

MT. ZION UNIVERSITY

HOW TO START?

1. Make sure you register by going to the connect desk in the church foyer, calling the church or online @ Mzov.org.
2. Begin Reading each section numbered 1-12. We suggest you read one section every week to two weeks to keep a good pace.
3. Submit the reflection questions found on the website for each section or you can print out and email or you can submit at the connect desk at the church.
4. Watch out for text and emails from Pastor Larry that will be sent to you weekly.
5. Attend the periodic in-church Mt. Zion fellowships and gatherings that will be sent to you throughout the semester.
6. All you are asked to complete is 4, 8 or 12 of the sections to receive MZOVU credit!
7. Call the church if you have questions!



Our first semester we will be using lifeway studies for curriculum.

Empowering You to Live Your Best Life

Mt. Zion University is an at home, self-paced and self guided Bible study that will lead you into a journey of relevant topics and devotionals that will help you in your Christian walk each week. All 12 Session are downloadable here online for print or online viewing. After completing each reading, all students are asked to complete the reflection assignments and submit them via the website or by email webmaster@mtzionoakwood.org.

A Message from the Dean

Bible study and time with God in prayer is essential to our christian faith. As you embark on this self-pace, at-home, biblically-based time of learning and growth, I pray you receive blessings and the assurances that the Lord gives through his word!

Pastor Larry



All Material can be accessed online @ mzov.org and then click on the Mt. Zion University tab on the top menu of the website.

SURE OF FORGIVENESS

Leader pages on pp. 102-105

THE POINT:
WE ARE FORGIVEN
WHEN WE CONFESS
OUR SIN AND WALK
WITH CHRIST.

1 JOHN 1:5–2:2

^{1:5} This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you: God is light, and there is absolutely no darkness in him.

⁶ If we say, “We have fellowship with him,” and yet we walk in darkness, we are lying and are not practicing the truth.

⁷ If we walk in the light as he himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin.

.....

⁸ If we say, “We have no sin,” we are deceiving ourselves, and the truth is not in us.

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MEMORY VERSE

⁹ If we confess our sins, he is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

¹⁰ If we say, “We have not sinned,” we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.

.....

^{2:1} My little children, I am writing you these things so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father—Jesus Christ the righteous one.

² He himself is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours, but also for those of the whole world.

KEYWORDS

Confess (1:9) – To confess means “to say the same thing,” “to agree.” In this verse, to confess specifically means to agree with God about our sin.

Advocate (2:1) – An advocate is a person who “helps,” who “provides aid.” Jesus is a legal counsel to defend Christians,

particularly from His position in heaven.

Atoning sacrifice (2:2) – The words mean that God has provided His grace through Jesus’ sacrificial death on the cross so that people can be accepted by God.

WHAT MUST WE DO TO BE FORGIVEN OF OUR SINS?

Can we be sure of anything? Some philosophers will tell you we can't. After COVID-19 arrived last year and shook up our lives, nothing seemed certain.

We can have assurance, though. God desires for every believer to have assurance of salvation. Sadly, many Christians struggle daily with doubt as it pertains to their eternal destiny. Some even believe it's impossible to know with certainty that a person is eternally saved. At other times, believers who are not sure of their salvation find themselves plunged into the depths of doubt and despair, uncertain of whether or not God has truly forgiven them. Others allow their own self-condemnation to smother the assurance God desires for them to have.

But we can be assured of assurance! The apostle John stated this clearly in 1 John 5:13: "I have written these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life." We have God's assurance of eternal life even as we have the assurance of our forgiveness.

Turn from Darkness // 1 John 1:5-7

The character of God is the foundation for our forgiveness. When John wrote, "God is light," he described the very nature of God. Since He is light, "there is absolutely no darkness in him" (v. 5). To describe God as light refers not only to His holiness, but also to His moral goodness. In His perfect righteousness and goodness, God determines the terms for our forgiveness. God's terms are clear: we are forgiven when we confess our sins and commit our lives to walk with Christ.

We are forgiven when we turn from darkness to light. John underscored this by looking at this truth from two sides.

- **Darkness.** "If we say, 'We have fellowship with him,' and yet we walk in darkness, we are lying and are not practicing the truth" (v. 6). The idea of walking refers to a person's way of life. If anyone lives a life of continual, unrepentant sin and claims to be forgiven, he is tragically mistaken.



THE POINT: WE ARE FORGIVEN WHEN WE CONFESS OUR SIN AND WALK WITH CHRIST.

The gospel's powerful work in our lives is what moves us from darkness (sin) to light (salvation). "He has rescued us from the domain of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of the Son He loves. In him we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins" (Col. 1:13-14). The ones whose lives have been transformed by the power of the gospel are transferred to the kingdom of the Son and their sins are forgiven!

- **Light.** "If we walk in the light as he himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin" (v. 7). When we turn from darkness and walk with Christ, we are assured of forgiveness. To walk in the light is to live a life consistent with the will of God. Of course, this does not mean we are perfect, but that the trajectory and the purpose of our lives has become the pursuit of God.

WHEN DOES IT FEEL THE MOST DIFFICULT TO WALK IN THE LIGHT?

Tony Evans wrote: "Every week, people have the habit of taking clothes to the cleaners that have been soiled. The job of the cleaners is to freshen them up and get them smelling good again." As Tony Evans said, "Jesus has a cleaning service. He picks up dirty people who have allowed, for one reason or another, their lives to take a turn down the wrong path. And at his cleaning service, Jesus knows just what to do to wash you and make you clean again."² Jesus is the One who "cleanses us from all sin." This is the beautiful message of the gospel: Jesus gave His life to save dirty sinners like you and me. If your life pattern is turning from darkness and pursuing holiness, then don't doubt God's forgiveness toward you.

Confess Our Sin // 1 John 1:8-10

In verses 5-7, John gave a darkness and light contrast to stress we are forgiven when we turn from darkness to light. In verses 8-10, he used a similar negative and positive pattern:

- **Deception.** "If we say, 'We have no sin,' we are deceiving ourselves, and the truth is not in us" (v. 8). Failure to admit sin is a mistake of the highest order. Why would a person fail to recognize and confess sin? Many can't see their own sin because of self-righteousness and self-deception.



DIGGING DEEPER OUR ADVOCATE

An advocate is a person who speaks in favor of, argues a case for, and defends on behalf of someone else. In our day and time, there are child advocates whose primary role is to look after a child's best interests. Essentially, they make sure that the needs of a child are met. As children of the King, we also have an Advocate. Our Advocate is Jesus Christ (John 14:16-21). He serves many roles in this capacity. He's our High Priest, our lawyer, our comforter, and our friend to name a few. He walks with us, having paid a spiritual debt for our sins, lifting us up, pleading our cases before God. Every time our Savior advocates for us, we receive the same judgment: NOT GUILTY! He makes us righteous before the Father. There is no other One like our Advocate, Jesus Christ.

How does knowing that Christ is your Advocate impact your Christian walk?



- **Self-righteousness.** A self-righteous attitude says, “I’m not that bad; as a matter of fact, I’m pretty good compared to some people. Therefore, I have nothing to confess.” When sharing Christ with a young man, I asked him if he had ever sinned. He stated without hesitation, “No!” I asked him if he had ever lied, stolen, or lusted. His answer reflected the self-righteousness of our day. He said, “Of course I’ve done those things, but I thought you were talking about murder and adultery. You know, stuff like that.” Before our conversation was over, he saw how he had broken the entirety of the law of God; sadly however, his pride still would not allow him to confess to God.
- **Self-deception.** Air Florida Flight 90 crashed into the Potomac River on January 13, 1982, killing 78 people. Even though they knew better, the pilots convinced themselves that further de-icing of the plane was unnecessary. They were tragically wrong. People deceive themselves when they try to justify and make excuses for their sins. To deny one’s sin is to call God a liar.
- **Confession.** The opposite of deception is confession. “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins

and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (v. 9). We are forgiven when we look at our sin in light of Christ’s righteousness and willingly confess our sin for what it is: wickedness against God Himself.

IN WHAT WAYS DO WE SOMETIMES DECEIVE OURSELVES ABOUT OUR OWN SIN?

You have no reason to doubt forgiveness when you confess your sin and walk with Christ. The trustworthy character of God secures the promise of forgiveness. I’m sure you have heard it said that a promise is only as good as the person giving it. Consider then, who is making this promise? God is “faithful and righteous,” and His promises are true.

Depend on Our Advocate

// 1 John 2:1-2

John assured his readers, “If anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father—Jesus Christ the righteous one” (v. 1). The word for advocate literally means “one who is called to come alongside another.” It’s the counselor for one’s defense in a court of law, a person who intercedes for someone else. I can think of nothing more encouraging than to know Jesus is the One who stands up on our behalf. You have no doubt of forgiveness when Christ is your Advocate.

The foundation of Christ’s advocacy is the blood He shed for our atonement. The reason for atoning is to appease an offended party. Jesus, through His death on the cross, satisfied the righteous indignation of God. However, we are not to perceive God as some pagan deity who is reluctantly appeased because of blood being shed. On the contrary, God the Father provided the sacrifice Himself; thus, He satisfied His wrath by giving His only Son to die in our place. Furthermore, Christ willingly gave His life as our substitute.

THE POINT: WE ARE FORGIVEN WHEN WE CONFESS OUR SIN AND WALK WITH CHRIST.

Therefore, when we sin, Christ pleads our defense based on His finished work upon the cross, which the Father lovingly gave and received. This truth is truly good news! Christ died for the sins of the world. The extent of His atoning sacrifice is for everyone who believes—regardless of skin color, ethnicity, or economic status. He died so that people from every tongue, tribe, and nation could know Him and praise Him.

WHY IS IT SIGNIFICANT THAT JESUS IS OUR ADVOCATE AND AN ATONING SACRIFICE?

Patients often need blood transfusions after severe accidents or during surgery. Better than any artificial blood, the blood of Jesus saves everyone who receives it. Those who come to Christ face no compatibility issues, and they will find no scarcity of supply. When you find yourself in doubt, depend on Jesus as your Advocate and your atoning sacrifice, the One who shed His own blood for you.

Turning from darkness, confessing sin, and having Jesus as our Advocate and the One who shed His blood to atone for our sins leaves no room for doubt. Therefore, we can be certain

of forgiveness because we have confessed our sin, and we walk with Christ.

DID YOU KNOW?

Botham Jean was sitting in his home on September 6, 2019 when he was shot and killed by Amber Guyger. She mistakenly thought Botham's apartment was hers. A tragic accident took place and a 26-year old lost his life. He was known by others as a church going accountant. What made this case extraordinary was what took place at the sentencing hearing. Brandt Jean, Botham's younger brother, forgave the defendant. He boldly stated through tears, "I know if you go to God and ask Him, He will forgive you. I want the best for you because I know that's exactly what Botham would want for you. Give your life to Christ. I think giving your life to Christ is the best thing Botham would want for you."³ What a powerful example of forgiveness! Because of his forgiveness, he was awarded the 2019 Ethical Courage Award by the Institute of Law Enforcement Administration in Plano, Texas.

How can forgiveness give you peace?

LIVE IT

How can you better focus on forgiveness when you confess your sin and walk with Christ?

Just ask yourself this question, "When have you experienced a time when the promises of God were not true?" All of us should respond with a resounding, "Never." So we can also trust the promise of Christ's forgiveness when we confess our sins. We have God's assurance of eternal life even as we have the assurance of His forgiveness. Place your focus on these options this week.

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- **Focus on freedom.** Spend time in prayer, focusing on Christ and the freedom you have through Him.
- **Focus on confession.** Every time you recognize you've sinned, stop what you are doing, immediately confess it to God, and ask for His forgiveness. Reread 1 John 2:1-2.
- **Focus on forgiveness.** Ask the Lord to reveal to you any unforgiveness you've held in your heart against someone else. If appropriate, speak forgiveness to that individual and spend time in prayer.

DAILY READINGS

1. I AM FREE

// ISAIAH 55:6-7

“Your sentence has been pardoned.” These are words that many incarcerated individuals long to hear. Guilty or not guilty, many prisoners are provided a chance to plead their case to a governing board. This board consists of people that can grant the prisoner a parole and an opportunity to re-enter the general population. The prisoner will stand before the board talking about how he or she has been rehabilitated and can be a productive citizen. The outcome is based on the judgment of finite individuals. But praise the Lord! We serve an infinite God who hears our honest, heartfelt confession and grants us freedom from our sins.

All we have to do is turn to God, confess our sins, and He will freely pardon us.

2. A LESSON LEARNED

// PSALM 32:5

Toddlers will many times try to cover up their wrongdoing. For instance, they might sneak a cookie from the cookie jar. When asked, they will deny what they have done. But what they failed to realize is their little faces are covered with crumbs. As Christian parents, we will prompt our child to ask for forgiveness. This teaches them the correct response to sinful behavior—admit and confess. They will learn that the response to admitting and confessing will be forgiveness. Just as earthly parents forgive their children, so does our heavenly Father. All we need to do is admit and confess our sin to God. It's the same lesson we learned as children.

The bonus is we don't have to carry the burden of sin. We will be free to faithfully follow God.

3. ALL-FORGIVING GOD

// COLOSSIANS 1:13-14

Many of us have done some things of which we are utterly ashamed. We sometimes hold on to these past sins because it seems impossible in our human minds that the Almighty God could forgive some of what we have done. But thank God we have the

assurance of forgiveness found in this verse. We are forgiven of our sins through the blood of Jesus Christ. Yes, it is hard for people to forgive, but our God is an all-forgiving God who loves us.

Because He has forgiven us, we have been brought into His eternal kingdom.

4. THIS LITTLE LIGHT

// MATTHEW 5:14-16

Many of us learned the song, “This Little Light of Mine,” many years ago. This song basically states that no matter where we are, we should be a light. We are to let this world know we represent Jesus Christ. We hide our lights when we don't speak up because we are ashamed of Christ. We hide our lights when we do what a sinful crowd is doing. We hide our lights when we don't tell others about the Christ we serve. The song refrains; “all in our homes, all on our jobs, everywhere we go.” These phrases emphasize that even in the darkest places, people should see our light as we represent our Father. Our life just might influence someone else to want to know Christ.

Let your light shine so the rest of the world can see to whom you belong.

5. MADE FOR GOOD WORKS

// EPHESIANS 2:10

Although mostly a lost art, there are still cobblers in various parts of the world. Cobblers are shoemakers who understand the essential nature of shoes; they protect our feet. Therefore, quality is essential to cobblers, whether they are building custom-made shoes or repairing worn-out shoes. Just as cobblers craft quality shoes, we are crafted by God. Anything God crafts is a masterpiece. We are extraordinarily made by a skillful Father. He lovingly made us to do His will, which includes serving Christ and building up His church. We were not made for our own works, but for good works. This knowledge should motivate what we do for God.

When we have this view, it becomes easy to keep the focus on Christ and not on ourselves.



My Notes

Name

Email

Session Number

Answer 4 Questions

What did You learn?

What Is God saying to you?

What are you gonna do about it?

**Do you have any questions
about the reading?**



My Notes



A series of horizontal dotted lines spanning the width of the page, providing a guide for writing notes.



SURE OF A RELATIONSHIP

Leader pages on pp. 106-109

THE POINT:
MY RELATIONSHIP
WITH GOD IS
REFLECTED IN HOW I
LIVE.

1 JOHN 2:3-11,15-17

³ This is how we know that we know him: if we keep his commands. ⁴ The one who says, "I have come to know him," and yet doesn't keep his commands, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. ⁵ But whoever keeps his word, truly in him the love of God is made complete. This is how we know we are in him: ⁶ The one who says he remains in him should walk just as he walked.

.....
⁷ Dear friends, I am not writing you a new command but an old command that you have had from the beginning. The old command is the word you have heard. ⁸ Yet I am writing you a new command, which is true in him and in you, because the darkness is passing away and the true light is already shining. ⁹ The one who says he is in the light but hates his brother or sister is in the darkness until now. ¹⁰ The one who loves his brother or sister remains in the light, and there is no cause for stumbling in him. ¹¹ But the one who hates his brother or sister is in the darkness, walks in the darkness, and doesn't know where he's going, because the darkness has blinded his eyes.

.....
¹⁵ Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. ¹⁶ For everything in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride in one's possessions—is not from the Father, but is from the world. ¹⁷ **And the world with its lust is passing away, but the one who does the will of God remains forever.**

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MEMORY VERSE

KEYWORDS

His commands (v. 4) – These words mean the same thing as "his word" in verse 5 and Jesus's example in verse 6 ("just as he walked"). The true follower of Christ is a doer (Jas. 1:22).

Remains (v. 6) – This refers to remaining in God or Christ and reveals a permanent relationship.

We cannot claim to abide in Christ unless we live like Him.

Dear friends (v. 7) – Literally means "beloved." This was a favorite term of address for John (3:2,21; 4:1,7,11). It is a reminder that Christians are what they are—"beloved"—because God has loved them (4:10).

HOW CAN I REFLECT GOD IN THE WAY I LIVE?

Life has a way of surprising us and throwing us into a sea of unknowns. We saw this in early 2020 when a virus from the other side of the globe came crashing down on us.

- One day parents were dropping their kids off at school. The next day, the schools were closed indefinitely.
- One day people had steady, stable jobs. The next day, many businesses had to shut their doors indefinitely.
- One day people were free to move about, but suddenly they were cautioned to stay in for fear of catching or spreading the COVID-19 virus.

When life is full of unknowns, confidence and assurance can disappear. In their place come fear and doubt. We all need confidence and assurance, and when it comes to living the Christian life, confidence and assurance become critical. This session shows we should live in confident obedience to God when we give our hearts to Christ.

Do Not Be a Liar // 1 John 2:3-6

In short order in these passages, John used the word “know” four times. John wrote that Christians can know with certainty they are in a relationship with God. Assurance of salvation is based on the right conditions.

The right conditions for a Christian to have the assurance of his or her relationship with God result from walking in obedience to God's commands. We don't obey out of legalism, but out of gratitude for all God has given us, especially the gift of His Son.

Obedience happens as we keep His Word. This phrase stresses the importance of consistent, continual compliance with the Word of God. We still will falter on occasion, but all true Christians seek to live their lives in obedience to God's commands.

HOW DOES OBEDIENCE TO GOD REFLECT OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH CHRIST?



THE POINT: MY RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD IS REFLECTED IN HOW I LIVE.

Obedience is the natural outcome of the new birth. Jesus said, “If you love me, you will keep my commands” (John 14:15). We demonstrate our love for Jesus through our obedience. Therefore, if we lack assurance of salvation, all we need to do is to look at the pattern of obedience in our lives. Obedience to God’s commands doesn’t save us; we are saved by grace through our faith in Jesus, the One who kept the law perfectly. Now we obey because we have that relationship. Our obedience reflects our relationship with Christ.

However, for those who don’t obey, John had some harsh words: “The one who says, ‘I have come to know him,’ and yet doesn’t keep his commands, is a liar, and the truth is not in him” (v. 4). It’s like the guy who claims to be a football player but never shows up to practice or for the game. His claim is not backed up by reality. Unfortunately, this is the same for many so-called Christians today. They profess Christ without any life change whatsoever. Is this real Christianity? Absolutely not. No Christian obeys perfectly, but every genuine believer has a desire to obey God, and that desire is substantiated by practice. The proof of our love for God is our loyalty and obedience to Him.

True love for God is reflected through gracious obedience to His commands. Throughout John’s writing, he reminded us of the call to love others. (See John 13:34-35; 1 John 4:7-11). Let’s put this together. God loves us. We love Him in return (4:19) and we show that love by obeying His command to love one another. God’s love has worked on us and in us. In this way “the love of God is made complete,” (2:5) meaning it is maturing us and pointing to our conversion and transformation.

Do Not Be Blind // 1 John 2:7-11

In this passage John wrote of love as both an old and new command. Love is “an old command” in that it is mentioned in the Old Testament law (Lev. 19:17-18; Deut. 6:5). And we see the newness of this old command in how Christ perfectly obeyed and manifested it. He fully and perfectly demonstrated agape love, like no one else. He showed us what obedience to these commands looks like. Jesus told His disciples, “I give you a new command: Love one another. Just as I have loved you, you are also to love one another” (John 13:34-35).



DIGGING DEEPER DISCIPLESHIP

Discipleship should be a major component in the life of every believer. Jesus commands us in Matthew 28:19-20 to go, make disciples, and to teach them to obey His commandments. A disciple is a person that follows Christ. Just as we wouldn’t leave a newborn baby to fend for itself, we must not leave a new believer without guidance. We must show each one how to live godly through the practice of the spiritual disciplines, which include: reading the Word of God, studying and interpreting the Bible, praying daily, memorizing Scriptures, and fellowshiping with other fellow believers. Through this process, each will, in turn, learn to disciple someone else. This is discipleship at its best.

What opportunities do you have when it comes to discipling someone?

“Love” is a word that is overused. People often say they love hot dogs, hamburgers, baseball, and naps, and in so doing we can lose the deeper, greater sense of love. Love is the highest virtue a person can express toward another. It’s the attribute God revealed when He gave His Son to die on the cross.

When God’s children choose to love, they walk in the light, and the darkness flees. For this reason, John wrote, “Yet I am writing you a new command, which is true in him and in you, because the darkness is passing away and the true light is already shining. The one who says he is in the light but hates his brother or sister is in darkness until now” (vv. 8-9).

HOW WOULD YOU DESCRIBE SPIRITUAL BLINDNESS?

The “light” John referred to is God’s kingdom, which was inaugurated at Christ’s first coming: “the true light is already shining,” (v. 8) Jesus is “the light of the world” (John 8:12), and His kingdom is characterized by both light and love. Our love for God and for others is proof we are citizens of that heavenly kingdom.

The light of Christ is here, but the darkness is not fully eradicated—yet. Individual Christians are the ‘light of the world’ (Matt. 5:14). And as citizens of Christ’s kingdom of light, we push back the darkness when we walk in love. If we don’t walk in the light, we will be blinded by the darkness. “But the one who hates his brother or sister is in the darkness, walks in the darkness, and doesn’t know where he’s going because the darkness has blinded his eyes” (v. 10).

WHY DO SOME PEOPLE ALLOW THEMSELVES TO BE BLINDED BY HATRED?

Loving as Christ loves doesn’t come easily. Love can be costly. God’s love for us led Him to the costly sacrifice of His Son. When we love sacrificially, we are reflecting the love of

God, and we are reflecting a right relationship with Him.

Do Not Love the World

// 1 John 2:15-17

John taught us the critical importance of loving our brothers and sisters, but we are not to “love the world or the things in the world” (v. 15). When John used the word “world,” he was not referring to the people who inhabit this planet. That would be a glaring contradiction to what he wrote in his Gospel: “For God loved the world ...” (John 3:16). Nor was John’s use of world referring to creation. It would be a contradiction to love God if we hated what He created. Instead, John was talking about the organized, evil system of darkness that encompasses this world. This sin-filled, worldly mindset is manifested in those actions and attitudes that oppose God.

WHAT ARE SOME THINGS IN THE WORLD WE ARE TEMPTED TO LOVE?

The world’s temptations can be grouped into three categories:

- **The lust of the flesh.** This is the desire for selfish pleasure; the person who cares



THE POINT: MY RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD IS REFLECTED IN HOW I LIVE.

more about himself than others. Most of the time this particular temptation manifests itself in self-centeredness and narcissism.

- **The lust of the eyes.** This particular temptation usually reveals itself through coveting and feeding our physical desires. The person who gives into this sin is always wanting the upgrade: the newer car and the bigger house.
- **Pride in one's possessions.** This temptation refers to envy and the love of popularity, recognition, and applause. Folks caught in this sin love to brag. They are showoffs who like to put their possessions on display for others to see.

It is utter foolishness to fall in love with the things of the world, no matter how appealing they may appear. Why? Because “The world with its lust is passing away” (v. 17).

HOW CAN WE PROTECT OURSELVES FROM LOVING THE THINGS OF THIS WORLD?

The great news is that “the one who does the will of God remains forever” (v. 17). God

provides us so much more than what the world offers—and it lasts! The person who seeks the things of God rather than the things of the world is someone who is prepared for eternity—and you can be assured of that! Let your life reflect your relationship with God.

DID YOU KNOW?

“Would you say ‘stay’ when God said ‘go’
To that dark foreign land and
Spread the light? Would you say ‘no’
That bright their souls might stand?”

These are words from a poem written by Eliza Davis George when she felt a strong conviction to be a missionary in Liberia. She endured many hardships but eventually was able to go to school and receive her teaching certificate. While teaching at Central Texas College, she felt the overwhelming desire to go to Africa. Despite opposition; she persevered, and God used her. She established a school and in only two years over 1,000 people accepted Christ in nearby villages.⁴

In what ways did Eliza’ life reflect Christ?

LIVE IT

How should you live to show that your life is a reflection of your relationship with God?

Salvation comes through Jesus because of what He has done. He died in our place, and received the punishment that was due us because of His love for us. We should respond by graciously obeying the commands of God. The way we live after coming to Him in faith is a reflection of our true love for God and our relationship with Him. Let your life reflect Christ by doing the following:

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- **Practice obedience.** Ask God to show you one area of your life where you can become more obedient to His commandments. Then seek to change.
- **Discipline yourself.** Consider picking up a spiritual discipline you don’t already practice regularly—prayer, Bible reading, fasting, service, worship, etc. Put it into practice every day this week.
- **Live in the light.** Spend some of the time you might normally devote to media or social media to the Lord this week. How might devoting that time to God lead you to walk more fully in the light?

DAILY READINGS

1. THE EVIDENCE

// JOHN 14:15

In a criminal case, prosecuting attorneys accuse people who have committed crimes. In court, the attorneys must present evidence that confirms the guilt of the accused. Consider this: If being a Christian were a crime, in a court of law would you be found guilty of reflecting Christ in your life? What evidence would a prosecuting attorney have against you? Would the attorney accuse you of loving Christ and keeping His commandments? Would the judge find you to be guilty as charged? If we truly love Christ, people around us will know it by the way we live and the love we have for our Savior. They will see Christ reflected in us.

As Christians we are peculiar and must stand out as different from the world.

2. THE TRANSFORMED LIFE

// ROMANS 12:2

As Christians, we are called to be separate from people in the world. Our actions and talk should not be like those who don't have a relationship with Christ, because our standards are different. Also, our minds have been changed or transformed. Furthermore, we must continue to read the Bible so that our way of thinking continues to change. This is Christian growth. One of the goals of Christian growth is to increasingly have a mind that closely resembles the mind of Christ. This will prevent us from "straddling the fence" between righteousness and unrighteousness. Instead, we will be empowered to live a life pleasing to God. A life lived in this way can easily prove "what is the good, pleasing, and perfect will of God."

If we love God, we will earnestly seek to live an increasingly transformed life.

3. WITHOUT EXCUSE

// EPHESIANS 1:3

This verse is frequently quoted by my pastor. It is basically a "no excuse" proclamation. As Christians, God has granted us everything we need to live the

Christian life. We can't use the excuse, "I would do it, but ..." According to this verse, our Father has given us all we need spiritually to serve Him and live godly both now and in eternity. Just as a soldier must be equipped before going into battle, God has equipped us with power to live for Him and do His will while on earth.

Thank God for these blessings: forgiveness, spiritual gifts, spiritual power, and hope for eternity. We are without excuse.

4. LIFE-LONG LEARNERS

// 2 TIMOTHY 2:15

There is a deacon in our church that often says, "I didn't make it up; I looked it up." He says this to affirm that what he is saying can be found in Scripture. What he said wasn't anything made up by him. These words should be expressed by every Christian. This is called proof texting the Bible. We must stand on the truth and not make up things to fit our truth. To avoid this error, we must be life-long learners of the written Word of God. Consistency in Bible study will provide the confidence we need to truthfully represent God in this world. We will become unashamed dispensers of the truth.

Only truth matters in our Christian walk as ambassadors of God. Keep studying His Word.

5. THE RIGHT OPINION

// 2 TIMOTHY 4:3-4

Let's face it—no one wants to be told they are wrong. Correction is something that is not welcomed. Because many people want to be right, this has led to a sad state of affairs in our culture. Everyone has an opinion they think is right. However, there is no need to correct words from the Bible. It is the absolute authority on every issue. For example, arguments related to eternity can be settled quickly. According to the Bible, it is true that death and destruction lie ahead for those who do not follow Christ. (See 2 Thess. 1:8-9). As Christians, our opinions must be based on the Word of God.

There is truth and life in following God's Word.



My Notes

Name

Email

Session Number

Answer 4 Questions

What did You learn?

What Is God saying to you?

What are you gonna do about it?

**Do you have any questions
about the reading?**



My Notes



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SURE OF THE TRUTH

Leader pages on pp. 110-113

THE POINT:
TRUTH IS FOUND IN
JESUS ALONE.

1 JOHN 2:18-29

¹⁸ Children, it is the last hour. And as you have heard that antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have come. By this we know that it is the last hour. ¹⁹ They went out from us, but they did not belong to us; for if they had belonged to us, they would have remained with us. However, they went out so that it might be made clear that none of them belongs to us. ²⁰ But you have an anointing from the Holy One, and all of you know the truth. ²¹ I have not written to you because you don't know the truth, but because you do know it, and because no lie comes from the truth.

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+
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MEMORY VERSE

.....
²² Who is the liar, if not the one who denies that Jesus is the Christ? This one is the antichrist: the one who denies the Father and the Son. **No one who denies the Son has the Father; he who confesses the Son has the Father as well.** ²⁴ What you have heard from the beginning is to remain in you. If what you have heard from the beginning remains in you, then you will remain in the Son and in the Father. ²⁵ And this is the promise that he himself made to us: eternal life. ²⁶ I have written these things to you concerning those who are trying to deceive you.

.....
²⁷ As for you, the anointing you received from him remains in you, and you don't need anyone to teach you. Instead, his anointing teaches you about all things and is true and is not a lie; just as it has taught you, remain in him. ²⁸ So now, little children, remain in him so that when he appears we may have confidence and not be ashamed before him at his coming. ²⁹ If you know that he is righteous, you know this as well: Everyone who does what is right has been born of him.

KEYWORDS

The last hour (2:18) – Between Jesus' first and second comings, often considered a time of conflict between God and Satan.

Antichrist (2:18) – A title used in only four verses in the Bible (1 John 2:18,22; 4:3; 2 John 7) meaning persons who oppose Christ.

Anointing (2:20) – An action, process, or state of being of having the Holy Spirit live in a person and impacting his or her life.

Holy One (2:20) – A title referring to God as separate, distinct; this applies to all three Persons of the Trinity (Father, Son, and Spirit).



WHAT IS THE IMPORTANCE OF TRUTH IN OUR LIVES?

It seems our culture has become increasingly less adept at determining what is true and what is not. In a culture of 24-hour news feed and online opinions masquerading as fact, it should be no surprise that many Americans believe ideas that are nothing more than conspiracy theories. In fact, half of Americans believe at least one conspiracy theory. For example:

- 40 percent believe the FDA is withholding natural cures for cancer.
- 27 percent believe America is hiding aliens in Area 51.
- 23 percent believe 9/11 was an inside job.
- 19 percent believe the government is using chemicals to control the population.⁵

Typically, conspiracy theories start with some fringe group and then are picked up by some credible source. It's hard to know what to believe. The struggle for truth is real. However, there is good news! Absolute truth does exist, and it is found in Jesus Christ.

The Anchor that Keeps Us

// 1 John 2:18-21

Since the coming of Jesus, believers have known they were living in the “last days.” The expression “last hour” (v.18) is only found here in the New Testament and is synonymous with the idea of the last days. The phrase points to the imminent return of Christ and the final judgment. For believers, this is a day of joyful expectation. (See 2 Pet. 3:12-13). However, for the unbeliever, this will be a day of judgment and punishment. (See Rom. 2:5).

John highlighted the reality of the last hour. He said, the “antichrist is coming” (v. 18). In the future, this man will set himself up to oppose God. In the meantime, “many antichrists have come” (v. 18). While the last days will involve someone who will oppose Christ, multiple antichrists also exist, who even now are working in opposition to the kingdom of God.

False teaching is prevalent in our contemporary culture. For example, one highly popular pop

THE POINT: TRUTH IS FOUND IN JESUS ALONE.

artist is quoted as saying, “What I’ve discovered is that in art, as in music, there’s a lot of truth—and then there’s a lie. The artist is essentially creating his work to make this lie a truth, but he slides it in amongst all the others. The tiny little lie is the moment I live for, my moment.”⁶ Here’s a hugely popular singer whose goal is to convince her listeners to accept a lie! In the same manner, this is the moment all false teachers live for: a deception that mixes a lie with the truth.

How are we to identify these false teachers? We know them by their unwavering commitment to falsehood and their departure from the church. In John’s day, these peddlers of deception gave evidence of their real character by leaving the church. “They went out from us, but they did not belong to us; for if they had belonged to us, they would have remained with us” (v. 19). These false teachers were nothing more than wolves in sheep’s clothing.

HOW DOES KNOWING THE TRUTH CHANGE OUR PERSPECTIVE ABOUT LIFE?

Thankfully, true believers “have an anointing from the Holy One, and ... know the truth” (v. 20). This anointing is the Holy Spirit’s presence and indwelling, which all believers receive at the moment of their conversion. “You, however, are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God lives in you. If anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to him” (Rom. 8:9). The Holy Spirit is the ultimate teacher, guiding us into all the truth (see John 16:13); therefore, He teaches and leads us as we study the Bible. As we rely on the Spirit of God, we are protected against error.

The Antidote to Anti-Christ

// 1 John 2:22-26

John also declared that every antichrist is a “liar.” The fact that they are anti—opposed to Christ—means they deny the reality of who Jesus is. The antichrist lies because he denies that Jesus is the Christ. And whoever denies the divinity of Jesus—that He is the Christ, the anointed One from God—ultimately denies the Father as well. A person cannot believe whatever he or she wants about God’s Son and have a relationship with the Father.



DIGGING DEEPER COUNTERFEIT CHRISTIANITY

Most Christian colleges offer classes that equip believers in knowing what they believe and why they believe. They teach Christians in the truths of Scripture by equipping them with thoughtful and practical responses for whenever the core issues of their faith and life are challenged. The name of this study is Apologetics. Apologetics comes from the Greek word *apologia* from 1 Peter 3:15, which states we should always be prepared to give a reason for our belief. Christian apologetics, therefore, involves making a case (or defense) for the truth of the Christian faith. This isn’t just the job of philosophers, pastors, and speakers though. As Christians, we are all called to defend our faith. We need to be so familiar with the Bible that we can spot false doctrine and teachers.

How are you equipping yourself to define the gospel?

WHAT ARE SOME TRUTHS ABOUT JESUS THAT ARE DIFFICULT FOR MANY NON-CHRISTIANS TO BELIEVE?

The false teachers of John's day blatantly denied the truth of who Christ is. The particular falsehood that was being taught was called Gnosticism. Gnosticism had two primary doctrinal errors.

- **Docetism.** Docetic is from the Greek word *dokeo*, which means "seems" or "appears." The Gnostics believed the body is evil. Therefore, God, who is Spirit, could not take on flesh. Thus, according to them, Jesus did not come in the flesh, it only appeared that He did. This is a blatant denial of the incarnation.
- **Cerinthianism.** Cerinthus was a contemporary of John. He taught that Jesus had a real human body, but that He was not the Christ until the Spirit came upon Him at His baptism. However, the Spirit left Jesus before the crucifixion, since the Spirit could not be associated with suffering.

About twenty years after John wrote this epistle, Polycarp (a disciple of John) sent a letter to the Christians in Philippi. He wrote:

"For everyone who does not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is an 'anti-Christ'; and whosoever does not confess the testimony of the Cross is of the devil: and whosoever perverts the oracles of the Lord for his own lusts, and says that there is neither resurrection, nor judgment,—this man is the first-born of Satan."⁷

For believers, though, John offered encouragement. "What you have heard from the beginning is to remain in you. If what you have heard from the beginning remains in you then you will remain in the Son and in the Father" (v. 24).

What they had heard from the beginning was the preaching of the gospel.

The heart of the gospel message is that all who know the Father through the saving work of Christ His Son have the promise of eternal life. Eternal life is a gift from God to every person who believes and trusts in Christ.

The Anointing in Us // 1 John 2:27-29

The proof of true salvation is not just believing the right thing. Conforming to the doctrine is not enough. Our belief should translate into right living. We are to pursue righteousness in light of the return of Christ. John mentioned the return of Christ to motivate his readers to righteous living. Our attitude toward Christ's second coming says a lot about our spiritual state.

HOW DOES THE HOLY SPIRIT HELP US DISCERN TRUTH?

John urged his readers to "remain in Him" (v. 27). We are to hold to the Christ of Scripture, while living for the glory of God "so that when Jesus appears, we may have confidence and not be ashamed before him at his coming" (v. 28). John mentioned two of the benefits of remaining in Christ:



THE POINT: TRUTH IS FOUND IN JESUS ALONE.

- **Confident.** This could also be translated boldness. God desires that all will be prepared to meet Him and will have solid confidence in His return.
- **Unashamed.** Sadly, many people do not have confidence; instead they carry the weight of guilt and shame. However, God desires that His people would remain in Him and thus have no reason to be ashamed when Jesus returns.

Because many people—including Christians—don't see the return of Christ on the horizon, they may not see a need to change their routines or live with His return in mind. For the Christian, however, the right belief—including the belief that Christ is returning—must be consistently supported by the right ethic.

We look to Christ—the Righteous One—and in response to the new birth He offers, we seek to live right in His power. “If you know that he is righteous, you know this as well: Everyone who does what is right has been born of him” (v. 29). That practical righteousness is proof of genuine salvation. We can be sure of our salvation, and we can be sure of the truth—the truth that

is found through a personal relationship with Jesus. A personal relationship with Christ ensures a life of joy, hope, and purpose beyond anything a mere religion can bring.

DID YOU KNOW?

“The Great Debaters” was a movie based on Wiley College’s Debate Team. Wiley was a small liberal arts college in Marshall, Texas. Melvin B. Tolson started this team. Henrietta Bell Wells was the only woman on the team. She was a freshman at the time. Wiley began debating and defeating other black colleges, sometimes three times its size. In 1930 the team broke new ground and debated with an all-white school, the University of Michigan Law School. Wiley won. In 1935, Wiley became the national champion when they won against the University of Southern California. Debater James Farmer Jr. went on to found the Congress of Racial Equality and become a leader in the Civil Rights Movement.

Which is the most difficult to debate, the truth or a lie? Explain your answer.

LIVE IT

How can we live according to God’s unchanging truths?

It goes without saying that the struggle for truth is real. The news is flooded with conspiracy theories; some of these theories have cost lives. Remember the January 6 capitol riots which were born out of various beliefs about the November 2020 election. Many people didn't know what the truth was then and still don't know now. However, there is good news! Absolute truth does exist, and it's found in Jesus Christ.

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- **Seek the truth.** Is there an area of your life where you tend to bend the truth a bit or allow the world to inform you? Ask God to search your heart and show you these areas.
- **Dive deeper into truth.** If there's a specific biblical truth causing you confusion in your walk with the Lord, spend time researching that specific topic. Also, ask the Lord to reveal His truth to you.
- **Speak the truth.** It's likely you'll enter into a conversation, even with believers, where biblical truths are challenged by the world's standards. Ask God to help you speak firmly, yet gently, in truth.

DAILY READINGS

1. YES PEOPLE // MATTHEW 24:24

It is sometimes easy and very comfortable to be around people who will not tell us the truth. We call them “yes people.” They easily accept and spread “urban legend,” which is simply information that is not true. Instead of telling the truth, these people tell us words we want to hear. This can be very dangerous. The power of these deceptions is real and can cause us to stumble. Therefore, we must refuse to listen and not have ears itching to hear falsehoods. Today’s verse states there will arise false teachers, and they will tell us what we want to hear. Let this one important thing be your guide: what they have to say will not be based on Scripture.

We must be very discerning and make sure what is said is based on words from the Bible.

2. REAL OR FAKE? // ACTS 20:28-30

Students have a popular saying today. They use the word “fake” for anyone pretending to be someone they are not. They believe some people present themselves in a false light, just like the people in these verses. Paul warned the leaders of the church about false people who worshiped within their midst but had bad intentions. These people will distort the truth and attempt to draw believers away from it. Paul admonished them to stand on the Word.

This is true for us today. We must be people of the Book who know It, and who live and stand by It.

3. THE COUNTERFEIT // I KINGS 18:21

To work in the Treasury Department of the United States workers must undergo much training. One of their many functions is to protect the integrity of the financial system our country. Investigating counterfeit money is one of those duties. They are trained to know all of the intricate details about all monies. They become so familiar with the real thing that it’s easy for them to spot a fake. This is a good

description for the insight of the prophet Elijah as he dealt with false prophets on Mt. Carmel. He exposed them as worshipers of Baal.

In the same way, we must know the Word, so we can identify false doctrine.

4. NOT MY WILL, YOUR WILL // I JOHN 5:14

It was so rewarding when my siblings and I were teenagers. We were able to freely ask our parents for certain things and we knew we would receive what we asked for. We had confidence in their answer because what we asked for was based on our parents’ values and their expectations. When kids are doing their chores, maintaining good grades, and being respectful, they are living out their parents’ values. We were those kinds of kids, so our parents wanted to reward us. How great to know that our heavenly Father is the same. When we’re in the will of God, our wants are His wants. That makes it easy to ask when we are praying according to the will and the Word of God.

Our Father wants to reward us when we are obedient to His Word.

5. MORE THAN CONQUERORS // ROMANS 8:37

Confidence makes us feel great. There’s nothing like being filled with assurance. For example, when we were students, nothing compared to the way we felt when we diligently studied. With confidence, we passed our exams. But the opposite also rang true. If we were not studious, more than likely we did not do well on the exam. We felt dread rather than confidence. As Christians, the Bible gives us the assurance that we are “more than conquerors.” And just like a student who diligently studies, we exude confidence knowing we are not only conquerors through Christ, but we are “more” than conquerors. That means no matter what we go through, we will be victorious. With this assurance, we should have a great feeling of confidence.

No matter what, we win with Christ.



My Notes

Name

Email

Session Number

Answer 4 Questions

What did You learn?

What Is God saying to you?

What are you gonna do about it?

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My Notes



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SESSION 4

SURE OF VICTORY

Leader pages on pp. 116-119

THE POINT:
BECAUSE JESUS HAS WON THE VICTORY, HIS PEOPLE ARE VICTORIOUS.

1 JOHN 3:19-4:4

¹⁹ This is how we will know that we belong to the truth and will reassure our hearts before him ²⁰ whenever our hearts condemn us; for God is greater than our hearts, and he knows all things. ²¹ Dear friends, if our hearts don't condemn us, we have confidence before God ²² and receive whatever we ask from him because we keep his commands and do what is pleasing in his sight.

.....
²³ Now this is his command: that we believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, and love one another as he commanded us.

²⁴ The one who keeps his commands remains in him, and he in him. And the way we know that he remains in us is from the Spirit he has given us.

.....
^{4:1} Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see if they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world. ² **This is how you know the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, ³ but every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God.** This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you have heard is coming; even now it is already in the world. ⁴ You are from God, little children, and you have conquered them, because the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world.

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MEMORY VERSE

KEYWORDS

Before him (v. 9) – This phrase refers to God's observation of our lives.

His command and believe in ... Jesus Christ (v. 23) – These are not different things, but two aspects of a single, undivided love of God.

Spirit that does not confess Jesus (4:3) – These words show that John was aware of people speaking by the power of spirits other than the Holy Spirit.

HOW ARE WE VICTORIOUS BECAUSE OF CHRIST?

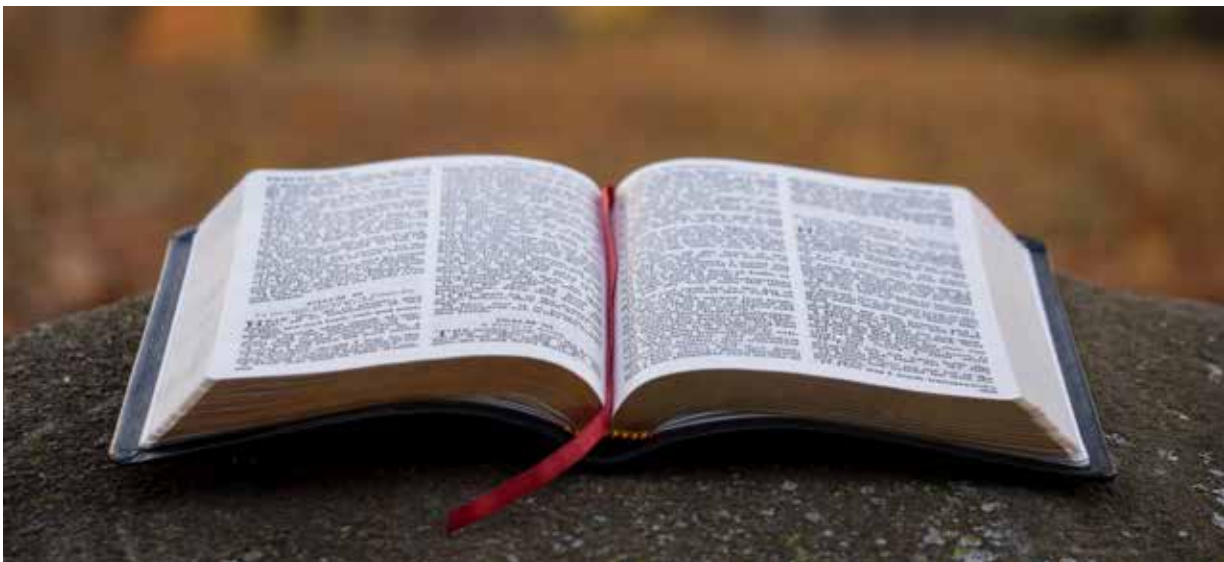
When I was a little boy, my uncles raised cattle. I can remember sitting on the tailgate of the old farm truck watching two of their bulls fighting. They seemed mismatched since one was a young bull and the other was old. The younger bull may have been quicker, but the older bull was bigger. After pawing the ground and throwing dirt in the air, the two bulls put their heads together and began to shove. Most of the time, the older bull won, but the younger bull would get the best of him on a few occasions.

When I look at the current condition of our world, I see a similar picture of righteousness fighting against wickedness. There is a constant shoving match between the two. If you draw your information solely from the news media, then darkness seems to be winning. But when you read the Bible, you discover the opposite is true. Darkness may seem to be winning, but it has already been defeated. Jesus has won the victory, and His followers are on the winning side. We have the ultimate “comeback story” because of Jesus!

Victory over Doubt // 1 John 3:19-22

In the previous verses, John has been teaching on our responsibility to love one another. Love is proof of genuine salvation (see 1 John 3:14), which in turn assures our hearts before God. Sadly, we have times in our lives when we don't love as we should. When this happens, a sense of failure can set into our minds causing us to feel condemned before God, which in turn can fill us with doubt. Such doubt can be debilitating at times and render us unable to move forward.

Apparently, John's readers were struggling with doubt. For this reason, John wrote to reassure their hearts: “before him whenever our hearts condemn us; for God is greater than our hearts, and he knows all things” (vv. 19-20). Praise be unto God! He looks beyond our failures to the true intent of the heart. We can wrongly see ourselves through the lens of self-condemnation, but God sees us through Christ's righteousness. (See 2 Cor. 5:21). It is good to know that when we trust the finished



THE POINT: BECAUSE JESUS HAS WON THE VICTORY, HIS PEOPLE ARE VICTORIOUS.

work of Christ, “there is now no condemnation for those in Christ Jesus” (Rom. 8:1).

Because of Christ, we can walk in victory over doubt. This confidence allows us to pray with boldness in accordance with God’s will. (See 1 John 5:14). Think about it this way: When we abide faithfully in Christ, assurance blooms within us, which allows us to pray in faith according to God’s will. Prayer, in this way, carries a promise: “Dear friends, if our hearts don’t condemn us, we have confidence before God and receive whatever we ask from him because we keep his commands and do what is pleasing in his sight” (vv. 21-22).

Of course, the promise is conditional: “We keep his commands.” God takes great pleasure in answering prayers that are offered from an obedient heart. This “is pleasing in his sight.”

WHY IS IT IMPORTANT TO REMEMBER THE TRUTHS IN THESE VERSES WHEN WE DOUBT?

Recently, one of my sons worked hard to raise money to purchase a used car. I was proud of him, so when he asked if I would pay the remaining amount for the car’s purchase, I was glad to do so. Why? Because he had been diligent, worked hard, and done so well. He had respected my wishes and had done what I asked of him. Therefore, it pleased me to help him. He was not trying to perform for me; he simply wanted to please me. In the same way, God does not want us to perform for Him; He wants us to please Him. He wants our obedience to arise out of love for Him, not merely out of obligation.

Victory through Consistency // 1 John 3:23-24

At first glance, the two actions we are called to do sound like two commands from Christ: “believe” and “love.” However, John referred to these as “his command” (singular). These two commands function together as one test for true Christianity. If we truly believe the right doctrine, then we will manifest the right ethic. We confirm the authenticity of our faith by obeying the command to believe Christ and love others, which in turn produces assurance of salvation and confidence in prayer.

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO REMAIN IN JESUS?



DIGGING DEEPER DAVID’S VICTORIES

Although pursued by King Saul, the Books of 1 and 2 Samuel reveal God had His hand on David. After the death of King Saul and his son, Jonathan, David became king of Israel. He had one of the most successful military campaigns that Israel had ever experienced. During his reign, he extended the boundaries of Israel. He captured Jerusalem from the Jebusites and established a new capital. With God on his side, David was able to win many battles against neighboring countries. In only a few years, he defeated the Philistines, Edomites, Moabites, and the Ammonites. In the beginning, David was an unlikely king; but God took a shepherd boy and made him one of the most famous kings in Israel. When you keep your hands in the hands of Almighty God, victory is the outcome.

How can the story of King David’s victories inspire your walk with God?

John drew from Jesus' allegory of the vine and branches (see John 15:1-8) when he wrote, "The one who keeps his commands remains in him, and he in him" (v. 24). The condition for this mutual indwelling is obedience. Obedience in faith and practice is what it means to "remain." Remain indicates a close, personal relationship with Christ—a desire to please Christ no matter the cost.

The mutual fellowship between the believer and Christ is the highlight of the Christian's earthly experience. It is only through abiding in Him that we bear fruit—the fruit of love and obedience. (see John 15:1-8). Consider the reciprocal effect. The more we believe, love, and obey, the more faith, love, and obedience we produce. As we remain in Christ and produce more fruit from our faith, love, and obedience, our assurance will continue to grow. John wasn't talking about actions we do to earn salvation, but rather, actions that cultivate and deepen our relationship with Christ. This is the essence of remaining in Christ.

When we come to Christ in faith, He comes to dwell in our hearts through His Holy Spirit. (See Rom. 8:9-10). Even as Christ dwells and remains in our lives through His Holy Spirit, the same Spirit draws us, in turn, to remain in Him and obey Him. As Paul wrote: "work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. For it is God who is working in you both to will and to work according to his good purpose" (Phil. 2:12-13).

HOW DO THESE VERSES GIVE US CONFIDENCE IN OUR STANDING WITH GOD?

The "working out" of our salvation and our "remaining in Christ" is the result of the Spirit of God first working in us. (See 1 John 3:24). The proof of the Spirit's presence breeds security in the heart of the believer, and that security breeds fruitfulness and productivity.

I often visit with doubting Christians. One young lady in particular struggles with the reality of her eternal security. She has become so frozen in fear that her spiritual productivity is minimal. Don't base your security on how you feel, but on what you know. We have victory because we remain in Jesus and He remains in us.



Victory over False Prophets

// 1 John 4:1-4

Our relationship with Christ is the source of our victory over the world. Christ overcame the world through His death, burial, and resurrection. (See John 16:33; Rev. 1:18). Since the Spirit of Christ resides in every believer, every Christian has likewise been given the power to overcome the world. Because He is victorious, we are victorious!

We still must be on our guard against these false teachers and false teaching. John admonished his readers, "do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see if they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world" (v. 1). False prophets are masters of confusion, but the apostle Paul assured us that God is not the author of confusion. (see 1 Cor. 14:33). Instead, God

THE POINT: BECAUSE JESUS HAS WON THE VICTORY, HIS PEOPLE ARE VICTORIOUS.

desires for peace to reign in the hearts of His beloved saints.

Christ is guaranteed, and we can cheer for Christ's victory even now!

HOW DOES THE HOLY SPIRIT ALLOW US TO FACE EACH DAY VICTORIOUSLY?

The responsibility falls on God's people to learn to discern truth from error. We are to "test the spirits" (v. 1). The ultimate test is this: what does a teaching or a sermon say about Jesus Christ? The core doctrine to begin with is where they stand on the truth that "Jesus Christ has come in the flesh" (v. 2).

John lovingly reminded his readers that, while these false teachers were not from God, they were! "You are from God, little children" (v. 4). We do not stand victorious over them because of any skill or mastery within ourselves. No, we conquer because "the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world" (v. 4). The Holy Spirit's illumination is far greater than any false teacher's deception. The Spirit gives the true testimony of Christ's identity and enables Christians to persevere in that truth.

At times, it may seem that the world is winning. We can rest assured, though, that victory in

DID YOU KNOW?

Although considered a tourist spot, Jamaica became an unlikely location for a bobsled team. In 1987, two American businessmen were inspired by a local pushcart derby to form the country's first bobsled team. The team trained for three hours a day next to a soccer field in the army barracks using a makeshift sled. This was grueling since they didn't have snow. In February 1988, they were welcomed warmly by their fellow Olympian peers. The team competed. They were the picture of endurance as disaster struck in the third heat. The driver lost control and the sled crashed. But it's what happened afterwards that showed perseverance; the team pushed the sled over the finish line as people waved and cheered.

What role does perseverance play in the victorious ending of our Christian journey?

LIVE IT

In what ways can you align yourself with Christ to be victorious everyday?

Jesus won the victory over sin through His life, death, and resurrection. When we receive Him into our hearts and lives that victory becomes ours. But we struggle to live out that victory in our day-to-day lives because we don't remain connected to the Source of our victory. Jesus said in John 15:5, "You can do nothing without me." Take a step toward connecting with Christ by doing the following:

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- **Remember victory.** Spend some time looking back at when Christ clearly gained victory over your life, whether that be freedom from doubt or when you came to Christ. Praise Him for those victories.
- **Pray in victory.** Spend time staying connected to Christ through prayer. Pray for God to overcome the darkness of this world and in your life. Have faith that He will do what He says He will do.
- **Step out in victory.** How might the assurance of Christ's victory give you the courage to move forward in what He has asked you to do? Take a step forward this week, in confidence.

DAILY READINGS

1. AND THE WINNER IS ... // 1 JOHN 5:4

America is built in part on sports. In this country, it is actually a billion dollar industry because many people are big fans who purchase tickets to attend games. Every player on the sports teams wants to be on a winning team. However, the sad reality is that not every team can be a winning team. Every team can't win a championship. There is only one team that will win the Super Bowl, the Stanley Cup, the NBA finals, or other sports championships. What an honor for the players who are on the winning team. To have Christ is to have the honor of being on the winning team. But there is a difference: a sports team may win one championship but won't always win again. On the team of Christ, we always win.

No matter what comes our way, we have victory in Jesus Christ.

2. GAME OVER // JOSHUA 10:8

When the Canaanite kings heard about the victories of Israel over Jericho and Ai, they began to develop a strategy. Then they gathered to fight the Israelites on a united front. But even the best strategy is no match for the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords. God reassured Joshua that he didn't have to fear. Therefore, Joshua confidently fought against his enemy and defeated them. Although Joshua faced strong opponents, he trusted God to give him the victory. With God on our side, we will be victorious too. The battle is not ours, but the Lord's.

When facing a battle just put your hand in the Master's hand. He will see you through.

3. OUR INHERITANCE // 1 CORINTHIANS 15:55

We hear many stories about inheritances when a loved one dies. We hear of family members who are distraught and at odds with one another over what they receive. Relationships are often broken and the memory of the loved one is smeared. Indeed earthly inheritances can be messy. But by God's grace, the

inheritance that awaits us in heaven is not. Our God will receive the glory, because we will be victorious over death itself. This is one of God's heart-felt promises. If we trust in Him as our Lord and Savior we have the assurance of victory over death.

Because of the resurrection of Christ, we can rest assured that our inheritance is intact.

4. THIS I KNOW // JOHN 3:16

We learned many songs while growing up in church. One of those songs was, "Jesus Loves Me." How do we know about this love? Well, the lyrics to the song answer that question: "for the Bible tells me so." There is no doubt about this. Just read John 3:16. This verse lets us know about the love of God. He loved us so much that He gave His one and only Son to die for us. Through this act, God set the pattern for love. Real love is sacrificial and should be the basis for our relationship to Him and to one another. That's the way we are loved by the Father and His Son.

No matter our background, economic status, college education or nationality, we can sing loudly because it's true, "Yes, Jesus loves me."

5. A TRUE FRIEND // JOHN 15:13

Before Christ was crucified, He spent time with His disciples. They were near and dear to His heart. Many, if not all of them had given up all they had to walk alongside Him. For three years they broke bread together, witnessed together, and fellowshiped with one another. They lived life together. Jesus taught them everything they knew about ministry and apostleship. In many cases, He gave them the power to do the impossible. It was a tight-knit bond they shared. But the irony of their relationship with Jesus was that those same friends would deny Him and even betray Him. Christ, however, remained their true friend. He willingly died for them and everyone else in the world. That's how much Christ loves us, and He wants us to love others as He loves us—sacrificially.

There is no love greater than that.



My Notes

Name

Email

Session Number

Answer 4 Questions

What did You learn?

What Is God saying to you?

What are you gonna do about it?

**Do you have any questions
about the reading?**



My Notes



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SURE OF GOD'S LOVE

Leader pages on pp. 120-123

THE POINT:
GOD'S LOVE IS SEEN
WHEN WE LOVE
OTHERS AS HE HAS
LOVED US.

1 JOHN 4:7-13, 19-21

MEMORY VERSE

⁷ Dear friends, let us love one another, because love is from God, and everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. ⁸ The one who does not love does not know God, because God is love. ⁹ God's love was revealed among us in this way: God sent his one and only Son into the world so that we might live through him. ¹⁰ Love consists in this: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins.

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¹¹ Dear friends, if God loved us in this way, we also must love one another. ¹² No one has ever seen God. If we love one another, God remains in us and his love is made complete in us. ¹³ This is how we know that we remain in him and he in us: He has given us of his Spirit.

.....
¹⁹ We love because he first loved us. ²⁰ If anyone says, "I love God," and yet hates his brother or sister, he is a liar. For the person who does not love his brother or sister whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen. ²¹ And we have this command from him: The one who loves God must also love his brother and sister.

KEYWORDS

God is love (v. 8)—This phrase does not mean that love is God. Love is an attribute of God, like righteousness and goodness.

Live through Him (v. 9)— This means not just biological existence, but the spiritual high road of eternal life.

Atoning sacrifice (v. 10)—Jesus satisfied God's demand for sin. The standard of love is not what humans feel but what God has revealed in Christ's life and death on the cross.

WHAT DO WE KNOW ABOUT GOD'S LOVE?

Last year America launched into a season of chaos in the streets. Peaceful protests for Black Lives Matter exploded into violent mobs. And this January as U.S. senators were in the process of affirming electoral votes from the 2020 presidential election, a riot broke out within the very walls of the nation's capital. This marked a dark day in U.S. history. People died in both of these chaotic events.

Some people may wonder where God is in all this. Others are tempted to question God's goodness. The presence of human hatred, however, in no way negates God's goodness and love. Hate will not last forever, but God's love is everlasting. Love can and will prevail over a world filled with so much hatred.

This love does not match the world's concept of love. God's love was on display when He gave His Son to die on the cross for the sins of the world. (See John 3:16). We don't deserve it, but He loves us anyway. God's love abides forever, and He wants us to be sure of His love for us.

We Know God Is Love

// 1 John 4:7-10

John had already spoken twice on the theme of love in this epistle (1 John 2:7-11; 3:11-18). Now he was dealing with the topic for the third time. When Scripture addresses a matter even once it is important, but when God inspires the biblical writers to address a topic repeatedly, we should really sit up and take notice!

HOW WOULD YOU DESCRIBE LOVE IN THESE VERSES?

Love is the very nature of God. The apostle John wrote, "Love is from God," (v. 7) and love comes from God "because God is love" (v. 8). Love is not just another attribute among many; rather, it is God's very nature from which all other attributes proceed. To this point, John Stott wrote, "It is true that the words 'God is love' mean not that loving is 'only one of God's many activities' but rather that 'all his activity is loving activity' and that, therefore, 'if He judges, He judges in love.'"⁸ This certainly does not



THE POINT: GOD'S LOVE IS SEEN WHEN WE LOVE OTHERS AS HE HAS LOVED US.

mean God condones sin, but in love, He has exposed it and sent His Son to die for sin's penalty.

Christians should know God loves them because "God sent his one and only Son into the world" to save them. We have already seen that the origin of love is God. Therefore, Christ is the manifestation of God's love. God manifested His love for us by sending His Son to pay our sin debt. The greatness of God's love is observed in the value of the gift: God gave "his one and only Son." The Greek word used here for only Son is *monogenes*, the same word used to describe Abraham's offering up his only son Isaac. (See Heb. 11:17).

God spared Abraham's son, but He did not spare His own Son on the cross. He "sent His Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins" (v. 10). The Father willingly gave His Son to die in our place, and Jesus willingly took the punishment for our sins upon Himself.

God's children have no reason to be uncertain regarding God's love for them, especially when that love was displayed so clearly on the cross. We can't receive salvation without putting our faith and trust in Christ; we cannot put our trust in Him without knowing what He did for us on the cross; and we can't appreciate what Christ did for us on the cross without also seeing God's sacrificial love for us. Since God loved us in this way, we know He withholds no good thing (see Psalm 84:11) from us as His adopted children. You can be sure of God's love!

WHAT DIFFERENCE DOES GOD'S LOVE MAKE IN YOUR LIFE COMPARED TO OTHER LOVES?

We Must Love One Another // 1 John 4:11-13

We have already seen in verse 7 the command to "love one another." John repeated it twice more in verses 11-12. With this call to love comes great responsibility. We are to love others as God has loved us. God has loved us with a changeless, self-sacrificing love. God still loves us in the same way today, and He seeks to display that love through us.

As we saw in verses 8-9, God revealed His love when His Son, Jesus, became the sacrifice for our sins. He took away our sin, but He didn't just take away the bad; He gave to us as



DIGGING DEEPER TYPES OF LOVE

The Bible speaks of different types of love. They are identified as *Eros*, *Storge*, *Philia*, and *Agape*. *Eros* is the Greek word for romantic love. This is love reserved for marriage. Paul stated in I Corinthians 7:8-9 that it is better to marry than to burn with desire. This love is ordained by God. *Storge* is a Greek word that describes family love. The love that Isaac had for his son Joseph is one example. *Philia* love is the type of love believers should have towards one another. Romans 12:10 tells believers to show brotherly affection to one another. *Agape* is the highest type of love which describes God's unconditional love for us. John 3:16 tells us that He loved us so much that He gave His only son so that we would have eternal life.

How can we overcome those things that prevent us from loving God and others as we should?

well: He gave us life, “that we might live through him” (v. 9). We are to live in Him and through Him, which means we are to allow others to see His love in and through us. To love with God's love gives evidence that we have a relationship with the One who displays His love through us. To state that negatively: the one who does not love does not know God.

WHY DOES GOD'S LOVE FOR US COMPEL US TO LOVE ONE ANOTHER?

The key to loving others is in loving God. The more we love God, the more of God's love will flow out of us toward others. Picture a garden hose attached to the outdoor faucet of a house. When the faucet is turned on, the water flows. The hose doesn't produce the water; it is only the conduit for the water to freely flow. In ourselves, we might find it difficult to love—especially to love unconditionally, as God loves—but when we are “attached” to Him (remaining in Christ) His love flows freely through us.

Although “no one has ever seen God,” (v. 12) believers reveal God through the way they love one another. The very fact that “we love one another” (v. 12) serves as evidence that “God remains in us” (v. 12). We see a perfection, a completion to love when this happens. We embrace God's love, He comes to live in us, and His love pours out of us as we love others. And the mutual love brothers and sisters in Christ display reveals God's love to the world. (See John 13:35). We point to Christ, and those around us also have the opportunity to embrace the love of Christ.

Our love for others is proof of God's love in us. Love is the fruit of His indwelling Spirit. God is perfect in His love; He lacks nothing. But God's “love is made complete” (v. 12) only when that love flows through us. He has chosen to use His people as channels of His love. We are to

present ourselves to Him daily as instruments of His self-sacrificing, continual love. Therefore, when we love others, we cooperate with God's redemptive plan for the world so that others can be sure of God's love for them.



We Must Not Hate // 1 John 4:19-21

John left no gray areas, nor did he sugar-coat his words! “If anyone says, ‘I love God’ and yet hates his brother or sister, he is a liar” (v. 20) A true Christian will not be filled with selfish hatred toward another brother or sister in Christ. A true Christian cannot hate another believer because God's Spirit abides in him. It is an utter impossibility. To claim faith in Christ while harboring hate is a complete insult to the character of God. God is love.

To further stress this truth, John said, “For the person who does not love his brother or sister whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen” (v. 20). John's statements strike to the core of the issue. Of course, some would say it's easier to love God because “he first loved us.” However, John argued just the opposite. Logically, it's easier to show love to people who are visibly present, rather than God, who is invisible (John 4:24). A failure to love

THE POINT: GOD'S LOVE IS SEEN WHEN WE LOVE OTHERS AS HE HAS LOVED US.

people whom we can see is a failure to love God whom we cannot see—and a failure to love is hate.

WHAT STEPS CAN WE TAKE TO OBEY THESE VERSES IN OUR EVERYDAY LIVES?

We are to walk in love. Our lives ought to be characterized by daily, tangible acts of kindness. To love someone is to seek after their highest good. Love overcomes hate. With so much hate in the world today, it is paramount that Christians love one another. But our love should not stop with other Christians. Love must go out into the world and seek to win the lost to Christ. Christ came in human flesh because He loved us (see John 3:16). He gave His life out of love for the lost, and we are to follow His example. We are to love the sinner. We are to love the broken. We are to love the needy. We are to love “the least of these” (Matt. 25:45).

Commit to love like Christ, who unselfishly gave His life for others. Strive to love like the four men who did whatever it took to get their paralyzed friend to Jesus (see Luke 5:17-26). Practice love like the Good Samaritan who willingly gave to

meet the needs of a stranger (see Luke 10:30-35). This kind of love changes the world. And let's help others be sure of God's love for them.

DID YOU KNOW?

Thomas Dorsey was the son of a Baptist preacher and his mother was an organist. After playing in secular venues and experiencing several breakdowns, he finally submitted to God and started composing gospel music. In 1932, his wife and son died during childbirth. It is during this time that he composed his most famous song, “Take My Hand, Precious Lord.” He went on to help found the National Convention of Gospel Choirs and Choruses in 1933. Dorsey, called the father of gospel music, wrote over 400 compositions. His songs have been recorded by Elvis Presley, Pat Boone, Aretha Franklin, Little Richard, and B.B. King, among many others. During the 1980s, he was honored so often with honorary doctorates that he came to be known as Dr. Thomas A. Dorsey.

What does the title “Take My Hand, Precious Lord” say about God's love?

LIVE IT

How will you love others?

God's love is powerful. According to Romans 8:38-39 there is nothing we can do to cause Him to stop loving us. Because of our salvation, God's love resides inside of us. But we should not keep it to ourselves. The reality of God's love is the way He transforms us to love others as He does. He loves us so much that He gave His Son to die on the cross for the sins of the world. Share God's love by doing the following:

+ + +

- **Pray in love.** Identify someone you know who is struggling right now. Spend time praying for that person this week.
- **Act in love.** Write someone a note; give of your time; drop off dinner; do something that says you care without actually using the words.
- **Reach out in love.** Share a meal with someone you don't know well who has a different background, culture, or belief system than you. Spend time getting to know him or her on a more significant level.

DAILY READINGS

1. I PROMISE // 2 CHRONICLES 6:14

We all have heard someone say the words, “I promise.” In essence, they are saying, “if you do this for me, then I promise I will do this for you.” As with many promises, sometimes they don’t come into fruition. Most people have every intent to keep their promises, but as life would have it, they break them. People fall short in this area. But it is comforting to know that God always keeps His promises. King Solomon understood God as a promise keeping God. He said God would keep His covenant of love with His people. The only prerequisite was that Israel would “continue wholeheartedly” in obedience to God. God’s Word still rings true for us.

He will shower us with His steadfast love if we will walk in obedience before Him.

2. MY PROTECTOR // PSALM 91

There are many ways a mother hen will cherish and protect her chicks. One way is to droop her wings so the chicks can creep under them. The hen protects her baby chicks this way. She just covers them with her wings. David understood the value of God’s love and protection. He wrote that God would cover you with “His wings.” David had many enemies and needed God’s care. He knew that God’s grace and mercy were precious, yet intimate attributes. Through God’s mercy, he could find rest and refuge. As our Protector, God will also carry us through all our fears in life. We only need to trust that He will see us through. Being under the shadow of His wings can bring comfort to each of us. God’s love means protection and rest.

It is good to know God is our refuge.

3. FAITHFUL LOVE // MICAH 7:18

The song titled, “Who Wouldn’t Serve a God Like This?” speaks of all the good things God can and has done for us. There is no one like Him. He is mighty and powerful, yet loving. Nothing can

compare to His faithful love. As sinners, we don’t deserve to be pardoned by Him. But God through His grace forgives our sins. He removes our sins as far as the east is from the west (Ps. 103:12). Our sin has been taken away and placed on Christ. No one can forgive like our Father in heaven. Why? Because He is a God of love.

“Who wouldn’t serve a God like this?”

4. OH, TO BE KEPT // 1 PETER 1:4-5

“Oh, to be kept by Jesus.” These are familiar lyrics to a popular Christian hymn with the same title. The song simply emphasizes we have security in Jesus. We are saved by His Holy keeping. Through Him we have an incorruptible inheritance that is reserved in heaven for us. But while we are on earth, we are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation. When we mess up, He remains faithful to us. Nothing can change our destination. He assures us in His Word that heaven is our real home. I don’t know of anyone that can make that guarantee.

This is a promise that can only be guaranteed by our Savior. Oh, to be kept by Jesus.

5. ARE YOU LISTENING? // JOHN 10:27-28

Sheep are interesting animals. They are meek, quiet, and gentle. But they are also mindless. Left to themselves, they will not and cannot last very long. They must have a shepherd to care for them. Sheep will listen for and obey their shepherd. People are like sheep. We too have the propensity to wander or stray. However, we have a Shepherd who is Christ to lead and guide us through this life. If we follow Him, we will not perish and no one can take us from our Shepherd—not even our enemy who is Satan. So rest assured, even though the earth is the devil’s domain, he cannot harm or take away our souls. Our Shepherd will protect and sustain us throughout eternity. We only need to remain close to Him and listen for and obey His voice.

We have an assurance in our salvation.

HOW ARE WE VICTORIOUS BECAUSE OF CHRIST?

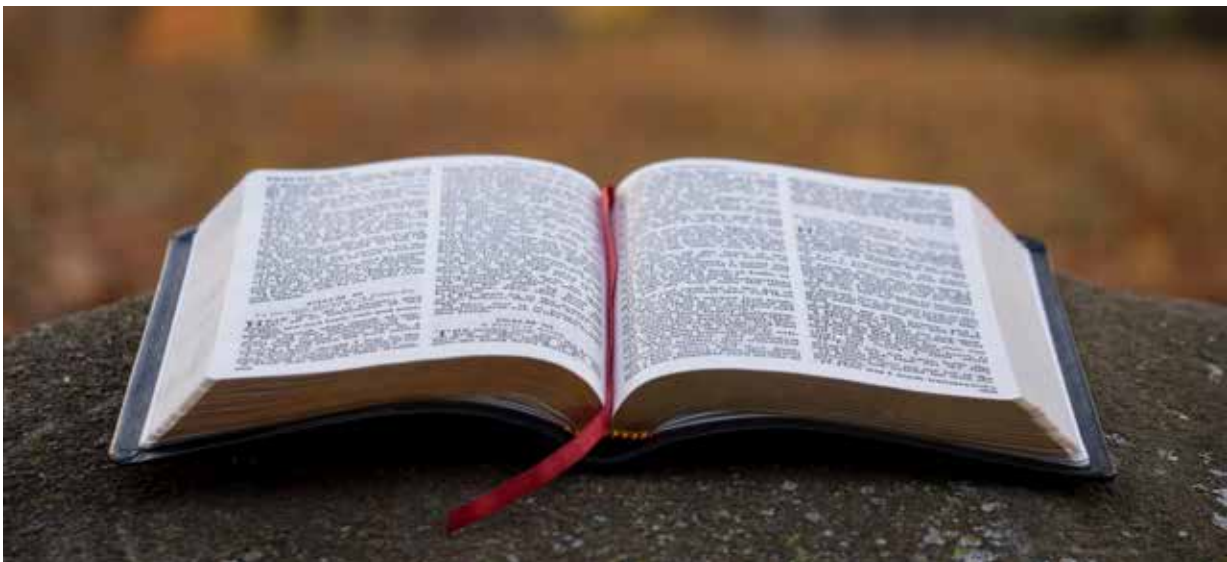
When I was a little boy, my uncles raised cattle. I can remember sitting on the tailgate of the old farm truck watching two of their bulls fighting. They seemed mismatched since one was a young bull and the other was old. The younger bull may have been quicker, but the older bull was bigger. After pawing the ground and throwing dirt in the air, the two bulls put their heads together and began to shove. Most of the time, the older bull won, but the younger bull would get the best of him on a few occasions.

When I look at the current condition of our world, I see a similar picture of righteousness fighting against wickedness. There is a constant shoving match between the two. If you draw your information solely from the news media, then darkness seems to be winning. But when you read the Bible, you discover the opposite is true. Darkness may seem to be winning, but it has already been defeated. Jesus has won the victory, and His followers are on the winning side. We have the ultimate “comeback story” because of Jesus!

Victory over Doubt // 1 John 3:19-22

In the previous verses, John has been teaching on our responsibility to love one another. Love is proof of genuine salvation (see 1 John 3:14), which in turn assures our hearts before God. Sadly, we have times in our lives when we don't love as we should. When this happens, a sense of failure can set into our minds causing us to feel condemned before God, which in turn can fill us with doubt. Such doubt can be debilitating at times and render us unable to move forward.

Apparently, John's readers were struggling with doubt. For this reason, John wrote to reassure their hearts: “before him whenever our hearts condemn us; for God is greater than our hearts, and he knows all things” (vv. 19-20). Praise be unto God! He looks beyond our failures to the true intent of the heart. We can wrongly see ourselves through the lens of self-condemnation, but God sees us through Christ's righteousness. (See 2 Cor. 5:21). It is good to know that when we trust the finished





My Notes

Name

Email

Session Number

Answer 4 Questions

What did You learn?

What Is God saying to you?

What are you gonna do about it?

**Do you have any questions
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My Notes



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SURE OF SALVATION

Leader pages on pp. 124-127

THE POINT:
WE CAN BE SURE GOD SAVES US WHEN WE TRUST IN CHRIST.

1 JOHN 5:1-5, 11-13, 18-21

¹ Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God, and everyone who loves the Father also loves the one born of him. ² This is how we know that we love God’s children: when we love God and obey his commands. ³ For this is what love for God is: to keep his commands. And his commands are not a burden, ⁴ because everyone who has been born of God conquers the world. This is the victory that has conquered the world: our faith. ⁵ Who is the one who conquers the world but the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?

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MEMORY VERSE

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¹¹ And this is the testimony: God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. ¹² **The one who has the Son has life. The one who does not have the Son of God does not have life.** ¹³ I have written these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life.

.....
¹⁸ We know that everyone who has been born of God does not sin, but the one who is born of God keeps him, and the evil one does not touch him. ¹⁹ We know that we are of God, and the whole world is under the sway of the evil one. ²⁰ And we know that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding so that we may know the true one. We are in the true one—that is, in his Son, Jesus Christ. He is the true God and eternal life.

²¹ Little children, guard yourselves from idols.

KEYWORDS

Love for God (v. 3)—This is not separate from keeping the commands of God. God’s commands teach His people how to do what God accepts as pleasing (Rom. 12:1-2).

Testimony (v. 11)—The word means “witness,” “evidence,” and “record.” This word translates the

Greek word from which we get our English word *martyr*. This testimony is in the believer. We have growing conviction of the gift of eternal life we have received.

True God (v. 20)—Here John is clearly affirming the full divinity of Christ.



WHAT PROOF DO WE HAVE THAT WE ARE SAVED?

Many religions claim to offer people a way to God and/or eternal life, but how do you know you will actually reach God or eternal life?

- Islam teaches that paradise awaits those who are obedient to the practices of Islam, but it offers no guarantee that a Muslim has obeyed enough to “make it.”
- Hinduism says reincarnation might eventually get you to enlightenment. However, how can one possibly know he or she has ever reached enlightenment?
- Even cults that include a belief in Jesus add an element of works to what is required to go to heaven. What they cannot offer is any assurance that you’ve done enough to reach heaven.

The Christian life—grounded solely in the Word of God—points us to the death and resurrection of Christ as the only path to salvation and a relationship with God. We can add nothing to it! When we simply trust what Christ has done, we can be assured of a relationship with God.

I Believe Jesus Is the Christ

// 1 John 5:1-5

It is impossible to be filled with the Spirit of God and His love if the object of our faith is an erroneous view of Christ. Everything rises or falls on our view of Christ.

On the other hand, if we believe correctly about Jesus Christ, trusting in Him as Lord and Savior, then we can be assured of the new birth. Our faith—our trust in Christ—is evidence of the new birth. And tied to our faith is our love and obedience. What we believe determines how we live.

Through the new birth, the curse of the old life is broken. John wrote, “Everyone who has been born of God conquers the world. This is the victory that has conquered the world: our faith” (v. 4). Christ is the sovereign Lord, victorious over the world (Satan’s realm), and believers also are victorious through their faith in Jesus Christ.

THE POINT: WE CAN BE SURE GOD SAVES US WHEN WE TRUST IN CHRIST.

The evidence that Jesus is the Christ is overwhelming. For example:

- Jesus pointed to Himself as God in human flesh. (See John 8:58; 10:30).
- Jesus was explicitly identified as God by the apostles John and Paul, two men who encountered Jesus. (See John 1:1; Rom. 9:5; Phil. 2:5-6; Col. 1:15; Titus 2:13).
- Jesus was described as having divine attributes: omnipresent (see Matt. 28:19-20), eternal (see John 1:1-2), omnipotent (see John 5:19), omniscient (see John 16:30), and unchanging (see Heb. 1:12).
- Jesus manifested divine prerogatives: He forgave sins (see Matt. 9:2) and raised the dead (see John 11:38-44).
- Jesus accepted divine worship and honor. (See Matt. 14:33, 28:9).

All these truths (and many more) point to Jesus as the Christ. Consequently, those who trust in Him are born of God.

WHAT EVIDENCE DO WE SEE IN PEOPLE'S LIVES WHEN THEY ACCEPT JESUS' GIFT OF SALVATION?

Steve McQueen was one man who found that to be true. In the 1960s, he was one of the biggest stars, earning the nickname the "King of Cool." He had a painful childhood, and when he became a successful actor, he used alcohol and a string of relationships to fill the dark void that his childhood had left. In his later years, he became intrigued by the man teaching him to fly. McQueen knew something was different about him, and the instructor explained that he was a follower of Jesus. McQueen and his wife started attending a local church, and eventually he became a Christian.

A short time later, McQueen was diagnosed with cancer. Just four days before his death, Billy Graham came to visit him, fulfilling one of McQueen's wishes. They talked and prayed, and Dr. Graham left his personal Bible with him. "Before his death, McQueen said he wanted to tell more people about God. While he grew weaker physically, he grew stronger spiritually, and wanted others to know where that strength came from."⁹, McQueen was found clutching the Bible Dr.



DIGGING DEEPER PHASES OF SALVATION

According to Ephesians 2:8-9 we are saved through faith. It is not because of anything we have done. The word *salvation* means to be rescued or delivered from danger. The salvation we receive because of Christ is identified in three tenses. First, we have been saved (past tense). At the point of salvation our sins are forgiven entirely. We no longer have to pay the penalty of sin. We have been justified. (See 2 Cor. 5:21). Secondly, we are being saved (present tense). This phase is the process in which we are being continually delivered from sin's power. We are being sanctified. (See 2 Pet. 3:18). This is the ongoing work of the Holy Spirit. Thirdly, we shall be saved (future tense). This means that once we are in heaven we will be delivered from the presence of sin entirely. We will be glorified. (See Phil. 3:20-21).

How can knowing the tenses of salvation help you daily?



Graham had given him. Salvation came to a man who embraced the truth that Jesus is the Son of God who brings salvation.

God's Word Says So

// 1 John 5:11-13

John's whole point of writing this short letter was that we may know we have eternal life in Christ. "I have written these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life" (v. 13). Under the direction of the Holy Spirit, John wrote that we can be sure of our salvation, but this is not the only place God's Word confirms the security believers have in Christ.

Jesus stated, "My sheep hear my voice, I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish. No one will snatch them out of my hand" (John 10:27-28). Jesus taught that the power of His hand keeps His followers secure. He continued, "My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all. No one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand. I and the Father are one" (vv. 29-30). We are kept by both the Father and the Son. And we are not to leave out the Holy Spirit either. "In him you also were sealed with the

promised Holy Spirit when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and when you believed" (Eph. 1:13). The work of a triune God seals the security of our salvation.

The absolute security of salvation caused Paul to write:

"No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom. 8:37-39).

Absolutely nothing can separate us from the salvation we have in Christ.

HOW CAN WE BE CONFIDENT WE HAVE ETERNAL LIFE?

One study found that Americans are among the most anxious people on earth.¹⁰ The Scriptures call us to take our concerns to God in prayer rather than engage in fruitless worry (Phil. 4:6), but too many believers still give in to the temptation to worry and be anxious. If you have trusted in Christ for eternal life, then uncertainty of salvation should never be a cause of anxiety. We can know we have eternal life because God's Word says so.

My Life Has Changed

// 1 John 5:18-21

In this concluding section, John got straight to the point. The nature of the new birth has an ongoing result. "We know that everyone who has been born of God does not sin, but the one who is born of God keeps him, and the evil one does not touch him" (v. 18). One of the lasting results of the new birth is a repentant life. It is not that believers will never sin, but they will not continually live in sin. Christians are those who

THE POINT: WE CAN BE SURE GOD SAVES US WHEN WE TRUST IN CHRIST.

continually repent. Refusing to repent or even concern at all over sin is evidence a person has never been transformed by the gospel. Proof of the new birth is a heightened awareness to sin.

Because believers are now in Christ, they do not continue in sin, and Jesus—“the one who is born of God” (v.18)—protects us from Satan’s influence. Christ keeps the Christian from living a sinful lifestyle.

HOW DOES GOD PROTECT US FROM THE EVIL ONE?

Because believers are still tempted to sin, John gave one final exhortation, “Little children, guard yourselves from idols” (v. 21) When we begin to give our hearts away to other things, we ruin our testimony to the world. Therefore, as Christ keeps us, let us guard our hearts against idols—anything we let come between us and our love and commitment to Christ.

Jesus Christ, in His great love on high, embraces you, opens His arms to you, and keeps you eternally secure. You can be sure of your salvation when you have trusted in Christ.

DID YOU KNOW?

The famed Renaissance artist, Michelangelo, displayed a changed life in his later years. Some see this change as a reflection of a spiritual rebirth. The poems he once wrote were about tormented death, but his latter poems were primarily prayers focused on faith, the cross, and forgiveness. One of his final sculptures, Florentine Pietà, shows Mary, Mary Magdalene, and Nicodemus taking the body of Jesus from the cross. Many believe Michelangelo sculpted himself as Nicodemus, the man who came secretly to Jesus and learned the truth that “you must be born again” (John 3:7). At the end of his life, Michelangelo’s only hope was not in being a great artist or receiving acclaim from others, but rather in Christ. He ended his poem, “On the Brink of Death,” with this: “Painting nor sculpture now can lull to rest, My soul that turns to His great love on high, Whose arms to clasp us on the cross were spread.”¹¹

How has your life changed since you first encountered Christ?

LIVE IT

How will you rest in the assurance we have of our salvation?

God is like no other. He has proven Himself faithful and trustworthy. When we trust Him, He saves us. The Christian life—grounded solely in the Bible—points us to the death and resurrection of Christ as the only path to salvation and a relationship with God. When we simply trust what Christ has done, we can be assured of our salvation and a relationship with God.

+ + +

- **Evaluate your trust.** Do you trust God with the small and the large things in your life? Pray for Him to reveal a couple of areas in your life that still need change. Ask God to help you trust Him more.
- **Be encouraged by others.** Ask others to tell you the stories of God’s goodness in their lives. Be encouraged by the life-changing work of God in those around you. It is balm for the anxious soul.
- **Get ready to share.** Keep at the forefront of your mind the ways God has blessed and saved you, so you can share with others. Ask God to give you opportunities to share.

DAILY READINGS

1. “TRULY” // JOHN 5:24-25

Neon signs help to draw attention to messages and advertisements. This is done with bright lights, bold lettering, and intense exclamation marks. We see them a lot in movies or on the streets. Another way to attract attention could be the use of a town crier who shouts the words, “Hear ye, hear ye!” Our ears will instantly be drawn to those words because of the loud insistence of the crier's command. The repetition of a word or command makes the difference. Jesus said the word “truly” twice. He wanted passionately for His message to get across because He knew what He said to be true. So in these verses, without a shadow of a doubt, if anyone hears the Word of God and believes in Christ, they will have eternal life.

Jesus shouted this to our hearts; let's shout this from the rooftops.

2. NO STUMBLING // JUDE 1:24

When someone undergoes a foot injury, most times it will require the assistance of certain medical equipment. A person could require crutches, a walker, or may have to wear a boot. These items will keep the injured from falling. Thank God for His promise to protect us from stumbling. We have God's help to keep us from falling into sin. He operates in our lives like a crutch we can lean on to overcome Satan's tricks and temptations. We know that sin separates us from God. So He keeps us connected to Him. There is no need to fear. We won't fall back into that from which we have come. God by His power will keep us.

God's grace sustains us day-to-day as we live out our salvation in obedience to Him.

3. THAT SETTLES IT // HEBREWS 7:25

Hebrew priests were appointed to act on behalf of the people. This was done by offering gifts and sacrifices for sins. But their offering was a temporary fix and didn't solve the sin problem. Today we have Jesus as our High Priest, and He is permanent in

this role (Heb. 7:24). Therefore He is the ultimate authority for our spiritual lives, and what He says settles any issue. That means once we are saved, we are saved forever. When we come to Jesus and receive salvation, we will never lose it.

He is able to save completely those who draw close to God through Him.

4. UNFAILING LOVE // ISAIAH 54:10

In the lifetime of believers, we will experience many trials and tribulations. Those trials include natural disasters such as floods, earthquakes, or tornadoes, and accidents in our homes and cars, or sicknesses and diseases. Isaiah addresses some of these. But he says that in the event these things happen, God's love will not be changed. In our darkest hour, we can rest in the knowledge that God's love will not be shaken. He truly is a God of compassion. And for that we should be grateful.

When it seems like everything is coming apart, I can stand on the knowledge that I am loved by God.

5. MY GOOD IN PAIN // ROMANS 8:28

A defendant in a courtroom believes his lawyer will have his best interest at heart. A child believes his or her parents have his or her best interest at heart. A student trusts that his or her teacher has the best education in mind for him or her. Even though this is true, in some cases, people will fail us. This nullifies the former belief and can damage relationships. The interest God has in us will never change, and the plan He has for us will never be thwarted. At the heart of this is the love we have for God. He sees this love and responds to it by making sure that everything works out okay—even when our lives are not good. Because of love nothing can stop God's plan from moving forward. We can rest assured our loving God is working through our hardships for our good.

There is purpose for our pain.



Can I Lose My Salvation?

BY MARK CROSTON

A saintly elderly lady approached her pastor and asked, “Can I lose my salvation?” Her question perplexed the pastor after all the bible studies she had taught, prayers she had prayed, and evangelistic events in which she had participated. Yet, to give her assurance he shared three points from the 1 John 2.

First, he told her, you can never lose that which is kept by another. First John 2:1-2 says, “He himself is the atoning sacrifice for our sins.” The phrase “He himself” lets us know that we are saved and kept by Jesus. Since we are saved by grace, the only way we can be kept is by the same grace that saved us, 9 ...not from works, so that no one can boast (Eph. 2:9). As we do not have the power to save ourselves, we also do

not have the power to keep ourselves. We must be kept by the power of God. Paul says, 12 ... I am not ashamed, because I know whom I have believed and am persuaded that he is able to guard what has been entrusted to me until that day (2 Tim. 1:12).

Second, he said, you can never lose what you never had. Often, we raise the question of losing salvation because of people we know who are no longer in the church. First John 2:19 says, They went out from us, but they did not belong to us; for if they had belonged to us, they would have remained with us. However, they went out so that it might be made clear that none of them belongs to us. This lets us know that one sign of a true Christian is perseverance, that is to say,



they continue in the faith till the end.

There is no such thing as a revolving door salvation. Hebrews 6:4-6a states, “4 For it is impossible to renew to repentance those who were once enlightened, who tasted the heavenly gift, who shared in the Holy Spirit, 5 who tasted God’s good word and the powers of the coming age, 6 and who have fallen away.” Here the whole idea of falling away is in the subjunctive mood. The subjunctive mood is used to express wishes and hypothetical situations. So, it is saying that if it were even possible for one to lose their salvation, they could not get it back again. Jesus is the door, not the revolving door.

The point is that true faith is more than talk. Matthew 7:21ff affirms this. 21 “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven.” Note the contrast between the word “says” and the word “does.” This lets us know that true Christianity is more than just talk, it’s our walk!

Finally, he reminded her, you can never lose that which has become a part of you. 24 What you have heard from the beginning is to remain in you. If what you have heard from the beginning remains in you, then you will remain in the Son and in the Father (1 John 2:24). The phrase “remain in” is repeated over and over.

The idea of losing one’s salvation is not like saying, “I had ten cupcakes and I lost one.” It is possible to lose one of ten cupcakes. To lose one’s salvation is more like saying, “I had a cake, but I lost the butter out of it!” Once you have baked the cake it is impossible to lose the butter out of it. Why? Because it is no longer butter, sugar, eggs, and flour. It is a new creation, a cake! When we get saved, we too are new creations! 17 Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has passed away, and see, the new has come! (1 Cor. 5:17) It’s no wonder we call it being born again!

Upon the Pastor’s conclusion, the senior saint responded, “Thanks Pastor! I just wanted to hear you tell it. Don’t worry about me... “You can’t make me doubt Him, because I know too much about Him!””

13 I have written these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life. -- 1 John 5:13.

Mark Croston is director of Black Church Ministries at Lifeway.



My Notes

Name

Email

Session Number

Answer 4 Questions

What did You learn?

What Is God saying to you?

What are you gonna do about it?

**Do you have any questions
about the reading?**



My Notes



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THE BASIS FOR CONFIDENCE

THE POINT:
CONFIDENCE COMES FROM TRUSTING GOD.

Leader pages on pp. 130-133

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GENESIS 12:1-8

MEMORY VERSE

¹ The Lord said to Abram: Go from your land, your relatives, and your father’s house to the land that I will show you.

² I will make you into a great nation, I will bless you, I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing.

³ **I will bless those who bless you, I will curse anyone who treats you with contempt, and all the peoples on earth will be blessed through you.**

.....
⁴ So Abram went, as the Lord had told him, and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he left Haran.

⁵ He took his wife, Sarai, his nephew Lot, all the possessions they had accumulated, and the people they had acquired in Haran, and they set out for the land of Canaan. When they came to the land of Canaan,

⁶ Abram passed through the land to the site of Shechem, at the oak of Moreh. (At that time the Canaanites were in the land.)

.....
⁷ The Lord appeared to Abram and said, “To your offspring I will give this land.” So he built an altar there to the Lord who had appeared to him.

⁸ From there he moved on to the hill country east of Bethel and pitched his tent, with Bethel on the west and Ai on the east. He built an altar to the Lord there, and he called on the name of the Lord.

KEYWORDS

Blessing (v. 2)—To bless someone is to wish or declare God’s goodness or favor on them. The greatest blessing given by God is the forgiveness and salvation offered by the work of Christ.

Canaanites (v. 6)—A distinct cultural group of people (Gen. 15:21). But the term is also an

umbrella term for many different groups who are living in a region.

Offspring (v. 7)—The Hebrew term for offspring *zerâ* means seed (Num. 24:7). It can indicate human or animal seed (Jer. 31:27).

WHY SHOULD WE TRUST GOD WITH CONFIDENCE?

The band MercyMe has a song titled, “Say I Won’t” in which the singer states, “I’m going to know what it means to live and not just be alive; I will be dancing when circumstances drown the music out.” That’s confidence.

Where does confidence like that come from? Some people seem to be born with it; others have it instilled in them by a parent, coach, or teacher. On the flip side, others have been told they’re not good enough, and they lack any sense of self-confidence. Confidence is related to faith, and our faith is only as good as what we’re trusting in. The past two years have brought that to light. Putting your faith and trust in anything other than God will just lead to disappointment, disillusionment, and despair.

The confidence we truly need is not grounded in ourselves. Confidence—true, life-changing confidence—comes from trusting God. One of the best biblical examples of confident, trusting faith is Abraham. His journey began with God calling him to leave everything he knew to go to a place and in a direction that only God knew.

God Gives Us a Purpose

// Genesis 12:1-3

God made an incredible covenant with Abram long ago—but it’s a promise that still lives on today. As Christ followers, we get to live in the benefits of this fulfilled promise. This was the promise that God would not forget about His creation, but He would provide a way for us to be in right relationship with Him. This was the starting point of God’s unfolding grace. We see this promise ultimately displayed and fulfilled with the birth of Jesus Christ, who was a descendant of Abram (Gal. 3:16).

God chose Abram (and later changed his name to Abraham [Gen. 17:5]) to initiate this promise. It was a promise of multiplication, by way of land, children, and blessing. God told Abram that He would make his name great; in other words, the patriarch would be famous. Today, all three major world religions—Islam, Judaism, and Christianity—identify Abraham as a key figure. God did as He had promised: He made Abram famous. But far more than just being



THE POINT: CONFIDENCE COMES FROM TRUSTING GOD.

well-known, Abram's greatness would be significant because all peoples of the world would be blessed through him when his descendant Jesus Christ came to earth.

WHAT STANDS OUT TO YOU AS SIGNIFICANT IN THE PROMISE GOD MADE TO ABRAM? WHY?

We don't know what type of relationship Abram had with God prior to his encounter with Him in Genesis 12, but his understanding of the nature and character of God may have quite limited. Abram's ancestors, including his own father, worshiped other gods (Josh. 24:2), and Abram himself may have even initially engaged in such pagan worship. So, when Abram heard God's request, he may have been overwhelmed by it, but he was willing to trust and act. Abram's confidence rested not in himself, but in the One who was calling him to go.

The more we understand the heart of God, the stronger our dependence and confidence will grow in Him. As a result, when God calls us to something specific, His voice no longer seems foreign to us; instead, it will seem familiar. This will help give us the confidence we need to move and act on what God is calling us to do. When we trust God, we act on that trust.

God Expects Our Obedience // Genesis 12:4-6

God told Abram to go and that is exactly what Abram did! Abram packed up his possessions and left everything he knew. His comforts, accomplishments, and all things familiar to him were now going to be behind him. Although he took his wife, Sarai, his nephew Lot, and others with him, other family members that he loved and invested in were left behind in Haran. In that culture and time, land and family had a powerful emotional bond connecting them, but for the sake of survival, they also formed a strong economic bond. Relocating had a whole other depth of meaning compared with relocating in our world today.

Abram responded to God's call with obedience. He did not respond by simply affirming what God had said; he responded with action. When he came to Canaan, Abram passed through the land even though he knew the Canaanite people had already inhabited the land God promised to give him. When it came to children, Abram kept trusting God even though he



DIGGING DEEPER SHECHEM

Shechem, the site of Abraham's first altar he built in the Promised Land, is a very important biblical site. It is also one of the oldest cities in the world. Jacob bought a parcel of land here (Gen. 33:19-20) and built an altar and later dug a well. Joshua gathered all the nation to this location to make a covenant with the people (Josh. 24). Shechem was one of the cities of refuge (Josh. 20:7) and Joseph's bones were transported to Shechem to be buried (Josh. 24:32). This is also where Jesus held His conversation with woman from Samaria as she came to draw water in the afternoon (John 4:5). Shechem is reported to be one of the most beautiful spots in Central Palestine. The city still remains today but is called Nablus.

Why did biblical characters build altars to the Lord?

and Sarai were childless; now he was seventy-five years old and his wife Sarai wasn't getting any younger. He didn't know how God was going to show off His power in either situation, or how specifically God was going to get it done. However, he kept moving and trusted God would show him how.



WHEN HAVE YOU FOUND IT CHALLENGING TO FOLLOW GOD'S LEADING?

Abram's actions imply a trust that God would reveal to him each detail in His perfect timing. Often we just need to move, even before we know exactly how God is going to work. We act in obedience on the last step He told us to take, and we keep on moving until He speaks again.

God spoke specifically to Abram, but he wasn't the only one to step out and move. His wife, Sarai, and nephew Lot also moved. That means Sarai and Lot were most likely getting second-hand information of this promise from Abram, and yet they still moved. They trusted that Abram was trusting in God.

It can be easy for us to lose confidence in the direction God is leading us. We can easily be swayed from obedience to disobedience. We may wonder if Abram ever struggled with the

temptation to say, "Maybe we should just turn back. Maybe I misunderstood what God was telling me."

Thankfully, God does not leave us alone. As His followers, He has placed His Holy Spirit in our lives. When our confidence becomes weak, lean on His Spirit. We are to trust the Spirit of Christ when we're not feeling confident. It's not how we feel that matters; it matters who we trust. When we feel unsure about the direction, or when we feel like turning back, we trust in Christ. When we feel alone or oppressed, we trust in Christ. When the enemy plays with our minds and causes us to doubt, we trust in Christ. He is our line of defense that gives us the confidence to keep moving even when we don't know the final destination.

God Blesses Our Obedience

// Genesis 12:7-8

The more we learn to trust God, the more our confidence will grow. As we trust God more and more, He is faithful to increase our faith by continually reaffirming us along the way. The journey from Haran to Canaan was around 400 miles. Since Abram and his assembly likely were traveling on foot, it would have taken them several months to arrive.

When we have the courage to step out in faith, along the way on the journey we must hold onto the truth that God is always with us. We are reminded in both the Old and New Testaments that God never leaves or forsakes His children and followers (Deut. 31:6; Matt. 28:20).

HOW HAVE YOU EXPERIENCED GOD'S PRESENCE WITH YOU DURING A DIFFICULT TIME?

Some people dismiss God's presence and promises or they rationalize them as mere coincidence. When we seek God, He reveals Himself through His creation (Rom. 1:20),

THE POINT: CONFIDENCE COMES FROM TRUSTING GOD.

through His Spirit (John 14:26), through His Word (2 Tim. 3:16), and through His people (1 John 3:24). As we trust Christ, His Holy Spirit takes up residence in our lives. He is our Advocate, our Helper, and our Comforter who gives us a level of confidence beyond our own abilities.

When the Lord appeared to Abram in verse 7 reassuring him of His presence and the promise of land and children, Abram responded with worship. It was his natural response. We recognize an altar as a place of worship, a place where we bow in worship before the Lord, but an altar also could serve a second purpose: a place of remembrance. Even as Abram worshiped, he created a marker for himself, the Canaanites currently living in the land, and future generations of His people.

What does an altar of worship and remembrance look like for us today? Some people have created literal altars of stone or wood to mark and remember God's work in their lives, but let me suggest another approach: write. Create a written "altar" of remembrance and worship.

DID YOU KNOW?

In 1790, George Washington Bush was born in Pennsylvania. His father was an African-American from India and his mother was Irish-American. Bush was educated in Philadelphia, fought in the War of 1812, and became a fur trapper with the Hudson Bay Company. In 1844, Bush was one of the first African-Americans to move and settle in the west. Bush and his family, along with four white families left Missouri to travel the Oregon Trail. However, discriminatory laws were already established in the Oregon Territory so Bush and the other four families continued to travel to what is present day Washington. There they established a settlement they named Bush Prairie near what is now Puget Sound, Washington. They farmed the land, built the first gristmill in the area, and assisted other travelers heading to the region. In 1855, Bush was granted ownership of the land and became the first African-American landowner in Washington.

How can confidence in God lead someone to step out into the unknown?

LIVE IT

In what ways will you strengthen your confidence?

Confidence is related to faith, and our faith is only as good as what we're trusting in. Confidence comes from trusting God. The more we understand the heart of God, the stronger our dependence and confidence in Him. As a result, when God calls us to something specific, His voice no longer seems foreign to us; instead, it will seem familiar. When we trust God, we can act on that trust.

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- **Study about confidence.** Take time to study the following passages about confidence in Christ: Isaiah 41:10, Hebrews 13:6, and 1 John 3:20-21. Take note of what God offers when we trust Him.
- **Worship in confidence.** Take time this week to worship the Lord, praising Him for all things, including (and especially) the unknown or confusing circumstances in your life.
- **Share your confidence.** What anchors you in Christ during times of uncertainty? Make a point to share your experience with someone this week.

DAILY READINGS

1. TIME TO GO // GENESIS 12:1

Most of us know where we are going when we pack up, pile into a moving truck, and head to a new home and maybe a new job. And let's be real, moving is no fun—especially if you have no idea where you're going. But that's not the real point of this verse, is it? The focus isn't the final location—the focus is trust in God as the Locator. Abram trusted God so completely that he would go wherever God took him. How about you? Can you truthfully say that your faith is at that same level? If it is not, spend some time in prayer today, asking God to teach you how to trust Him more.

Following our faithful God when He says, “go,” is evidence of your trust in Him.

2. KEEP LOOKING AHEAD // HEBREWS 11:8-10

When Abram was called, he obeyed. There wasn't any hesitation. Why? Because Abram trusted in the promises of God. He believed that God would do everything He had said He would do. He trusted God's words. Today, you have the entire Bible—the Word of God—that's full of God's promises for you. There's a promise for you in whatever situation you're facing. The struggle is taking your focus off present circumstances and looking ahead, with faith at God and on His promises. God will never fail to fulfill His promises in your life. Just trust Him.

Ask God to show you His promises in the Bible—the ones you need to hear today.

3. MOVED TO WORSHIP // GENESIS 12:7

In addition to his trust in God, Abram is an example of a true worshiper. When God appeared to him, he responded in worship. Building an altar was a physical act of worship in response to something God had done. Today, you don't have to wait to be in a church service to worship the Lord. Make worship of God a lifestyle—part of the way you live your life everyday. You can worship God wherever you are—

at your desk, in your car, walking down the street, in a park, and everywhere else. Respond and express your heart to God.

Take time today to worship the Lord for all He has done for you.

4. OVERCOMING FEAR // JOHN 14:27

There are so many things that can cause fear—and they've all been magnified since the COVID-19 pandemic. Fear can demoralize and paralyze you. Fear is an enemy that robs us of our peace. This peace is the confident assurance we need while in the midst of difficult circumstances. Abram faced all kinds of unknown fears in his journey of following God. Like you, there were probably days he felt no peace and felt like he couldn't go on any more. Today, believers have the presence of the Holy Spirit to help us overcome fear. The Spirit gives us the courage we need to continue moving forward. Through the Spirit, Jesus wants us to know we don't need to be afraid when we rest in His peace.

Ask God to grant you His peace today—the peace that passes all understanding.

5. GETTING BACK TO THE SOURCE // GENESIS 13:3-4

Sometimes the pressures of life and the fear of the unknown can feel completely overwhelming. You may feel like all you want to do is just cry or give up all together. It's at those times, especially, that you need to get back to your source of confidence and hope. Go back to the place where you started. Abram took his family back to the place where he had built an altar—and they got down on their knees and worshiped the Lord. For believers today, we received our new life in Christ on our knees when we called out for the gift of salvation. We can always return to our knees and call out to God for His strength, comfort, guidance, and confidence in the midst of fear. As He did before, God will meet us where we started.

Cry out to God and fall before Him in prayer.



My Notes

Name

Email

Session Number

Answer 4 Questions

What did You learn?

What Is God saying to you?

What are you gonna do about it?

**Do you have any questions
about the reading?**



My Notes



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CONFIDENCE IN THE FACE OF FEAR

Leader pages on pp. 134-137

THE POINT:
TRUST GOD WHEN YOU ARE OVERWHELMED WITH FEAR.

GENESIS 12:10-13,17-13:4

¹⁰ There was a famine in the land, so Abram went down to Egypt to stay there for a while because the famine in the land was severe.

¹¹ When he was about to enter Egypt, he said to his wife, Sarai, "Look, I know what a beautiful woman you are.

¹² When the Egyptians see you, they will say, 'This is his wife.' They will kill me but let you live.

¹³ Please say you're my sister so it will go well for me because of you, and my life will be spared on your account."

.....
¹⁷ But the Lord struck Pharaoh and his household with severe plagues because of Abram's wife, Sarai.

¹⁸ So Pharaoh sent for Abram and said, "What have you done to me? Why didn't you tell me she was your wife?

¹⁹ Why did you say, 'She's my sister,' so that I took her as my wife? Now, here is your wife. Take her and go! "

²⁰ Then Pharaoh gave his men orders about him, and they sent him away with his wife and all he had.

.....
^{13:1} Abram went up from Egypt to the Negev—he, his wife, and all he had, and Lot with him.

² Abram was very rich in livestock, silver, and gold.

³ He went by stages from the Negev to Bethel, to the place between Bethel and Ai where his tent had formerly been,

⁴ to the site where he had built the altar. And Abram called on the name of the Lord there.

MEMORY VERSE

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KEYWORDS

Sister (v. 13)—Abram was technically asking Sarai to be truthful since she was his half-sister. But Abram's intent was to deceive Pharaoh.

The Lord struck ... plagues (v. 17)—This act foreshadowed what God would do in Moses's day to bring the Israelites out of Egypt

(Ex. 12:29), to take them to the promised land.

Bethel (v. 3)—An area of Canaan with greater rainfall—and more vegetation—than the Negev. This move probably was to feed the large flocks of Abram and his nephew Lot.

HOW DOES TRUST IN GOD HELP US OVERCOME FEAR?

What do you fear? Whether we want to admit it or not, fear is something we all wrestle with. Your fears could include standing on a tall ladder, a spider crawling on you, being the victim of violence, or getting sick and battling a disease. Or you may fear losing a job, something happening to one of your kids or grandkids, or just being alone. And a lot of people have the fear of death and not being completely certain what will happen after they die.

While some fears may seem small, any fear can have a crippling effect. The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted some of the things that can happen when fear takes hold. There were fights in stores over the last pack of toilet paper. Fear can cause our minds and bodies to become almost paralyzed. For some people, just imagining that spider crawling on your skin—can fill them with fear.

What do we do when the ugly little head of fear begins to creep into our lives? An example from Abram's life shows us what we should do—and what we shouldn't do.

Focus on God Not Fear

// Genesis 12:10-13

A famine swept across the land of Canaan. God had called Abram to Canaan and made a covenant with him to provide land and offspring. However, the famine was so severe that fear kicked in and Abram chose to take his family to Egypt. Abram had fled the famine in fear, but he seemed to have traded that apprehension for the fear of being oppressed by the Egyptians. That fear led him to respond irrationally.

Abram's response should not surprise us since fear has the ability to reduce our sound judgment and logical reasoning. We see this on display as we see Abram's fear inducing him to hand over his beautiful wife Sarai to the Egyptian pharaoh so that his own life would be spared. We might think Abram was being totally irrational in passing off Sarai as his sister and not his wife, but perhaps it was in line with the cultural thinking of that time. Abram may have truly thought he was protecting his own life and doing the right thing even though this was a lie.



THE POINT: TRUST GOD WHEN YOU ARE OVERWHELMED WITH FEAR.

WHEN HAS FEAR CAUSED YOU TO ACT IRRATIONALLY?

Simon Peter modeled the principle that when we focus on God, the less we focus on our fear. He and the other disciples were in a boat when a storm came up and began to pummel the boat in the waves. To their amazement, Jesus came to them walking on the water. With Jesus' command to come, Peter stepped out of the boat and walked on water! But when Peter began to look around at his surroundings and took his focus off of Jesus, fear swept in, and he began to sink (Matt. 14:22-33).

Fear and uncertainty strike at all of us. In those moments, we need to remember what Abram seemed to forget: God is with us and He will take care of us. In those moments, we must take our attention off of the fear and focus instead on the Father. Or, put another way, turn your worry into worship. Reasons to fear will always be around, but we have far more reasons to worship God. When we change our worry to worship and carry our fear to the Father, our perspective becomes clearer.

WHAT ARE SOME SITUATIONS THAT CAN CAUSE US TO BE FEARFUL INSTEAD OF TRUSTING GOD?

Our Fear Impacts Others // Genesis 12:17-20

When Abram arrived in Egypt, the beauty of his wife Sarai captured the attention of the palace officials. Sarai went along with her husband's scheme. The officials raced to Pharaoh with the news that a beautiful new woman was available in his land. Pharaoh had Sarai brought to his palace. In exchange for Sarai, the Pharaoh lavished Abram with valuable gifts.

Imagine what Sarai must have been feeling in that moment. The text is silent regarding any response from Sarai, but she surely must have felt betrayed by her husband. Confusion, hurt, and fear were probably not far off. She likely questioned any confidence she had in God's promise to Abram.

WHEN HAVE YOU FELT BETRAYED BY SOMEONE?

Here's an important truth: fear not only can reduce our faith, but it also can affect the faith of those around us. By relying on his circumstances instead of putting his confidence in God's promise, Abram affected the faith of Sarai and also forced her



DIGGING DEEPER THE NEGEV

The Negev region that Abram crossed when leaving Egypt (Gen. 13:1-4), is a pie-shaped piece of land at the southern end of Israel. At its widest point, it is about 70 miles. It is a harsh, dry, desert region. Unlike the sandy Saharan deserts one might imagine, this region is much more like an Arizona desert. It is full of dirt, rocks, and canyons. It's also hot and dry, receiving less than 8" of rain per year. But, the Negev also features some beautiful landscapes, caves, waterfalls, craters, and important biblical archeological sites. This region also had cities such as Beersheba and Ziklag. The Negev is made up of almost half the land mass of Israel. The modern day city of Beersheba has well over 200,000 people.

What are some barriers to confidence people face today?

to lie. Admittedly, Abram's statement, "She is my sister," was technically not a lie. Abram and Sarai had the same father but different mothers (Gen. 20:12). This may sound strange to us, but in the ancient world, marriage within a family or tribe was common.

So here we have Abram and Sarai, half siblings, telling a half truth. We must remember that a half-truth always equals a full-lie. There is no way around it. The fear of getting caught or the fear of telling the full story only shows the lack of confidence we have in God to go before us. Those fears can lead to lies, and those lies only lead to hurting ourselves and those around us.

Abram's fear-induced lie also impacted Pharaoh and his entire household. Innocent people who had no idea what was going on were affected, as the Lord struck Pharaoh and his household with severe plagues. Scripture does not reveal the specifics of the plagues, but they were intense enough for Pharaoh to react and get to the bottom of Abram's lie. How ironic that we see a pagan Pharaoh calling out the great, faithful patriarch Abram. How humbling that must have been for Abram to get a moral lesson from a pagan Pharaoh!

Abram might have been a great influence among the Egyptians, pointing them away from their idols toward the one true God. But the opportunity for Abram to exercise any leadership was being dismantled by his fear and lack of faith. The level of our fear and faith today can have a ripple effect on others either for good—or bad. Fear and faith are both highly contagious. When chaos or trouble strikes, or when we have the opportunity to lead or influence others, we should consider how our attitudes and actions will impact them.

WHEN HAS YOUR FAITH OR FEAR HAD A RIPPLE EFFECT ON OTHERS?



Overcome Fear in God's Presence // Genesis 13:1-4

After Pharaoh gave the orders to leave and get out of Egypt, Abram took Sarai, his family, and all his possessions and started the journey back into Canaan. What could have been going on in Abram's mind as he traveled through the desert of the Negev after such a spiritual defeat?

HOW DO YOU FEEL WHEN YOU EXPERIENCE A SPIRITUAL DEFEAT AND FALL INTO SIN?

When Abram heard the words from Pharaoh to go, he might have recalled God's promise when He said to him, "Go from your land" (Gen. 12:1). Abram seemed to forget God's promise when he felt threatened, but that's true for most of us. In those moments, we must remember that, even when we are unfaithful, God remains faithful (2 Tim. 2:13). God defines faithfulness by His very character; that is just who He is. When He makes a promise, He will keep it.

After we fail, it can be so easy to wallow in failure and to stop allowing God to move in us. Abram did not stop, nor did he leave his faith in Egypt. He moved back to where he came from—the place where he knew and worshiped God. The enemy loves to grab a shovel and bury us

THE POINT: TRUST GOD WHEN YOU ARE OVERWHELMED WITH FEAR.

with the guilt of our past failures. We must keep moving so the dirt of guilt doesn't cover us, and we must keep moving toward the One who loves us and is ever faithful to us.

Abram went back to where he first built his altar. Perhaps Abram retraced his steps back to that place to show humility, to express remorse for his misconduct, to renew his allegiance, to remind himself of the original promise, to show his gratitude for God's mercy, or a combination of all these! The important thing is that he understood who he was and who God is. Abram's act of worship reflects his recognition of the incredible mercy God granted to him instead of the incredible judgment He could have granted.

While we recognize that fear reduces our faith and confidence in the Lord, one form of fear actually strengthens our faith. It is a fear we must increase, not decrease, in our lives: a healthy, reverent fear of the Lord. "In the fear of the Lord one has strong confidence" (Prov. 14:26). The more we deepen our reverent fear of God, the more our faith and trust in His mercy grows.

DID YOU KNOW?

In 1954, the African-American population of Belzoni, Mississippi outnumbered white residents 2–1. Yet they couldn't go to white schools, sit in certain bus seats, eat in white restaurants, and couldn't vote. The Reverend George Lee was a black minister who also ran a grocery store as well as a printing press. Lee wanted change, and he knew it would begin with the right to vote. George Lee, along with Gus Courts, started a chapter of the NAACP in their area. They printed information brochures and encouraged people to register to vote. At the time, African-Americans were required to pay a poll tax, which Lee encouraged them to do. Threats were made against Lee. As a result, white officials offered him protection on the condition he would stop encouraging people to register to vote. Lee refused and chose to confidently stand for rights and freedoms. On May 7, 1955, Lee was shot in the face while driving his car. He later died at the hospital.

How can the enemy use fear to weaken our faith and confidence?

LIVE IT

In what ways can you trust God in your fear?

The world can be a dangerous place at times, but God calls us to live in this world. This requires faith that He will be with us and enable us to endure and overcome whatever we encounter. Fear and uncertainty strike us all. In those moments, we need to take our attention off of the fear and focus instead on the Father. When we change our worry to worship and carry our fear to the Father, our perspective becomes clearer.

+ + +

- **Identify your fear.** Pinpoint one specific area of consistent fear in your life. Why does that fear continue to return to you? Make a plan to praise God despite this fear, praying into it.
- **Examine your influence.** It's possible your fears in the past have affected others. Ask God to reveal any people you have hurt because of fear. Ask for forgiveness from those people when appropriate.
- **Live in obedience.** Is there something God has been asking you to do that you've been too afraid to do? It's time to live in obedience regardless of your fears.

DAILY READINGS

1. IT'S ALL GONE // GENESIS 12:10

“There is absolutely no toilet paper here!” Do you remember that feeling? It seemed as if everything came crashing down as we all scrambled to find basic supplies. Some people physically fought each other for that last item on the shelf. Abram and Sarai found themselves in a similar, yet more serious, situation as there was a severe famine in the land. Famines can cause great devastation, including uncontrollable diseases, acute malnutrition, and even death by starvation. Therefore, Abram and Sarai were faced with a reality with no food. Regardless of the situation; however, we can trust in God’s care and protection. God will provide.

In the midst of fearful circumstances, trust God’s faithful love and care.

2. MAKING A MESS OF THINGS // GENESIS 12:17-19

Abram really made a mess of things when he decided to handle matters into his own hands rather than completely trust God’s leadership. His lie about to Pharaoh caused God to strike Pharaoh’s household with plagues. How often have you experienced issues because you’ve taken matters into your own hands, rather than trust God? He has promised to be with us and will enable us to endure whatever circumstances we may encounter. If we’re not careful, our fear can have a ripple effect that can impact others—just like what happened to Pharaoh’s household in these verses.

Trust God even when you are overwhelmed with fear.

3. GOD WILL // PSALM 91:14-16

When faced with fear that overwhelms you, do as so many of the psalmists did—reflect on who God is. Psalm 91 is an incredible psalm of trust in who God is and what He will do for His children—those who abide in His presence. God spoke to the psalmist, saying, “Because he loves me.” God says these

same words to you when you express and show your love and trust to Him.

Personalize these verses by adding your name “Because ____ has set his or her heart on me, I will deliver _____” and pray this aloud to God.

4. CRUSHING CONFLICT // PHILIPPIANS 2:2-4

Being in relationships with other people generally means you will experience conflict at some point. Relationships and conflict often go hand-in-hand. Choosing how to handle that conflict, especially conflict among believers, can be a demonstration of one’s trust in God. The apostle Paul challenged believers to be united in spirit and to avoid conflict by considering the needs of others above our own. When we boil it down, a lot of our conflicts stem from our own personal desires or selfish ambitions. Remember this is the stuff that ruins our churches and the relationships within our homes.

Prayerfully consider if you are more interested in looking out for your own interests or for the interests of others.

5. PROMISE KEEPER // DEUTERONOMY 31:8

At one point or another, we’ve all had someone break a promise. It hurts and it disrupts our relationship. Eventually, after enough promises are broken, we have a hard time believing any promise that anybody makes—including God. But God is not like the rest of us. Because of who He is—our holy and righteous God, He keeps all of His promises. In Deuteronomy 31, God promised His people that He would never leave them or abandon them. That promise is for us too. God will never leave you alone, He will never abandon you, and He will never turn His back on you. So no matter what we are facing, we should not be afraid, because the all powerful, all knowing God is by our side. Wherever you are, God will be with you.

Thank God that He keeps His promises and that He is always with you.



My Notes

Name

Email

Session Number

Answer 4 Questions

What did You learn?

What Is God saying to you?

What are you gonna do about it?

**Do you have any questions
about the reading?**



My Notes



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CONFIDENCE IN THE MIDST OF CONFLICT

Leader pages on pp. 138-141

THE POINT:
TRUST GOD WHEN
CONFLICT DISRUPTS
YOUR RELATIONSHIPS.

GENESIS 13:5-11,14-18

⁵ Now Lot, who was traveling with Abram, also had flocks, herds, and tents. ⁶ But the land was unable to support them as long as they stayed together, for they had so many possessions that they could not stay together, ⁷ and there was quarreling between the herdsmen of Abram’s livestock and the herdsmen of Lot’s livestock. (At that time the Canaanites and the Perizzites were living in the land.) ⁸ So Abram said to Lot, “Please, let’s not have quarreling between you and me, or between your herdsmen and my herdsmen, since we are relatives.

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⁹ Isn’t the whole land before you? Separate from me: if you go to the left, I will go to the right; if you go to the right, I will go to the left.” ¹⁰ Lot looked out and saw that the entire plain of the Jordan as far as Zoar was well watered everywhere like the Lord’s garden and the land of Egypt. (This was before the Lord destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah.) ¹¹ So Lot chose the entire plain of the Jordan for himself. Then Lot journeyed eastward, and they separated from each other.

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¹⁴ After Lot had separated from him, the Lord said to Abram, “Look from the place where you are. Look north and south, east and west, ¹⁵ for I will give you and your offspring forever all the land that you see. ¹⁶ **I will make your offspring like the dust of the earth, so that if anyone could count the dust of the earth, then your offspring could be counted.** ¹⁷ Get up and walk around the land, through its length and width, for I will give it to you.”¹⁸ So Abram moved his tent and went to live near the oaks of Mamre at Hebron, where he built an altar to the Lord.

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MEMORY VERSE

KEYWORDS

Eastward (v. 11)—Lot’s journey eastward has troubling implications. Other situations in which “east” is a destination include

Adam and Eve following their sin (3:24), Cain following his judgment (4:16), and sinful humanity prior to tower of Babylon (11:2).

HOW CAN TRUST IN GOD HELP US DURING CONFLICT?

For sailboats, tension is a good thing. The tension of the ropes in the hands of the sailors creates tension in the sails—which in turn creates tension between the sail and the wind. That tension moves the sailboat forward. This is a good form of tension.

Like sailing, we are always managing tensions in life. We deal with the tension of finances, news, politics, healthy habits, household tasks, and work expectations. Learning how to handle the tension in a way that honors Christ is our goal as believers.

But one of the most difficult tensions we must manage is relational tension, including the nationwide racial tension we're all experiencing. We can't escape it—and some of it ends up being hard to handle. The tension in some relationships may have been stirring like a steady current for a long time. Others suddenly came out of nowhere like a heavy gust of wind. So, let's take some cues from Abram to see how he navigated the waters of his relationships.

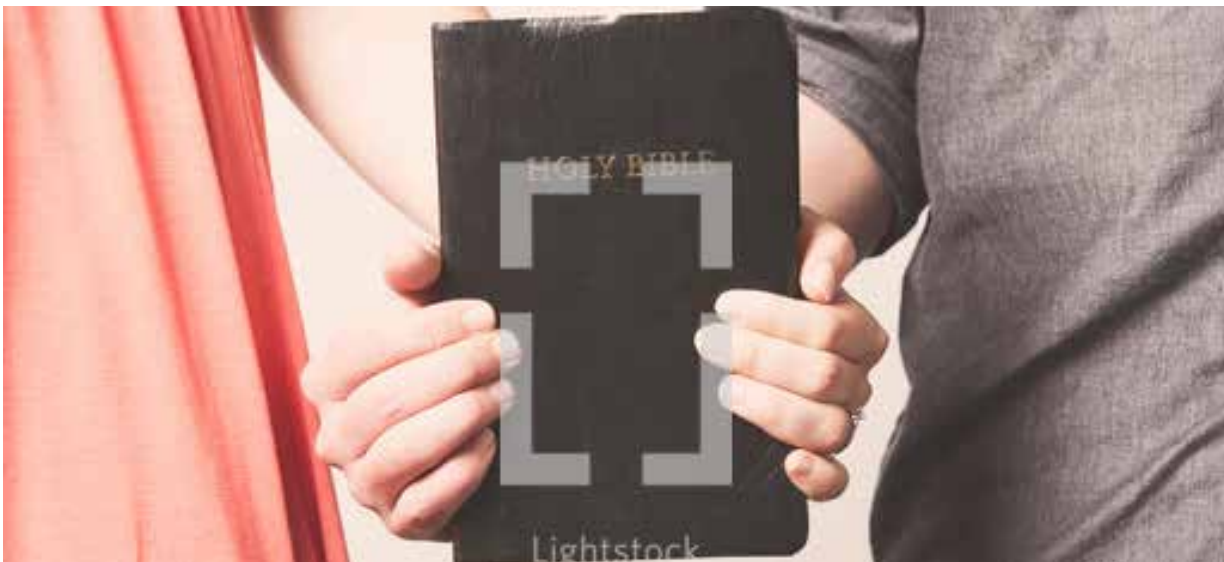
Confront Conflict Appropriately

// Genesis 13:5-8

As we saw in our last session, Abram displayed a lack of trust when he took his family to Egypt. Even so, during that sojourn, God allowed Abram to acquire flocks and herds (Gen. 12:16). When Abram left Egypt and returned to Canaan, he returned with a lot more than he left with—a whole lot more! And his nephew Lot apparently did as well.

Their collective wealth made traveling together extremely difficult. This created tension between the herdsmen of Abram's livestock and the herdsmen of Lot's livestock. It was a "turf war" type of conflict.

You can sense the tension heating up. As the leader of the large assembly, Abram had a choice: he could ignore the conflict, or he could confront it. Abram chose to confront it. Abram didn't run from the conflict; he had the courage to face it head on, and he did so by first thinking of his relationship with Lot who was his nephew.



THE POINT: TRUST GOD WHEN CONFLICT DISRUPTS YOUR RELATIONSHIPS.

We face the same decision anytime conflict arises in our relationships. Do we ignore the issue or confront it? Let's keep moving toward unity because the tension and conflict is just not worth it. This is especially true in the church and with relationships among believers. We are to make "every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace" (Eph. 4:3). We cannot control the attitudes and actions of another individual or group, but we can control our own attitudes and actions. We must evaluate our role by asking: Am I doing my part to maintain peace and resolve the conflict?

Abram confronted the issue. When done correctly, confrontation can show the other person how much we care. It demonstrates how much the individual matters to us. This practice can prevent so much unnecessary conflict. The alternative approach of ignoring the issue does not solve anything. In fact, by ignoring a tiny issue, we allow it to fester and grow. Over time, you can discover a gigantic wall in a relationship that should never have built up in the first place.

WHAT ARE SOME EARLY STEPS WE CAN TAKE TO AVOID OR REDUCE CONFLICT?

Consider the Needs of Others

// Genesis 13:9-11

Abram also lowered the temperature of the tension by walking into his conversation with Lot without the goal of winning the conversation. The goal in any conflict cannot be about who is right; it must be about making it right. In order to make things right, we must be willing to put the other person first.

By allowing Lot to choose land first, Abram demonstrated the importance of putting the needs of others before our own needs, a principle Paul spelled out centuries later. "Do nothing out of selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility consider others as more important than yourselves. Everyone should look not to his own interests, but rather to the interests of others" (Phil. 2:3-4). But let's be honest: putting the needs of others before our own doesn't always sit so well, especially in a conflict situation. It's easier said than done!

WHY IS HUMILITY A KEY WHEN SOLVING RELATIONAL TENSION?



DIGGING DEEPER LOT AND HIS DAUGHTERS

While the decision to part ways was necessary, Lot's life and direction completely changed after parting from Abram. After the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, and the death of his wife, Lot and his daughters fled to the caves near Zoar. Lot was afraid to live in the city, so he and his daughters just lived in the caves. His daughters, fearing they would never have children while living in the caves, got Lot drunk and both slept with him. Their resulting children became the forefathers of the Moabites and the Ammonites—both nations became enemies of Israel. A series of poor decisions stemming from conflict eventually produced people groups who were constantly in conflict with God's people.

How have you experienced consequences of past actions?



A humble attitude does not dismiss any wrong that may have been done to you, but remember the goal: The goal in any conflict cannot be about who is right; it must be about making it right. In order to make things right, we must be willing to put the other person first.

Consider the promise and position God gave to Abram. God had given this land to him! Abram did not have to make Lot such an offer. He could have told Lot to take the worst piece of property, and that still might have been viewed as gracious. After all, God had given the land to Abram, so Abram could've said, "It's time for you and your quarreling herdsmen to leave and get off my property." Keep in mind, Abram did not know Lot would choose land outside the promised land. Abram lowered the temperature of the tension by raising the level of his humility, not by allowing pride or his "rights" to control the situation.

Jesus was a far greater model of humility. Jesus willingly and gladly laid down His life for us, taking the death we deserve as His own. As Christ followers, we are to lean into His example and practice humility. Indeed, it's only possible to remain humble in Christ Jesus. The only way we can truly maintain humility in any conflict is to run our words and actions through the filter

of Jesus. This is a lesson we may have to learn every day, but it is a lesson—a principle—worth fighting for. When we do so, a lot of conflicts can be avoided altogether, and relationships can be restored.

Remain Confident in God's Provisions // Genesis 13:14-18

Tragically for Lot, he made a poor decision. He may have thought he was getting the better land—land that was well watered (Gen. 13:10). But his decision moved him away from his uncle, whom God had obviously blessed, and into a place of compromise. Notice Lot's downward progression. He chose land that was outside Canaan, the land promised to Abram. Lot "set up his tent near Sodom (v. 12), but later we find him "living in Sodom" (14:12), and finally we see him "sitting in Sodom's gateway" (19:1), a place where the city leaders sat. Lot eventually moved from being connected to Abram to being a leader in a wicked city.

Abram, however, maintained his trust in God. God reaffirmed His promise to Abram. He told Abram to open up his eyes and look around. All of the land, as far as his vision could see and beyond, would be given to Abram and his descendants. God reminded Abram of His promise—His unchanging, immutable promise.

HOW WOULD YOU DESCRIBE THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN LOT AND ABRAM?

Setting aside our own human viewpoint to see things from God's perspective can be difficult. That can be doubly difficult when things seem to be so far out of reach and a solution seems unimaginable—even when we hear Jesus' words, "With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible" (Matt. 19:26).

The situation between Abram and Lot was solved quickly, but what do we do when our

THE POINT: TRUST GOD WHEN CONFLICT DISRUPTS YOUR RELATIONSHIPS.

own conflicts don't resolve so quickly? We trust God to work, and we trust Him to work in His timing. We typically want a quick resolution, but a resolution takes two parties. We may need to pray and ask God to work in the heart of the other person. We have to come to grips with the tension between God's timing and our timing. Trusting that His timing is better—His timing is perfect—can be difficult to swallow. We need to surrender our timing to His.

Reconciliation and forgiveness are not the same thing. We strive for both to take place, but reconciliation depends on the willingness of both parties to reconcile. While we can't control reconciliation, we can forgive. Forgiving another person can be hard—extremely hard—but it is the most healing thing to do. It takes two, but we can still forgive regardless of how the other person responds (Eph. 4:32). Forgive and trust God to work in the hearts of others. Trust that God will break through the walls and trust that the Holy Spirit to convict as we do our part to forgive and help manage the tension.

HOW CAN WE APPROACH CONFLICT IN A GODLY WAY?

DID YOU KNOW?

In the 1950s and 60s, the civil rights movement brought to the forefront of culture the disparity in legal rights for white and black Americans. Various forms of civil rights legislation were passed. Schools could no longer be segregated and discrimination in public places based on the color of one's skin was illegal. On August 28, 1963, a quarter of a million Americans marched in Washington, D.C. for Jobs and Freedom. Their voices were joined with other leaders in civil rights in an attempt to draw attention to stark racial differences in regard to basic civil rights. While some things did change, more than 60 years later, our country is still divided and racial tensions have escalated to new levels. Indeed, there is much work left to do.

How can all believers demonstrate trust in God in the midst of racial tensions that disrupt relationships?

LIVE IT

How can you trust that God will provide peace when conflict disrupts relationships?

God calls us to place the needs of others before our own. As humble as Abram was, Jesus is a far greater model of humility. Jesus willingly and gladly laid down His life for us, taking the death we deserve as His own. The only way we can truly maintain humility in any conflict is to run our words and actions through the filter of Jesus. Then the peace of God will abide as we deal with conflict.

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- **Pray about it.** Can others still see Christ in you during conflict? How well do you put others before yourself? Spend time this week praying over any unhealthy tendencies you have in times of conflict.
- **Resolve it.** Do you have a conflict that continues to have power over you? Pray, and then go to that person if possible. Ask God to help you place this person's needs above your own.
- **Give it to God.** Remember that God will fight for you. Trust that if the Lord has something for you, He will provide it. Take time this week to relinquish control or anger over anything you've been fighting for.

DAILY READINGS

1. CAN'T WE JUST GET ALONG // GENESIS 13:8

Abram was willing to do crazy things just to avoid conflict within the family. Abram said, "Let's not have quarreling." And then he says to Lot, "for we are close relatives." Abram put his nephew before himself and allowed Lot to have first choice of the land. That is a serious demonstration of putting the interests of others before your own (Phil. 2:4). It seems like relationships within a family can magnify conflict sometimes. Who in your family do you tend to have the most conflict with? Pray that God will guide you to resolve conflict in a way that honors Him.

Choose to safeguard the precious love and unity you have with your loved ones and with fellow believers.

2. DO EVERYTHING IN LOVE // 1 CORINTHIANS 16:13-14

As believers, we know in our minds that we are to put the needs of others before our own. But then real life happens and we discover how hard it can be to actually do that. The apostle Paul challenged believers with practical things we can all do to nurture unity and model a Christ-like attitude. In 1 Corinthians 16:14, he encouraged believers to be watchful for threats that can pull people apart. Then he summed it up by challenging us to do everything in love. Even when others don't respond in love, as Christ's followers we are to demonstrate love.

So watch for threats against unity and pray that God will help you respond in love if you are caught up in a conflict.

3. BLESSED BY GOD // GENESIS 13:14-15

So, Abram gave Lot the first choice of land—and, of course, he chose the best land. But that wasn't the end of the story. God blessed Abram because he had sought to avoid conflict with Lot. Abram recognized conflict would not make him a good witness to others who followed God. When we respond in a way that pleases God, we are also

blessed. We may not end up with all the land we can see, but we are blessed with the knowledge that we have honored God and we have honored others. That is a good feeling to have.

Trust God to remain faithful to keep His promises as you honor Him.

4. YOU CAN'T TRUST YOURSELF // PROVERBS 3:5-7

We've all experienced the disappointment of making plans only to have them fall apart. Or we think we have things figured out only to find out we really don't. King Solomon had tried all sorts of things to find answers, meaning, and pleasures in life—as evidenced in the Book of Ecclesiastes. What he discovered he wrote in these verses. Rather than trusting in yourself, trust in the Lord with all your heart. What can we, who are finite beings, do that a great infinite God can do? God's is strong enough to bear the weight of anything we are going through. Just trust and lean on Him.

When has leaning on your own understanding caused a problem for you?

5. THE WAY ISN'T CLEAR // JOSHUA 1:9

Escape rooms are very popular today. You and a group of friends are "trapped" inside a room and you have to use clues to solve puzzles and unlock the door to the room to escape. Sometimes you get out and sometimes you don't. Often the clues are just too hard to figure out. Life can feel like an escape room sometimes when you don't know what to do or which way to go. But you don't need to solve an elaborate clue to find direction in life. God reminded Joshua to be strong and remember God was with Him. Abram lived this out. When God told him to go, he trusted God and left his home, even though the way was not clear. You can trust God to provide the direction you need.

Thank God for His guidance and protection in your life.



My Notes

Name

Email

Session Number

Answer 4 Questions

What did You learn?

What Is God saying to you?

What are you gonna do about it?

**Do you have any questions
about the reading?**



My Notes



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CONFIDENCE IN SEASONS OF UNCERTAINTY

Leader pages on pp. 142-145

THE POINT:
TRUST GOD WHEN YOU
DON'T HAVE ALL THE
ANSWERS.

GENESIS 15:1-6,13-16

¹ After these events, the word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision: Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield; your reward will be very great. ² But Abram said, "Lord God, what can you give me, since I am childless and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?" ³ Abram continued, "Look, you have given me no offspring, so a slave born in my house will be my heir." ⁴ Now the word of the Lord came to him: "This one will not be your heir; instead, one who comes from your own body will be your heir." ⁵ He took him outside and said, "Look at the sky and count the stars, if you are able to count them." Then he said to him, "Your offspring will be that numerous."

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MEMORY VERSE

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⁶ Abram believed the Lord, and he credited it to him as righteousness.
.....

¹³ Then the Lord said to Abram, "Know this for certain: Your offspring will be resident aliens for four hundred years in a land that does not belong to them and will be enslaved and oppressed. ¹⁴ However, I will judge the nation they serve, and afterward they will go out with many possessions. ¹⁵ But you will go to your ancestors in peace and be buried at a good old age. ¹⁶ In the fourth generation they will return here, for the iniquity of the Amorites has not yet reached its full measure."

KEYWORDS

Abram believed (v. 6)—This means that Abram affirmed that God is dependable.

Righteousness (v. 6)—To be righteous is to measure up to God's standard. Righteousness is credited to a person who trusts in Jesus for forgiveness and salvation.

Credited ... righteousness (v.6)—God judged or accounted that Abram measured up to the standard, conformed to the norm.

WHAT HELPS US TO TRUST GOD DURING UNCERTAIN TIMES?

The year 2020 started out pleasantly enough, but it became the unsettling year of uncertainty. It seemed our entire world came to a halt. Many businesses had to close their doors. Even churches stopped meeting in person. Millions of people had to learn how to work at home while millions more were without jobs.

As the pandemic continued to increase across the country, so did the spread of skepticism and division. The news we heard one day seemed to conflict with the news from the day before. On top of the deadly virus, we saw 2020 add politics, racial tensions, disagreements over wearing masks, and debates over reopening schools to the mix.

The year 2020 created the perfect storm of uncertainty. When things in life seem to be blurry or unstable, how do we respond? Oh, if only our faith were strong enough to overcome the uncertainty of it all! We know Abram as a man of faith, but that faith did not prevent him from experiencing his own season of uncertainty. Let's learn some lessons from Him.

Trust God When Uncertain

// Genesis 15:1-5

Since the time God first called Abram and promised land, offspring, and blessing, the patriarch had encountered a lot. Abram had endured a trip to Egypt to escape a famine, and then being kicked out by Pharaoh. He had successfully managed tensions with his nephew, Lot, and he had defeated invading kings. All these events didn't seem to be leading to the promises God had given Abram.

Uncertainty can have the power to manipulate us and tempt us to take matters into our hands, instead of trusting in the hand of God. When we become overwhelmed with worry, we can foolishly try and attempt to force the hand of God—which never works! Uncertainty can cause us to worry but worry can cause us to react irrationally without sound judgment.

WHEN YOU THINK OF TIMES OF UNCERTAINTY, WHAT COMES TO MIND IN YOUR PERSONAL LIFE?



THE POINT: TRUST GOD WHEN YOU DON'T HAVE ALL THE ANSWERS.

Sadly, Abram demonstrated irrationality without sound judgment. Here was God, speaking to Abram in a vision and reminding Abram that He was his shield. God's divine protection would ensure his prosperity and blessing.

But Abram only saw the situation right in front of him. Since Abram had not yet received the heir God had promised, he may have been considering a practice that was common in Mesopotamia: an adoption to ensure that he would have an heir. Uncertainty has a way of making us forgetful. That seemed to be the case here with Abram. God lovingly corrected and reminded Abram of His promise.

Picture Abram squinting his eyes and trying to do the impossible when God told him, "Look at the sky and count the stars." Of course, even counting the stars would miss the point. God wanted Abram to realize that, in spite of how circumstances seemed at the moment, he would have so many descendants—a great nation—they couldn't all be counted. Abram couldn't count them, but God could—and even more so, He would know each one by name.

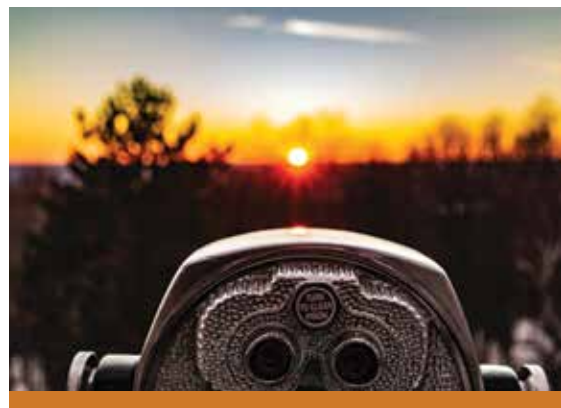
Trust God in Righteousness // Genesis 15:6

Earlier, in verses 2-3, Abram appeared quite uncertain about God's promises to him, but now we see Abram responding differently. But God did not give Abram any details concerning how He would deliver on the promises. Abram trusted the word God spoke to him. He believed. Abram chose to believe God even when the future seemed uncertain. The one thing that was certain was that Abram chose to trust and believe.

WHAT INITIALLY CAUSED YOU TO TRUST AND BELIEVE IN GOD?

With this simple act of trust, God "credited it to him as righteousness." The idea behind credited is to assign value to something. Abram's belief was valued as righteousness. Abram did not have to do anything to be credited with righteousness except believe. Abram believed God's promise that his offspring would be as numerous as the stars; in turn, God counted that belief as righteousness.

To have righteousness credited to one's account means to be made right with God, to be in a right standing with Him, and to be accepted into a relationship with Him. This was not only



DIGGING DEEPER VISIONS

Throughout the Bible, in both the Old Testament and the New Testament, God used visions to communicate in a special way with people. The vision of the sacrifice and the covenant Abram experienced in Genesis 15, Jacob's vision of wrestling with God in Genesis 46, and the prophetic visions of Daniel, Ezekiel, and Isaiah were all initiated by God at times when the recipients did not anticipate them. Visions occurred during waking hours rather than while sleeping—although many visions were accompanied by a sleepy state. Visions were used to convey something that would happen in the future or visions could be used to teach a spiritual truth. Some visions were used to bolster the strength of an individual during a trial or to reveal aspects of God's majesty.

Describe the way God does this same work in the lives of believers today.

a benefit to Abram, it set the entire stage for all humanity to receive the very same benefit.

From the time of Abram all the way to the present, the great deceiver has used the deadly trap of a works-based faith to infiltrate and sabotage the hearts of many souls. Human nature is mistakenly drawn to the idea that we need to step in and help fix our sin problem.

If we believe our relationship with God is based solely on our behavior, then our relationship with Him will be constantly filled with uncertainty. Have I done enough? Have I said enough? Have I repented enough? For those who think they need to work or contribute to their salvation, Paul said trusting in laws or works makes faith empty and God's promise unnecessary (Rom. 4:14).

Uncertainty in our faith has a domino effect on the way we respond to other uncertainties in life. Securing salvation on God's promise we are made right by our faith in Christ alone propels us through other unknowns. Faith provides us with a foundation that is certain and stable. Faith helps give us an eternal perspective to see the world through the eyes of God, so when everything around us seems to be crumbling, we can stand confidently.

Trust God to Work on Time //

Genesis 15:13-16

God responded to Abram with an oath using animal sacrifices that were to be cut down the middle. Ritual sacrifices to confirm an agreement were not uncommon in the ancient Near East, but this particular sacrifice was uniquely directed by God. In the middle of this oath ritual, Abram fell into a deep dark sleep. In that moment, God gave Abram an idea of what would happen with his descendants. Before Abram's offspring would occupy the promised land, they would be oppressed in slavery for

four hundred years in a foreign land. They would inhabit this land, but not before they faced great challenges.



HOW CAN A RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD PROVIDE CONFIDENCE IN SEASONS OF UNCERTAINTY?

While God confirmed His promise of descendants and land, it was clear the fulfillment of receiving the land would be a long time coming. This was news Abram surely was not expecting. God's timing is not always our timing. It is in these moments when we will truly be tested. In the moments of uncertainty when God's plan and timing do not match up with ours, we have a choice. We can choose to either trust or reject His promise. We will either lift up a fist in anger or lift up a hand of adoration.

As God confirmed His covenant with Abram, He underscored it with a manifestation of His presence. This surely was a comfort for Abram. Fire can be ferocious, consuming all it touches. Fire can also be comforting; it warms us, lights our way, and serves us in a variety of ways, such as cooking food. I would think seeing the fire pot and torch appear would be a fear-inducing sight, but the fear of the God also carries with it the comfort of His presence and goodness.

THE POINT: TRUST GOD WHEN YOU DON'T HAVE ALL THE ANSWERS.

As a part of a covenant ceremony like this, the ones who walked through the cut animals were responsible for upholding the agreements of the covenant. The reason for passing through the cut animals was a way of saying, "If I fail to uphold to arrangements of our covenant, may the same happen to me." Because Abram was asleep and the Lord alone passed through the animals, the Lord took it upon Himself to uphold the agreements of the covenant. The Lord was taking sole responsibility for bringing about the promises of the covenant. Abram simply had to believe and trust God.

We must strive to trust God's timing in the seasons of uncertainty. Things may not occur in the time frame we think they should, but God's timing is always perfect. And through it all, as we trust Him, we can rest in the comfort of His loving and awe-inspiring presence. We can be confident in seasons of uncertainty because we do not have to face them alone.

WHAT MAKES IT SO HARD TO WAIT FOR GOD'S TIMING?

DID YOU KNOW?

Uncertainty can be classified as a "frienemy." That's because despite the insecurity and lack of control we experience during times of uncertainty, we learn valuable lessons on how to cope in similar future events. For example, when the Spanish flu pandemic of 1918 caused the death of 50 million people worldwide, we walked away with many resources that have helped us during the uncertain times of our current pandemic. First, there were many similarities between the two pandemics. Schools and places of public gathering were closed, the economy suffered, and over time people rebelled against having to remain at home. This created new waves of illnesses, both then and now. The one lesson that medical and public official learned from the 1918 pandemic is that wearing masks and social distancing worked. They learned that these two actions along with hand sanitizing help to get the pandemic under control.²

What are some things you have learned from times of uncertainty in your life?

LIVE IT

How will you strengthen your resolve to trust God in all things?

When things in life seem to be blurry or unstable, how do we respond? God's Word reminds us over and over again of His promises and protection by which we can deflect all the arrows of worry that attack us in times of uncertainty. Until we see and understand how God is at work, we must trust His unseen hand. And remember nothing takes God by surprise.

+ + +

- **Plan for uncertainty.** Resolve how you will face your next season of uncertainty in confidence. Journal about how God has gotten you through uncertainty before. Take note of what you can do.
- **Change course.** Is there an area of life where God is asking you to adjust your hopes or plans, or even your timeline? Pray and ask Him to help you keep your eyes focused on Him.
- **Trust together.** Talk with people who have stayed confident in Christ through difficult circumstances. What can you glean from their lives?

DAILY READINGS

1. GREATER THAN YOU CAN IMAGINE // GENESIS 15:5

While Abram was waiting for the fulfillment of God's promise, he dealt with discouragement—especially when he was left alone with his own thoughts. He didn't see a human way for God's promise to be fulfilled in his life. That's when God reminded him that the promise wouldn't be fulfilled in a human way but in God's way. While you can't see God's grand plan, you can rest in the fact that His plan is far greater than anything you can imagine. God says about Himself: "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, and your ways are not my ways" (Isa. 55:8).

Trust God even when you can't understand how things will work out.

2. YOU CAN PLEASE GOD // HEBREWS 11:6

Abram believed God when God said his offspring would be as numerous as the stars in the night sky. While you might be tempted to think Abram had a different type of faith in God, you can exercise the same faith Abram had in God. Hebrews 11:6 says that without faith it is impossible to please God. That's true. But the inverse is also true: With faith, it is possible to please God. So what are the things that are pleasing to God? Abram understood this, and he lived it. Just believe God's Word and the things He reveals to you. Then obey all He has commanded you to do. These two things are pleasing to God..

Exercise your faith in God and in His Word.

3. GOD'S PLAN IS THE BEST PLAN // GENESIS 15:13-16

When God revealed His plan to Abram, it must have seemed so strange. God's plan included long life and peace for Abram. That's great. But God's plan also included 400 years of slavery and oppression for Abram's descendants. That didn't sound so great. But God had a plan to save His people and bring judgment upon the Amorites. In the same way,

God's plan for your life may seem strange. It may involve some ups and downs, but continue to trust Him through it all. He is doing something you can't completely understand. You will never completely understand.

Thank God that He has the best plan for your life.

4. NOTHING IS IMPOSSIBLE // MATTHEW 19:23-26

Trusting in God and following Him in faith requires a recognition that God can do things that are impossible for us to do and imagine. From small things to huge things, God is able. The Bible is full of examples of God doing what we would consider impossible. As a matter of fact, the word "impossible" could never be used to describe anything God does. If He can feed a multitude with five dinner rolls and two small fish, is it too much to believe that He can cause a 90-something year old woman to have a baby? Nope. God does the impossible for His glory and to fulfill His plans.

Praise God for all the ways He has worked in your life, including doing things you might have thought were impossible.

5. WORSHIP THE LORD // GENESIS 17:3

Over and over again, Abram, was moved to worship the Lord. And wouldn't you, too, with all that God was revealing to Him and doing around him? But don't miss the fact, this was Abram's natural response to God. He responded to God's working in his life by coming before Him in worship. It really is a mindset choice—during the events of your life, good and bad, you can choose this same mindset. You can choose to worship the Lord when God is doing great things in your life. Notice too what else is happening. This verse also indicates that worship opened the lines of communication for God to clearly guide Abram. This is a bonus to responding in worship to what God is doing in our lives.

Take some time, right now, to worship the Lord.



My Notes

Name

Email

Session Number

Answer 4 Questions

What did You learn?

What Is God saying to you?

What are you gonna do about it?

**Do you have any questions
about the reading?**



My Notes



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CONFIDENCE IN THE MIDST OF CONFLICT

Leader pages on pp. 138-141

THE POINT:
TRUST GOD WHEN
CONFLICT DISRUPTS
YOUR RELATIONSHIPS.

GENESIS 13:5-11,14-18

⁵ Now Lot, who was traveling with Abram, also had flocks, herds, and tents. ⁶ But the land was unable to support them as long as they stayed together, for they had so many possessions that they could not stay together, ⁷ and there was quarreling between the herdsmen of Abram’s livestock and the herdsmen of Lot’s livestock. (At that time the Canaanites and the Perizzites were living in the land.) ⁸ So Abram said to Lot, “Please, let’s not have quarreling between you and me, or between your herdsmen and my herdsmen, since we are relatives.

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⁹ Isn’t the whole land before you? Separate from me: if you go to the left, I will go to the right; if you go to the right, I will go to the left.” ¹⁰ Lot looked out and saw that the entire plain of the Jordan as far as Zoar was well watered everywhere like the Lord’s garden and the land of Egypt. (This was before the Lord destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah.) ¹¹ So Lot chose the entire plain of the Jordan for himself. Then Lot journeyed eastward, and they separated from each other.

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¹⁴ After Lot had separated from him, the Lord said to Abram, “Look from the place where you are. Look north and south, east and west, ¹⁵ for I will give you and your offspring forever all the land that you see. ¹⁶ **I will make your offspring like the dust of the earth, so that if anyone could count the dust of the earth, then your offspring could be counted.** ¹⁷ Get up and walk around the land, through its length and width, for I will give it to you.”¹⁸ So Abram moved his tent and went to live near the oaks of Mamre at Hebron, where he built an altar to the Lord.

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MEMORY VERSE

KEYWORDS

Eastward (v. 11)—Lot’s journey eastward has troubling implications. Other situations in which “east” is a destination include

Adam and Eve following their sin (3:24), Cain following his judgment (4:16), and sinful humanity prior to tower of Babylon (11:2).

HOW CAN TRUST IN GOD HELP US DURING CONFLICT?

For sailboats, tension is a good thing. The tension of the ropes in the hands of the sailors creates tension in the sails—which in turn creates tension between the sail and the wind. That tension moves the sailboat forward. This is a good form of tension.

Like sailing, we are always managing tensions in life. We deal with the tension of finances, news, politics, healthy habits, household tasks, and work expectations. Learning how to handle the tension in a way that honors Christ is our goal as believers.

But one of the most difficult tensions we must manage is relational tension, including the nationwide racial tension we're all experiencing. We can't escape it—and some of it ends up being hard to handle. The tension in some relationships may have been stirring like a steady current for a long time. Others suddenly came out of nowhere like a heavy gust of wind. So, let's take some cues from Abram to see how he navigated the waters of his relationships.

Confront Conflict Appropriately

// Genesis 13:5-8

As we saw in our last session, Abram displayed a lack of trust when he took his family to Egypt. Even so, during that sojourn, God allowed Abram to acquire flocks and herds (Gen. 12:16). When Abram left Egypt and returned to Canaan, he returned with a lot more than he left with—a whole lot more! And his nephew Lot apparently did as well.

Their collective wealth made traveling together extremely difficult. This created tension between the herdsmen of Abram's livestock and the herdsmen of Lot's livestock. It was a "turf war" type of conflict.

You can sense the tension heating up. As the leader of the large assembly, Abram had a choice: he could ignore the conflict, or he could confront it. Abram chose to confront it. Abram didn't run from the conflict; he had the courage to face it head on, and he did so by first thinking of his relationship with Lot who was his nephew.



THE POINT: TRUST GOD WHEN CONFLICT DISRUPTS YOUR RELATIONSHIPS.

We face the same decision anytime conflict arises in our relationships. Do we ignore the issue or confront it? Let's keep moving toward unity because the tension and conflict is just not worth it. This is especially true in the church and with relationships among believers. We are to make "every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace" (Eph. 4:3). We cannot control the attitudes and actions of another individual or group, but we can control our own attitudes and actions. We must evaluate our role by asking: Am I doing my part to maintain peace and resolve the conflict?

Abram confronted the issue. When done correctly, confrontation can show the other person how much we care. It demonstrates how much the individual matters to us. This practice can prevent so much unnecessary conflict. The alternative approach of ignoring the issue does not solve anything. In fact, by ignoring a tiny issue, we allow it to fester and grow. Over time, you can discover a gigantic wall in a relationship that should never have built up in the first place.

WHAT ARE SOME EARLY STEPS WE CAN TAKE TO AVOID OR REDUCE CONFLICT?

Consider the Needs of Others

// **Genesis 13:9-11**

Abram also lowered the temperature of the tension by walking into his conversation with Lot without the goal of winning the conversation. The goal in any conflict cannot be about who is right; it must be about making it right. In order to make things right, we must be willing to put the other person first.

By allowing Lot to choose land first, Abram demonstrated the importance of putting the needs of others before our own needs, a principle Paul spelled out centuries later. "Do nothing out of selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility consider others as more important than yourselves. Everyone should look not to his own interests, but rather to the interests of others" (Phil. 2:3-4). But let's be honest: putting the needs of others before our own doesn't always sit so well, especially in a conflict situation. It's easier said than done!

WHY IS HUMILITY A KEY WHEN SOLVING RELATIONAL TENSION?



DIGGING DEEPER LOT AND HIS DAUGHTERS

While the decision to part ways was necessary, Lot's life and direction completely changed after parting from Abram. After the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, and the death of his wife, Lot and his daughters fled to the caves near Zoar. Lot was afraid to live in the city, so he and his daughters just lived in the caves. His daughters, fearing they would never have children while living in the caves, got Lot drunk and both slept with him. Their resulting children became the forefathers of the Moabites and the Ammonites—both nations became enemies of Israel. A series of poor decisions stemming from conflict eventually produced people groups who were constantly in conflict with God's people.

How have you experienced consequences of past actions?



A humble attitude does not dismiss any wrong that may have been done to you, but remember the goal: The goal in any conflict cannot be about who is right; it must be about making it right. In order to make things right, we must be willing to put the other person first.

Consider the promise and position God gave to Abram. God had given this land to him! Abram did not have to make Lot such an offer. He could have told Lot to take the worst piece of property, and that still might have been viewed as gracious. After all, God had given the land to Abram, so Abram could've said, "It's time for you and your quarreling herdsmen to leave and get off my property." Keep in mind, Abram did not know Lot would choose land outside the promised land. Abram lowered the temperature of the tension by raising the level of his humility, not by allowing pride or his "rights" to control the situation.

Jesus was a far greater model of humility. Jesus willingly and gladly laid down His life for us, taking the death we deserve as His own. As Christ followers, we are to lean into His example and practice humility. Indeed, it's only possible to remain humble in Christ Jesus. The only way we can truly maintain humility in any conflict is to run our words and actions through the filter

of Jesus. This is a lesson we may have to learn every day, but it is a lesson—a principle—worth fighting for. When we do so, a lot of conflicts can be avoided altogether, and relationships can be restored.

Remain Confident in God's Provisions // Genesis 13:14-18

Tragically for Lot, he made a poor decision. He may have thought he was getting the better land—land that was well watered (Gen. 13:10). But his decision moved him away from his uncle, whom God had obviously blessed, and into a place of compromise. Notice Lot's downward progression. He chose land that was outside Canaan, the land promised to Abram. Lot "set up his tent near Sodom (v. 12), but later we find him "living in Sodom" (14:12), and finally we see him "sitting in Sodom's gateway" (19:1), a place where the city leaders sat. Lot eventually moved from being connected to Abram to being a leader in a wicked city.

Abram, however, maintained his trust in God. God reaffirmed His promise to Abram. He told Abram to open up his eyes and look around. All of the land, as far as his vision could see and beyond, would be given to Abram and his descendants. God reminded Abram of His promise—His unchanging, immutable promise.

HOW WOULD YOU DESCRIBE THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN LOT AND ABRAM?

Setting aside our own human viewpoint to see things from God's perspective can be difficult. That can be doubly difficult when things seem to be so far out of reach and a solution seems unimaginable—even when we hear Jesus' words, "With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible" (Matt. 19:26).

The situation between Abram and Lot was solved quickly, but what do we do when our

THE POINT: TRUST GOD WHEN CONFLICT DISRUPTS YOUR RELATIONSHIPS.

own conflicts don't resolve so quickly? We trust God to work, and we trust Him to work in His timing. We typically want a quick resolution, but a resolution takes two parties. We may need to pray and ask God to work in the heart of the other person. We have to come to grips with the tension between God's timing and our timing. Trusting that His timing is better—His timing is perfect—can be difficult to swallow. We need to surrender our timing to His.

Reconciliation and forgiveness are not the same thing. We strive for both to take place, but reconciliation depends on the willingness of both parties to reconcile. While we can't control reconciliation, we can forgive. Forgiving another person can be hard—extremely hard—but it is the most healing thing to do. It takes two, but we can still forgive regardless of how the other person responds (Eph. 4:32). Forgive and trust God to work in the hearts of others. Trust that God will break through the walls and trust that the Holy Spirit to convict as we do our part to forgive and help manage the tension.

HOW CAN WE APPROACH CONFLICT IN A GODLY WAY?

DID YOU KNOW?

In the 1950s and 60s, the civil rights movement brought to the forefront of culture the disparity in legal rights for white and black Americans. Various forms of civil rights legislation were passed. Schools could no longer be segregated and discrimination in public places based on the color of one's skin was illegal. On August 28, 1963, a quarter of a million Americans marched in Washington, D.C. for Jobs and Freedom. Their voices were joined with other leaders in civil rights in an attempt to draw attention to stark racial differences in regard to basic civil rights. While some things did change, more than 60 years later, our country is still divided and racial tensions have escalated to new levels. Indeed, there is much work left to do.

How can all believers demonstrate trust in God in the midst of racial tensions that disrupt relationships?

LIVE IT

How can you trust that God will provide peace when conflict disrupts relationships?

God calls us to place the needs of others before our own. As humble as Abram was, Jesus is a far greater model of humility. Jesus willingly and gladly laid down His life for us, taking the death we deserve as His own. The only way we can truly maintain humility in any conflict is to run our words and actions through the filter of Jesus. Then the peace of God will abide as we deal with conflict.

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- **Pray about it.** Can others still see Christ in you during conflict? How well do you put others before yourself? Spend time this week praying over any unhealthy tendencies you have in times of conflict.
- **Resolve it.** Do you have a conflict that continues to have power over you? Pray, and then go to that person if possible. Ask God to help you place this person's needs above your own.
- **Give it to God.** Remember that God will fight for you. Trust that if the Lord has something for you, He will provide it. Take time this week to relinquish control or anger over anything you've been fighting for.

DAILY READINGS

1. CAN'T WE JUST GET ALONG // GENESIS 13:8

Abram was willing to do crazy things just to avoid conflict within the family. Abram said, "Let's not have quarreling." And then he says to Lot, "for we are close relatives." Abram put his nephew before himself and allowed Lot to have first choice of the land. That is a serious demonstration of putting the interests of others before your own (Phil. 2:4). It seems like relationships within a family can magnify conflict sometimes. Who in your family do you tend to have the most conflict with? Pray that God will guide you to resolve conflict in a way that honors Him.

Choose to safeguard the precious love and unity you have with your loved ones and with fellow believers.

2. DO EVERYTHING IN LOVE // 1 CORINTHIANS 16:13-14

As believers, we know in our minds that we are to put the needs of others before our own. But then real life happens and we discover how hard it can be to actually do that. The apostle Paul challenged believers with practical things we can all do to nurture unity and model a Christ-like attitude. In 1 Corinthians 16:14, he encouraged believers to be watchful for threats that can pull people apart. Then he summed it up by challenging us to do everything in love. Even when others don't respond in love, as Christ's followers we are to demonstrate love.

So watch for threats against unity and pray that God will help you respond in love if you are caught up in a conflict.

3. BLESSED BY GOD // GENESIS 13:14-15

So, Abram gave Lot the first choice of land—and, of course, he chose the best land. But that wasn't the end of the story. God blessed Abram because he had sought to avoid conflict with Lot. Abram recognized conflict would not make him a good witness to others who followed God. When we respond in a way that pleases God, we are also

blessed. We may not end up with all the land we can see, but we are blessed with the knowledge that we have honored God and we have honored others. That is a good feeling to have.

Trust God to remain faithful to keep His promises as you honor Him.

4. YOU CAN'T TRUST YOURSELF // PROVERBS 3:5-7

We've all experienced the disappointment of making plans only to have them fall apart. Or we think we have things figured out only to find out we really don't. King Solomon had tried all sorts of things to find answers, meaning, and pleasures in life—as evidenced in the Book of Ecclesiastes. What he discovered he wrote in these verses. Rather than trusting in yourself, trust in the Lord with all your heart. What can we, who are finite beings, do that a great infinite God can do? God's is strong enough to bear the weight of anything we are going through. Just trust and lean on Him.

When has leaning on your own understanding caused a problem for you?

5. THE WAY ISN'T CLEAR // JOSHUA 1:9

Escape rooms are very popular today. You and a group of friends are "trapped" inside a room and you have to use clues to solve puzzles and unlock the door to the room to escape. Sometimes you get out and sometimes you don't. Often the clues are just too hard to figure out. Life can feel like an escape room sometimes when you don't know what to do or which way to go. But you don't need to solve an elaborate clue to find direction in life. God reminded Joshua to be strong and remember God was with Him. Abram lived this out. When God told him to go, he trusted God and left his home, even though the way was not clear. You can trust God to provide the direction you need.

Thank God for His guidance and protection in your life.



My Notes

Name

Email

Session Number

Answer 4 Questions

What did You learn?

What Is God saying to you?

What are you gonna do about it?

**Do you have any questions
about the reading?**



My Notes



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CONFIDENCE AFTER WE FAIL

THE POINT:
TRUST GOD TO REDEEM YOUR FAILURES.

Leader pages on pp. 146-149

GENESIS 16:1-5; 17:1-9

^{16:1} Abram’s wife, Sarai, had not borne any children for him, but she owned an Egyptian slave named Hagar. ² Sarai said to Abram, “Since the Lord has prevented me from bearing children, go to my slave; perhaps through her I can build a family.” And Abram agreed to what Sarai said. ³ So Abram’s wife, Sarai, took Hagar, her Egyptian slave, and gave her to her husband, Abram, as a wife for him. This happened after Abram had lived in the land of Canaan ten years. ⁴ He slept with Hagar, and she became pregnant. When she saw that she was pregnant, her mistress became contemptible to her. ⁵ Then Sarai said to Abram, “You are responsible for my suffering! I put my slave in your arms, and when she saw that she was pregnant, I became contemptible to her. May the Lord judge between me and you.”

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^{17:1} When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the Lord appeared to him, saying, “I am God Almighty. Live in my presence and be blameless. ² I will set up my covenant between me and you, and I will multiply you greatly.” ³ Then Abram fell facedown and God spoke with him:

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⁴ “As for me, here is my covenant with you: You will become the father of many nations. ⁵ Your name will no longer be Abram; your name will be Abraham, for I will make you the father of many nations. ⁶ I will make you extremely fruitful and will make nations and kings come from you. ⁷ I will confirm my covenant that is between me and you and your future offspring throughout their generations. It is a permanent covenant to be your God and the God of your offspring after you. ⁸ And to you and your future offspring I will give the land where you are residing — all the land of Canaan—as a permanent possession, and I will be their God.” ⁹ God also said to Abraham, “As for you, you and your offspring after you throughout their generations are to keep my covenant.

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MEMORY VERSE

Psalm 73:26— My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength[a] of my heart, my portion forever.

KEYWORDS

Covenant (17:2)—A covenant is an oath-bound agreement between two or more parties. God

enters into covenant relationships with His people.



WHAT CAN WE LEARN FROM FAILURE ABOUT TRUST IN GOD?

Our football team was up 14-13. It was the last two minutes of the game, and we had the ball. It was third down, and we needed five yards to keep the drive alive. The quarterback dropped back to pass, but a blitz was coming. Under extreme pressure, he threw the ball ... but it was picked off. A quick pick-6 ended the game, and our hopes for any post-season play.

I felt the pain of the quarterback as he walked off the field holding his head low. I was not just his assistant coach; I was his dad. My son had actually had a good day on the field, but it didn't matter. In his mind he had failed, and his confidence was shattered.

We all fail at times. When we make mistakes, it's so easy for us to beat ourselves up. Whether our tongue gets the best of us, we drop the ball at work, or we run back to an old addiction, our sins and failures can completely crush our confidence. When that happens, how do we pull ourselves out of the dugout and get our heads back into the game of life? Let's take some coaching tips from the life of Abram.

Don't Take Over // Genesis 16:1-5

This account out of Abram's life is one of failure and of getting ahead of God. Abram's failure in this account involved three individuals:

Sarai: It had been ten years since God had promised that Sarai would bear Abram a son. It would surely not be surprising to know she had been becoming increasingly embarrassed and frustrated by her barrenness. At this point, her patience had run out.

Sarai took matters into her own hands. We are shocked by Sarai's proposal. We see her suggestion as outright disobedience and the encouragement of adultery. But her heart was truly in the right place—she wanted to assist God with His plan to provide an heir for Abram—and the surrounding culture would not have thought twice about it. It was common in the ancient Near East for men to sire children through other wives or female servants. And since Hagar was Sarai's servant, Hagar's children could be considered Sarai's children.

THE POINT: TRUST GOD TO REDEEM YOUR FAILURES.

WHY IS IT SO TEMPTING TO TAKE MATTERS INTO OUR OWN HANDS?

Abram: Even if we think Sarai made a poor judgment call, let's not lay all the blame on her. After all, Abram went along with the plan. He could've said no, but Sarai's reasoning apparently made perfect sense to Abram. He had faith in God's promise of offspring, but perhaps this was the way he should "put feet to his faith."

Hagar: Hagar was an Egyptian maidservant likely acquired during Abram and Sarai's brief sojourn in Egypt (Gen. 12:10-20). Sarai used Hagar for her benefit almost like a modern-day surrogate. Because of her position as a servant, Hagar had no choice but to go along with the plan. As a result, she got pregnant.

Sarai's plan seemed to be working, but then the situation got ugly. As Hagar's stomach grew with her baby, her confidence grew. Hagar's behavior was both disrespectful and threatening. This created tension and animosity between the two women, and Sarai flew off the handle—at Abram! "You are responsible for my suffering!" Sarai forgot her own role in all this, and she called on God to judge between the two of them.

Abram again complied with Sarai and left the matter in her hands to correct. His statement: "Here, your slave is in your power" (v. 6), was to remind Sarai that she was still the wife and had the primary role. Abram added, "Do whatever you want with her." Unfortunately, Sarai abused her position and treated Hagar so horribly that she fled.

Do What God Expects // Genesis 17:1-3

Thirteen years passed between Genesis 16 and 17; now God came to Abram again with a word of reassurance. God had not forgotten His promise! At this point in Abram's life, he may have assumed Ishmael, the son born to him through Hagar thirteen years earlier, was the child of God's promise. Frankly, we don't know, but we do know God was about to make it clear that Abram would have another son—the son of the promise (Gen. 17:19-21).

But before God revealed this, He reminded Abram, "I am God Almighty." He is El Shaddai, the all-powerful God. God



DIGGING DEEPER COVENANT

Covenants are an important biblical concept. The covenants described in the Bible are similar to contracts today. In a contract, two parties make agreements with one another. For example, when you buy a house, you sign a contract with the bank or lender. The bank agrees to loan you the money to buy your house and you agree to make monthly payments. Biblical covenants include the one made with Noah in Genesis 9 where God promised to preserve humanity; the covenant with Abraham in Genesis 12 and 15 to provide land, descendants, and a blessing; the covenant with Moses in Exodus 19 and 24 to provide the Law to govern the people; the covenant with David in 2 Samuel 7 to provide a ruler on his throne forever; and the New Covenant through Jesus in Luke 22.

How does God's eternal covenant through Jesus Christ impact you?

was about to tell Abram what He would do through Sarai, and this would be at the hand and will of El-Shaddai, the all-powerful and all-sufficient God. Nothing is beyond His ability, including enabling a ninety-nine-year-old man to father a child!



WHEN HAVE YOU EXPERIENCED GOD DOING SOMETHING THAT WAS UNEXPECTED?

God had earlier called Abram to “go” (Gen. 12:1) and he obediently went; now God called Abram to obedience again. Abram had gone, and now he was to continue going—to walk with God and live a life that honored Him. We should embrace that call too.

Abram had gotten ahead of God’s plan when he sought a child through Hagar. He probably was not aware of that at that time, but now he was about to learn of God’s greater plan. Abram didn’t hear a rebuke from God, but he did hear a call to live in God’s presence and move forward in obedience.

Note Abram’s response to God’s call to obedience and His reminder of the covenant: “Abram fell facedown.” This is the position of respect a person in that culture showed to one who was superior. It was in this position

of humility that Abram acknowledged God Almighty truly is almighty and expressed his willingness to obey.

God Can Restore Us

// Genesis 17:4-9

God previously had made promises to Abram related to the land and his descendants, but now He formalized it with a covenant. Abram would, from this point on, carry a sign and remembrance of this covenant: a new name.

Names in the Old Testament carried meaning behind them. For all of his 99 years, Abram’s name meant “exalted father,” but now God changed his name to reflect the covenant and what God was doing in Abram’s life. Abram would now be Abraham. He could still be considered an exalted father, but even more so, he would now be seen as Abraham: “father of many.” At the same time, Sarai’s name also would be changed to Sarah (v. 15). This change was subtle since both names have their root in the word “Princess.” Sarah would be even more of a princess as the wife of the one who was a father of nations!

WHAT DO THESE VERSES TEACH US ABOUT THE GRACE OF GOD?

What catches our attention is the fact that this covenant does not have an expiration date—it’s a permanent covenant. But God never intended it to be exclusive to Abraham’s physical descendants, the Jews. We understand this as we see the significance of the word offspring in this passage. We might think it’s a reference to Abraham’s son Isaac, but it refers to Jesus. As Paul wrote: “Now the promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. He does not say ‘and to seeds,’ as though referring to many, but referring to one, and to your seed, who is Christ” (Gal. 3:16).

THE POINT: TRUST GOD TO REDEEM YOUR FAILURES.

When Jesus came to earth, He kept the law for us. He died the death our disobedience deserved, and through His death He established a whole new covenant. This covenant is not based on our ability to keep it; it is based solely on all Christ has done for us.

God sought a covenant relationship with Abraham, and He desires a covenant relationship with us also. Even as He told Abram, “Live in my presence and be blameless” (Gen. 17:1), He calls us to do the same. We can live in His presence because of Christ, and we can be blameless because Christ has forgiven us and made us blameless. When we see all that God has done in Christ to make this covenant relationship with Him possible, let’s respond as Abram did, falling facedown before Him in humility and thankfulness. Our sin and all the times we took the place of God in our own lives are forgiven in Christ. The certainty of failure has been replaced with the certainty of forgiveness. He redeems our failures and puts us back on the path of following Christ to live in His presence with confidence even after we fail.

DID YOU KNOW?

Anthony Flynn was born in Memphis, Tennessee to a mom in poverty. They later moved, but then, when Anthony was five years old, his father came home and had a major fight with his mom. Anthony and his mom were put on a bus and sent back to Memphis. Anthony had a rough childhood. He says, “When you look at the path of my life, it purely represents the pain that I felt that day when my mom and I were put on that bus.” He thought, there has to be a way out of this. My pain will be resolved by my success. At 24, he was working at a Fortune 100 company. But he desired to do more, so he left that company and jumped into non-profit work. He’s now a mentor with Mentoring Kings and serves youth in Atlanta, Georgia through Project Success. He desires to help young men break the cycles of poverty, under-achievement, and violence so they can reach their highest potential.

How has God redeemed failures in your own life?

LIVE IT

What helps you trust God to redeem your failures?

We all fail at times. When we make mistakes, it’s easy for us to beat ourselves up. Giving up in defeat doesn’t resolve anything. Resting confidently in God’s forgiveness, we can move forward in obedience. Regardless of what we’ve done, we’re never beyond the love and grace of God. When we turn to God and trust Him, He brings us into an incredible relationship with Him. Seek redemption by doing the following:

+ + +

- **Give up control.** When have you tried to take matters into your own hands recently? Repent to the Lord of your desire for control.
- **Check your influences.** Who influences you? Who do you have influence over? Spend time in prayer, asking God to show you which connections are healthy and which aren’t.
- **Seek guidance.** Take the bold step this week to talk with a spiritual leader about a recent failure in your life: How can you experience victory over it now?

DAILY READINGS

1. THAT WAS A BAD DECISION // GENESIS 16:1-5

Have you ever made a decision and later regretted it? Sure you have; we all have. Sarai tried to “help” God with His plan for Abram to have numerous descendants. However, her actions (along with Abram’s) created the Ishmaelites who would become (and continue to be) the enemies of the Israelites. One small, seemingly insignificant decision had long-term consequences for Sarai and Abram as well as the nation of Israel. The take-away is we should not take God’s matters into your own hands. He will fulfill all He has said He will do. It’s a matter of trust, plus a little patience to wait on God.

Confess your tendency to take matters into your own hands. God is the God of second chances.

2. CALLED TO HOLINESS // 1 PETER 1:15-16

Just as God called Abram to live in His presence and to be blameless, all believers are called to do the same thing. Because God is holy, He expects His children to live holy, blameless, devoted lives that honor Him. Holy means “set apart, devoted to, and consecrated for God.” The Greek word, *haggios*, can be translated as sacred, pure, and worthy. Our responsibility, as believers, is to live our lives the way God expects us to. That means we should not be like the world in our actions, words, and thoughts. Even the clothes we wear should also glorify and give honor to God. Your life can be a witness for Him.

Examine your life for signs of holy living.

3. LIVING AS COVENANT KEEPERS // GENESIS 17:9

God changed Abram’s name to Abraham and renewed His covenant with him. A covenant is a conditional promise with each party having a responsibility to keep. Abraham and his descendants, including us today, were to keep God’s law and remain faithful to God. In response,

God promised His protection, guidance, and presence for His people. God desires a covenant relationship with you, not just a one-day-per-week relationship. He wants you to walk with Him everyday, throughout the day.

Evaluate how well you are keeping God’s Word and remaining faithful to Him.

4. BIBLICAL THANKSGIVING // 1 THESSALONIANS 5:16-18

Every year when the Thanksgiving holiday rolls around, we stop whatever we are doing to be with family and friends, celebrate, and eat lots of savory foods and desserts. Many of us will take time to state specific things for which we are thankful that happened during the year. Have you ever stopped to consider that thanksgiving is biblical—not the holiday but the actual act of giving thanks? There are many things for which we should be thankful, the air we breathe, our health, our homes, our families, and the list goes on. The apostle Paul challenged believers to give thanks to God in every circumstance, not just one day per year.

As you reflect on the past year, what are some circumstances—both good and bad—for which you can thank God?

5. PRAISE THE NAME OF GOD // 1 CHRONICLES 29:10-13

As King David neared the end of his life, he led the people in prayer to God before the building of the temple. The entire prayer is a glorious realization and proclamation of the greatness, power, splendor, and majesty of God. Verse 13 encourages the people to give thanks to God and to praise His name. These verses would make a great addition to a pre-meal prayer on Thanksgiving as you lead your family in thanks to God for another year. God is certainly worthy of our praise and so much more. David recognized this, and we should too.

As you prepare for Thanksgiving this year, reflect on some specific things God has done for which you are thankful.



My Notes

Name

Email

Session Number

Answer 4 Questions

What did You learn?

What Is God saying to you?

What are you gonna do about it?

**Do you have any questions
about the reading?**



My Notes



A series of horizontal dotted lines spanning the width of the page, providing a guide for writing notes.



CONFIDENCE IN TIMES OF TESTING

Leader pages on pp. 156-159

THE POINT:
TRUST GOD EVEN
WHEN YOUR FAITH IS
TESTED.

GENESIS 22:1-14

¹ After these things God tested Abraham and said to him, "Abraham!" "Here I am," he answered. ² "Take your son," he said, "your only son Isaac, whom you love, go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains I will tell you about."

.....
³ So Abraham got up early in the morning, saddled his donkey, and took with him two of his young men and his son Isaac. He split wood for a burnt offering and set out to go to the place God had told him about. ⁴ On the third day Abraham looked up and saw the place in the distance. ⁵ Then Abraham said to his young men, "Stay here with the donkey. The boy and I will go over there to worship; then we'll come back to you." ⁶ Abraham took the wood for the burnt offering and laid it on his son Isaac. In his hand he took the fire and the knife, and the two of them walked on together. ⁷ Then Isaac spoke to his father Abraham and said, "My father." And he replied, "Here I am, my son." Isaac said, "The fire and the wood are here, but where is the lamb

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+
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MEMORY VERSE

for the burnt offering?" ⁸ **Abraham answered, "God himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering, my son." Then the two of them walked on together.** ⁹ When they arrived at the place that God had told him about, Abraham built the altar there and arranged the wood. He bound his son Isaac and placed him on the altar on top of the wood. ¹⁰

.....
Then Abraham reached out and took the knife to slaughter his son. ¹¹ But the angel of the Lord called to him from heaven and said, "Abraham, Abraham!" He replied, "Here I am." ¹² Then he said, "Do not lay a hand on the boy or do anything to him. For now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your only son from me." ¹³ Abraham looked up and saw a ram caught in the thicket by its horns. So Abraham went and took the ram and offered it as a burnt offering in place of his son. ¹⁴ And Abraham named that place The Lord Will Provide, so today it is said, "It will be provided on the Lord's mountain."

KEYWORDS

Burnt offering (22:2)—A burnt offering was a sacrifice to God in worship that was entirely consumed on the altar. It symbolized the transfer of the worshiper's sin to the offering.

The Lord will provide (22:14)—Refers to the place where God provided a sacrifice for Abraham. The general principle/promise is the Lord will provide what His people need when they need it.

WHAT CAN WE LEARN WHEN OUR FAITH IS TESTED?

Every summer, many people travel to the Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore in Michigan to hike. Every step forward up the steep dunes actually seems like a half step backward in the sand. This strenuous hike will test the limits of your physical agility and your determination to get to the top. However, it's worth every grueling step when you get to the top and look out over the great, crystal blue waters of Lake Michigan.

In much the same way, we can feel tested to our limits in many different ways: parenting a child, balancing a budget, navigating a new position at work, or reconciling tension with a friend or a spouse, just to name a few. In the past year, racial tensions have tested our country. Life will always test us; we can't escape it.

This testing in our lives also includes the testing of our faith. In order for your faith to be stretched and strengthened, God will allow it to be tested. How do you maintain trust and confidence in God when those times of testing come? How do you stay the course when

spiritual tests seem to surpass your limits? Let's learn how Abraham was able to pass his faith test.

Pop Quizzes Will Come

// Genesis 22:1-2

To be honest, God's instructions to Abraham seem incredibly outlandish—even unimaginable. God asked Abraham, who was well over 100 years old, to sacrifice the very son the Lord had promised him for twenty-five years. This was the long-awaited heir promised by God. Now, God told Abraham to sacrifice him like a lamb on an altar.

WHAT'S YOUR INITIAL REACTION TO GOD'S COMMAND HERE?

God will often put our faith to the test by making a request that might seem extreme to us. God may direct us to forgive someone who has hurt us, use a gift for His service, give sacrificially, move to a new location, or even travel to an unknown part of the world to share the gospel.



THE POINT: TRUST GOD EVEN WHEN YOUR FAITH IS TESTED.

God may ask us to do things that seem beyond our limits. It is normal to wrestle with such questions, but it is how we respond to those requests that matter.

Testing strengthens our trusting. No difficult test Gods brings our way is intended to demean us, but to produce more trust in us. In working with athletes or clients in a gym, a personal trainer increases the intensity of a workout over time. Those workouts are put in place to help the one in training achieve physical abilities they never imagined possible. They're pushed to go a little farther or faster each time. God loves us so much that He tests us to bring the best out of us. He does this so that we can reach spiritual depths only made possible through Him.

God's Word does not say God tempted Abraham. God will test us, but He will never tempt us. James pointed out, "No one undergoing a trial should say, 'I am being tempted by God,' since God is not tempted by evil, and he himself doesn't tempt anyone" (v. 13). Satan tempts us to sin in order to break us down and pull us away from God, but God tests us to build us up and pull us toward Himself. When we feel drawn to do something, we should ask: Is this a test or a temptation? Will this strengthen my faith and bring me closer to God or will it pull me away from Him? Like Abraham, the longer we walk in fellowship with God, the more we'll recognize His voice.

WHEN HAVE YOU ENDURED A TEST OF YOUR FAITH?

Follow the Instructions // Genesis 22:3-10

Regardless of any questions Abraham may have had, he still responded with prompt obedience. Even though he didn't have all the answers and didn't know how the story would end, he still proceeded. Abraham chose to trust in a perfect God who does not make mistakes.

In times of testing, it is important for us to respond promptly in faith even when we don't have all the answers. Trusting God because of what He has done in the past helps us have confidence in times of testing.

At any given point, Abraham could have quit. Whether it was while he was cutting the wood, saddling his donkey, journeying to Moriah, or building the altar, Abraham could have



DIGGING DEEPER OFFERINGS

In the Old Testament, there were five primary sacrifices. The Holman Bible Dictionary explains "the burnt, grain, peace, sin, and guilt offerings composed the basic sacrificial system of Israel. These sacrifices were commonly used in conjunction with each others and were carried out on both an individual and a corporate basis. The sacrificial system taught the necessity of dealing with sin and, at the same time, demonstrated that God had provided a way for dealing with sin." The burnt offering (*olah* in Hebrew) animal was dependent on the financial ability of the offerer. The person offering the sacrifice would first put their hand on the animal then slit it's throat to signify the animal taking the person's sin. Then the entire animal was burnt on an altar before God.

Why do you think God required an offering or sacrifice to pay for sin?



stopped anytime. However, he mentally stayed the course and kept moving in his actions. I wonder how strong the voice of the enemy was on Abraham during this test. Surely Satan was hard at work planting seeds of doubt in Abraham.

WHAT HELPS YOU REMAIN OBEDIENT TO GOD DURING A TIME OF TESTING?

When we undergo seasons of testing, we must cancel out the noise of negativity. We need to recognize that we will experience real spiritual attacks along the way to tempt us into disobedience. As the apostle Paul wrote, “For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, . . . and spiritual forces in the heavens” (Eph. 6:12). Keep pressing forward in obedience to Christ.

Isaac must have undergone his own testing during this. Scholars vary, but they place the age of Isaac anywhere from his adolescence to a young man in his 20s. He assisted his aged father on every part of the journey. Isaac carried the firewood. Isaac even asked about the sacrificial lamb, but all he received from his father was an ambiguous answer—which turned out to be deeply insightful and trusting. Perhaps Isaac assisted his father in building the altar, but

there came a point when Isaac realized he was the sacrifice!

Isaac could have resisted. As a teen or young adult, he easily could have fought against his elderly father’s attempt to bind him. Isaac was not some small, helpless child being bound; he was a strong young man who willingly allowed his father to bind him and place him on the altar. As Isaac trusted his earthly father, he surely also trusted his heavenly Father. The sacrifice of Isaac is often cited as a picture of God’s sacrifice of His Son, Jesus Christ. It’s a beautiful picture of sacrificial love. But it’s not just a picture of the Father’s love for us; it is also a picture of Jesus’ love, who willingly laid down His life for us.

WHAT IMPRESSES YOU ABOUT ABRAHAM’S AND ISAAC’S RESPONSE IN THIS STORY?

God Supplies What We Need

// Genesis 22:11-14

At this point, no one can question Abraham’s faith. With his knife raised over Isaac, he was prepared to do what no parent would dream of doing. But right at the last gut-wrenching moment, God intervened! The angel of the Lord revealed that this was a test. Abraham’s fear of God was not a fear of terror, afraid of what God might do to him if he didn’t obey; rather, to fear God meant Abraham lived with a worshipful respect and love of God that played out in absolute obedience and trust.

As soon as the angel of the Lord told Abraham to stop, he surely must have dropped the knife instantly. I picture Abraham so overwhelmed with emotion that he fell to the ground in worship. This had to be a worshipful moment for Isaac as well; one that solidified his own faith in God. Both Abraham and Isaac experienced that day the truth that God will provide.

THE POINT: TRUST GOD EVEN WHEN YOUR FAITH IS TESTED.

WHAT DO YOU LEARN ABOUT GOD'S PROVISION IN THESE VERSES?

Abraham fittingly named the place "The Lord Will Provide." As we saw earlier, Abraham's test and his willingness to give up his son Isaac point to God's willingness to give His own Son for our benefit. But unlike Abraham who was stopped from carrying out the sacrifice, God the Father allowed His Son to be sacrificed. The perfect Son of God became the ultimate sacrifice to cancel our sin problem once and for all. God allowed this so that we could be brought into a relationship with Him through faith in His Son.

God will always provide. He may not always provide exactly what we want or provide on our timetable, but He will provide—and He provides what we truly need when we need it. In those moments when God doesn't provide what we think we need when we need it, trust Him. Trust that He has something even better planned down the road for us.

WHAT ARE SOME KEYS WAYS GOD IS PROVIDING FOR YOU RIGHT NOW?

DID YOU KNOW?

Louis Zamperini is a name that is probably not familiar to most of us. He was born to Italian parents in New York in 1917. As a teenager, he qualified to represent the U.S. in the 1936 Berlin Olympics as a distance runner. Zamperini set a new lap record for the 5,000 meter race, even though he finished 8th. In 1941 he enlisted into U.S. Air Force and was commissioned as a lieutenant. While flying a B-24 bomber in World War II, Zamperini crashed into the ocean where he and two other men spent 47 days adrift. After finally reaching Japanese occupied Marshall Island, Zamperini was held in captivity, severely beaten, and mistreated until the end of the war in 1945. Zamperini said he prayed while lost at sea and while he was imprisoned. But his life fell apart when he finally got home due to PTSD. He was finally able to move forward when he gave his heart to Christ at a Billy Graham Crusade. The movie *Unbroken* depicts his experiences.³

How do we know if we have passed or failed God's testing in our lives?

LIVE IT

In what ways can you strengthen your trust in God for times of testing?

It's one thing for someone to tell you, "Just trust God and have faith," but it's quite another to put that faith into action. In order for our faith to be stretched and strengthened, God will allow that faith to be tested. How do we stay the course when spiritual tests seem to surpass our limits? Like Abraham, the longer we walk in fellowship with God, the more we'll recognize His voice.

+ + +

- **Study up.** Review the Scripture passages from this session. Journal some bullet points from each passage that you can turn to and reflect on during a future test.
- **Encourage others.** Think of one or two people in your life who are going through a time of testing right now, and write them personal notes of encouragement.
- **Gather a support team.** Get together with a few Christian friends this week to talk about how you can be stronger together when times of testing come.

DAILY READINGS

1. A GREAT SACRIFICE // GENESIS 22:1-2

God asked Abraham to sacrifice his promised son, the first of his descendants who would outnumber the stars. At this point, Abraham would have been well over 100 years old. He had waited and waited for God's promise to be fulfilled ... and now, this? Sometimes, we can be plugging along doing all we know to do to live a life of faithfulness to God, and then something completely out of left field hits hard. Learning to trust in God can be difficult when life is hard. That's one of the reasons we have stories in the Word of God, like the story of Abraham, to motivate us to stay the course. God brought Abraham through; He will do the same for us. **Trust in God can provide confidence when your faith is tested.**

2. GOD WILL PROVIDE // GENESIS 22:8

God will never call you to do something for which He will not provide all that you need. He will equip you and He will go with you. Your responsibility is to trust Him and remain faithful and obedient. The conversation between Abraham and Isaac is amazing. The words Abraham spoke were a statement of faith in God. He said God would provide what they needed. After many years of learning trust and faith in God through his experiences, Abraham was now ready for the test. And his words were a witness and teaching moment for his son. **Faith, trust, and obedience all work together in the life of a believer.**

3. THE NATURE OF GOD // GENESIS 22:13-14

In the Old Testament, especially, we see numerous Hebrew names for God. Each name reflected something about the character and nature of God that different people experienced at different times. The Hebrew name for God in verse 14 is Yahweh Yireh which we know as Jehovah Jireh. Abraham

experienced a miraculous provision from God—the ram to be used as a sacrifice to God. In response, Abraham called the place The Lord Will Provide. God never changes, the same character trait of God that Abraham experienced is the same character trait of God today. He is your Provider. Trust Him. **Praise Jehovah Jireh today for His provision in your life.**

4. CONFIDENCE IN THE LORD // JEREMIAH 17:7-8

The word “confidence” is defined as the feeling or belief you can rely on someone or something. It is a firm trust—in this case, a trust in God. The focus on these Bible study sessions has been that you can have confidence in life as a result of your trust in God. We all know that life can be super challenging, and there are so many things that can rock our personal lives. The constant source of strength through all of life's ups and downs is your trust in God and His care for you. Let that sink down deep in your heart like an anchor—trust in God—so that when you need it, you can easily activate it. **Confess your trust in God today.**

5. WALKING IN CONFIDENCE // PSALM 27:1-3

As you've learned in these Bible study sessions, believers can walk in confident trust in God. Biblical characters such as Abraham, David, Paul, and others demonstrated their trust in God through their faithfulness to God. The same type of confidence they had in God is the same type of confidence you can have in God. Like this psalmist, you can confidently trust God no matter what might happen in your life. He saw God as light, salvation, and a stronghold in the face of anything that would try to harm him, including an army. Try rewriting these verses with some of the things you've experienced recently. Allow the Spirit of God to encamp around you and give you confident peace. **Walking in confidence comes from trusting God.**



My Notes

Name

Email

Session Number

Answer 4 Questions

What did You learn?

What Is God saying to you?

What are you gonna do about it?

**Do you have any questions
about the reading?**



My Notes



A series of horizontal dotted lines spanning the width of the page, providing a guide for writing notes.

