable to help himself or to go find help. Also, since he



THE POINT: THE GREATEST SIN IS NEVER TRUSTING JESUS.

couldn't speak, he was unable to ask for help.

Which came first, the demon possession or the physical ailments? We don't know, but we do know that Satan's purpose is to keep people from seeing and speaking of God. C. H. Spurgeon said this of the man, "An extraordinary case exhibited a novel form of the handicraft of Satan.

The evil spirit had secured himself by stopping up the windows and the door of the soul."⁶ Another way to look at it is that Satan blinded his eyes so he couldn't see Jesus and sealed his lips from calling out to Jesus for help.

Matthew didn't give many details as to the healing itself. Did Jesus touch him? Did He pray over him? Did Jesus command the demon to leave as He had on other occasions? The only description of the event is simply, "He healed him" (v. 22). In this section of his book, Matthew sets up several contrasts.

- **The malice of Satan and the mercy of Jesus.** Satan's minions were doing everything in their power to keep the man from experiencing the healing touch of Jesus, who saw the man's plight and had compassion and mercy on him.
- **God's mighty power and Satan's limited power.** The powers of evil were able to shut the man's eyes and mouth, but one act of Jesus freed the man from the evil chains that held him.
- **The love of the people and the loathing of the Pharisees.** Even though in these two verses we don't see the Pharisees' reaction, it has already been described earlier in the chapter (v. 14).

One word or touch from Jesus immediately broke the chains with which Satan had bound the man. At one moment, he couldn't see or ask for help, but after encountering Jesus, the man was fully restored and could praise the God of heaven.

The crowds were astounded. Matthew used the plural when talking about the crowds, referring to the segmented groups of people gathered. It could have been crowds from different locations or regions. The Pharisees were certainly one of the groups. All the different crowds were astounded for one reason or another.

WHEN HAVE YOU BEEN ASTOUNDED BY A DISPLAY OF GOD'S POWER?

The question began rumbling through the crowd, "Could this be the Son of David?" (v. 23). The term "Son of David" is a messianic title. Many times the Old Testament speaks of the one from David's line who will establish God's kingdom forever (Isa. 11:1).



DIGGING DEEPER JESUS STANDS WHEN SYSTEMS FAIL

Jesus healed the demon-possessed man right after he withdrew himself from the synagogue because of the Pharisees. In order to explain Jesus's actions, Matthew supplies us with a quotation from Isaiah 42:1-4 (Matt 12:15-21), the focal passage for session one of this study. One of the keywords in Isaiah 42 is justice (*mishpawt*), and Jesus will one day extend God's justice to the ends of the earth. However, until then, we should seek to imitate Jesus and provide individual justice to those within our sphere of influence. This is exactly what Jesus does with the demon-possessed man. The disciples of the Pharisees were either unable or unwilling to cast the demon out of this man. The physicians were unable to restore this man back to perfect health. The system failed him at all points, but Jesus did not. Similarly, we should help others experience God's justice when our modern systems fail.

How might we help those who can't see their sin and call out to Jesus because they are gripped by the powers of this world?



We Trust His Presence //

Matthew 12:24-29

This encounter is in the middle of a section of Scripture, where Matthew was highlighting the growing opposition among the Pharisees to Jesus's ministry. The resistance to Jesus among the religious elite rose in conjunction to His popularity among the people. The more the people loved Jesus, the more the Pharisees loathed Him.

The crowds were astounded that the man was able to speak and hear immediately. They began to question if Jesus could be the Son of David. Apparently, they asked loud enough that the Pharisees were able to hear. With each miracle Jesus performed and each message He taught, the Pharisees witnessed their esteemed place in the hearts of people slipping.

With a contemptuous attitude and disdain in their voices, the Pharisees called Jesus "this man" (v. 24). They insulted Jesus by not calling Him by His name. The phrase itself is contemptuous and distasteful. Their waning popularity in the hearts of the people brought the Pharisees to the point where they just wouldn't even utter Jesus's name.

The validity of the miracle couldn't be doubted. Every person in the crowd witnessed the demon flee, as sight and speech walked back into the man's world. The healing and release couldn't be denied. The Pharisees' response to the question reveals their desperation. In essence, the best

argument they could come up with was, "This man, whose name we won't even let pass through our lips, does all of this by the power of Beelzebul."

Beelzebul is mentioned throughout Scripture. While the specific meaning these Pharisees had in mind in invoking the name of Beelzebul is unclear, one thing is certain: it was a vile insult and displayed the utter contempt they had for Him. Jesus unraveled their flawed logic with three truths:

1. **A divided kingdom will not stand.**
2. **The Pharisees had a double standard.**
3. **The kingdom of God has arrived.**

Jesus said that one could only enter a strongman's house and steal, by first entering and binding him. The world was Satan's domain. Jesus let everyone know He was present to bind the strongman and take back what the enemy had stolen. Jesus is the ultimate victor with the power over sin and darkness to bring people light and life.

WHAT DOES THIS PASSAGE HAVE TO SAY ABOUT GOD'S NATURE AND CHARACTER?

We Trust His Truth //

Matthew 12:30-32

With the Pharisees in His gaze, Jesus announced that when it comes to the battle against evil, there is no Switzerland. There's no middle way. He minced no words, made it plain and clear, drew a line in the sand, and pulled no punches. He landed a strong left hook to the Pharisees. There is no neutrality in this war against Satan's strongholds; you are either with Jesus or you are against Him.

Jesus's next words may have created as much angst, worry, discussion, study, and reflection as any He uttered. His first ones are great news for each of us. He assured the crowd every sin and blasphemy committed against the Son of Man would be forgiven. Jesus let us know that His grace is greater than all our sin.

What is sin? Sin is anything that we actively (commission) or passively (omission) do that misses the mark of God's standard.

THE POINT: THE GREATEST SIN IS NEVER TRUSTING JESUS.

Consider two types of sin that plague the lives of many Christians:

Inherited sin. We inherit this sin nature from Adam. It has been passed down through the generations all the way back to Adam and Eve. We are born with an inclination to sin.

Personal sin. This is our personal choice to rebel against God. Each one of us chooses to rebel against God just as Adam and Eve did.

Blasphemy is more than just saying something bad about God. In the Old Testament, it carries the idea of cursing, reviling, or despising. It's to call into question God's personal integrity and holiness.

According to Jesus, the Holy Spirit's role is to convict people of their sin and lead them to Jesus (John 16:8). This sin of blasphemy is not only saying something bad about the Holy Spirit, but it is a persistent rejection of the convicting work of the Spirit, whose job it is to expose our sin and lead us to embrace Jesus as Savior and follow Him.

Blasphemy against the Holy Spirit keeps someone from trusting that Jesus's grace is greater than all our sin, so they are left in their trespasses and sins, and separated from God forever.

WHAT ARE THE CONSEQUENCES OF WILLFUL AND PERSISTENT UNBELIEF?

DID YOU KNOW?

Every event or action must be interpreted. Jesus's healing of the demon-possessed man received contrasting responses. The people understood that the "Son of David" was being revealed. However, the Pharisees connected Jesus to the "prince of demons." How might we deal with modern events that could be viewed similarly? We should interpret them through two main lenses: 1) the consistency of God's nature, and 2) the motives of the people involved. These two lenses are often combined in Scripture because God's nature is connected to His mission and people either act in alignment with or against His mission. Jesus was born to be the "Son of David" and throughout Matthew, we can see references to how Jesus fulfilled this title (Matt 1:1,20; 9:27). In contrast, the Pharisees's motives did not align with God's mission, because they failed to see how God's actions should have affected them.

Biblical Truth: As believers, our mission must align with the mission of God.

How does your life's mission align with God's mission?

LIVE IT

Can we really trust Jesus to take care of all our sins?

The answer is yes. One of the reasons is because we have no other hope. Another reason is because of Jesus's determination. God could have reversed our situation and only died so that we could get into heaven and then spend the rest of eternity paying off our debt. Instead, God chose to give us something we could never afford. Still, the greatest sin is never trusting Jesus. Use the following ideas to help you move forward with placing your complete trust in Jesus.

+ + +

- **Get off the unpardoned list.** Have you resisted the Holy Spirit drawing you to Jesus? Jesus is the way to heaven. Embrace the forgiveness of sin provided for by the life, death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus. Turn to the insider front cover of this book for help or talk to your group leader.
- **Give up the critical attitude.** It's so easy to possess a critical spirit, just like the Pharisees. Sit quietly and ask God to examine your heart for a critical spirit. Is there a sin for which you need to repent or a person with whom you need to reconcile?
- **Have your lips freed.** Jesus freed the demon-possessed man's lips, so he could give God the glory. Who do you need to talk with about what Jesus has done in your life? Schedule a time to meet with this person and share what Jesus can do.

DAILY READINGS

1. STRONG FOUNDATION // 1 CORINTHIANS 3:10-11

A faulty foundation on a home is costly and dangerous. A weak foundation can cause any home to deteriorate without the resident knowing. Spiritually, a faulty foundation can be just as dangerous. A shaky trust in God affects what we say, how we act, and how we think. As followers of Christ, we must believe that He has the power to do "more than we could ask or think" (Eph. 3:20). This belief grounds our trust in Christ, verifying that we can put our full hope and confidence in Him. The Lord promises that people who "trust in the Lord will renew their strength" (Isa. 40:31). Choosing to trust God lays a solid spiritual foundation for the believer.

Take some time today to inspect your foundation.

2. FREEDOM FUELED TRUST // MATTHEW 12:22-25

In Matthew 12:22-25, Jesus defends His power to people who refuse to believe. Like Jesus, as His followers, we face opposition to our faith through slander and mockery of our belief in God, His Power, and the mission to make disciples. We must defend our beliefs in a world that equates indulging one's flesh to freedom. This worldly vision of freedom often leads to exhaustion from attempting to control every single aspect of one's life. But believers know of a true freedom defined by our trust in God. Through the freedom we have in Christ, we can trust in Him and His truths.

Lord, help me to rest on your truth and put my trust in You.

3. TRUSTING IN DISAPPOINTMENT // PSALM 34:17-19

My class of 9th graders often say, "Life be 'Life'n". This phrase emphasizes the pains of heartbreak, death, sickness, and all other discomforts accompanying living. Over time, a prolonged period of discomfort causes one to lose hope out of fear of being disappointed by the "negative"

aspects of life. A hopeless disposition causes a believer to wrestle with their faith, leaving them with an unwillingness to trust anyone or anything. When we are in the face of disappointment, we must rely on God's character. We can be reminded of this through studying the Word and spending time with Him in prayer. This builds our trust in Him and helps us overcome disappointment.

When you trust in God even disappointment doesn't stand a chance.

4. A TRUST THAT SAVES // ISAIAH 12:1-3

Salvation is God's gift that grants us eternal life. When we come to Christ with repentant hearts and open minds, we are ready to accept the divinity of Christ and our mortality. We also accept His promises and authority over us and every aspect of our lives. Acknowledging this gives the believer confidence to come to Christ for salvation. This is a never-ending cycle of faith-building, starting with affirming God's authority in our lives, expanding our knowledge of Him, and finally extending our trust in Him. Salvation and trust in God are intertwined, meaning you can't have one without the other.

I can put my trust in God, building on the trust I put in His gift of salvation.

5. A REPENTANT HEART // PSALMS 51:1-19

After committing several transgressions and being rebuked by the prophet Nathan, King David looks inward and repents to God. He asks God to "create a clean heart for me and renew a steadfast spirit in me" (v. 10). David illustrates in this passage is the humbling and intimate effort of repentance. We all "fall short," and when we do, it is our responsibility to repent. However, after we've been forgiven, repentance requires that we completely turn away from sin. Believers must deliberately choose God over our flesh because doing so declares to the world that Christ is our Lord and Savior.

Like David, we can demonstrate humility when we fall short with repentant hearts.



Living in Truth

BY DR. DOROTHEA JOHNSON JAMES

Have you ever found yourself in a situation where everything seemed to fall apart, yet you found strength in something solid and unwavering? This reality hit home for me during a cookout that had been planned amid torrential rains. As the guests arrived and began to sit in the chairs, they sank in the mud. My friends and family dealt with sinking chairs, leaning precariously as the ground struggled to hold their weight. It was a small yet noticeable reminder of the importance of a firm foundation.

That day, I was reminded of an article I read when Hurricane Katrina destroyed the Gulf Coast. Yet, in Pass Christian, Mississippi, one house stood amidst the rubble. The question the citizens were left with was, what allowed this structure to withstand the storm? Dare I say a firm, indestructible foundation. A firm foundation just like the one Jesus teaches His disciples about in Matthew 7:24-27.

This parable illustrates a life built on the unshakable foundation of God's Word, which can weather any storm.

What is Truth? Truth is deeply rooted in the character and nature of God. Jesus declares in John 14:6, "I am the way, the truth, and the life." This statement clarifies that truth is not just an abstract idea; it is embodied in Jesus, serving as the ultimate standard for all things. Jesus is the Word.

In his book *Jesus Among Other Gods*, Ravi Zacharias says, "In calling Christ the Word, John anchors him as the eternal self-expression of God, the source of all creation, and the bridge between divine revelation and human understanding."⁷

- **Truth is Absolute and Unchanging:** Psalm 119:89, "LORD, your word is forever; it is firmly fixed in heaven."

- **Truth is the Architect of Spiritual Growth:** John 17:17, “Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth.”
- **Truth is our Advisor in Chaos:** 2 Timothy 3:16, “All Scripture is inspired by God and is profitable for teaching, for rebuking, for correcting, for training in righteousness.”

Core Truths of the Word

Living in Truth Will Uncover Man's Greatest Problem

Romans 3:23 states, “For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” Humanity’s most significant problem is sin. This fact causes separation from God as identified in the Word. Recognizing sinfulness is essential. The Bible exposes sin and guides us to God’s grace and redemption.

Living in Truth Will Reveal God's Gift

John 3:16 reveals the ultimate solution to sin: “For God loved the world in this way: He gave his one and only Son so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life.” Salvation is offered to all, making it the greatest gift ever given. Martin Luther stated, “The Bible is the cradle wherein Christ is laid,”⁸ stressing that every page of Scripture points to the truth of Jesus.

Living in Truth is the Ultimate Standard

Living in truth requires aligning one’s life with God’s Word. Psalm 119:105 states, “Your word is a lamp for my feet and a light on my path.” God’s Word illuminates darkness and provides clarity for every decision. The Word challenges us, causing us to reflect on God’s character rather than conform to the world’s faulty value systems.

Living in Truth is Our Testimony to Others

James 2:17 asserts, “In the same way faith if it does not have works, is dead by itself.” As we practice the truth every day, our actions will demonstrate the depth of our faith. A lifestyle aligned with God’s truth honors Him and serves as a testimony to those around us.

Living in Truth: Practical Applications

Living in God’s truth involves more than mental understanding or lip service; it requires a commitment to embody His principles. Here are two practical ways to live in truth:

1. Model Your Life After Scripture:

- Let Scripture Guide Your Decisions (Prov. 3:5-6).
- Seek Wisdom in Uncertainty (Jas. 1:5).

2. Manifest Your Beliefs Through Actions:

- Choose Obedience Over Conformity (Dan. 1:8-16).
- Serve Others in Practical Ways (1 John 3:18).
- Respond to Conflict with Grace (Matt. 5:9).

In a world where people believe in their own “truths,” believers are called to stand firm in God’s unchanging Word. God’s truth brings freedom, clarity, and purpose (John 8:32). We will counter-cultural confusion by renewing our minds (Rom. 12:2). Although we live in uncertainty and chaos, we have a firm foundation in the truth. Whether it’s a house standing firm against a hurricane or a life built on the truth of God’s Word, the principle remains the same: a solid foundation is the key to Living in Truth and enduring life’s storms.

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Week 3 – God’s Covenant People

Scripture Readings: Genesis 12:1–9; Genesis 15; Exodus 19:1–6; Deuteronomy 7:6–9

God chose Abraham and made a covenant with him: his descendants would become a great nation, live in the land God promised, and bless all nations. Israel was not chosen for privilege alone but for purpose—to reveal God to the world. Through covenants with Abraham, Moses, and David, God demonstrated His faithfulness. Each covenant carried forward His plan until the ultimate covenant through Christ. Israel’s story shows God’s patience, mercy, and justice.

SESSION 4

THE GREATEST GIFT

Leader pages on pp. 116-119

THE POINT:
**WE CAN RECEIVE NO
GREATER GIFT THAN A
RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD.**

ROMANS 5:6-11,18-21

⁶ For while we were still helpless, at the right time, Christ died for the ungodly.

⁷ For rarely will someone die for a just person—though for a good person perhaps someone might even dare to die.

⁸ But God proves his own love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

.....
⁹ How much more then, since we have now been justified by his blood, will we be saved through him from wrath.

¹⁰ **For if, while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son, then how much more, having been reconciled, will we be saved by his life.**

¹¹ And not only that, but we also boast in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received this reconciliation.

.....
¹⁸ So then, as through one trespass there is condemnation for everyone, so also through one righteous act there is justification leading to life for everyone.

¹⁹ For just as through one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so also through the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous.

²⁰ The law came along to multiply the trespass. But where sin multiplied, grace multiplied even more

²¹ so that, just as sin reigned in death, so also grace will reign through righteousness, resulting in eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

MEMORY VERSE

KEYWORDS

At the right time (v. 6)—Greek for a fixed and definite time. Christ died at the right time in the scope of history, but also in the sense that we were powerless to break our bondage to sin.

Justified (v. 9)—To be justified is to be declared righteous in God's sight.

Reconciled (v. 10)—To end the hostilities between conflicting parties and to allow for ongoing relationship.

Righteous act (v. 18)—Christ making provision for our redemption from sin by His substitutionary death on the cross; the whole scope of Christ's ministry.

WHAT IS THE GREATEST GIFT THAT CHRIST OFFERS?

Gift giving and gift getting can be tricky, if not outright difficult. As a parent, we search for the perfect gift for our children. They unwrap it and in just a few short minutes we discover they enjoy playing with the box more than the toy!

Do you remember your favorite gift you received as a child? For me, it was a pair of ice skates. It meant I graduated from standing to the side, sliding on the ice in my boots, pretending to be in the game. Now I was able to play with the older kids on the frozen neighborhood pond.

What about the best gift you ever gave to someone? Do you remember the look on his or her face and the joy in your heart when he or she unwrapped it? Scripture says that all of heaven rejoices when a person receives the greatest gift that God has ever given (Luke 15:7). Let's explore the GOAT of all gifts, the one that changes everything.

The Gift Of God's Love //

Romans 5:6-8

The book of Romans was written by the apostle Paul to the believers in Rome he was planning to visit. The driving force of the letter was to instruct

them how to get right with God. Before he could tell them, though, he had to convince them they were not right with Him. With divinely inspired precision and court savvy logic, in the first four chapters, Paul effectively presented the case that all humans are not right with God. In chapter 5, he transitioned from the wages of our sin to the revelation of how God makes His people right with Him.

Paul underscored that any attempt to get right with God through keeping the law was useless. While in that powerless state, "at the right time" (v. 6) Christ died for the ungodly. There are two choices of Greek words available for time: *chronos* and *kairos*. The first word is used to talk about "clock time." This is why Paul chose the second word, which means the "perfect, opportune time." So, how was this the perfect time?

One explanation is that it was the right time because the people of Israel finally understood they were helpless to keep the entire law. There perhaps was no further convincing needed that it was the right time for Jesus to come to earth and demonstrate God's love for His people.

HOW HAS GOD'S PERFECT TIMING ALTERED THE COURSE OF YOUR LIFE?



THE POINT: WE CAN RECEIVE NO GREATER GIFT THAN A RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD.

Another intriguing interpretation of Jesus's incarnation is the historical context. Jesus arrived at the height of the Roman Empire, which put the world at possibly the most strategic time in history for someone with an all-time, all-world message to be able to succeed. Could God have sent His Son at some other time? Of course. But He chose to send Him at an important time.

To put it simply, the time was right for Jesus's arrival with the most important news ever.

Christ came to die not for the good but for the ungodly, the wicked, and the sinner. That was scandalous. Why would someone die for an evil person? Paul shared that it was unheard of: It was rare for a person to die for a good man, yet it was much rarer for a person to die for a sinner. For whom would you be willing to lay down your life? People who have hurt you, betrayed you, cursed you, mocked you, or outright ignored you are probably not high on the list. But for God they are the list.

Paul was very clear: The cross wasn't a plan for redemption that Jesus stumbled upon; it came from the heart of the Father: "God proves his own love for us" (v. 8). God's eternal love for His rebellious creation was once and for all nailed down through the cross.

There is no doubting the Father's love. When we were helpless, at the perfect time, in our darkest hour, Christ died for us. This is why lyrics like those found in the song "Jireh" by Elevation Worship and Maverick City Music ring true for those who belong to Christ:

*I'm already loved
I'm already chosen
I know who I am
I know what You've spoken
I'm already loved
More than I could imagine
And that is enough . . .⁹*

HOW HAS GOD'S PERFECT TIMING ALTERED THE COURSE OF YOUR LIFE?

The Gift Of Reconciliation //

Romans 5:9-11

Paul continued to build his case for how lost, helpless people at war with God can be made right. He twice used the phrase "how much more" (v. 9,10). He reasoned that if God does the saving, doesn't it make sense that He will do the preserving? If God did not spare His own Son to prove His love for us, then doesn't it make sense that those for whom He died will also be saved from God's



DIGGING DEEPER RECONCILED FOR RIGHTEOUSNESS

The Bible clearly teaches that God is good and the source of all goodness (Gen. 1; Jas. 1:17). Therefore, there is nothing better than to be in the presence of God. Sometimes, people will incorrectly assume that the worst thing in the universe is to be in the presence of Satan or hell. However, encountering the wrath of God is worse than both. Thus, when Paul says that Jesus has saved us from the "wrath of God" (Romans 5:9) and given us access to God's grace (5:2), he is saying that we have traded the worst possible gift for the best one. This does not mean that we should dismiss the power of temptation to ruin our lives and cause us to grieve God's heart. But we should focus our efforts on remembering how the power of God's reconciliation has allowed us to claim worthiness that we will never deserve.

How does God's love and reconciliation encourage you to live a righteous life?

wrath against sin and rebellion? What does it mean to justify a sinful people? Justification is a legal term, used when a judge:

- **Acquits.** God declares the defendant not guilty,
- **Reckons.** God calls the person free. The guilt is no longer held against the defendant. In the spiritual sense, God announces us innocent of our sins.
- **Justifies.** The defendant walks out of the courtroom justified, “just as if I had” never sinned.

God not only acquits believers, but He declares them to be righteous in His sight. Since Jesus’s work has been completed, “how much more” then will God save those who believe in Jesus from His wrath? He will finish what He started.

Salvation from God’s wrath is not a one-time event; it’s ongoing and has three tenses.

Past tense means what we have been saved from. All have fallen short of God’s standard (Rom. 3:23). The sinner is saved from that which made him or her guilty. **Present tense** means we are daily being saved. Paul instructs the believer to work out his salvation with fear and trembling (Phil. 2:12). **Future tense** means the believer in Christ is saved from God’s future wrath against sin. The believer won’t experience this destruction because he or she will be fully restored.

What is God’s wrath? It’s not Him losing His temper and going off on sin, rather it’s His fair and just judgment against unrepentant sin. Hebrews 9:22 tells us that without the shedding of blood, there is no forgiveness of sin. In the Old Testament, the blood of an unblemished lamb was needed for the forgiveness of sin. It took innocent blood to be forgiven. In all of history, there is only one person born innocent, one who was without sin, and therefore only one who could possibly be the blood sacrifice for the sins of the world.

God’s wrath against sin doesn’t make Him the enemy of sinners or the seeker of their destruction. Instead, He acts in a way so that all can be spared the wrath and judgment to come and embrace the knowledge of the truth.

This salvation, justification, and righteous standing with God have been accomplished in such a way that it’s not possible for humans to boast about how good they are.

HOW DOES THE INNOCENT BLOOD OF JESUS THAT BOUGHT YOUR RECONCILIATION RELATE TO YOUR ABILITY TO LIVE RIGHTEOUSLY?



The Gift Of Eternal Life //

Romans 5:18-21

Paul opened his closing argument for justification by faith with a phrase translated as “so then,” “consequently,” or “therefore.” It alerts the reader to a couple of things:

- **These are closing remarks on this subject.** He’s putting the final touches, or the exclamation point on his argument that he had just laid out so powerfully.
- **A transition is coming.** Since you now know this, in other words, here is the result. Another way to phrase it could be: Here are the results of what you just discovered.

He landed this argument of condemnation and justification by comparing the actions and results of two men. They’re not named in this passage, but we know them as the first man, and the last man: Adam and Jesus.

THE POINT: WE CAN RECEIVE NO GREATER GIFT THAN A RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD.

First, Adam's act was a trespass, which carries the idea of the deliberate crossing over of an established boundary. It was an act of rebellion, defiance, and disobedience. Adam knew the command and deliberately chose to ignore it to do his own thing. The consequence for his act was condemnation for everyone. It's not just everyone who may have been present, but for everyone who comes after him. That would be the whole human race.

Jesus's righteous act occurred in a few phases. The word translated "act" can also be correctly translated as "work." It was more than just one step; it was a whole lifetime of a righteous plan leading to justification on the cross. And it did more than erase our sin and rebellion; it made it possible for us to have a life with and in God if we would trust Him. This is called eternal life.

Paul one more time juxtaposed Adam's disobedience with Jesus's obedience. The one man's disobedience made the many to be sinners; the other man's obedience made the many to be righteous, or right in God's sight. Paul emphasized that justification comes through belief, faith, and trust. The more we're aware of our sins, the more we realize we need God's grace and mercy.

HOW DOES AN AWARENESS OF SIN RESULT IN A GREATER AWARENESS OF THE NEED FOR GRACE?

DID YOU KNOW?

Sometimes people will accuse God of being unjust because He did not stop Adam from committing the original sin. These people find it hard to believe one person's actions affected everyone else's eternal state. However, this is a misunderstanding of Paul's point in Romans 5:18-19 that requires at least three corrections. First, we are all impacted by where we come from. This was true even for Adam. He was born outside of Eden (Gen 2:7; 3:23) and needed to learn how to serve God once he was placed there. Second, inheriting Adam's original sin does not mean that we are the worst people possible. Instead, we are simply born with a desire to resist God's good design. Third, none of us would have represented mankind any better than Adam did. Even if we had been given the perfect conditions to serve God, eventually, we would have chosen to do our own thing. This is why Paul highlights that the seriousness of death is matched by the superior gift of eternal life with Christ.

Biblical Truth: Christ is the greatest gift we can give to anyone.

Who do you know that needs the gift of reconciliation through Jesus Christ?

LIVE IT

When is a gift most valued?

We demonstrate how important something is to us by how we use it. When understand the impact and implications of Jesus's gift of grace, we can't help but use this to alter the course of our lives and relationships. Spend some time trying to identify ways to remember and reflect on the reality that we can receive no greater gift than a relationship with God. Perhaps, the following will help you do this:

+ + +

- **Gifts to be opened.** Gifts aren't gifts until they're received and opened. Have you received the gift of being made right with God? Believe Jesus died for your sin and rose to life again. Check out the inside front cover of this book for help.
- **Steps to reconciliation.** God took big steps to reconcile us to Himself. Who are the people with whom you need to reconcile? What steps can you take to begin that process? Get started this week.
- **A message to deliver.** Tell others about God's amazing gift of reconciliation. Make an appointment in the next week or two to share your faith story with a family member, friend, or neighbor.

DAILY READINGS

1. SALVATION // ROMANS 5:6-8

What did your life look like before you accepted Christ? Be honest. Were you a liar? A cheater? A “no good . . .” You can fill in the blanks from here. We all have a not-so-pretty past that would spark surprise to anyone we share it with. God saw us in our sins and still chose to sacrifice His Son for us. He loved us at our worst moments and despite them, died for us. God’s love is unconditional, so we didn’t have to prove ourselves worthy of His sacrifice. In fact, He watched and waited patiently while we were deep in the trenches of our sin.

We aren’t worthy of the salvation God offers us, but Christ’s blood justifies us.

2. RECONCILED TO CHRIST // 2 CORINTHIANS 5:18

Betrayal is gut-wrenching. It can harden the heart, and destroy relationships. When we were in sin, we, in many ways, betrayed Christ. Hurting Him as He closely watched us choose our flesh over Him time and time again. However, the death of Jesus makes reconciliation with God possible through salvation. Salvation saves us from the righteous judgment of death (Rom. 6:23); which is the fate of those who do not believe in Christ. Salvation through Christ restores the broken relationship between God and ourselves. Setting a new foundation of trust over a relationship fractured by our sin. This further shows God’s love, compassion, and nurturing nature towards us.

Lord, thank you for the reconciliation of our relationship through Christ. Amen.

3. MOVING DAY // JOHN 5:24

“When the Lord gets ready, you got to move.” A woman started her remarks at a funeral by singing this song. After singing, she went on to say that the difference between moving and being evicted is that when you move, you know where you’re going. The price of sin is death, not just a physical death but an eternal one. Living a life enveloped in sin will only equate to hell in the afterlife. Thankfully, through salvation, we attained a “get out of hell free

card” when Jesus paid our debt of sin on the cross. Because we’ve accepted this salvation into our hearts, we have been gifted with eternal life! So, when it’s moving day, there won’t be any confusion about where we’re heading. Heaven is our home!

We can rejoice in the fact that Heaven is our eternal home!

4. EXEMPLARY LOVE // GALATIANS 2:20

Love guides our relationship with God. God showed His love toward us through the gift of salvation. 1 John 4:19 states, “We love because he first loved us.” As believers, we respond to His love by loving Him in return. We show our love of God in several ways: praise, service, testifying of His goodness, and, most importantly, how we live. As we grow in Christ, our love for Him develops from simple affection to a deep respect, admiration, loyalty, and desire to defend over time. With this mindset, believers shift their lifestyles from the practice of pleasing themselves to honor God in all aspects of their lives. In how we act and speak, our lives begin to reflect the love that we have for God.

Let us exemplify the love that God gives us by living for Him in return.

5. AIDED IN LOVE // 1 CORINTHIANS 13:4-8

In this passage, Paul lists the attributes of love. These characteristics are personified through the life and sacrifice of Christ and even further through the gift of salvation. As we are loved by Christ, we are commanded to love others in the same manner (John 13:34). The correlation between the attributes of love and the fruit of the Holy Spirit is evident. The Holy Spirit cultivates the believer’s character into one that is Christ-like. To love others the same way Jesus shows love. Aiding us when we, in our own power and strength, cannot love the way we are commanded to. Recognizing the Holy Spirit’s function in aiding us to love one another, draws us closer to Christ.

Pause and reflect that it is Christ’s love for us that aids us in becoming more like Him.

Week 4 – Exodus, Law, and Worship

Scripture Readings: Exodus 12; Exodus 20; Leviticus 16; Deuteronomy 6:4–9

God delivered His people from Egypt with mighty acts of judgment and salvation, climaxing in the Passover. This event foreshadows Jesus, our true Passover Lamb. At Sinai, God gave the Law to teach His people how to live holy lives. The Tabernacle and sacrifices provided a way for sinful people to dwell in God's presence. The Law showed God's holiness and humanity's need for grace. It pointed forward to Christ, who fulfilled the Law perfectly and became the once-for-all sacrifice.

SESSION 5

THE GREATEST COMMAND

Leader pages on pp. 120-123

THE POINT:
OUR OBEDIENCE TO GOD
IS SEEN IN OUR LOVE FOR
HIM AND OTHERS.

MARK 12:28-34

²⁸ One of the scribes approached. When he heard them debating and saw that Jesus answered them well, he asked him, "Which command is the most important of all?"

²⁹ Jesus answered, "The most important is Listen, Israel! The Lord our God, the Lord is one.

³⁰ Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.

.....
³¹ The second is, Love your neighbor as yourself. There is no other command greater than these."

.....
³² Then the scribe said to him, "You are right, teacher. You have correctly said that he is one, and there is no one else except him.

³³ **And to love him with all your heart, with all your understanding, and with all your strength, and to love your neighbor as yourself, is far more important than all the burnt offerings and sacrifices."**

³⁴ When Jesus saw that he answered wisely, he said to him, "You are not far from the kingdom of God." And no one dared to question him any longer.

MEMORY VERSE

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KEYWORDS

Listen, Israel (v. 29)—Jesus quoted a passage identified as the Shema (Mark 12:29-30). The Shema became a confession of faith by which the Jews acknowledged the one true God.

As yourself (v. 31)—These words do not justify a self-centered or self-focused love. This kind

of love is loyal, unselfish, and benevolent toward others.

Far from the kingdom of God (v. 34)—This scribe's affirmation of Jesus's response to his question indicated the scribe's receptivity to Jesus's person as well as to His teaching.

HOW ARE WE TO LOVE GOD AND HIS PEOPLE?

"What's the one thing?" That's the beginning of many questions asked of those who are successful or at the top of their given profession. Whether it's in business, marriage, athletic performance, or just general success and happiness. The question usually gets asked something like this:

- "What's the one thing you did, know, or feel that got you to where you are?"
- "What's the one thing I need to do, know, or feel to get me to where you are?"
- "What's the most important piece of advice you've been given or can give to someone who wants to be successful?"

Sometimes the answers are a treasure, while others could be trash, depending upon the person's values and worldview.

Jesus was asked that "one thing" question. An expert in the Old Testament law witnessed Jesus verbally sparring with religious leaders. Impressed with how Jesus handled His accusers and their questions, the expert had to know something for himself. He approached Jesus and asked, "Which command is the most important of all?" (Mark 12:28). Jesus perceived his sincerity

and gave the man a clear, concise answer. Their interaction has fascinated preachers, philosophers, princes, and even paupers since it occurred.

Love God With Our Whole Being // Mark 12:28-30

The honeymoon was over. Just a few days removed from making His triumphal entry into Jerusalem amidst the cheers of the people, Jesus was again at odds with the religious elites. They were seeking to trap Him in an error so they could bring charges. This time it was the Sadducees. They were trading verbal blows over the resurrection, something they didn't even believe in.

On the periphery, witnessing the inquisition was a scribe. Scribes were scholars and experts in the Mosaic law. Their role was to copy, interpret, and write rules and regulations on how the law should be lived out for each generation. They counted 613 commandments, 365 prohibitions, and 248 positive commands in the Torah. While these experts wrote the Mosaic law procedure manual, they also attempted to summarize the whole of the law in as few words as possible.



THE POINT: OUR OBEDIENCE TO GOD IS SEEN IN OUR LOVE FOR HIM AND OTHERS.

After witnessing Jesus's resounding victory, the scribe approached Jesus alone. He inquired which commandment could be considered the most important. His tone was different. Three things point to the man's sincerity.

1. **The type of question.** The scribe asked Jesus to summarize the whole of the law in a nutshell.
2. **The man came alone.** Since Jesus's arrival in Jerusalem, He was usually approached by groups of religious leaders.
3. **Jesus's answer.** When Jesus perceived nefarious motives, He would answer questions with questions, or even reply in parables.

Jesus quoted the Shema found in Deuteronomy 6:4-5. Shema is so named because it is the first word of the statement in the Hebrew, a word that means "hear." The Shema was first delivered to the people of Israel, as they were about to enter the promised land. It was recited morning and evening by the Jewish people and was also the opening words of temple services.

It's a commandment to know God and to remind His people that He is One. The Lord is the only One. He alone is God; there is no other. He has no equal, no rival; He stands alone.

"All" is repeated four times to highlight the total response of love that's to be given to the Lord (Mark 12:30). In His covenant, God gives Himself totally to Israel; He expects it to be reciprocated. We're not to love God casually or half-heartedly, but in full measure with our every thought, emotion, feeling, word, and action. We are to pursue our love for Him in every aspect of daily life, with all that we are. The call is to love God with all your:

- **Heart.** To love God exclusively. We should have no other gods before Him. He alone has our heart's allegiance.
- **Soul.** To love God with all our souls means we find our purpose and meaning in Him alone. Our love for God must surpass our love for others and for all things.
- **Mind.** We love God with all our minds by choosing obedience because we know what He says is true. Jesus said we are to worship God in truth.
- **Strength.** To love God with all our strength is to love with perseverance. It keeps its commitment through all the trials and suffering of life lived in a broken world.

WHY WOULD THE COMMAND TO LOVE GOD BE GREATER THAN ANY OTHER COMMANDS?



DIGGING DEEPER GOD OF ALL GENERATIONS

Within Deuteronomy, the Shema was prescribed to remind God's people that they should not become idolaters. Once in the Promised Land future generations would be tempted to forget the Lord because of the wealth they inherited (Deut. 6:10-14). The current generation had experienced God's miraculous deliverance and understood the importance of what they had been given. But the future generations would become content because they did not have the same experience. The correction for this is to remember that God is "One," and that God is uniquely set apart from everything and everyone else. Achieving great wealth is not sinful if one remembers how it is acquired, through following God's commandments (Deut. 6:1-2). This is true of every good thing in life. Remembering that God is uniquely the only source of truth, is what will allow us to safely transfer genuine faith from one generation to the next.

What some practical steps that you are taking to ensure that the next generation understands who God is?

Love Others as Ourselves //

Mark 12:31

Isn't it just like Jesus to go the extra mile for someone who is truly seeking? Not only does He give the scribe a straightforward answer, but He expands upon it and brings something revolutionary to the table.

Within the listing of the Old Testament commands, the Shema (Deut. 6:4-5) and command to love our neighbors (Lev. 19:18), are two separate commands that are separated by quite some distance. This caused some religious leaders to treat them as two separate commands. Jesus, however, clarified that these commands were always meant to function together. Loving God is intrinsically linked to loving one's neighbor. We can see Jesus put into practice what He was speaking even in His response to this scribe.

CAN YOU IDENTIFY AT LEAST THREE WAYS THAT LOVING OTHERS WHOLEHEARTEDLY BEGINS WITH LOVING GOD WHOLEHEARTEDLY?

As mentioned earlier the command "Love your neighbor as yourself" (v. 31) is a quotation from Leviticus 19:18 and is found at least eight times in the Scriptures. Religious leaders of the day had not modeled following this command well. Jesus quoted the command without any limiting boundaries. Jesus summarized the totality of the law as love God and love others. The Ten Commandments define how to love God and others. The first four are about love for God, while the second six are love for others.

"Love others as yourself?" Loving ourselves doesn't sound Christlike, does it? If love means sacrificially working in another's best interest, shouldn't we also do that for ourselves? Jesus's command to love others as ourselves implies that we won't love others in the right way unless we love ourselves in the right way. Think about it this way: God loves you, so you can love yourself. God accepts you, so you can accept yourself. God treasures you as His unique creation, so you can treasure yourself. Loving yourself like that isn't just okay, it's what Jesus commands. By telling us to love others as we love ourselves, Jesus gave us permission to do two things:



- **Love ourselves.** We are created in the image of God. If God loves us, we should certainly love ourselves.
- **Set boundaries on that love.** Our tendency can be to be selfish, to think more of ourselves than we ought to. God wants us to be selfless, not selfish.

We are to love others "as" ourselves, not more than and not less than, not better than or worse than, but we are to love others like we love ourselves. Could this also mean that as we love others, we are loving ourselves? When we act in our neighbor's best interest, we're obeying God, and therefore nurturing our relationship with God, which is also acting in our best interest.

Love God Above All // Mark 12:32-34

What began as a situation described by the old English proverb "the enemy of my enemy is my friend," ends in mutual respect, admiration, and possibly an authentic friendship. The scribe was as pleased with how Jesus answered his question as he was with how Jesus responded to the Sadducees. The scribe answered Jesus with, "You are right, teacher" (v. 32).

The word translated "teacher" is a title of respect and dignity. It's possible the scribe was acknowledging Jesus's credentials as a Rabbi. While all the other groups had tried to trap Him, at least this scribe gave Jesus a measure of His due.

THE POINT: OUR OBEDIENCE TO GOD IS SEEN IN OUR LOVE FOR HIM AND OTHERS.

The scribe, while sincere in his question, and like the Pharisees and Sadducees before him, may have originally sought to render judgment upon Jesus. Initially, he may have questioned Jesus's understanding of the Mosaic law and therefore His credentials as a Rabbi. As a scribe, he did have the authority to bring judgment upon others for their knowledge and use of the law. But regardless of his initial intent, the scribe walked away knowing Jesus had the authority to judge on matters much greater, matters of the eternal soul.

Jesus implicitly revealed His identity. When Jesus witnessed the scribe's understanding and insight into spiritual matters, He declared him "not far from the kingdom of God" (v. 34). That judgment was more than just his understanding of the law; it was a judgment on the state of his eternal soul. Only God can judge eternal matters of the soul. Jesus revealed His authority to pronounce judgment on matters of eternal importance. When humans dare to sit in judgment of Christ, they find instead that Christ sits in judgment of them!

WHAT OFFERINGS AND SACRIFICES DO PEOPLE MAKE TODAY THAT ARE MEANT TO REPLACE THE HARDER SACRIFICE OF LOVING OTHERS?

DID YOU KNOW?

Within Mark 11:27-12:34, Jesus is questioned by several groups. First, come the chief priests, scribes, and elders (11:27). They question the very source of Jesus's authority, and they receive no response from Him. Second, are the Pharisees and the Herodians (12:13). They want to trap Jesus by asking Him about how God's people should deal with governmental policies. Third, are the Sadducees who ask him a philosophical question about the resurrection (12:16). In response, Jesus explains that the philosophy of Scripture points toward the philosophy of Heaven. This allows God's people to transcend the limitations of this world. Lastly, comes the scribe (12:28), who asks a genuine question that receives a genuine response. Collectively, as the church, we can rely on our different giftings to provide a defense for the faith.

Biblical Truth: "Now there are different gifts, but the same Spirit. There are different ministries, but the same Lord" (1 Cor. 12:4-5).

How has God gifted individuals to edify the Body of Christ in your local community?

LIVE IT

Does your life reflect a love for God that is modeled in a love for others?

Since Christians do not accept that every lifestyle choice is good, they are sometimes accused of being unloving. This is rooted in a fundamental misunderstanding of true love. Because righteousness is rooted in God, one must live according to God's word to love someone else (i.e., point them toward goodness). Below are some ways for you to grow in biblical love:

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- **Put God first.** What are the areas of your life that rival the place only God should occupy? Check your calendar and your bank statement. Where do you spend your time and money?
- **Seek God always.** To love God with your mind means you seek truth. What are you reading that will help you love God with your mind? Consider readings that will sharpen your understanding of biblical truth.
- **Love God with your strength.** Find a person in need in your church or community and gather a group to help meet that need. It could be yard work, maintenance, or even errands this person is incapable of completing.

DAILY READINGS

1. LOVE SETS THE TONE // MARK 12:30

After a long day, it's common for one to light a candle. The lighting of a candle creates an atmosphere of calm, setting the tone by preparing the mind for relaxation. For the believer, a deep love for Christ sets the tone for a life that honors Him. Jesus commands us to love God with our whole being. This commandment is vital in setting the tone of a believer's spiritual life. How so? Loving the Lord with your heart and soul positions Christ as revered and adored in our spirit. Loving God with our minds acknowledges His thoughts above our own. Loving God with our strength signifies a determination to set Him above everything that seeks to take His place.

Following Christ's commandment to love sets the tone for a life that honors Him.

2. LOVE THAT SERVES // 1 PETER 4:8-10

Christ commands us to love one another as we love ourselves. But how can we show love? We can show love through service to others. Serving others honors Christ as we show obedience to serve one another in love (Gal. 5:13). The act of service is self-sacrificing, humbling and selfless. God gives us gifts that we can use to serve others. Service follows the same path as Christ. He sacrificed His life so that we can have eternal life. What they see in our service is a direct reflection of Christ and illuminates a path to Him.

By serving others with love, we show the same love that Christ showed us.

3. FIRST COMES GOD // DEUTERONOMY 11:22-24

The Israelites were near the promised land, but before possessing the land of Canaan, they were taught the necessity of loving God above all else. It may seem conflicting to love God above everything else. Putting God above our dreams, careers, and relationships can prove difficult as we naturally feel passion for these things. Despite this, the greatest thing we can do is love

God above everything else. Prioritizing our love for God illustrates submission to Him, and our submission does not go unrecognized. Matthew 6:33 implores the believer to seek God first with the assurance that all other things that concern us will be provided for. Knowing this gives the believer spiritual and mental fortitude to make God first.

Our daily posture must be, God first, then everything else.

4. SURETY OF CHRIST'S RETURN // HEBREWS 9:28

One of my favorite songs present these lyrics "God said it, I believe it, I'm going to take Him at His word."¹⁰ Numbers 23:19 states that "God is not a man that He might lie, or a son of man, that He might change His mind." What this means is that every word from God is an absolute guarantee and will not falter or change. Christ promised that He will appear a second time for His believers that are patiently waiting for Him. This surety inspires, encourages, and empowers us to live righteously as we await His glorious return. Furthermore, this guarantee evokes a response of praise as we honor the Lord for being a promise keeper.

Because God cannot lie, we can trust in the promise of His return!

5. A PREPARED PLACE // JOHN 14:1-3

A handmade gift is often considered more remarkable than a store-bought one, because of the giver's time and effort to create. Receiving a handcrafted gift reveals a deep fondness for the giftee. Jesus promises to return to take believers to a place He's prepared for us, specifically so He can commune with us. His desire to commune with us shows His intense love for us. As He personally sees to us receiving the gift, He created for us. For those who believe in Christ, His determination rooted in love drives the believer to a closer relationship with Him.

"If I go away and prepare a place for you, I will come again and take you to myself, so that where I am you may be also" (John 14:3).

Week 5 – Into the Land, Judges, and Kings

Scripture Readings: Joshua 1; Judges 2; 1 Samuel 8; 2 Samuel 7

Israel entered the Promised Land, but their obedience wavered. In Judges, “everyone did what was right in their own eyes.” The people demanded a king to be like other nations. God gave them Saul, then raised up David, through whom He made a covenant promise: a king from David’s line would reign forever. This eternal King is Jesus Christ. Israel’s ups and downs with earthly kings highlight the need for a perfect King who rules with justice and righteousness.

SESSION 6

THE GREATEST RETURN

Leader pages on pp. 124-127

THE POINT:
JESUS WILL RETURN ONE DAY, AND WE SHOULD BE READY.

1 THESSALONIANS 4:16-5:8

¹⁶ For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the archangel's voice, and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first.

¹⁷ Then we who are still alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord.

¹⁸ Therefore encourage one another with these words.

.....
¹ About the times and the seasons: Brothers and sisters, you do not need anything to be written to you.

² For you yourselves know very well that the day of the Lord will come just like a thief in the night.

³ When they say, "Peace and security," then sudden destruction will come upon them, like labor pains on a pregnant woman, and they will not escape.

⁴ But you, brothers and sisters, are not in the dark, for this day to surprise you like a thief.

⁵ For you are all children of light and children of the day. We do not belong to the night or the darkness.

.....
⁶ So then, let us not sleep, like the rest, but let us stay awake and be self-controlled.

⁷ For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk, get drunk at night.

⁸ **But since we belong to the day, let us be self-controlled and put on the armor of faith and love, and a helmet of the hope of salvation.**

MEMORY VERSE

KEYWORDS

Dead in Christ...(v. 16)—Paul wrote to clear up misunderstandings about believers who had died before the second coming.

The day of the Lord (v. 2)—This expression appears in both the Old and New Testaments. Meaning a point in time in which God intervenes in history to display His sovereign power.

Not in the dark (v. 4)—God's children are to be people of light (1 John 1:5).

The armor of faith and love (v. 8)—Putting on armor is figurative language for obedience to God's instructions in the Scriptures. As armor was essential for a soldier, so faith and love are essential characteristics of a Christian.

HOW DOES JESUS'S RETURN IMPACT THE WAY WE LIVE?

Many of us have seen footage of the person walking the city streets or perhaps in the stadium adorned with a sign saying: "The end is near." Catastrophic events and seasons of dramatic change always seem to increase speculation that we are living in the last days. Our world has certainly experienced our share of these types of events in the last few years, but a 2022 survey of U.S. citizens revealed some interesting insights about the end times.

39% of adults said we are living in the end times, while 58% do not. 29% of non-Christians believe we are in the last days and 92% of Protestant Christians believe that Jesus will return.¹¹

Pew Research Center conducted an additional study which revealed that the percentage among the Black community is much higher than other ethnic groups. In all, 76% of Black Christians believe that we are living in the end times and this is matched by 68% of all African Americans believing the same.¹²

Of course, Jesus did promise His disciples and all those who follow Him that He will return for His bride one day and take her home. He did not give the date, but He did give a description of what that day will be like.

Live Encouraged //

1 Thessalonians 4:16-18

Paul wrote the letter titled 1 Thessalonians to believers in the seaport city of Thessalonica, in what is modern-day Greece. He and Silas were there during Paul's second missionary journey recorded in Acts 17. The church had begun amidst persecution that continued throughout its early history.

The Thessalonians had questions about "the day of the Lord" (1 Thess. 5:2). The confusion ran the gamut with questions about when Jesus would return to some individuals being concerned that they may have even missed it. Believers were passing away, and they feared the departed missed the day. Thus, Paul provides an explanation of what would happen on the day of the Lord, so people wouldn't be uninformed.

In verses 16-18, Paul laid out the sequence of the Lord's return:

- The Lord Himself descends.
- There's a commanding shout.
- There's a trumpet call.
- The dead in Christ are raised.
- Those living meet them and Jesus in the air.



THE POINT: JESUS WILL RETURN ONE DAY, AND WE SHOULD BE READY.

Paul used the word *parousia*, which meant the glorious coming of a deity or the official visit of royalty to a city. The inauguration of the Lord's eternal kingdom is so important that the Lord Himself would return to initiate it. He won't send anyone ahead of him; He Himself will be leading the charge. The Lord will usher in the end of the age.

Jesus will descend from where He has been residing, seated at the right hand of the Father after His resurrection from the dead (Acts 7:55-56). "With a shout" (v. 16) carries the idea of a loud command. The Lord's shout is certainly not a comment or mere suggestion. It represents a command from God stating that He has the authority to rule over everyone's actions and behavior. The command will have the power to raise the dead, not just a few but all who have died in Christ throughout history, all "who have fallen asleep" (v. 14).

The archangel's voice will accompany the Lord's loud command. No name is attached to the archangel, but Jude refers to Michael by that title in his epistle. He has traditionally been seen as the highest-ranked of all angels and the commander of heaven's army. It seems plausible the voice of the Lord Himself signals the angel to dispatch heaven's army with a war cry.

Paul assured his beloved Thessalonians that their loved ones who had died in Christ would not miss the Lord's Day. They won't remain in their tombs and lose the opportunity to receive their sovereign Lord; instead, they occupy a place of privilege in this grand meeting.

When you think about the return of Jesus, what do you most look forward to or what are you most concerned about?

We who are still left will be caught up to meet them in the clouds. The "we" gives us a reflection of Paul's hope either that Jesus would come in his lifetime, or he was just identifying himself as a follower of Christ. We would be caught up, snatched, or carried away. The Latin version of this idea is *rapio*, which is where the word "rapture" comes from. And we would meet Him. This meeting reflects the official welcome of a newly arrived dignitary.

The church is the official delegation to meet Jesus at His return, with the departed believers at the front of the line. Jesus's return will unite all believers with their glorious King. What a wonderful day that will be! Paul ended this section by challenging the Thessalonians to encourage each other with the truth that the day of the Lord will not be missed by anyone and will itself be a "can't miss" day.

Live Expectant // 1 Thessalonians 5:1-3

"About the times and the seasons" (v. 1) refers to another question brought to Paul concerning the Day of the Lord. The first was about



DIGGING DEEPER JESUS THE BEST MEDIATOR

The description of Jesus's second coming has some thematic parallels to God's encounter with Israel at Mount Sinai (Ex. 19). At Sinai, there was thunder, clouds, and a trumpet sound, and the Israelites feared encountering God firsthand. Instead, they wanted Moses to be their mediator and speak to God for them (Ex. 20:19). In a similar fashion, Paul described Jesus's second coming as an event that will also contain a trumpet sound, clouds, and a cry from heaven. However, instead of God's people fearing their encounter with God, they will join Him. While the Israelites feared speaking with God because they thought it would result in their deaths, Paul explains that those who are in Christ need not fear death. This is because Christ is a better mediator than Moses. Moses attempted to plead with the Israelites to convince them that God was on their side, but he failed (Ex. 20:20-21). Jesus did not fail but protects us from the wrath of God through the power of his death and resurrection.

What are some things that cause anxiety and fear that you need to surrender to Christ?



how those who have passed away will participate in that day. This question referred to in this reference deals with those still living when Christ returns. In a sense, Paul answered, "You know what I know." There was nothing else he could share. Apparently, he had already thoroughly instructed them about the times and seasons. There was nothing else to add.

"Times and seasons" refers to when and what the times will be like at the Day of the Lord. It was a question of both *chronos*, when is the actual day, and *kairos*, when will it be just the right time. This question of the timing of Jesus's return isn't just theological but practical. The common belief was that Jesus would return within their lifetimes. So, should they cease and desist with normal life in anticipation for the impending day? If He were coming quickly, what is the use of going to your job and living life as normal?

The Day of the Lord is mentioned throughout the Bible. It's a day that ushers in a new era. It will be a day of judgment upon the ungodly and salvation for those made righteous by Jesus Christ. There will be victory over sin and death, restoration and a time of making things right once again.

It will be inescapable and terrible for the ungodly but welcomed and comforting for the saints. It's not profitable to speculate upon the times and seasons of the coming day. Paul's instructions echo Jesus's answer to the same question posed by His disciples.

Paul's analogies of a thief and childbirth depict the day as both sudden and inevitable.

- **Sudden.** Like a thief who comes in the night with no advance warning. When a thief strikes, the sleeping victim has no time for escape.
- **Inevitable.** Paul likens the day to childbirth and the pains that precede it. One knows the day is coming, and even though speculations of the day and date can be made, no one really knows the exact moment.

Not knowing the exact time of His coming is a call to live each day as if it might be that day. There's only one thing you can know for certain about the timing of the Day of the Lord: You can't know for certain! It's inevitable but unpredictable.

Destruction is to be understood as separation from God, a state of complete and hopeless ruin. There's no coming back from this; you can't rebuild. For those not ready when the day comes, there will be no time or way to escape the judgment. It will be both a sudden and inevitable day of reckoning.

HOW DOES JESUS'S ANTICIPATED RETURN PROVIDE MEANING TO OUR DAILY ACTIVITIES?

Live Empowered //

1 Thessalonians 5:4-8

Paul turned the focus to his brothers and sisters, united by the saving work of Christ. He employed a wordplay to draw a contrast between how believers and unbelievers will face the Day of the Lord. While unbelievers will be in the dark, the believers will be different. He assured them this day would not overtake them as a thief in the night might catch them unaware.

How could Paul have confidence that the Thessalonian believers wouldn't be overtaken or surprised by the Day of the Lord? He told them that they are "children of the light and children of the day" (v. 5). "Children of. . ." means a group of people closely related or together participating in something significant. Children of light are those who have been transformed from death to life, darkness to light, or night to day, by the saving work of Jesus Christ.

THE POINT: JESUS WILL RETURN ONE DAY, AND WE SHOULD BE READY.

Paul changed his focus in verse 6; his language went from “you” to “us.” This change is in keeping with addressing the Thessalonian believers as brothers and sisters. He reminded them they were family and going through this together.

Children of the day must stay awake and be self-controlled. For those who have been transformed by Christ, there must be a change in attitude and behavior. To stay awake is to be alert. The gift of salvation carries with it a call to obedience, to act as we now are.

The call to no longer sleep, but to be alert and to have self-control is in relation to the Day of the Lord. Since the day isn’t known, the believer should always live in anticipation as if today could be the day. The believer stands prepared for the climatic event of history by living each day on guard, alert, and self-controlled because when you least expect it, you should expect it.

Paul assured the Thessalonians that they are no longer children of the night but of the glorious day. He reminded them that they are soldiers and to always be vigilant. The great triad of Christian virtues: faith, love, and hope are to be the armor every Christian soldier adorns themselves with.

WHAT ARE SOME PRACTICAL STEPS WE CAN TAKE TO STAY AWAKE AND BE SELF-CONTROLLED?

DID YOU KNOW?

Christians are children of the day, and a thief of the night cannot sneak up on someone surrounded by light. Sometimes, modern conversations about the end of times do not lead people to be more encouraged but distressed. Paul wants Christians to use their knowledge of the end to encourage each other (4:18; 5:11). Some spend countless hours trying to understand how the events of the world might be paralleled to Biblical signs. While this part of the conversation does help Christians stay engaged and aware, it might also keep us from the work before us. On both sides of his explanation, Paul highlights how believers should be people who work diligently (4:11) and “admonish the idle” (5:14). Christians can look at the end of history and use this as motivation to live better, more meaningful lives here. This is one way we bear witness to the hope of Christ in a hostile world.

Biblical Truth: “I am coming soon. Hold on to what you have, so that no one takes your crown” (Rev. 3:11).

What are some specific examples of how your knowledge of Christ’s return impacts your motivation to live better now?

LIVE IT

Can you trust the process long enough to achieve the results?

Jesus will return one day, and we should be ready. No person enjoys being caught off guard. They would always choose to prepare for something if they knew it was coming. Christians should prepare for Christ’s return just like an athlete trains during the off-season. A good athlete knows that all the small workouts will matter in the long run, even if they don’t appear to matter in the moment. Below are some suggestions of small things that can help prepare us for Jesus’s return:

+ + +

- **Be alert.** Look at your calendar. Regardless of what you’ve got planned for the week ahead, consider each day as if Jesus could return. What would you change?
- **Be self-controlled.** Take time in the middle of each day next week to see how you’re doing. Redirect or reorder your calendar if you’ve gotten off track.
- **Warn others.** Consider how you can winsomely remind others this week that Jesus is coming back. You might consider beginning the conversation with a question: “What would you say to Jesus if He came back for you this week?”

DAILY READINGS

1. RAPTURE PRACTICE // REVELATION 1:7

Growing up attending church youth rallies and services, the Master of Ceremonies occasionally would yell at any random point of service, "Rapture Practice!" This would elicit a response of thunderous praise among the congregants, practicing how they'd react when Jesus returned. Jesus promises the believer that He will return, and when He returns, it will be with fanfare. Every eye will see Christ, and as a result, His followers will praise Him for fulfilling the promise of returning to take us with Him to glory.

Take time today to have "rapture practice" and praise God for the promise of His return.

2. REMAIN UNTIL HE COMES // 1 JOHN 2:28

Cold brew coffee is a delicious treat for coffee lovers. The process of making a cold brew includes coffee grounds being soaked in water for at least 12 hours, as opposed to the making of regular coffee that includes hot water poured over coffee grounds and steeped for 5 minutes or less. The process of a cold brew coffee gives the drink a deeper and richer flavor. Similar to this process, believers should "soak" themselves in connection to God. Believers are instructed to remain in Christ so that we are transformed when He returns. The promise of Christ's return evokes an earnest desire to steep in the knowledge of Him, knowing that by "soaking" in Christ, our faith and resemblance to Him will mature.

Lord, give me a desire to "soak" in your presence so that our relationship can grow deeper and richer.

3. STAY READY // MATTHEW 24:42-44

One of my favorite motivational quotes is, "Stay ready, so you don't have to get ready." This quote points to the importance of being prepared. Jesus is coming back; however, we do not know when He is returning. Keeping this in mind, it is vital for His followers to live with the expectation of His return.

We are instructed to be alert, not knowing when Jesus will return (Matt. 24:42). Our expectation of Christ's return results in us living a righteous life. The Bible gives us instructions on how we should live and indicates the benefits of living according to God's directives. When we live righteously, we stay ready because when Christ returns, it will be too late to get ready.

When we live in line with God's Word, we're always prepared for Him to return.

4. EMPOWERED BY CHRIST'S RETURN // 1 THESSALONIANS 5:5,8

Christ's promise of His return empowers His followers to live confidently in Him. Believers can trust that He is faithful to His word, and this assurance strengthens us to live boldly. When we come to know Christ, we transition from children of darkness to children of light (1 Thess. 5:5). Our decisions are guided by His promises, particularly the assurance of His return. The promise of Christ's return enables us to live holy lives, knowing that we serve a God with all authority (Matt. 28:18). In this confidence, we can live each day empowered by His truth and His eternal plan.

Thank you, God, for giving us confidence to live in Him through His promise of returning for us!

5. RETURNING FOR ALL! // TITUS 2:11-15

Christ died for everyone (John 3:16). This sacrifice symbolizes His love for us, and His return further proves that point. The knowledge of Christ's imminent return should inspire believers to evangelize. We are commanded to proclaim the gospel while waiting for Him to appear. Heaven is not for churchgoers or "good" people. But heaven is for all people who confess Christ as Savior, as God had everyone in mind when He sent His Son. We should evangelize to those who are lost so that they can receive salvation and join us in awaiting His return.

Lord, help me to evangelize to those who are lost so that they can await Your return.



Life Interrupted

BY MARK CROSTON

As I reached my mid-40's, my children were in or moving to college, and my wife of 26 years, at that time, and I were beginning to look forward to an empty nest, extra resources, new travel opportunities and more we would do in that new phase of life. And then it happened. A cancer diagnosis, treatment protocols, a myriad of medicines, declining health, and within a year—death.

All those dreams were shattered. Everything stopped, twisted, wrenched and turned. My life, and the lives of my children, had been invaded and interrupted in ways I could not have imagined. As we traverse through life, we all meet interruptions, some are minor ripples, others rock us to the core. For me it was cancer,

for another an unplanned pregnancy, a lost job, an expensive repair, a prison sentence, a financial loss, an anguishing affair, a divorce, an injury from an accident, a special needs child, a parent with Alzheimer's—the list goes on.

Change is one of the constants we have in life. Depend on it. Look for it. Expect it. There is an old Yiddish adage “Mann Tracht, Un Gott Lacht.” My late mother-in-law used to say the English version of this to us all the time, “Man Plans, and God Laughs.”

Since life can be so turbulent at times, and change so inevitable, should we even plan at all? What are the eternal truths we need to remember about life's interruptions.

First know that God is a planner. I often hear people talk about the Holy Spirit, who is part of the triune God, as if He does everything at the last minute. This could not be farther from the truth. Think about it. God completed the plan of salvation before He laid the foundations of the world. “For he chose us in him, before the foundation of the world, to be holy and blameless in love before him. He predestined us to be adopted as sons through Jesus Christ for himself, according to the good pleasure of his will” (Eph. 1:4-5).

How else could we possibly explain how Jesus came down through forty-two generations, of the lineage of David, foretold by the prophets, announced by an angel, to be born of a virgin, celebrated by a star, sought by a sovereign, soothsayers and shepherds, in the City of Bethlehem. God is a planner.

Second, God has a plan for our lives. Growing up in my church youth group I can remember hearing over and over again, God loves you and has a wonderful plan for your life. I could not see it or understand it then, but now looking back over the years I see it plainly.

God is intimately involved with his creation and none of us are an accident or after thought. “For I know the plans I have for you”—this is the LORD’s declaration—“plans for your well-being, not for disaster, to give you a future and a hope (Jer. 29:11).

Third, we all need a life plan. We only get one earthly life with a limited number of days. “Since a person’s days are determined and the number of his months depends on you, and since you have set limits he cannot pass” (Job 14:5). Also know there is an evaluation at the end.

“And just as it is appointed for people to die once—and after this, judgment—” (Heb. 9:27). Thus, it is important we live life in productive ways. Hence, we are instructed in Proverbs 16:3, “Commit your activities to the LORD, and your plans will be established.” Also in Proverbs 21:5, “The plans of the diligent certainly lead to profit, but anyone who is reckless certainly becomes poor.”

Fourth, God uses interruptions to bring us into alignment with His eternal plan. An interruption to us is not and interruption for God. Some interruptions are the self-inflicted wounds of our sinfulness. Some are the natural course of life, but others may be the nudge of God. God uses all of these, when we are willing, to bring us into alignment with His eternal plan.

God interrupted the lives of Abraham, Moses, David, Ruth, Mary, Elizabeth, Peter, James and John. My plan was to be an engineer; God interrupted and made me a Gospel preacher.

Interruptions can make life seem herkie jerky, but God works His plan through it all. “We know that all things work together for the good of those who love God, who are called according to his purpose” (Rom. 8:28).

Dr. Mark Croston serves as national director of Black Church Ministries and general editor for the YOU curriculum at Lifeway.

STUDY 2 HOW TO HANDLE LIFE'S INTERRUPTIONS

INTRODUCTION

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Obey God and Deny Self.

Our response to life's interruptions is a good indicator of who is in charge of our lives. This study pushes us to obediently trust God rather than our own plans.

Writer Bio

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A STUDY ON HOW TO RESPOND WHEN INTERRUPTIONS HAPPEN

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Interruptions don't care about our plans, desires, schedules, or goals. They can be rude and imposing such as:

- A car breaks down on the freeway while you're miles from your destination.
- After dressing your baby and self for church, the baby wets through their diaper all over themselves and you requiring clothing changes making you late.
- After months of preparing an important presentation, your computer crashes and you're left without the work you have labored so hard over.

Interruptions come in all shapes and sizes, often disrupting our paths causing discouragement and doubt, unless we learn to handle these potholes realizing they're really for our good. But these interruptions are also opportunities for spiritual growth and alignment with God's greater plan. This study explores how unexpected moments refine

our faith, reveal God's sovereignty and plans, and transform our perspective to trust that "... all things work together for the good for those who love Him" (Rom. 8:28). Interruptions in our plans are inevitable and are ultimately reminders we're These events that can be used to determine the depth of our trust in God.

Over six sessions, we'll look at the lives of Abraham, Joseph, Moses, and others who are examples of lives interrupted. Their stories are accounts of people impacted in unexpected, frightening, unjust, and sometimes unexplainable ways.

To discover we're not alone in our challenges, it's important to take time to investigate other satisfied customers and discover how their reviews of life while walking with God are an assurance we too can be victorious through life's disruptions.

By seeing God's invitation in the interruption, He can turn it into an on-ramp to new opportunities, deeper faith, and greater intimacy with Him!

Week 6 – Wisdom and Worship

Scripture Readings: Psalm 1; Psalm 23; Proverbs 1:1–7; Ecclesiastes 12:13–14; Song of Songs 8:6–7

The wisdom and poetry books reveal the full range of life with God—worship, wisdom, suffering, and love. Psalms teach us to pray and worship in every season. Proverbs calls us to live skillfully, anchored in the fear of the Lord. Ecclesiastes wrestles with meaning and concludes that fearing God is true purpose. Song of Songs celebrates love and intimacy as God’s gift. Together, these books remind us that God is present in both our questions and our praise, in joy and in pain.

WHEN GOD INTERRUPTS YOUR LIFE

Leader pages on pp. 130-133

THE POINT:
THE BEST
INTERRUPTIONS
COME FROM GOD.

HEBREWS 11:8-19

⁸ By faith Abraham, when he was called, obeyed and set out for a place that he was going to receive as an inheritance. He went out, even though he did not know where he was going.

⁹ By faith he stayed as a foreigner in the land of promise, living in tents as did Isaac and Jacob, coheirs of the same promise.

¹⁰ For he was looking forward to the city that has foundations, whose architect and builder is God.

¹¹ By faith even Sarah herself, when she was unable to have children, received power to conceive offspring, even though she was past the age, since she considered that the one who had promised was faithful.

¹² Therefore, from one man—in fact, from one as good as dead—came offspring as numerous as the stars of the sky and as innumerable as the grains of sand along the seashore.

.....
¹³ These all died in faith, although they had not received the things that were promised. But they saw them from a distance, greeted them, and confessed that they were foreigners and temporary residents on the earth.

¹⁴ Now those who say such things make it clear that they are seeking a homeland.

¹⁵ If they were thinking about where they came from, they would have had an opportunity to return.

¹⁶ **But they now desire a better place — a heavenly one. Therefore, God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them.**

.....
¹⁷ By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac. He received the promises and yet he was offering his one and only son,

¹⁸ the one to whom it had been said, Your offspring will be traced through Isaac.

¹⁹ He considered God to be able even to raise someone from the dead; therefore, he received him back, figuratively speaking.

MEMORY VERSE

KEYWORDS

Obedied (v. 8)—The Greek term for *obey* means to listen attentively with the implication of heeding the command.

Died in faith (v. 13)—All died not having received the promised inheritance of the land. Yet they lived and died trusting that God would one day fulfill His promise.

A better place . . . (v. 16)—In contrast to the land of Canaan this better place was a heavenly homeland where they would live forever in the presence of God.

Offered up Isaac (v. 17)—This was a test of Abraham's loyalty and obedience to God. Did Abraham love God more than his son Isaac?

WHAT SHOULD BELIEVERS DO IN SEASONS OF WAITING?

History is full of major shifts caused by small interruptions which unleashed a series of consequences no one could have imagined.

- What if Rosa Parks had not been one of the few who were tired of segregation and its inequalities, and did not say no to giving up her seat on the bus, enacting the Montgomery Bus Boycotts which launched the Civil Rights movement?
- What if an uncovered Petri dish of staphylococcal bacteria in Alexander Fleming's lab had not been contaminated with penicillin mold, a life-saving discovery?
- If it were not for the infamous terrorist attack on American soil on 9/11, the Transportation Security Administration (TSA) would not have been formed in 2001 to secure greater safety for travelers.

The Bible has many stories whose outcomes were dramatically transformed by an unavoidable turn of events, divine appointments, or God's calling. Abraham's day started out like any other, with everyday routines running their course. Then, God interrupted. How Abraham responded would put in play a series of outcomes that were bigger than he

could have ever dreamed. How we can learn from him how to handle less challenging circumstances in our own lives.

God Will Interrupt Our Plans //

Hebrews 11:8-12

By every worldly standard, Abraham had it made. He was "very rich in livestock, silver, and gold" (Gen. 13:2), with hundreds of servants (Gen. 14). Living in the popping city of Ur (Gen. 12), Abraham was living the good life. "Ur" might sound like what we say when we can't find the right word, but back in its day, Ur was a place of status; classy, rich, spiritual, and safe. Abraham was happily married to Sarah, and at 70, life was very comfortable, like having a posh home on Easy Street.

But Abraham did not know God. Joshua 24:2 tells us that Abraham grew up in a family of idol worshipers. In no way was his mind on God. And he was a pagan through and through, serving gods of his own making, with no thought of the God who made him. Sound like anyone you may know today?

Then, it happened! God interrupted his life, big time! Acts 7:2 says, "the God of glory appeared to our father, Abraham." His words filled everything



THE POINT: THE BEST INTERRUPTIONS COME FROM GOD.

for Abraham, "Go from your land, your relatives, and your father's house to the land that I will show you" (Gen. 12:1). God's orders came with promises, guaranteeing to give Abraham the land he was going to, to bless him and his family, and this: "all the peoples on earth will be blessed through you" (Gen. 12:3).

Put yourself in Abraham's shoes. Life in Ur was very comfortable. But God was standing in front of him, calling him to leave his old life behind and go with Him into an unknown future, armed with promises that were amazing, but not very detailed. Abraham faced the question in life's interruptions: "Can I trust God? Will God do what He said?"

Hebrews 11:8 tells us what happened: "By faith, Abraham, when he was called, obeyed." Just like that. Even with Abraham having no history of belief, when God said go, he went. He didn't cringe at the sacrifice he was called to make. He didn't wait for more information. Abraham believed that this God who cared enough to interrupt his life must be up to something bigger than he could imagine. "And He's inviting me into it!"

What helps you respond in faith when God changes directions in a way you didn't expect?

God's interruptions may not make sense. And you'll know they're by God's doing because they'll always stretch you, putting your faith to the test. But you can count on this: God is weaving Romans 8:28 into your life. He's taking you deeper into His purposes. He's shaping your character. He's stretching your faith. Let's look at a couple of ways God tested Abraham's faith.

When Abraham arrived in the land God promised to him, only to find people were already living there. Verse 9 tells us Abraham remained "a foreigner in the land of promise," living in tents for the rest of his life.

So, what do you do when things don't go the way you imagined? You do what Abraham did. By faith, he figured that God's promises must not be limited to the present. Something bigger, better, and longer lasting is coming (v. 10). Abraham looked past his temporary life on earth to his forever home in heaven. He couldn't wait to trade his flimsy tent for the eternal city God was building. That future-looking faith kept him going.

Then there was the problem of infertility. God promised that Abraham and Sarah would have a son (Gen. 12:7; 17:5-6), but they faced serious challenges:

1. Sarah couldn't have children.
2. Twenty-five childless years passed after God's promise (Gen. 21:5).



DIGGING DEEPER NAME CHANGE

When God first made His covenant with Abraham, he hadn't yet changed his name from Abram. Namesakes are extremely important in the Bible as they personified who and what the person was or would represent in their lives. The name Abram means exalted father, but twenty-five years after God told him he would have offspring, he renamed him Abraham which means the father of a multitude. Though God originally promised Abram he would make him into a nation, naturally the assumption might be through the birth of many children. God changed Abram's name to display the magnitude of His God-sized promise.

Look at other verses where names were changed for a greater purpose:

- Genesis 17:15-16
- Genesis 32:27-28
- Matthew 16:13-19
- Acts 13:9

Even if it isn't your name, what change do you desire God to make in you for your good and His glory?

3. Abraham and Sarah are now past their childbearing years. But they held onto God's trustworthiness, and, by God's power, Sarah gave birth to a son . . . at age 90 (v. 11).

In verse 12, the Holy Spirit shows us the world-influencing product of Abraham's faith. It's an amazing thing when God calls us into His plans. And often, interruptions are His invitation! It makes me wonder if I'm really willing to go with Him when He interrupts my life, believing that He wants to work in and through me in ways bigger than I could imagine.

God Has a Greater Purpose //

Hebrews 11:13-16

The Book of Hebrews calls a time out in Abraham's story to help us answer this question: How did Abraham do it? Verse 13 fast-forwards to the end of three generations in Abraham's family. They all had the same eulogy: "He didn't receive all that God promised, but he never lost his confidence in the Lord."

What's the secret to this kind of overcoming faith? Verses 13-16 show us what happens inside the person who trusts in the Lord with all his heart, soul, mind, and strength. Three motivating conditions are at work.

Keep It Moving! The fathers of our faith saw themselves as "foreigners and temporary residents on the earth" (v. 13). Abraham introduced himself to Canaanite locals as "an alien residing among you" (Gen. 23:4). This family "made it clear that they are seeking a homeland" that wasn't on this planet (v. 14). We're foreigners here, waiting to go home. We don't fit in and shouldn't feel we need to.

Keep Eternity in Mind. Hebrews 11:1 tells us that "faith is the reality of what is hoped for, the proof of what is not seen." Faith is a rock-solid trust that is so convinced God will keep His promises that it becomes a preview of the fulfillment right now! Faith helps us see and embrace what is coming as real and wonderful.

The patriarchs so believed God's promises that "they saw them from a distance," and "greeted

them" as though they were near (v. 13). They desired "a better place" than this world offers, "a heavenly one" (v. 16). The same heavenly mindedness will strengthen us. "Every one of God's promises is 'Yes' in [Christ]" (2 Cor. 1:20). That moves us to "seek the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God" (Col. 3:1).

Don't Go Back! Every hero of Hebrews 11 had the chance to return to his or her old life. "If they were thinking about where they came from, they would have had an opportunity to return" (v. 15). The living conditions for Abraham were certainly better in Ur.



His family and friends would welcome him back. If he wanted an easier earthly life, it was within reach.

The patriarchs didn't know 1 John 2:17, but they believed it: "The world with its lust is passing away, but he who does the will of God remains forever." Their faith and ours is rocket-fueled by a visitor's mindset that longs for heaven and refuses the world's temptations.

HOW DOES HAVING FAITH IN GOD'S GREATER PLAN HELP US IN DIFFICULT SITUATIONS?

Trust God in Every Test //

Hebrews 11:17-19

When God interrupted Abraham's life and called him to trust regarding things that weren't visible yet, Abraham took God at His word. Even when it defied common sense and biological ability, Abraham remained convinced that the one true God was committed to his good and up to amazing

THE POINT: THE BEST INTERRUPTIONS COME FROM GOD.

things in this world. This interruption in verse 17 challenged all that. Would Abraham find the faith to lay his son, Isaac, on the altar? Though we're never told Abraham's inner thoughts, I suspect he struggled with the same questions we ask when we're hit hard.

Abraham's unwavering confidence in God's faithfulness led him to prepare to sacrifice his son—on the integrity of the Lord. Now, Abraham had seen God do the impossible, but he had never seen or heard of anyone being raised from the dead! Even so, when he and his son arrived at Moriah, he gave these instructions to his servants: "Stay here with the donkey. The boy and I will go over there to worship; then we'll come back to you" (v. 5). What Abraham hinted at in Genesis is made clear in Hebrews: "He considered God to be able even to raise someone from the dead; therefore, he received him back, figuratively speaking" (v. 19).

God interrupted Abraham on more, this time in the split second before he plunged the knife into his son. Abraham's story of faith reminds us that no one gets through life without tests. Even when we don't understand what God is doing, we can count everything we have on our faithful God, who always keeps His Word.

WHAT THINGS DO YOU TREASURE THAT GOD MIGHT ASK YOU TO SACRIFICE?

DID YOU KNOW?

During Abraham's lifetime, He had many encounters with God stretching him out of his comfort zone, what was familiar, and his own self-sufficiency. In Genesis 12, though Abraham chose to initially respond in obedience when God said go to Canaan, there were also times that he walked in fear as he detoured from God's instructions. Instead of remaining in the land God had promised, people already occupying the land and famine drove Abraham to Egypt which was never in God's instructions. Because Abraham was walking in his own power and not God's, he was fearful when entering Egypt and seemed to forget about the promises God made when he asked Sarah to lie and say she was his sister because he feared for his life (vv. 10-20). As Abraham stepped outside of God's plans, he stepped into an unknown of his own doing and a lack of confidence.

Biblical Truth: "For we walk by faith, not by sight" (2 Cor. 5:7).

Why is it important to embrace what God is doing in our lives despite the challenges we may face?

LIVE IT

How can you respond to unexpected interruptions in a God-glorifying way this week?

Have you ever planned your week and it's thrown off by unexpected interruptions? As you try to recover time and productivity, interruptions impact you requiring changing your plans. This can be stressful and frustrating, so what can we do to manage areas of life that are out of control? Abraham shows us how to respond well.

+ + +

- **Shift your focus.** Meditate on Scriptures about heaven (John 14:1-4; Matt. 6:19-21). Read Tony Evans book, "Eternity: Understanding Life After Death." Sing songs about being home with Him, like "Going Up Yonder," or "Take Me to The King."
- **Follow God's leading.** Train yourself to obey God immediately. When He presses you to pray with someone, help another financially, or share the gospel — don't ignore Him. Obeying God leads to experiencing Him in new, reviving ways.
- **Learn to reason by faith.** When challenges came, Abraham considered what was unchanging and true about God before deciding what to do. God's Word, prayer, and wise counsel set godly boundaries when life's confusing.

DAILY READINGS

1. FAITH IN THE UNKNOWN // HEBREWS 11:8-12

When designing airports, every detail is planned to ensure the runways, taxiways, and surrounding areas are safe for takeoffs and landings. Trees are cleared so no obstacles are in the flight path, and tall buildings are lit to warn the pilots of hazards. Air traffic controllers assist in guiding the planes to move carefully through the air. Passengers trust that airports are safe and have faith that the pilot knows the way to the destination. Hebrews 11:8 challenges us to have faith to obey and move into the unknown. Just like we trust airplanes, pilots, and air traffic controllers, we can have faith that God knows the path He is leading us on.

Lord, teach me to have faith and to obey when you guide me. In Jesus's name. Amen.

2. GOD'S TIMING IS PERFECT // HEBREWS 11:13-16

Hebrews is called the "Hall of Faith, for it lists people who had exceptional faith. Yet, they did not see their promises fulfilled. Look at Abraham and Sarah; God promised them a child but did not say when it would happen. They waited year after year until Sarah decided to fulfill the promise herself. Abraham received the promise at 75 years old, but he was 100, and Sarah was 90 when Isaac, the promise, was born. They waited 25 years. What we think of as a delay is God working in His perfect divine timing. Isaiah 55:8 says, "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, and your ways are not my ways." This is the LORD's declaration."

Father, remind me that your promises are forever true. In Jesus's name. Amen.

3. WHO DO YOU WANT ME TO SACRIFICE? // HEBREWS 11:17-19

Imagine God commanding you to sacrifice your only son, Isaac, as an offering to him. The promise of the descendants was to come through Isaac. How can the promise be fulfilled if Isaac dies? Abraham's unwavering faith is why he is in the "Hall of Faith." He did not understand as he prepared Isaac for

sacrifice; however, Abraham fully believed in God's power over life and death. Even though he had not seen anyone raised from the dead, the possibility of Isaac being raised to fulfill God's promise to him demonstrates Abraham's obedience and trust. Who or what are we willing to sacrifice to honor God? Would we pass the test?

Hymn: Trust and obey, for there's no other way to be happy in Jesus but to trust and obey.¹³

4. NEVER ABANDONED // DEUTERONOMY 31:8

The Voice of the Martyrs (VOM), founded by Pastor Richard Wurmbrand and his wife Sabina after their imprisonment, shares inspiring stories of persecuted Christians. Hassan, a Christian leader at a pastor's conference in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, was imprisoned for his faith. As he moved to different prisons, he preached to 300 inmates. The prison said they had never seen such hunger for God's Word. He felt blessed to share the gospel.¹⁴ Genesis 39 tells of Joseph's unjust imprisonment, but he was not alone. The Scripture states, "The LORD was with Joseph." God did not abandon Joseph, Hassan, or us; he will use us in any situation for his kingdom.

Lord, help me trust that I am in the right place to draw others closer to you. In Jesus's name. Amen.

5. GOD SEES, AND GOD KNOWS // 1 PETER 5:6

In life, we may find ourselves on the fringes of society, unseen and overlooked. It could be an unfortunate circumstance or our personal struggles, and we wonder why God is silent. Our situation may appear hopeless, but knowing God leaves room for supernatural blessings. 1 Peter 5:6 tells us to "Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God, so that he may exalt you at the proper time." In Genesis 39, Joseph used his gifts, and God exalted him to a higher position at the proper time. God was not unaware of Joseph's situation, He saw and He knew and had a plan for his life. The same can be said for believers today.

Father, remind me I am seen, and like Joseph, I believe you are working in your divine time. In Jesus's name. Amen.

Week 7 – Prophets and Exile

Scripture Readings: Isaiah 6; Jeremiah 31:31–34; Ezekiel 37; Daniel 7:13–14

When Israel strayed, God sent prophets to call them back. They warned of judgment, pointed to God's faithfulness, and announced hope. The prophets declared that God would make a New Covenant written on hearts and that a coming Messiah would bring salvation. The exile of Israel and Judah revealed the consequences of sin but also set the stage for longing—a longing fulfilled in Christ, who brings forgiveness, Spirit-empowered life, and an eternal kingdom.

WHEN LIFE GOES TERRIBLY WRONG

Leader pages on pp. 134-137

THE POINT:
EVEN HARD
INTERRUPTIONS PLACE
US WHERE GOD CAN
USE US.

GENESIS 39:21-23; 40:5-8; 41:10-14

MEMORY VERSE

^{39:21} But the LORD was with Joseph and extended kindness to him. He granted him favor with the prison warden.

²² The warden put all the prisoners who were in the prison under Joseph's authority, and he was responsible for everything that was done there.

²³ The warden did not bother with anything under Joseph's authority, because the LORD was with him, and the LORD made everything that he did successful.

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^{40:5} The king of Egypt's cupbearer and baker, who were confined in the prison, each had a dream. Both had a dream on the same night, and each dream had its own meaning.

⁶ When Joseph came to them in the morning, he saw that they looked distraught.

⁷ So he asked Pharaoh's officers who were in custody with him in his master's house, "Why do you look so sad today?"

⁸ "We had dreams," they said to him, "but there is no one to interpret them." Then Joseph said to them, "Don't interpretations belong to God? Tell me your dreams."

.....

^{41:10} Pharaoh was angry with his servants, and he put me and the chief baker in the custody of the captain of the guards.

¹¹ He and I had dreams on the same night; each dream had its own meaning.

¹² Now a young Hebrew, a slave of the captain of the guards, was with us there. We told him our dreams, he interpreted our dreams for us, and each had its own interpretation.

¹³ It turned out just the way he interpreted them to us: I was restored to my position, and the other man was hanged."

¹⁴ Then Pharaoh sent for Joseph, and they quickly brought him from the dungeon. He shaved, changed his clothes, and went to Pharaoh.

KEYWORDS

Prison warden (v. 21)—The Hebrew term for warden means "chief" or "prince" and is used to describe someone who has rule over a specific sphere of government or life.

Dream (v. 5)—In this context, a dream is more than what most people experience when they sleep. The dream were prophetic

in as they provided glimpses into the futures of the men who dreamed them.

Dungeon (v. 14)— The Hebrew term can mean of a pit, cistern, or well. The royal dungeon may have used converted cisterns for holding prisoners.

WHY IS IT IMPORTANT TO HAVE A POSITIVE PERSPECTIVE IN NEGATIVE SITUATIONS?

The birth of a giraffe is amazing to see! First, the newborn calf drops ten feet to the ground at birth. Then, his mama kicks him. Hard! Somehow, the calf knows what this means and tries to stand. But those stilts-for-legs rarely work on the first try.

Bam! A second kick sends the calf flying and stumbling. This cycle of kick, try, and fall repeats until the infant giraffe finds its wobbly balance. Then, bam! Mama kicks him off his feet! Her baby must learn how to rise and get moving right away or predators will pick him off.

I've got some things in common with a baby giraffe. I've been knocked off my feet, kicked while I was down, kicked by the people I expected kindness from. Can you relate?

Joseph certainly can. His life was interrupted by jealous and evil people, cruel injustice, and harsh hardship. Yet, his God-centered response offers an example of trusting God on a road full of potholes. How we can learn from him how to handle less challenging circumstances in our own lives and still keep a God-trusting posture enabling us to know confidently, "Won't He do it!"

God May Allow Suffering for a Season // Genesis 39:21-23

Meet Joseph. In Genesis 37, he's seventeen and his life is a reality show, full of drama. Nothing could have prepared him for what was about to happen.

- He was born into a dysfunctional family.
- His half-brothers took turns being brutal, conniving, and openly morally wrong.
- He was his dad's favorite, and his brothers hated him for it.
- Jacob's gift of the "coat of many colors" signified firstborn privileges and position to Joseph, deepening the conflict with his siblings and expanding the hate.
- God gave Joseph dreams predicting his status in his family. Excited, immature, and clueless, Joseph shared the dreams that showed he would rule over his family. You can guess how that went.

So, what happened when daddy's favorite, with firstborn rights and big dreams of future influence,



THE POINT: EVEN HARD INTERRUPTIONS PLACE US WHERE GOD CAN USE US.

was spotted by his hateful, jealous brothers as he walked toward them in a remote area — wearing that irritating coat? Answer: Nothing good!

In one afternoon, Joseph went from spoiled heir in a rich family to pitiful slave headed for Egypt, where he was sold to Potiphar, Pharaoh's head man in charge. Imagine what Joseph must have felt during that terrible road trip: injustice, grief, anger, devastation.

We all carry wounds caused by others. It's easy to check in to Hotel Hurt and stay there, putting on replay how we've been wronged. Questions weigh on us in times like these: "God, where are you in all this?"; "How could You let this happen to me?"; "What did I do to deserve this, God?"

But Joseph's story gives a different perspective despite the trials, God had not walked out on him. Quite the opposite, God was with him in every valley. As Genesis 39 opens, Joseph had a choice to make. Joseph chose God and that made all the difference. He could let what others had done to him define his life, becoming a hardhearted, bitter man — OR — He could trust that God, the dream giver, was present and doing something he couldn't see or understand.

HOW HAS GOD SHOWN GRACE TO YOU DURING SETBACKS IN YOUR LIFE?

Four times in Genesis 39, we read that "the LORD was with Joseph" (vv. 2,3,21,23). Hebrews 13 tells us what happens when we believe this truth. "...I will never leave or abandon you. Therefore, we may boldly say, The LORD is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me?" (vv. 5-6).

Sounds like Joseph, doesn't it? Confidence in God protected his heart from toxic emotions and opened him up to God's blessing. Each time God's presence with him is mentioned, we're told his work succeeded and Joseph advanced. We see God steadily moving Joseph up the status ladder, but it wasn't easy for him. It's obvious that Joseph told Potiphar and the prison warden the reason for his attitude or skill (vv. 3,23). They acknowledged that God was the explanation for Joseph's life. God got all the glory.

Even when Potiphar's wife tried to seduce him daily (v. 10), Joseph never gave in to temptation. He was living his life according to God's standards: he would not give in to this "great evil" and sin against God (v. 9). It was obedience that cost him. She smeared Joseph's character, and canceled him, landing him in prison (vv. 11-18). Joseph did what was right and got burned.

How encouraging it must have been for Joseph when while incarcerated, the warden gave him favor and complete trust.



DIGGING DEEPER JOSEPH

Throughout Joseph's life God used dreams as a vehicle carrying him on the path planned for him. From his first dream when God revealed Joseph's destiny to rule over his family, to the dreams revealing His providence from a prison cell; God disclosed His relationship with and power through Joseph. His accurate interpretation of dreams won him favor and status in Egypt. The fulfillment of Joseph's dreams showcased God's control over history and His ability to use human events for His divine purposes. Joseph's dreams and interpretations remind us God works through every situation, guiding His people toward His ultimate purposes. Reflect on this Joseph's life and your challenging situations to see God's plans at work for you. Meditate on the sentiment from Genesis 50:20, "You planned evil against me; God planned it for good to bring about the present result—the survival of many people."

How does Joseph's statement provide you comfort and hope to endure through hard times?



It makes me think: How many times has God met me with mercy and help in the darkest times of my life? How often, in those hard places, has He opened doors I would never have seen?

God Can Make You Shine in Any Situation // Gen. 40:5-8

When we hear of a “God-forsaken place,” we usually picture a location so harsh, isolated, and miserable it’s unfit for human thriving: a scorching desert, a freezing arctic, or a dark dungeon. That prison wore on Joseph.

The trauma of his imprisonment shrink-wrapped Joseph’s life. He felt claustrophobic, his whole existence confined to the length of his chains in a cell likely located underground. His limitations would bring up questions—the kind that haunt us when circumstances restrict us. Questions that focus speak to our doubts, trust and faith in God.

Sometimes, we Christians say to one another, “God is good all the time.” We declare this as public praise and mutual encouragement when prayers are answered, or when sickness is healed, or when God opens doors. But here’s an important question: Do we really believe He is good and do we believe it all the time?

Is God still good when tragedy comes, when prayers aren’t answered, when you get laid off, or your child is critically sick? According to Dr. Tony Evans in an X (Twitter) post, “One of the most difficult times to trust God is when He has disappointed you. Yet one of the most

important times to trust God is when He has disappointed you.”

HOW DO YOU THINK JOSEPH WAS ABLE TO KEEP A GODLY FOCUS EVEN IN PRISON?

We aren’t given the details, but judging from Joseph’s attitude and actions, he was stabilized by the kind of faith that stands even when God doesn’t do what we think He should do. He believed God had him there for a reason, which was confirmed by his release from his chains, his promotion over the prisoners (which included Pharaoh’s cupbearer and baker), and his God-enabled success in his work.

So, when Pharaoh’s two attendants told Joseph their confusing dreams, God enabled him to explain their dreams: the cupbearer would be released and restored to Pharaoh’s service in three days; on the same day, the baker would be released and hanged. Both were fulfilled exactly as Joseph predicted.

There’s a flip in the script in the story that we’re about to see. Joseph fulfilled God’s purposes while in prison. If God can use Joseph in a dungeon, Daniel in a lion’s den, and Paul in prison, he has work for you to do right where you are.

God Can Make Your Setback Your Setup // Gen. 41:10-14

While in prison, Joseph had two fellow inmates that had dreams on the same night. There was no one to explain the dreams (Gen. 40:8). After his interpretation, Joseph made a heartfelt appeal to the cupbearer to mention him to Pharaoh once he is released (Gen. 40:14).

Genesis 40:23 delivers the blow: “Yet the chief cupbearer did not remember Joseph; he forgot him.” Joseph’s whole life seems to be two steps forward, three steps back—a dance step no one wants to learn. Then, Genesis 41:1 adds to the pain. Read literally, it says, “After two whole years. . .”

Yet, Joseph’s trust in the Lord didn’t waver. His humility and focus on God when he stood before Pharaoh reveals the character-shaping work of his testing. Joseph couldn’t see the bigger picture,

THE POINT: EVEN HARD INTERRUPTIONS PLACE US WHERE GOD CAN USE US.

but he trusted God with the unknown. So, when the time came, Joseph was ready. It happened in a flash.

- The king had two fantastic dreams but Egypt's occult magicians couldn't make sense of them.
- The cupbearer's memories of prison kicked in and he remembered Joseph's accurate interpretation of his and the baker's dreams to Pharaoh.
- One royal command later and Joseph's unjust imprisonment was over.

Joseph interpreted Pharaoh's dreams, pointing him to God's wisdom and power as he explained the coming famine and Egypt's role in global relief. Hearing God's plans through Joseph, it was clear to the king who should manage the plan. And so, a Hebrew slave became the Prime Minister of Egypt. Look at God!

WHAT ARE SOME PRACTICAL WAYS TO MAINTAIN A GODLY PERSPECTIVE IN HARD TIMES?

It had been thirteen brutal years since Joseph was sold into slavery by his hateful brothers. But Joseph endured faithfully, looking past the wrongs and the losses. Joseph looked to God, who was preparing him for beyond belief purposes.

DID YOU KNOW?

People will often doubt Christian faith when hard times come asking "How could a loving and caring God allow terrible things to happen?" As we mature spiritually, we realize though God's desire is for our good, because we live in this fallen world, we will face hardships and difficulties. If we focus on the darkness of the challenges, instead of the light God provides as He's with us in them, we will miss our opportunities to deepen our faith and reveal it to others as living testaments of a real and present God. James 1:2-4 assures enduring challenges isn't in vain, but necessary for perfecting of our faith through endurance. In addition to suffering being necessary, James encourages us to count it joy when faced with trials because we know it's an opportunity to develop spiritually.

Biblical Truth: Every event and encounter in the believer's life is ultimately for our good and God's glory!

When has a difficult period in your life prepared you for a greater opportunity?

LIVE IT

How can you develop a positive perspective while adversity perfects your faith?

James warns us "I have told you these things so that in me you may have peace. You will have suffering in this world. Be courageous! I have conquered the world" (John 16:33). Suffering is part of life in the world we live in. Though we'd rather avoid hardships, they're necessary to develop spiritual maturity. Consider the following ways to help develop a positive perspective on adversity.

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- **Pray about everything.** Read 1 Peter 5:7 and 1 Thessalonians 5:17. Practice talking with God daily about everything. Set reminders to pray throughout the day.
- **Fuel your faith.** God is bigger than your problems, fears, and future. Make a list of current trials. This week, review your list while reflecting on these verses: Job 42:2; Matthew 10:29-31; 19:26; Romans 8:28,32; Romans 11:33; 2 Corinthians 4:16-18; 1 Peter 1:6-7.
- **Consider blessings in suffering.** Life is hard and unfair. People can be thoughtless and mean. But God is GOOD! Meditate on Joseph's words in Genesis 50:20. How could his perspective help you this week?

DAILY READINGS

1. GOD'S PRESENCE IN ADVERSITY // GENESIS 39:21-23

Nelson Mandela was born into royalty, baptized in the United Methodist Church, resisted apartheid in South Africa, and was imprisoned for twenty-seven years. During his time, he befriended the guards and found favor. Joseph was his father's favorite son, and now, in Genesis 39, he is unjustly imprisoned due to false accusations from Potiphar's wife. But the Lord showed him favor with the prison warden. Joseph became a leader in the prison and found success during his adversity. In life, we face tribulations where everything seems out of control; like Joseph, we must remain faithful. These stories remind us that in chaotic, dark times, God's presence is with us.

God's presence turns our tribulations into victories. Hallelujah!

2. VIBE CHECK // GENESIS 40:5-8

What is your vibe during hard times? Are you rude, disrespectful, or compassionate and kind? A vibe is the energy you give off in certain situations. Joseph, imprisoned with the cupbearer and baker, saw they were concerned by their dreams and offered an answer to their concerns. Joseph's vibe reflected his trust in God, and he conveyed to them that God knows the answer. Psalm 43:5 asks, "Why, my soul, are you so dejected? Why are you in such turmoil? Put your hope in God, for I will still praise him, my Savior and my God." By checking our vibe, we can point others to God.

Lord, let my vibe guide others to you. In Jesus's name. Amen.

3. DIVINE OPPORTUNITY // GENESIS 41:10-14

We all face times when it seems we are taking one step forward and two steps back. Joseph interpreted the cupbearer's dream and asked him to remember him when Pharaoh restored him to his desired position. The cupbearer forgot. Others may forget; however, God always remembers

His creation. Two years later, Pharaoh had a dream, then the cupbearer remembered Joseph. Immediately, he is summoned for this divine opportunity. What seemed like a setback became a glorious promotion. "I know your works. Look, I have placed before you an open door that no one can close because you have but little power; yet you have kept my word and have not denied my name" (Rev. 3:8).

My God is a Way Maker, Miracle Worker, Promise Keeper, and Light in the Darkness!¹⁵

4. WHO'S IN CONTROL // JAMES 4:7

Researchers at Cornell University estimate "we make 226.7 decisions each day on food alone."¹⁶ How many of our decisions align with God's plan? In Exodus 2, Moses made an impulsive decision after seeing an Egyptian abusing a Hebrew. He lost control of his emotions and killed the abuser. How many times have we lost control and did the unspeakable? Did someone see us commit the crime? James 4:7 tells us, "Therefore, submit to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you." The next time our emotions overcome us, say a quick prayer to God so the devil will flee. God will help us control our emotions.

Father, control me when I cannot control myself. In Jesus's name. Amen.

5. SAFETY IN A FOREIGN LAND // LEVITICUS 19:34

Lifetime Movie Channel makes dramatic movies inspired by real-life stories. Some people are fleeing for their lives. Moses is running for his life after killing an Egyptian. He finds safety in Midian, a foreign land, where he marries and starts a family. Moses' name means "to draw out."¹⁷ God has rescued Moses from many dangers as He prepares him for his future purpose as a liberator. Exodus 2 reminds us that when we run to avoid the consequences of our sins, God will give us a safe haven until He calls us to fulfill our destiny.

God is our refuge and strength, a helper who is always found in times of trouble (Ps. 46:1).

Week 8 – The Coming of Jesus

Scripture Readings: Luke 1:26–38; Matthew 1:18–25; John 1:1–14; Galatians 4:4–5

At just the right time, God sent His Son. Jesus is both fully God and fully man, born of a virgin, fulfilling prophecy. He is the Word made flesh, God dwelling among us. His coming shows that God's plan was always to rescue His people personally. The birth of Jesus is not simply a story of a baby but the arrival of the King who would save His people from their sins and reveal the Father's heart.

WHEN YOUR ACTIONS CAUSE AN INTERRUPTION

Leader pages on pp. 138-141

THE POINT:
GOD CAN REDEEM
OUR MISTAKES.

EXODUS 2:11-22; 3:5-10

^{2:11} Years later, after Moses had grown up, he went out to his own people and observed their forced labor. He saw an Egyptian striking a Hebrew, one of his people. ¹² Looking all around and seeing no one, he struck the Egyptian dead and hid him in the sand. ¹³ The next day he went out and saw two Hebrews fighting. He asked the one in the wrong, "Why are you attacking your neighbor?" ¹⁴ "Who made you a commander and judge over us?" the man replied. "Are you planning to kill me as you killed the Egyptian?" Then Moses became afraid and thought, "What I did is certainly known." ¹⁵ When Pharaoh heard about this, he tried to kill Moses. But Moses fled from Pharaoh and went to live in the land of Midian, and sat down by a well.

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¹⁹ They answered, "An Egyptian rescued us from the shepherds. He even drew water for us and watered the flock." ²⁰ "So where is he?" he asked his daughters. "Why then did you leave the man behind? Invite him to eat dinner." ²¹ Moses agreed to stay with the man, and he gave his daughter Zipporah to Moses in marriage. ²² She gave birth to a son whom he named Gershom, for he said, "I have been a resident alien in a foreign land."

MEMORY VERSE

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^{3:5} "Do not come closer," he said. "Remove the sandals from your feet, for the place where you are standing is holy ground." ⁶ **Then he continued, "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." Moses hid his face because he was afraid to look at God.** ⁷ Then the LORD said, "I have observed the misery of my people in Egypt, and have heard them crying out because of their oppressors. I know about their sufferings, ⁸ and I have come down to rescue them from the power of the Egyptians and to bring them from that land to a good and spacious land, a land flowing with milk and honey — the territory of the Canaanites, Hethites, Amorites, Perizzites, Hivites, and Jebusites. ⁹ So because the Israelites' cry for help has come to me, and I have also seen the way the Egyptians are oppressing them, ¹⁰ therefore, go. I am sending you to Pharaoh so that you may lead my people, the Israelites, out of Egypt."

KEYWORDS

Their forced labor (v. 11)—Out of fear of their growing numbers, Pharaoh oppressed the Israelites and used them as slave labor.

The land of Midian (v. 5)—Located in northwestern Arabia to the east of the Gulf of Aqaba.

Reuel (v. 18)—The name Reuel means "friend of God." Such a name might be further proof that Reuel was a prophet of the Lord God.

Holy Ground (v. 5)—Holiness refers to the complete separation of God from His creation.

HOW DOES GOD'S FAITHFULNESS REDEEM OUR FAILURES?

I'm fascinated with stories of "chance encounters." History is full of them. And so is your life. Ever made a left turn when you should've gone right? Maybe you knocked on the wrong door or stood in a long line only to discover thirty minutes later you were in the wrong line?

We don't usually see these as life-changing encounters. But they could be. James Chadwick stood in the wrong line—and science is glad he did. James was only sixteen when he enrolled at Manchester University. This young upstart had his eye on studying mathematics—until he got in the wrong line.

Chadwick got in line to register for mathematics, but it turns out he was registering for physics. He decided to stay enrolled because he liked the professor he talked with, Dr. Ernest Rutherford.

This wrong line and chance encounter led to a lifelong friendship and partnership. Was that a big deal? It turns out that Rutherford, who mapped out the atom, instilled in Chadwick a love for physics. Chadwick went on to discover the neutron, and he became a pioneer in nuclear science.

All because of the mistake of getting in the wrong line. I'm not saying that every mistake or wrong

turn in your life is divinely ordained by God. But since you're there, look around. God may want to use you in that situation.

Just don't assume your mistake is just that: a mistake. That mistake could be an opportunity. We sometimes wonder if God writes us off when we make bad or sinful decisions. But Moses shows us that God can use the mess we make of things to refine us if we let Him.

Our Actions Can Cause an Interruption // Exodus 2:11-15

Orphaned as a baby, Moses was now an adult, highly educated, trained for Egyptian royalty, and "powerful in his speech and actions" (Acts 7:22-23). His was a life of luxury and privilege.

But there was an ache in his heart that only orphans understand. Moses wanted to know his roots. What he discovered in his search was far bigger than bloodlines. Moses learned about God the Creator, who called the Hebrew people His own—and this captured him. In time, Moses embraced his heritage: he was a son of Abraham, not the son of Pharaoh's daughter.



THE POINT: GOD CAN REDEEM OUR MISTAKES.

Hebrews 11 tells us that Moses gave up his status in Pharaoh's family to join the faith and the suffering of God's people (v. 24). We're told he "went out to his own people" to see their suffering up close, and spotted "an Egyptian striking a Hebrew, one of his people" (Ex. 2:11).

Moses saw an Egyptian beating a Hebrew slave. Scholars differ over details: Did Moses already sense God wanted him to liberate Israel? Was this murder or defense of a third party? Differences aside, on this they agree: Moses was reckless and sinful, and his actions sparked unintended consequences. Ever shake your head at a foolish decision?

- In 1938, Joe Schuster and Jerry Siegel sold their rights for a comic book character they invented for \$130. The character's name was Superman.
- Little Richard was one of the most influential musicians of all time—but a bad record deal and the pervasive racism of the 1950's American music industry kept the singer from cashing in on some of his biggest hits, with no royalties on many of his records that were covered by white artists or used in movies.

In our text, Moses killed an Egyptian, then tried to cover it up. His actions were wrong on several levels. It was unnecessary; he could have ordered the Egyptian to stop. It wasn't God's will; God had not yet called Moses to free His people. It wasn't God's way; "Human anger does not accomplish God's righteousness" (Jas. 1:20).

Moses's conscience was obviously warning him. Look at his efforts to make sure no one was watching. He worked hard to hide the evidence, but the next day, he discovered that the news had leaked and the fellowship with his native people he hoped this might generate had backfired (vv. 14). When Pharaoh heard of it, Moses had to run for his life.

WHEN HAS TAKING MATTERS INTO YOUR OWN HANDS MADE A SITUATION WORSE?

I've been there. Amazed at my own words and deeds and staggering under the consequences. Here's what I learned on the backside of some bad decisions: you can keep hitting repeat on the "if onlys" and stay stuck. Or you can receive the bitter harvest of what you sowed as a necessary part of your spiritual growth.

Our Interruption May Be Our Preparation

// Exodus 2:16-22

The wanted posters didn't say "dead or alive." Pharaoh wanted Moses dead. As Moses put distance between Egypt and himself,



DIGGING DEEPER MOSES

Moses's life is a saga of preservation where God orchestrates the events of his life to fulfill His divine plans.

- As an infant, God saved his life by keeping the midwives from killing him and having him placed in a basket in a river for Pharaoh's daughter to find and adopt him.
- As a child into adulthood, Moses was raised in Pharaoh's house as a son of Egyptian royalty where he learned the inner ways of the land's ruler.
- As an adult, choosing his birth heritage over his adopted royalty, God kept him from dying at Pharaoh's hand after committing murder and preserved him in Midian.

Before confronting Pharaoh to demand the Israelites' freedom, Moses had encounters with God's faithfulness. There was more for Moses to be assured of about God than there was for him to doubt when experiencing the burning bush.

What can we learn from Moses's life about trusting God?



he faced a hard reality. Everything he had known was gone.

- Life where his every desire was provided for was over.
- He was a man without a people; neither the Egyptians nor the Hebrews claimed him.
- His hopes of leading his people to better things had been destroyed.

Alone, with only the clothes on his back, Moses was running on empty. God never wastes time or experiences in our lives. The question is, Did Moses learn anything from his failure? God tests us in ways that reveal and refine us, depending on how we respond. Moses was now up to bat.

Test #1: Life in the Wilderness

Moses traveled about 300 miles to a place where he could disappear: the remote wasteland of Midian. There, his life was reduced to the daily necessities of water, food, and shelter. The wilderness is one and the same with scarcity, isolation, and adversity—the kind of hard place that forces you to seek the Lord. Many were called to repentance by John the Baptist in the wilderness (Matt. 3:1-4).

By the time his first child was born, something deep had shifted in Moses. He named his son Gershom, which is a play on Moses's life story: "I have been a resident alien in a foreign land"

(v. 22). When Moses looked back to his early years in Egypt, he recognized that as a prince in the palace he was a resident alien in a foreign land. Living in the foreign land of Midian, he was a resident alien in a foreign land. Moses had no idea that his status as a resident alien was preparation for his leadership as the shepherd of the Israelites through forty years of wandering in the wilderness.

Test #2: Starting a Family

While in Midian, Moses paused at a well. Soon, seven sisters came to fill the watering troughs for their father's flock. While watering their flock, a group of shepherds arrived and pushed them and their flock out of the way (v. 17). The sisters work was delayed and their flock were forced to wait.

Moses stepped in and came to their rescue. He watered their flock, modeling how a man should treat women. Without violence, Moses demonstrated the kind of self-control a leader needs to break up tense situations. This display of bold, softened compassion impressed the girls and their father, Reuel (also called Jethro), the priest of Midian. Moses was invited to dinner and eventually into their family. He became a husband and a father, building servant-leadership and self-denial deeper into his character. He worked as a shepherd in the family, bringing further humility since Egyptians despised that lower class laborious work (Gen. 46:34b).

HOW HAS GOD USED TOUGH CIRCUMSTANCES TO HELP PREPARE YOU FOR THE FUTURE?

Moses's experiences show us that God can use the unintended consequences we bring on ourselves to create something new. God works in our hardships to make clear what we are committed to and speed up our spiritual maturity.

Our Interruption May Lead us to God's Greater Work

// Exodus 3:5-10

The providence of God is an intense and comforting conviction that is woven throughout the Bible. It teaches us that God is personally and powerfully upholding and directing the universe and everything in it according to His purposes.

THE POINT: GOD CAN REDEEM OUR MISTAKES.

Maybe Moses noticed the flaming bush in the distance. Then he looked again and the bush was unchanged. Moses's curiosity turned to amazement as he realized that the flame, like God Himself, wasn't dependent upon anything else. Adding to the wonder, Moses then heard his name called. ("He knows me?!") God cautioned him to keep his distance, then introduced Himself as the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. God had heard Israel's groaning. He saw their sorrows.

"I am coming down to rescue them from the power of the Egyptians and to bring them to a land flowing with milk and honey . . . **therefore, go. I am sending you to Pharaoh** so that you may lead My people, the Israelites, out of Egypt" (vv. 8,10).

God was saying, "Moses, Israel has prayed for deliverance, and you are My answer. I will lead them out through you." Moses cringed at God's interruption. He felt his smallness before such a task. He felt unworthy because of his past, scared because he won't know what to say, and incapable on his own of bringing together Israel's support or gaining Pharaoh's compliance.

Yet, in the end, Moses returned to Egypt with God's mighty hand upon him and Aaron by his side. Midian probably felt like the end of the line for Moses. But with God, wilderness time is only a detour, not a dead end.

HOW HAS GOD MET YOU IN THE WILDERNESS?

LIVE IT

What can you do to navigate through unintended consequences that left you feeling frustrated, or stuck in regret?

Life's detours can be overwhelming, but what if these moments are part of God's plan to shape and redeem you? As you reflect on personal missteps, how can you embrace God's grace is sufficient to transform failures into growth? Let's explore how God redeems failures.

+ + +

- **Ask God's forgiveness.** If sin put you in the wilderness, confess and receive God's forgiveness. Read Psalm 103:10-14; Ephesians 1:7.
- **Remember your past wilderness times.** Reflect on the wilderness and waiting seasons of your life. In God's hands, consequences aren't just for correcting, but for cultivating.
- **Follow God's call.** Moses felt disqualified, just like we do. Ask the Holy Spirit to guide you as you seek to be obedient to His call.

DID YOU KNOW?

Consider how the Israelites got to Egypt. We learned from Joseph's story in Genesis, that God preserved them from famine by first sending Joseph to Egypt to become an overseer and then reconciling with his family there. By Moses's lifetime, the Israelites began to outnumber the Egyptians, becoming a threat to Pharaoh. The Israelites' journey to Egypt was both a blessing and a burden, showing how God redeems even unfavorable circumstances. This history displays how God's purposes go beyond immediate outcomes. Even though the Israelites were enslaved, their time in Egypt set the stage for God's miraculous deliverance through Moses, revealing His faithfulness and power. This challenges us to trust God's redemptive work in our lives today, even when consequences feel like a wilderness.

Biblical Truth: "We know that all things work together for the good of those who love God, who are called according to his purpose" (Rom. 8:28).

How can we live out our faith in God when things don't go as planned?

DAILY READINGS

1. ENOUGH IS ENOUGH // EXODUS 2:11-15

Is this another day to witness the turmoil the Egyptians are imposing on the Hebrews, my people? Enough is enough! I believe this is what Moses was thinking when he killed the Egyptian and buried him in the sand. Did he act impulsively, or was he just tired of seeing the mistreatment of his people? Fearing Pharaoh would find out, Moses fled to another land where he settled. We can see that impulsive actions can lead to detrimental consequences. When faced with a conflict, do we take matters into our own hands, or do we pray for God's intervention? Let us always seek God because our actions may interrupt God's plan for our lives.

Sing, "Lead me, guide me along the way; For if You lead me, I cannot stray."¹⁸

2. DETOUR REALIGNMENT // EXODUS 2:16-22

Moses's life shows how God kept and prepared him until his divine appointment to lead the Israelites out of Egypt. Born a Hebrew in Egypt, Moses was found in the Nile River by Pharaoh's daughter and raised as an Egyptian. He fled to Midian, a foreign land, after killing an Egyptian abusing a Hebrew. Exiled and outcasted, Moses rescues Reuel's daughters from unruly shepherds at a water trough. What an unlikely place to start anew. When Moses ran, he did not know what he would discover, but God was ordering his steps. Whatever detour we take that interrupts our lives and God's plan, know that God will realign us back to his glorious plan.

Almighty God, thank you for the safe haven in a foreign land. In Jesus's Name. Amen.

3. IF I KNEW // EXODUS 3:5-10

When God calls us for such a time as this, hesitation and doubt can arise. When God calls Moses he hides his face in fear. God tells Moses that he sees the Israelites' misery, and here is my rescue plan, Moses: "I am sending you to Pharaoh so that you may lead my people, the Israelites, out

of Egypt." God chose Moses for a monumental task: to lead a nation. Despite his hesitation, Moses answered God's call. God is calling each one of us to fulfill our purpose. If I knew God's plan, would I doubt like Moses, or would I gladly answer his call? God's plan will always prevail.

Father, thank you for choosing me to fulfill your plan. Amen.

4. NEVER TOO BUSY // MATTHEW 20:32

We are fortunate to have facilities that provide emergency care when our loved ones are sick. Urgent Care Centers offer immediate, twenty-four hours per day, seven days a week, walk-in medical treatments. In Luke 8, Jairus, a leader of the synagogue, has a young daughter who is dying. He is desperate for a healer. Jesus, a known healer, was surrounded by a crowd when Jairus pressed his way through. As he falls at his feet, I imagine Jairus is frantically saying, "Please, please, Jesus, come to my house and save my daughter!" Jesus stops, listens, and goes to provide care. When we need him most, he will respond.

Let us sing, "Jesus is on the mainline. Tell him what you want."¹⁹

5. STOP TO SERVE // PSALM 144:3

"It's been estimated that at least 150 million people—about 2% of the world's population—are homeless."²⁰ These persons are often overlooked and forgotten. Their daily struggles are about survival. As Jesus journeys, he interacts with the poor, blind, sick, and homeless. Psalm 144:3 reminds us that the Lord cares about us. "Lord, what is a human that you care for him, a son of man that you think of him?" Jairus, in Luke 8, discovers Jesus cares about his dying daughter. Jesus interrupts his journey to go to Jairus' house. Just as Jesus cares, we should care too. As we journey, let's not be too busy to stop and be mindful of those in need.

Jesus, may my actions demonstrate that I am following your example. Amen.

Week 9 – The Life and Ministry of Jesus

Scripture Readings: Matthew 5–7; Luke 15; John 3:16–21; Mark 10:45

Jesus proclaimed the Kingdom of God—calling people to repent, believe, and follow Him. Through His teaching, miracles, and compassion, He revealed God's character and authority. He welcomed outcasts, forgave sinners, and showed love beyond measure. The Sermon on the Mount revealed Kingdom living. The parables explained God's love for the lost. Everything about His life demonstrated that He is the promised Messiah and the perfect image of God.

WHEN WELL-MEANING PEOPLE INTERRUPT YOUR PLANS

Leader pages on pp. 144-147

THE POINT:
GOD-ORDAINED
INTERRUPTIONS CALL
FOR A SENSITIVE HEART.

LUKE 8:40-50, 54-56

⁴⁰ When Jesus returned, the crowd welcomed him, for they were all expecting him.

⁴¹ Just then, a man named Jairus came. He was a leader of the synagogue. He fell down at Jesus's feet and pleaded with him to come to his house,

⁴² because he had an only daughter about twelve years old, and she was dying. While he was going, the crowds were nearly crushing him.

.....
⁴³ A woman suffering from bleeding for twelve years, who had spent all she had on doctors and yet could not be healed by any,

⁴⁴ approached from behind and touched the end of his robe. Instantly her bleeding stopped.

⁴⁵ "Who touched me?" Jesus asked. When they all denied it, Peter said, "Master, the crowds are hemming you in and pressing against you."

⁴⁶ "Someone did touch me," said Jesus. "I know that power has gone out from me."

⁴⁷ When the woman saw that she was discovered, she came trembling and fell down before him. In the presence of all the people, she declared the reason she had touched him and how she was instantly healed.

⁴⁸ "Daughter," he said to her, "your faith has saved you. Go in peace."

⁴⁹ While he was still speaking, someone came from the synagogue leader's house and said, "Your daughter is dead. Don't bother the teacher anymore."

⁵⁰ **When Jesus heard it, he answered him, "Don't be afraid. Only believe, and she will be saved."**

.....
⁵⁴ So he took her by the hand and called out, "Child, get up!"

⁵⁵ Her spirit returned, and she got up at once. Then he gave orders that she be given something to eat.

⁵⁶ Her parents were astounded, but he instructed them to tell no one what had happened.

MEMORY VERSE

KEYWORDS

When Jesus returned (v. 40)–

Much of the activity of Jesus's Galilean ministry revolved around the Sea of Galilee.

Fell down . . . feet (v. 41)–The Greek term for fell down means to rapidly throw oneself to the ground when approaching a superior with a request.

Suffering from bleeding

(v. 43)–Refers to a hemorrhage or flowing of blood. The result was that she would have been considered ceremonially and socially unclean.

Her spirit returned (v. 55)–The fact that the girl was dead is stated twice in this passage.

WHAT DO WE DO WHEN OTHERS INTERRUPT OUR PLANS?

Peter Greig was on his way home to England. As he hurried through Chicago's O'Hare Airport, he soon learned that the Iceland volcano had grounded all flights. Peter asked God how He wanted him to use this interruption and his thoughts flew to his friend Joe, 150 miles away in Madison, Wisconsin. "Hey, I'm in Chicago," he emailed. "Can I come crash on your couch?"

What Peter didn't know was that Joe had just received terrible news. His wife asked, "Who do you wish you had on your couch right now?" Joe answered, "I wish Pete was on my couch, but I know that's crazy."²¹ Within hours of Joe's stated longing, Peter was sitting on his couch. Sometimes, God interrupts our lives with people in ways that feel like an answer to prayer. In our passage, Jesus was surrounded by people, but He took time for two desperate people. He responded with such spiritual sensitivity and power, it changed them.

Interruptions Are Often Opportunities to Serve //

Luke 8:40-42

In Luke 8, Jesus was going from town-to-town, preaching and teaching about the kingdom of God,

taking back what demons had stolen, and bending the laws of nature to reverse what sin's curse had done.

In v. 40, Jesus had just crossed the Sea of Galilee, docking in Capernaum. As soon as He steps ashore, He was swept up into the current of human sin and need once more.

Pressing through the crowds of people was one of the most prominent men in the community. Jairus was a synagogue leader who was responsible for overseeing the teaching and worship in Sabbath gatherings. Since the synagogue was the spiritual and social center of life in a Jewish community, the townspeople would have recognized Jairus. What was he doing? Was he going to debate Jesus?

Jesus had been a troublemaker for Judaism. Jesus was likely held in contempt by Jairus's social group. He was a threat to their standing among the people, constantly calling their teaching and character into question. What would the other rabbis think if they knew what he was about to do?

But Jesus had been impossible for Jairus to write off. Capernaum had been His home base for ministry, so many of Jesus's miracles and teachings were done on its streets. This gave



THE POINT: GOD-ORDAINED INTERRUPTIONS CALL FOR A SENSITIVE HEART.

Jairus access to eyewitness accounts and personal stories about Jesus. All of Jesus's works displayed His compassion for people, authoritative teaching, and ability to perform miracles

Jairus must have known that what he was about to do would be risky. But on this day, he wasn't coming as a synagogue ruler; he was coming as a father whose only child, twelve years old, was dying. She needed a miracle. As he fell to the ground at Jesus feet, Jairus came to the only One who could heal her. He begged Jesus to come to his house.

Now, shift your attention to Jesus.

- His mission had a time limit, making His every action purposeful.
- He combatted demonic possession and opposition everywhere He went.
- He faced the winds of increasing hatred from religious leaders accusing him of being a heretic
- He bore the stress of being popular. The crowd was claustrophobic, and everyone wanted something from Him.
- He felt weary from the constant pace of ministry.

Yet we see no trace of impatience or irritation with Jairus or others in need. Jesus never allowed pressures to squeeze an unloving or selfish word or deed out of Him or make Him hardened toward people and their needs. Instead, He stopped and listened, graciously responding to the need in appropriate ways.

WHAT MIGHT HOLD US BACK FROM BRINGING OUR NEEDS TO JESUS?

Handle Each Interruption with Compassion // Luke 8:43-48

Concealed in the human traffic jam surrounding Jesus was a woman whose very presence violated the Mosaic Law. We don't know why she was hemorrhaging, but her blood loss kept her physically weak and ceremonially unclean (Lev. 15), costing her dearly.

She couldn't touch anyone without defiling them and was required to announce her "unclean" status when near people. She had drained her financial resources on physicians, undergoing painful procedures that only made matters worse (Mark 5:26).

See her lingering on the fringe of the crowd? For years, this woman had been told to keep her distance. Can you imagine how



DIGGING DEEPER FAITH

Faith often shows up most powerfully in moments of desperation, as seen in the lives of two unlikely individuals in Luke 8. Jairus, a respected synagogue leader, pursued Jesus to heal his dying daughter—an act of humility and faith that could have cost him his livelihood and status. Meanwhile, the woman with a chronic illness, considered unclean and an outcast, believed touching Jesus's garment would restore her health. Regardless of their differences in status, both displayed remarkable faith, trusting Jesus to meet their needs in seemingly impossible situations.

Their encounters show faith goes beyond social boundaries and personal shame. Jesus honored both their faith, healing the woman and raising Jairus's daughter, displaying His power and compassion.

What barriers—fear, pride, or doubt—might keep you from approaching Jesus with your deepest needs?

How can their faith inspire you to trust Him fully in your circumstances, no matter how desperate or unlikely?

emotionally starved and terribly lonely it was to be an “untouchable?”

Mark’s account tells us “she had heard the reports about Jesus” (5:27). He was doing impossible things. Some say He was the Messiah. Her hope was reborn as faith in Jesus gripped her heart. Now, that faith would move her to action.

Word of Jesus’s approach raced ahead of Him. She quickly formed a plan: get close, touch His garment, get away, and, hopefully, remain unnoticed. No need to draw unwanted attention to her unclean status.

Her pulse must have raced as she stepped into the crowd. When Jesus passed by, she reached out and touched the edge of His robe. Jairus’s emergency was put on hold as Jesus asked, “Who touched Me?” (v. 45).

Jesus’s disciples were confused by the question, considering the crowd. But Jesus was calm and determined to identify the person. Why did He insist on knowing who touched Him?

Jesus wanted to express compassion directly to this woman. When the woman realized she couldn’t hide, “she came trembling and fell down before Him” (v. 47). Jesus called her “daughter,” a term of family status. She was welcomed to the family. She was seen, affirmed in her faith, and restored

Jesus focused on her faith in three ways:

1. Jesus wanted to dismiss any idea that her healing came because she touched His clothes. “Your faith has saved you,” Jesus said.
2. He wanted to relieve her of any worries that “she had stolen this healing from Jesus” without His permission. Jesus’s words, “Go in peace” would relieve any guilt that she had taken something without His knowledge. Her healing was a gift of grace.
3. Jesus didn’t want her faith to be anonymous. Faith in Christ is not meant to be private. It must be publicly declared (Rom.10:9-11).

This woman had lived with her illness and uncleanness for a long time, leaving her a hopeless outcast. Her faith in Jesus, acted out in her reaching touch of His cloak, transferred her



uncleanness and alienation to Jesus, while He made her clean and welcomed. It was a beautiful picture of what Jesus came to do: taking our sin and shame upon Himself and giving us His righteousness (2 Cor. 5:21). What a Savior and Friend He is.

WHAT HAVE LIFE EXPERIENCES TAUGHT YOU ABOUT BEING FLEXIBLE IN MEETING THE NEEDS OF OTHERS?

When Delayed, Don't Be Discouraged // Luke 8:49-50, 54-56

What do you think was going on with Jairus as he watched Jesus and the woman? **Frustration** that they had stopped. “Did He not understand how serious the situation is?” **Aggravation** that Jesus was searching for someone who touched Him. “We don’t have time for this!” **Excitement** at the healing power and love of Jesus.

That’s when it happened. Jairus’s worst fears as a father were realized. Jesus and the woman were still speaking when a messenger arrived with the terrible news. Death was the period at the end of the sentence. It’s irreversible. Jairus was too shocked to speak. Jesus wasn’t. He said something to Jairus that would directly collide with the hopelessness he felt: “Don’t be afraid. Only believe, and she will be saved” (v. 50).

Jairus had come to Jesus, believing He could heal his daughter. Could he believe in Jesus now, in the face of death? In that moment, Jairus went all in with Jesus. Jairus turned toward home with Jesus. They heard the loud wailing and crying of

THE POINT: GOD-ORDAINED INTERRUPTIONS CALL FOR A SENSITIVE HEART.

mourners as they approached. Jesus corrected their perspective about death, which they found laughable. Jesus was delusional, as far as they are concerned. But He knew something they didn't. Jesus dismissed the crowds, nine of His disciples, and the mourners.

Six people enter the room when the girl lay dead: the girl's father and mother, three of His closest disciples, and Jesus. What happens next is mind-blowing. He tenderly took the dead girl's hand, which was a defiling act for a Jew, but Jesus was about to remove the source of any uncleanness. He said something very ordinary, something this girl would have heard almost every morning when her parents woke her. "Child, get up!"

When the One who is resurrection and life says "get up" to the dead, they got up. It was that simple. The astonished disciples and overjoyed parents were stunned by this truth. Jesus gave orders that food be brought for her, and that this holy moment be kept private.

Two desperate needs brought in faith to Jesus. Two great miracles mingled with personal attention by Jesus. This is who He is for us.

HOW CAN WE REMAIN SENSITIVE TO GOD'S LEADING WHEN WE FACE INTERRUPTIONS?

DID YOU KNOW?

Both the bleeding woman and Jairus exhibited bold faith that transcended social status quo or restrictions. Both heard about Jesus's miracles and desperately believed and needed to experience them themselves. Their actions show how faith compels individuals to overcome barriers, whether societal norms, personal shame, or fear of rejection. Both believed Jesus alone held the power to change their circumstances. Luke 8 highlights faith in Jesus isn't bound by human limitations or social expectations. As we defend our faith in today's postmodern cultural, this account offers evidence that Christ's power and compassion are for anyone who believes. Jesus's response to both—healing the woman and raising Jairus' daughter—proves His authority over illness, death, and societal barriers. How does this inspire you to trust Jesus boldly, even in situations where faith challenges cultural or personal boundaries?

Biblical Truth: Jesus is able to do above and beyond all we can ask or think.

What do Jesus's statements in verses 48 and 50 reveal about our faith and expectations of God?

LIVE IT

How will you respond to interruptions from people that throw your plans completely off?

Jesus provides an intense example of grace and focus when faced with interruptions. While on His way to heal Jairus's daughter, He was stopped by a woman in desperate need of healing. Instead of frustration, Jesus responded with compassion, addressing both needs fully. How can you reflect this Christ-like balance in your daily interactions, responding to interruptions with grace and purpose in today's hectic world?

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- **Become people-oriented.** Create a list of people you know who are facing some type of personal crisis (physical, spiritual, emotional, familial, relational). Pray Jesus meets their needs and makes God's love real for them.
- **Check your heart.** Ask God to give you a heart of compassion for people who are hurting and desperately in need of what only Jesus can provide.
- **Trust over fear.** Receive Jesus's word, "Don't be afraid. Only believe." Reflect on Psalm 23:4, Psalm 56:3, and Hebrews 13:5b-6, and trust Him when fear comes.

DAILY READINGS

1. A COMPASSIONATE INTERRUPTION // LUKE 8:40-42

While watching a talk show, I was inspired by a guest called a hero and earth angel. Due to past mistakes, he was not pleased with his life, but God had a purpose for him. On a day of fishing, his life was interrupted when he saved a drowning teenager with cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR). Six weeks later, while driving in the wrong direction, he saw an elderly man trapped in a burning car and pulled him to safety.²² God interrupted his life twice to save someone else. Jesus, in the midst of a crowd, stops to listen to Jairus' desperate pleas to heal his dying daughter. Each story was a divine, compassionate interruption guided by God.

Divine interruptions lead to your purpose!

2. A HEM HEALING // LUKE 8:43-48

Encountering God during challenging times can lead to life-changing moments. In Luke 8, the woman with the issue of blood was determined to reach Jesus. Her faith was so strong that she knew if she touched Him, she would be healed. With the crowd pressing so close, she could only touch the hem of his robe. Amazingly, she was instantly healed. Jesus felt His power leave Him and asked, "Who touched me? Nervously, she confessed, and Jesus praised her faith. Often, we believe we have strong faith, but do we? What is our faith like when we are in crisis? In our predicament, may we remain faithful and believe in Him.

Let us sing, If I could just touch the hem of His garment, I know I'll be made whole.²³

3. SHE IS ALIVE // LUKE 8:49-50, 54-56

Don't you love how Jesus easily moves from one crisis to another? Jesus is on his way to Jairus' house when he receives the message that Jairus' daughter has died. Those in attendance said, "Do not bother the teacher anymore." However, Jesus responded that it was no bother. He reassures

Jairus to have no fear, just believe. Matthew 19:26 tells us that with God, all things are possible. Jesus is working in a different realm where he controls life and death. We have all experienced overwhelming situations where we feel hopeless, but God! His authority is beyond our earthly boundary. Jesus, showing kindness and compassion, revives Jairus' daughter just by taking her hand.

Lord, I believe in your power. Thank you for your compassion toward humanity.

4. HAVE PATIENCE // PSALM 27:14

In our lives, waiting is difficult, especially when we are waiting for God to do what He promised. In Acts 1, Jesus instructs his disciples to wait for the promised Holy Spirit. I imagine the disciples are wondering how long it would take. Will it be today or tomorrow? The expression "pack your patience" means to prepare yourself for a situation that may be stressful or frustrating. This situation was stressful because the anticipation of receiving the power of the Holy Spirit was exciting. The disciples were instructed to wait and pray, we are also called to wait patiently and pray. So, take a seat with the disciples and patiently wait; The Holy Spirit will arrive soon.

Lord, teach me to wait patiently for your promise. In Jesus's Name. Amen.

5. REAL HOLY POWER // LUKE 4:14

The world wants power and influence but this worldly power is temporary. In Acts 1, Jesus is sending a power so great it is like a rushing wind and tongues of fire. The disciples are eagerly waiting to fulfill their mission of sharing the gospel and for the Holy Spirit. Yet, Jesus reminds them everything is in God's timing. We have to trust in God's timing and be faithful in our waiting for his promises. Here is what we can do while we wait – pray as a unified body of believers for God's divine wisdom.

Holy Spirit, empower us this week to fulfill your will. Amen.

Week 10 – The Cross and Resurrection

Scripture Readings: Matthew 27–28; Luke 24; 1 Corinthians 15:1–26; Romans 5:6–11

The cross is the climax of God's redemptive story. Jesus, the sinless Lamb, bore the penalty of sin and offered forgiveness for all who believe. His death satisfied God's justice and revealed His love. But death could not hold Him. The resurrection vindicated Jesus as Lord, broke the power of sin and death, and secured eternal life. This is the gospel: Christ died, was buried, and rose again according to the Scriptures.

WHEN A TIME OF INACTIVITY SLOWS YOU DOWN

Leader pages on pp. 148-151

THE POINT:
USE UNEXPECTED
DOWNTIME TO PREPARE
FOR WHAT'S NEXT.

ACTS 1:4-8,12-14; 2:1-4

¹⁻⁴ While he was with them, he commanded them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait for the Father's promise. "Which," he said, "you have heard me speak about;

⁵ for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit in a few days."

⁶ So when they had come together, they asked him, "Lord, are you restoring the kingdom to Israel at this time?"

⁷ He said to them, "It is not for you to know times or periods that the Father has set by his own authority.

⁸ **But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come on you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."**

MEMORY VERSE

¹⁻¹² Then they returned to Jerusalem from the Mount of Olives, which is near Jerusalem — a Sabbath day's journey away.

¹³ When they arrived, they went to the room upstairs where they were staying: Peter, John, James, Andrew, Philip, Thomas, Bartholomew, Matthew, James the son of Alphaeus, Simon the Zealot, and Judas the son of James.

¹⁴ They all were continually united in prayer, along with the women, including Mary the mother of Jesus, and his brothers.

^{2:1} When the day of Pentecost had arrived, they were all together in one place.

² Suddenly a sound like that of a violent rushing wind came from heaven, and it filled the whole house where they were staying.

³ They saw tongues like flames of fire that separated and rested on each one of them.

⁴ Then they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in different tongues, as the Spirit enabled them.

KEYWORDS

Baptism . . . Holy Spirit

(v. 5)—In the Old Testament, the Holy Spirit came temporarily upon individuals to enable them to fulfill specific God-given purposes. This baptism of the Spirit that Jesus promised would be a permanent indwelling of the Spirit in believers.

The Mt. of Olives (bold)—The location of Jesus's ascension.

Day of Pentecost (v. 1)—

Pentecost was one of the major annual Jewish feasts, and it celebrated the completion of the grain harvest.

WHAT SHOULD BELIEVERS DO IN SEASONS OF WAITING?

You and I have an issue: we hate waiting, yet we are forced to do it a lot. Think about how much of your life is spent . . .

- Standing in a grocery store check-out line.
- Growing older in a traffic jam.
- Listening to that terrible canned music song cycle again while on hold.
- Anticipating test results that seem to take forever and ever.

One UCLA professor humorously suggested the creation of a new unit of time called “the honko-second.” Defined as “the time between when the light changes and the person behind you honks his horn,”²⁴ it would be the smallest measure of time known to man.

Those of us who want things in a “honko-second” find waiting annoying. Isn’t that why we enjoy fast food, microwaves, freeway express lanes, and Amazon Prime? But what if God has something in those gaps for us that we can’t learn any other way? Let’s not waste our waiting anymore. Jesus’s disciples were in a waiting room with lessons to show us how to wait well.

Heed God’s Instructions //

Acts 1:4-8

The crucifixion of Jesus had been devastating. In the days before His crucifixion, Jesus grew an enormous following. He was shaking up the established religious institution with authoritative teaching no one had ever heard. His miracles were electrifying, causing rumors that He was the prophesied Messiah. All that momentum was shattered in a single afternoon when Jesus was nailed to a cross. The disciples had been shaken to the core by His death on the cross. Their hope in Jesus was buried with His dead body. It was over.

Only it wasn’t. “What happened next is on the same order as the creation of the universe: God raised

Him from the dead (Acts 3:15) by the power of the Holy Spirit,”²⁵ wrote David Powlison. It’s impossible to overstate the impact of Jesus’s resurrection.

Jesus was there in the room with them—alive, with His wounds from the cross obvious, eating and teaching. From this first shocking experience, after He rose from the grave to His ascension, Jesus instructed His disciples about what their priorities were to be for the rest of their lives. These men had been personally trained by Jesus Himself. He had commissioned them to carry on His cause. They were ready to lay down their lives for Him.



THE POINT: USE UNEXPECTED DOWNTIME TO PREPARE FOR WHAT'S NEXT.

During this time frame . All the truths He had revealed to them began to fall into place. An unshakeable confidence in Him took hold. The mission He started was to continue through them.

So, what was the first thing Jesus ordered them to do? We might expect the risen Son of God to give a mighty, "Go out in My name!" Instead, it was "Ready . . . Set . . . Wait: Stay in Jerusalem."

Wait for what? Jesus explains this waiting from three angles:

1. "The Father's promise . . ." that brought glorious prophecies to pass, raising the anticipation (Joel 2:28; Ezek. 36:26-27).
2. "Which you have heard Me speak about." Jesus stirred memories of His teaching about another Counselor like Himself who will be given to them.
3. Jesus then compared John the Baptist's water baptism to what He was about to give: baptism with the Holy Spirit. Just as John plunged a repentant believer in water, so they would be immersed in the Holy Spirit by who they would be "empowered from on high" (Luke 24:47).

Regardless of this exciting promise from Jesus, the disciples still had tunnel vision about God's kingdom. During this forty-day period they had heard Jesus teach about the kingdom of God (v. 3). But they couldn't comprehend it being any bigger than a Jewish kingdom: "Lord, are You restoring the kingdom to Israel at this time?" (v. 6). Jesus didn't ignore their question or correct their thoughts of an earthly kingdom. He focused on their sense of timing and desire to figure things out, then called them back to the pressing issue: "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come on you."

What the disciples could not have understood at this point in time was that they must have the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit for their witness to bear fruit. Jesus promised that He would send the Holy Spirit to them (John 15:26; 16:7). But for now, they must wait. What does waiting teach the believer?

- We need reminding that Jesus said, "you can do nothing without Me" (John 15:5).
- It is "not by strength or by might, but by My Spirit" that we will accomplish His mission (Zech. 4:6).
- Waiting lines up our lives to God's timing. He knows best and will give us what we need at the right time.
- Waiting offers us space where our focus on Him can be developed.

WHAT ARE THE CONSEQUENCES OF MOVING AHEAD OF GOD?



DIGGING DEEPER WAITING

For believers, waiting isn't a passive state but a powerful process where faith can be refined and deepened. Consider these verses:

1. **Waiting Produces Spiritual Maturity:** Waiting refines character and deepens dependence on God. James 1:3-4
2. **Active Waiting through Prayer and Worship:** Waiting doesn't mean inactivity. Instead, it's an invitation to seek God through prayer, worship, and meditation. Psalm 46:10
3. **Waiting as a Witness to the World:** The way Christians handle waiting can serve as a testimony to others. See 1 Peter 3:15
4. **The Cross as the Ultimate Example of Waiting Fulfilled:** The ultimate fulfillment of waiting is seen in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. For centuries, God's people anticipated the coming of the Messiah. John 3:16-17

How can we view periods of waiting as opportunities for God to work?



Seek God's Face // Acts 1:12-14

While growing up, my daughters loved Disney Princesses, their adventures, and magical ways. Their imaginations danced as they watched and sang with Tiana, Moana, Elsa, and Ariel. They were saddened when it seemed like things weren't going well for their beloved characters, but as in all Disney classics, there is always victory on the horizon for the main characters.

Though not a fairy tale, we can only imagine how unbelievable Jesus's death must have been for His disciples. Even more so, His resurrection and ascension must have been unreal like a disappearing act, with Him flying up to heaven with the promise of a return. The truth is far more shocking and important.

God exercised "the immeasurable greatness of His power" (Eph. 1:19-20). Free from the laws of space and time He created, Jesus stepped beyond this physical plane into eternity. His return to heaven was the necessary next step in His mission.

Jesus's exit certainly left the apostles stunned (v. 9-11). So now, the waiting begins, and the eleven apostles show us how to do this well. They didn't waste their waiting by complaining impatiently or worrying about what they couldn't control. Instead, their waiting was filled with continual prayer.

Prayer is the expression of our dependence on God and our trusting request to Him. It positions our hearts for what He wills to do in His time.

This became a habit for believers in Acts. It is striking that at almost every important turning point in the narrative of God's redemptive action in Acts we find a mention of prayer (1:24; 8:14-17; 9:11-12; 10:4,9,30; 13:2-3). Jesus's followers waited together. Their worship and prayer were a group experience, amplifying their praise and strengthening their fellowship.

HOW CAN PRAYING WITH OTHER BELIEVERS ENCOURAGE US DURING SEASONS OF WAITING?

When we turn waiting into worship along with others and set our hope in Jesus, God will work in us while He's preparing us for the awaited answer.

Trust God's Timing // Acts 2:1-4

The Jewish holiday called "Fifty" (in Greek: Pentecost) was calendared fifty days after Passover each year. Pentecost was a time of worship, feasting, and family reunions.

Ten days of prayerful waiting had passed for Jesus's disciples. Then, on Pentecost, the waiting was over. Their prayer meeting was suddenly interrupted with three sensory experiences that signaled the Spirit's outpouring.

- **Sound.** First came the roaring noise of a violent wind inside the house. Wind was often associated with God's Spirit in the Scriptures (Ps. 33:6; Ezek. 1:4; 37:9-14), emphasizing His power, freedom, and mysterious ways (John 3:8). At Pentecost, the sound of the Spirit's coming was a storm.
- **Sight.** Fire came next, appearing as a single blaze, then dividing into little fires that rested over their heads. The fire gave light without heat or smoke. Many biblical stories represent God and His work with fire (Gen. 15:17; Ex. 3:2; Heb. 12:18-21). The individualized flames separating over each disciple signaled that the Holy Spirit had been given to each believer.
- **Speech.** What followed moved the supernatural evidence of the Spirit's coming from observation to participation. The internationals in Jerusalem for Pentecost were mystified to hear Galileans "declaring the

THE POINT: USE UNEXPECTED DOWNTIME TO PREPARE FOR WHAT'S NEXT.

magnificent acts of God in our own tongues" (v. 11). Fifteen different language groups are named in verses 9-11, each hearing their own native language from people who had a reputation for being uncultured.

Luke explains the supernatural phenomenon to us: "they were all filled with the Holy Spirit." A new era had dawned in liberating history. God gave the Holy Spirit to every believer, not just in Jerusalem on Pentecost, but in every age to follow.

Through the empowered, multi-cultural witness of Spirit-filled disciples, thousands were saved by faith in Jesus Christ and baptized to form the church in Jerusalem.

The disciples had prayed and praised God as they waited, not knowing how long that would take. They were on hold for ten days before the Spirit was given. God calls us to wait worshipfully, trusting in Him through our uncertainty, delays, pain, and powerlessness. We can be confident that God wants to work in us while lining up circumstances for His glory.

WHY IS IT CRITICAL THAT BELIEVERS FUNCTION IN THE POWER OF THE HOLY SPIRIT AND NOT THEIR OWN?

DID YOU KNOW?

Have you ever had to sit in a waiting room? Whether it's for a scheduled appointment or an emergency, the purpose of the waiting room is for those who are anticipating an action, encounter, or sometimes answers. Think about when you were in a waiting room full of anxiety or anxiousness in comparison to swiping through your phone or taking a call while you waited patiently. What was the difference in your attitude about waiting? Usually, our state of mind about waiting is directly related to our focus and trust in what is to come. Maverick City Music's popular worship song, "Wait on the Lord," was based on Isaiah 40:31 with the encouragement of being strengthened and renewed while you wait.

Biblical Truth: "The LORD is good to those who wait for him, to the person who seeks him" (Lam. 3:25).

How can meditating on Isaiah 40:31 help you develop "waiting room" that builds your trust in God's promises and plans?

LIVE IT

How will you trust God's timing as you deal with waiting this week?

Today's culture focuses on getting what we want immediately. The microwave was created to avoid lengthy meal preparation. Instead of dinner in 30 minutes on a stove, meals are ready in 5 minutes, thanks to "nuking." Fast food restaurants make billions of dollars daily with drive-thru service. Waiting with God is living with what you know to be true about God when you don't know what's true about your life.²⁶ While waiting consider the following:

+ + +

- **Focus on Scripture.** Read Isaiah 40:31 and meditate on it. Commit this verse to memory this week. Hide God's Word in your heart for times in the future when you may find yourself waiting on the Lord.
- **Focus on Christ.** When you find yourself being forced to wait, intercept negative reactions by directing your thoughts to Jesus. Develop this response through repetition.
- **Focus on Building Community.** Ask God to help you find a believer(s) who you can share your heart with. Develop mutual trust by waiting together in prayerful hope.

DAILY READINGS

1. PREPARING FOR WHAT IS NEXT // ACTS 1:4-8

Waiting is the hardest thing to do. However, waiting during a timeout in basketball is full of activity. The players are gathering their strength and planning the next play for a victory. This applies to the disciples in Acts 1:4-8, where a time of inactivity is preparation for the coming of the Holy Spirit. The disciples used this waiting period to pray, unify, and trust in God's instructions. As a basketball team prepares during a timeout, we can use our waiting seasons to seek God, study His word, and prepare for what is next.

Lord, help me stay focused on You during times of waiting. In Jesus's Name. Amen.

2. WHO'S IN YOUR CREW // ACTS 1:12-14

The saying, Teamwork makes the dream work," goes back to the New York Mets' 1986 World Championship song - "We got the teamwork. . . that makes the dream work!"²⁷ This song highlights the power of a team in achieving a goal. Having the right people on your team or in your crew makes a difference. Similarly, in Acts 1:12-14, the disciples, "along with the women, including Mary the mother of Jesus, and his brothers," were unified on their purpose of praying while waiting for the Holy Spirit. Follow the disciples' example and build a devoted community of believers where we can find strength and encouragement as we share the gospel.

Father, help me seek your presence and stay united with others as we wait for Your timing. In Jesus's Name. Amen.

3. PLANT! WAIT! TRUST! // ACTS 2:1-4

In the book *Blooming For Christ*, we discover that growth takes time.²⁸ You plant a seed, water it, give it sunlight, and wait. At first, nothing happens, but trust that with time, the seed will grow into something strong and beautiful. In Acts 2:1-4, the disciples waited, and they received something strong and beautiful: the Pentecost. It came like a rushing wind with tongues like flames of fire.

Their waiting was not in vain. The Holy Spirit gave them the power to speak boldly and share God's message. This wait was not long, yet we may wait years for a response from God. As we wait, trust God's timing and continue to minister to His people.

Wait . . . your patience will be rewarded with something strong, beautiful, and powerful. Amen.

4. LOOK WITH PURPOSE // PSALM 71:18

As believers, we are called to purposely look for disciples just like Jesus. In Acts 16, Paul and Timothy have a wonderful mentorship partnership. Paul meets a young disciple named Timothy, whose grandmother and mother, Lois and Eunice, were among his first converts from the Jewish community. Paul sees great potential in Timothy. Like Jesus taught his disciples, Paul teaches and guides Timothy and calls him his "true son in the faith." Together, their journeys impacted the world. As we journey, look with a spiritual purpose for someone we can mentor for the sake of the gospel.

Lord, strengthen me to go and make new disciples. In Jesus's name. Amen.

5. DESTINATION UNKNOWN // GALATIANS 6:9

I love traveling with my family, riding along, and enjoying the scenery as we get closer and closer to our destination. However, long trips can be challenging, and we start checking the time to see how long it will be until we arrive. Paul and Timothy are traveling as spiritual father and son on a mission to spread the gospel and build the early church. Parts of their mission trips were tiring and hard, for some places were hostile, and others were welcoming. However, they moved together based on the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Can we travel without knowing our destination? Will we give up on our mission if the directions suddenly get changed?

Let's not lose faith but continue to do the work for the kingdom.

Week 11 – The Church and the Spirit

Scripture Readings: Acts 1–2; Ephesians 2:11–22; 1 Corinthians 12; Galatians 5:16–26

After Jesus ascended, He poured out the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. The Spirit empowered the disciples to witness, uniting Jews and Gentiles into one body—the Church. The Church is God’s family, called to bear witness to the gospel in word and deed. The Spirit equips believers with gifts, produces fruit in their lives, and strengthens them to live holy, mission-driven lives. God’s plan is now carried out through the Church until Christ returns.

WHEN DOING GOD'S WORK IS INTERRUPTED

Leader pages on pp. 152-155

THE POINT:
GOD MAY INTERRUPT US
TO MOVE OUR MINISTRY
IN A NEW DIRECTION.

ACTS 16:4-15

MEMORY VERSE

⁴ As they traveled through the towns, they delivered the decisions reached by the apostles and elders at Jerusalem for the people to observe.

⁵ **So the churches were strengthened in the faith and grew daily in numbers.**

⁶ They went through the region of Phrygia and Galatia; they had been forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia.

⁷ When they came to Mysia, they tried to go into Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus did not allow them.

⁸ Passing by Mysia they went down to Troas.

⁹ During the night Paul had a vision in which a Macedonian man was standing and pleading with him, "Cross over to Macedonia and help us!"

¹⁰ After he had seen the vision, we immediately made efforts to set out for Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them.

¹¹ From Troas we put out to sea and sailed straight for Samothrace, the next day to Neapolis,

¹² and from there to Philippi, a Roman colony and a leading city of the district of Macedonia. We stayed in that city for several days.

¹³ On the Sabbath day we went outside the city gate by the river, where we expected to find a place of prayer. We sat down and spoke to the women gathered there.

¹⁴ A God-fearing woman named Lydia, a dealer in purple cloth from the city of Thyatira, was listening. The Lord opened her heart to respond to what Paul was saying.

¹⁵ After she and her household were baptized, she urged us, "If you consider me a believer in the Lord, come and stay at my house." And she persuaded us.

KEYWORDS

Decisions (v. 4)—Not optional suggestions from the Jerusalem council but decisions that carried the authority of the apostles and elders from the Jerusalem church.

Paul had a vision (v. 9)—The Greek word means "that which is seen" and refers to a revelation of some sort.

A place of prayer (v. 13)—Paul's custom was to first preach at the city's Jewish synagogue on the first Sabbath after arriving in the city.

Thyatira (v. 14)—An important economic center in Asia Minor in the Lycus River Valley. Later, it contained one of the seven churches located in Asia Minor in the book of Revelation.

HOW SHOULD BELIEVERS HANDLE DIVINE INTERRUPTIONS?

On May 21, 2020, twin brothers Zak and Max Prizant took their first step in their journey across America on foot. They started on San Francisco's Golden Gate Bridge. They finished on the Brooklyn Bridge on New Year's Eve, completing their 3000-mile journey and raising \$15,000 for Covid relief.

Now, repeat that journey 2.5 more times. That's how far Paul and his companions traveled (over 10,000 miles) as pioneer missionaries. They faced many life-threatening hazards, and unlike the Prizants, they endured physical attacks and prison time to spread the gospel and start churches.

Of all the experiences they had, something unusual happened during the second missionary journey. God paused their plans, rerouting their mission efforts. Let's take a road trip with Paul and lessons in listening to God.

Be Open to New Directions

// Acts 16:4-5

Approximately five years had passed since Paul and Barnabas completed the first missionary journey (Acts 13-14). Now, Paul was anxious to get going again. He partnered with Silas this time, adding Timothy (16:1-3) and later, Luke (notice the

shift from "they" in v. 8 to "we" in vv. 10-40). What they found was incredibly exciting.

In every town, they met believers and churches that God had created through the gospel work of Paul and company years prior. Every salvation story was God's affirmation of their sacrifice and faithfulness.

Think of Paul's deep gratitude to God when he met Timothy and his family in Lystra.

- Three years before, Paul preached the gospel there and they tried to murder him (Acts 14:19-20). Whatever interest in the gospel existed in Lystra would have been violently put down.
- Returning to Lystra on this second mission trip, Paul discovered that the gospel seed sown in hard soil had not only taken root but had brought generational fruit. Here was a grandmother, mother, and son who had become believers (2 Tim. 1:5).
- Paul was so impressed with Timothy that he invited him to join the team, launching a mentoring partnership that would continue for the next seventeen years.



THE POINT: GOD MAY INTERRUPT US TO MOVE OUR MINISTRY IN A NEW DIRECTION.

- Timothy became Paul's trusted companion and representative who developed into an able pastor and leader. His ministry and work made a gospel impact for decades past Paul's life.

To be a part of God's work is humbling and amazing. Timothy's conversion story was repeated many times over. Churches were growing. The gospel was advancing. And these men were a part of it all. Paul walked into every town, synagogue, and gospel opportunity consciously surrendered to the Spirit's leading and power (1 Cor. 2:3-4). He encouraged us to do the same.

"The truth is that God can do anything He pleases through an ordinary person who is fully dedicated to Him," wrote Henry Blackaby.²⁹ God can use you in His work, as well. As you serve others in His name, He will work through you to accomplish His will. There's nothing better.

WHEN HAVE YOU SEEN SOMEONE'S OBEDIENCE TO GOD BEAR FRUIT IN ANOTHER PERSON'S LIFE?

Follow the Guidance of the Holy Spirit

// Acts 16:6-10

After strengthening the churches that had been planted across Galatia and Phrygia (southern Turkey), Paul and his companions experienced something unusual: they were forbidden by the Holy Spirit to share the gospel in Asia. Earlier in Acts, Peter and John were told by the Jewish religious leaders to stop teaching and preaching about Jesus.

So they called for them and ordered them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus.

Peter and John answered them, "Whether it's right in the sight of God for us to listen to you rather than to God, you decide; for we are unable to stop speaking about what we have seen and heard" (Acts 4:18-20). But Paul's experience in Acts 16 was different. It was God saying "no." "They had been forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak a word in Asia" (v. 6). We're not told how they reacted to this, but we can think of a few questions they might have.

- "Jesus, didn't You tell us to make disciples in all the nations?"
- "Don't You want to reach multiple cultures who will then take the gospel with them when they return home?"
- "Why are You preventing us from saying anything about You in this region?"

Later, God would open the door for the gospel to go into Asia, which include the city of Ephesus. Paul would spend three years there (Acts 20:31), establishing such a strong work "that all the



DIGGING DEEPER THE DAY OF PENTECOST

The day of Pentecost marked a transformative moment in Christian history, as the Holy Spirit empowered the disciples to preach the gospel in many languages, reaching people from diverse nations (Acts 2:1-12). This moment ignited a movement where new believers became native disciples, sharing Christ within their own cultures. Paul's encounter in Philippi is an example of this gospel spread through Lydia, a successful businesswoman from Asia. She became the first recorded convert in Europe. This was totally opposite of what was commonly acceptable in Jewish culture, but what God used to fulfill His plans for all nations to know of Him. Pentecost and Lydia's story demonstrate how God uses cultural diversity to advance His kingdom. Indigenous disciples bring unique perspectives and influence to their communities, showing that the gospel transcends cultural boundaries. Though Paul could have delivered the gospel to Asia, what are some reasons it was more effective for Lydia to do so?

How might God be calling you to share your faith or support others in spreading the gospel?

residents of Asia, both Jews and Greeks, heard the word of the Lord" (Acts 19:10). Timothy would eventually pastor the Ephesian church (Tim. 1:3). But at this point, the Holy Spirit stopped them in their tracks. We can only speculate about how He guided them to this conclusion, but we know this: His "no" was clear.

Next Paul and his companions headed to the northernmost province of Bithynia. The team made it to Mysia and "tried to go into Bithynia . . . but the Spirit of Jesus did not allow them" (v. 7). Again, we know that God would reach the people of Bithynia later (2 Cor. 2:12; 1 Pet. 1:1), but Jesus had other priorities for them at this time. He redirected Paul through the Holy Spirit's leading. So, they went due west to the port city of Troas on the Aegean Sea.

During the night, Paul had a vision of a Macedonian man on his feet, pleading with Paul. "Cross over to Macedonia and help us!" (v. 9). Now we know why the Holy Spirit had shut down Paul's plans. Jesus wanted missionaries in Macedonia. The next morning, Paul told the team what happened and immediate preparations were made to cross the Aegean Sea and get going with the gospel (v. 10).

HOW CAN WE PERSEVERE WHEN THERE ARE ROADBLOCKS TO SHARING THE GOSPEL?

Aren't you grateful for the Holy Spirit's guidance? Jesus works through the Holy Spirit to reveal just enough of His plan to get us to take the next step with Him. He closes and open doors to guide us to where He wants to work. We don't always understand these changes. We may not like what is happening. But His "no" is always given to get us to His "yes." And isn't that where we want to be?

God Opens New Avenues for Ministry //

Acts 16:11-15

Luke joined the team in Troas, so four missionaries set sail for Neapolis, 150 miles away by sea.³⁰ With good winds, they arrived in two days, with an overnight stop in Samothrace. They then make the ten-mile walk inland to one of Macedonia's primary cities, Philippi. A few facts about Philippi give us perspective.



- The east-west route connecting Rome with Macedonia's eastern provinces ran directly through Philippi, pouring trade and culture into the city.
- Philippi was a Roman colony, which means the emperor had ordered Roman citizens to live there, with the promise that they would be free of tribute and taxes. This made Philippi a "Rome away from Rome"³¹ and a desirable destination whose wealth "outstripped other cities in this district of Macedonia."³²
- Luke loved Philippi. He spent more ink on what God did there than any other location in Acts. He remained in the city when the mission team moved on (Acts 17:1). Some scholars believe Philippi was Luke's hometown.

Keeping to their strategy, Paul and his companions would have wanted to begin at the synagogue, but there wasn't one. Since it was on the Sabbath day, it was likely that Jewish people were in this group. We are also introduced to Lydia who was identified as a "God fearer." This suggests that she was a Gentile who had recognized in Judaism something wise and deep. She possibly had come to believe in the God revealed in the Old Testament.

So, at this place of prayer, a mixed group of Jews and Gentiles gathered, which included women. When Paul and his friends arrived, they spoke with the women who had gathered.

This was not a familiar script for Paul and his team, but they had learned to trust God's unusual ways.

THE POINT: GOD MAY INTERRUPT US TO MOVE OUR MINISTRY IN A NEW DIRECTION.

They sat down (a typical posture for a rabbi) and talked about Jesus with these women. We discover that Lydia was a businesswoman from Thyatira in Asia. Isn't that interesting? God had forbidden any word to be spoken in Asia, but He conveniently brought this woman from Asia to Philippi at just the right time.

Lydia specialized in fine linen treated with a rare purple dye extracted from mollusks found in the Mediterranean Sea. Purple clothing became a sign of rank and status and was worn only by the wealthy (Luke 16:19) and the royal.³³ While Lydia the God-fearer was listening to Paul speak about Christ, "The Lord opened her heart to respond to what Paul was saying" (v. 14). Her joy in Jesus was contagious. Likely, she told her household what had happened, and they also received Christ. They were all baptized, declaring their faith.

Paul had no idea what God was doing when He interrupted his ministry plans. He just wanted to reach a great city with the gospel. But God wanted to give him something greater. Because he obeyed God, we have had the gospel for more than two thousand years.

WHEN HAS GOD OPENED A DOOR FOR YOU TO MINISTER IN AN UNEXPECTED WAY?

DID YOU KNOW?

This session highlights how God's interruptions can redirect ministry for His greater purpose. Paul and his companions intended to preach in Asia, but the Holy Spirit prevented them, guiding them instead to Macedonia through a vision. This redirection led to Lydia's conversion in Philippi, a pivotal moment in spreading the gospel to Europe. This passage reminds us that God is dynamic, constantly working in ways we may not expect. Flexibility in ministry means surrendering our plans and trusting God's guidance, even when it disrupts our expectations. Trusting the Planner requires faith that His perspective is greater than ours and that His redirection is always purposeful. Are you open to trusting Him fully, even if it means stepping into the unknown? Take a moment to consider how you can align yourself with where God is working.

Biblical Truth: "Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and do not rely on your own understanding" (Prov. 3:5).

How might God be redirecting your plans or ministry efforts today?

LIVE IT

This week and the weeks to come, how can you be open to God's redirection?

Consider the impact of Paul's obedience to God's leadership in his life. What you do for Christ matters; singing, praying, teaching, caring, loving your neighbor as yourself, sharing the gospel—all these will bear fruit that remains. "What we do in Christ and by the Spirit in the present is not wasted."³⁴

+ + +

- **Seek God's will.** Set aside time this week for a spiritual life check-up. Ask God to reveal His will in specific areas of your life. Pray for an opportunity to get involved in ministry service. Read and meditate on Proverbs 3:5-6 for direction.
- **Stay spiritually attuned.** Always pay attention to the possibility of a gospel opportunity. Take time to review key Bible passages to use to share the gospel. Be deliberately surrendered to the Spirit's leading and power (1 Cor. 2:3-4).
- **Tell others about Jesus.** Read Romans 10:14-15. Lydia heard the gospel from Paul and God opened her heart to believe. Who can you tell about Jesus this week?

DAILY READINGS

1. MOLD ME // ACTS 16:4-5

Paul, the seasoned apostle, and Timothy, his young protégé, illustrate a beautiful relationship on mentorship, partnering in effectively spreading the gospel. They were empowered by their faith to establish Christian churches and assist them in strengthening their faith. There are always opponents, but they did not allow these interruptions by the doubters to dissuade them. Paul, Timothy, and the elders' testimonies led many to embrace Christ. Verse 5 tells us that "the churches were strengthened in the faith and grew daily in numbers." Like Paul, we are called to walk alongside new disciples like Timothy and build the church. Today, with purpose, look at the young people we can disciple in our congregations and our communities and become mentors.

Lord, mold me into a mentor who reflects Your image. Amen.

2. GET READY FOR A DETOUR // ACTS 16:6-10

What do you do when the Holy Spirit commands you to stop? Let us ponder that thought for a minute. In Acts 16:6-10, Paul and his companions were on their way to spread the gospel throughout Asia, but the Holy Spirit said, "Stop! Do Not Enter!" Paul understood the Holy Spirit's urgings and walked away from that area. Then, the Holy Spirit sent him a vision of a man in Macedonia pleading for his help. He knew this was a new assignment and trusted the Holy Spirit to change directions. We experience unexpected changes in life, whether it is a job offer out of town or a detour on the road. Remember, if God is leading us, we should go.

Father, lead me in Your direction. In the name of Jesus, Amen.

3. OPEN TO THE SPIRIT // ACTS 16:11-15

The poem by Robert Frost, "The Road Not Taken," illustrates the anguish of decision-making. It implies that each path is unknown. Isn't it good to know we do not have to make decisions all by ourselves? The Holy Spirit was sent to guide us, just like it guides Paul and his missionary team throughout Philippi.

Despite being redirected, Paul remains devoted, and God continues to work through him. In Philippi, he encounters Lydia, a businesswoman who sells purple fabric. Upon hearing Paul, Lydia fully converts to Christianity. She became the first recorded European Gentile to convert to Christianity. Let us stay open to the Holy Spirit's directions so we can share the message of the Living God.

God, help us spread Your word to those around us. In Jesus's Name. Amen.

4. EMBRACE THE INTERRUPTIONS // PSALM 37:23-24

Each day, we are interrupted by something or someone: spouses, children, coworkers, emails, phone calls, traffic, contractors, and even God. To us, these interruptions are an inconvenience. However, God is in the midst, guiding and redirecting us for the sake of the gospel. Whether called to journey to a new land like Abraham or find prison our home, like Joseph, God's plan will always succeed. As Psalm 37:23-24 reminds us, "A person's steps are established by the LORD, and he takes pleasure in his way. Though he falls, he will not be overwhelmed because the LORD supports him with his hand." God is a faithful protector to all who believe and trust Him.

Lord, help me to embrace the interruptions as You direct my life. In Jesus's Name. Amen.

5. LISTENING TO HIS VOICE // JOHN 10:27

John 10:27 says, "My sheep hear my voice, I know them, and they follow me." Are we listening to hear God's voice? In the Bible, we see God interrupting his servants to fulfill his plans. Moses was interrupted by God to lead a nation, Jesus was interrupted by the crowds to save a young girl's life, and Paul was interrupted by the Holy Spirit to reroute his path to a different land. These interruptions became a fulfillment of God's plan. So, what does this tell us? Interruptions are a part of life, and we are still called to do the work of ministry. Therefore, be attentive to God's voice and trust interruptions are for a greater purpose.

Father, In every interruption, let me hear Your voice. In Jesus's Name. Amen.

Week 12 – The New Creation and Eternal Hope

Scripture Readings: Revelation 21–22; Romans 8:18–25; 2 Peter 3:8–13

The Bible ends where it began—God dwelling with His people. But this time it is not a garden but a city: the New Jerusalem. There will be no more death, sorrow, or pain. God will wipe away every tear, and His people will reign with Him forever. This is the hope we cling to: creation renewed, sin defeated, and eternal fellowship with God. The story of Scripture ends in victory and joy, reminding us that our present sufferings are not the end of the story.

JESUS TOLD HIM, "I AM THE
WAY, THE TRUTH, AND THE
LIFE. NO ONE COMES TO THE
FATHER EXCEPT THROUGH ME.

John 14:6