



the **GOSPEL**PROJECT.

FROM CAPTIVITY TO THE WILDERNESS

ADULTS / DAILY DISCIPLESHIP GUIDE / WINTER 2021-22 / VOL. 2



GOD'S WORD TO YOU

A LIFE WORTH DYING FOR

In the beginning, God created all things good. With the making of humankind as male and female, He even declared His creation to be very good. Paradise was the location; abundant life was the experience, that is, until the taint of sin covered the world through the rebellion of Adam and Eve against their Creator.

As a result, humanity lost its paradise and was separated from the God who created all things good. Death was God's warning for disobedience, and death became the reality—the death of living apart from God (sin), the death of life (physical death), and the death of eternal separation from God's goodness (spiritual death).

But the God of all good things was not finished. He called a people to Himself to be a light to the world. He gave them His holy expectations that they should follow them. He made provision for sin through sacrifices. And even when His people continued to rebel against Him, He promised life from death.

In comes Jesus, the Son of God sent into the world to make all things new. "In him was life, and that life was the light of men" (John 1:4). "Full of grace and truth," Jesus obeyed all of the Father's holy expectations (1:14). He is the "Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" (1:29). He laid down His life in death on a cross to secure life for those who follow Him (10:11), and He proved it in His resurrection when He took up His life again (10:18). A thief comes to steal, kill, and destroy; Jesus came so we might once again have life and have it in abundance (10:10).

So how should we respond to this good news? By turning from sin (repentance) and believing in Jesus (faith). "The one who loves his life will lose it, and the one who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life" (12:25). The treasures and pleasures of this world cannot compare to the eternal life found in Jesus.

CONTENTS

+ + +

SUGGESTED FOR
THE WEEK OF

All Ages Study Plan	6
How to Use the Daily Discipleship Guide	8
7 Arrows of Bible Reading	10

UNIT 4: OUT OF EGYPT I CALLED MY SON

	Introduction	12
Dec. 5	Session 1 God Shares His Name (Exodus 1–4)	16
Dec. 12	Session 2 God Shows His Power (Exodus 5–12)	24
Dec. 19	Session 3 God Saves His People (Exodus 13–15)	32
Dec. 26	Session 4 God Shows His Faithfulness (Doctrine: God Is Faithful)	40

UNIT 5: TO DWELL IN THE HOUSE OF THE LORD

	Introduction	48
Jan. 2	Session 1 Failure in the Wilderness (Exodus 16–17)	52
Jan. 9	Session 2 The Way of Faithfulness (Exodus 19–20)	60
Jan. 16	Session 3 Faithlessness at the Mountain (Exodus 32–34)	68
Jan. 23	Session 4 The Place of Meeting (Exodus 25–31; 35–40)	76
Jan. 30	Session 5 The Means of Worship (Doctrine: Worship)	84

UNIT 6: BE HOLY, BECAUSE I AM HOLY

	Introduction	92
Feb. 6	Session 1 A Rebellious People (Numbers 13–14)	96
Feb. 13	Session 2 An Unfaithful Prophet (Numbers 20)	104
Feb. 20	Session 3 An Ungrateful People (Numbers 21)	112
Feb. 27	Session 4 A Holy People (Doctrine: God Is Holy)	120

Lay Your Burden Down	128
References	130

THE EDITOR

The first time I read the Book of Leviticus, I was baffled. As a brand-new, twenty-something Christian, I didn't know why this book—and most of Exodus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy for that matter—was so important. So I asked the more established Christians I knew. They weren't sure either. And it turned out that outside of the odd narrative passage and a few verses in isolation, many of them hadn't read these books either.

These books can be intimidating, especially when we're asking what we're supposed to get from them or how they apply to us. They're filled with rules and regulations, the social and ceremonial code of the Jewish people. At a glance, they hardly seem relevant to us at all. But if we believe that, we're going to miss out on something amazing: God's grace demonstrated time and again, not simply in the miracles God did rescuing the Israelites from captivity and providing for their every need in the wilderness but in that very same social and ceremonial code that leaves us scratching our heads.

The books of the Law reveal the holiness of God, a God who cares about the particulars in addition to the big picture. A God who declares that His people are to be holy as He is holy, that they are to live in a way that reflects His goodness and glory. We see God's faithfulness to deliver His people, not simply from their captivity but to a life of holiness—a deliverance that finds its ultimate fulfillment in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus.

In this volume, it is our prayer that you would see God's holiness and faithfulness afresh—and that as you do, your desire to be holy as He is holy would be strengthened.

Aaron Armstrong

Adult Publishing Team Leader
The Gospel Project

The Gospel Project®

Adult Daily Discipleship Guide
Volume 10, Number 2 Winter 2021-22

Ed Stetzer
Founding Editor

Trevin Wax
General Editor

Aaron Armstrong
Team Leader

Daniel Davis
Content Editor

Josh Hayes
Content and Production Editor

Ken Braddy
Director of Sunday School

Send questions/comments to:

Team Leader by email to aaron.armstrong@lifeway.com or mail to Team Leader, The Gospel Project: Adult Daily Discipleship Guide, One Lifeway Plaza, Nashville, TN 37234-0175; or make comments on the Web at lifeway.com.

Printed in the United States
of America

The Gospel Project®: Adult Daily Discipleship Guide (ISSN 2162-7207; Item 005461524) is published quarterly by Lifeway Christian Resources, One Lifeway Plaza, Nashville, TN 37234, Ben Mandrell, President. © 2021 Lifeway Christian Resources.

For ordering or inquiries, visit lifeway.com, or write Lifeway Resources Customer Service, One Lifeway Plaza, Nashville, TN 37234-0113. For bulk shipments mailed quarterly to one address, email orderentry@lifeway.com, fax 615.251.5933, or write to the above address.

We believe that the Bible has God for its author; salvation for its end; and truth, without any mixture of error, for its matter and that all Scripture is totally true and trustworthy. To review Lifeway's doctrinal guideline, please visit www.lifeway.com/doctrinalguideline.

Unless otherwise stated, all Scripture quotations are taken from the Christian Standard Bible®, Copyright 2017 by Holman Bible Publishers. Used by permission.

THE WRITERS

Y Bonesteale (Unit 4, Session 4; Unit 5, Session 5) is an editorial coordinator at Lifeway Christian Resources. She earned her MDiv from Talbot School of Theology with an emphasis in Evangelism and Discipleship.

Mike Brooks (Unit 6, Sessions 1-4) serves as Associate Editor of *For the Church* at Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary. He is currently a PhD student in Historical Theology at MBTS and a member at Emmaus Church. Mike and his wife, Paige, reside in Kansas City.

Daniel Darling (Unit 4, Sessions 1-3) is the Senior Vice-President at the National Religious Broadcasters and the author of several books. He is a graduate of The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary and serves as Pastor of Teaching and Discipleship at Green Hill Church in Mount Juliet, Tennessee.

Micah Fries (Unit 5 Introduction) is a director at GlocalNet and the Multi-Faith Neighbors Network. He co-authored *Leveling the Church* and co-edited *Islam and North America*. Micah is married to Tracy and dad to Sarah Grace, Kessed Noel, and Haddon.

Andrew Hall (Unit 5, Sessions 1-4) is the Lead Pastor of Community Bible Church, located in Ilderton, Ontario, Canada. He is a graduate from Southern Seminary. He and his wife, Melanie, have four children: Noelle, Ava, Calvin, and Brita.

J. A. Medders (Unit 4 Introduction) is on staff at Risen Church and the Risen Collective in Houston, Texas, as well as the Acts 29 Network. Jeff is married to Natalie, and they have two kids.

Sarah Walton (Unit 6 Introduction) has co-authored *Together Through the Storms: Biblical Encouragement for Your Marriage When Life Hurts* with her husband, Jeff, and *Hope When it Hurts* with Kristen Wetherell. She and her family live in Colorado Springs, Colorado.



ALL AGES STUDY PLAN

VOL 1: From Creation to Chaos

(Genesis) Fall 2021

Unit 1: The Heavens Declare the Glory of God (Gen. 1–2; Pss. 8; 96)

Unit 2: Let Us Make a Name for Ourselves (Gen. 3–11)

Unit 3: I Will Make Your Name Great (Gen. 11–50)

VOL 2: From Captivity to the Wilderness

(Exodus–Deuteronomy) Winter 2021–22

Unit 4: Out of Egypt I Called My Son (Ex. 1–15)

Unit 5: To Dwell in the House of the Lord (Ex. 16–40; Lev.)

Unit 6: Be Holy, Because I Am Holy (Num. 13–14; 20–21)

VOL 3: From Conquest to a Kingdom

(Joshua–1 Samuel) Spring 2022

Unit 7: Lord, Teach Me Your Statutes (Josh. 1; 3–4)

Unit 8: Fear the Lord and Worship Him (Josh. 2; 6–11; 23–24)

Unit 9: There Is No Fear of God Before Their Eyes (Judg.; Ruth; 1 Sam. 1–6)

VOL 4: From Unity to Division

(1 Samuel–1 Kings) Summer 2022

Unit 10: Because of Your Hardened Heart (1 Sam. 8–15)

Unit 11: Create a Clean Heart for Me (1 Sam. 16–17; 2 Sam. 6–7; 11–12)

Unit 12: If You Walk Before Me with a Heart of Integrity (1 Kings 1–12)

VOL 5: From Exile to Rebellion

(1 Kings–The Prophets) Fall 2022

Unit 13: What Comes Out of the Mouth Comes from the Heart (1 Kings 12–18; 2 Kings 1–5; Isa. 44)

Unit 14: Seek the Lord, All You Humble of the Earth (2 Chron. 24; Isa. 22; 25; 30; Zeph.)

Unit 15: He Has Made Every Nationality (Jonah; Nah.; 2 Chron. 36)

VOL 6: From Captivity to Restoration

(The Prophets, Ezra, Nehemiah)

Winter 2022–23

Unit 16: The Lord Keeps His Eye on Those Who Fear Him (Jer. 29–30; Dan.)

Unit 17: Take Refuge in the Lord (Ezra 1–6; Zech. 13–14)

Unit 18: For Look, the Day Is Coming (Esth.; Neh.; Mal.)

VOL 7: From Heaven to Earth

(The Gospels) Spring 2023

Unit 19: Here Is the Lamb of God

(John 1–2; Luke 2; Mark 1; Matt. 4)

Unit 20: God’s Love Was Revealed

Among Us in This Way (John 3–4)

Unit 21: Without Faith It Is Impossible
to Please God (Luke 4–5)

VOL 8: From Wonder to Rejection

(The Gospels) Summer 2023

Unit 22: The Works That I Do in My
Father’s Name Testify About Me

(Mark 4; 8; Luke 5; Matt. 9; John 10)

Unit 23: The Kingdom of God Is in Your
Midst (Matt. 5–7; 13; 24; Luke 15; 17)

Unit 24: God’s Glory in the Face of Jesus
Christ (Luke 13; John 11)

VOL 9: From Death to Resurrection

(The Gospels) Fall 2023

Unit 25: Jerusalem, Jerusalem,
Who Kills the Prophets

(Matt. 21–25; Mark 1; John 6; 14)

Unit 26: The Hour Has Come

(John 12; Matt. 26)

Unit 27: The King of the Jews

(Luke 22–23; Matt. 27–28)

VOL 10: From Many People to One People

(The Gospels, Acts) Winter 2023–24

Unit 28: I Am with You Always

(Luke 24; John 20–21; Matt. 28)

Unit 29: You Will Be My Witnesses

(Acts 1–2)

Unit 30: Every Day the Lord Added to
Their Number (Acts 2–5)

VOL 11: From One Nation to All Nations

(Acts and Epistles) Spring 2024

Unit 31: Every Knee Will Bow

(Acts 5–8; Phil. 2)

Unit 32: The Power and the Wisdom
of God (Acts 9–12; 1 Cor. 1; 12)

Unit 33: A Prisoner of Christ Jesus
(Acts 9; 13–14; Philem.)

VOL 12: From This World to the World to Come

(Acts, Epistles, Revelation) Summer 2024

Unit 34: Ambassadors for Christ

(Acts 15–19; 2 Cor. 5; Eph. 4)

Unit 35: That I May Gain Christ

(Acts 20–28; Phil. 3)

Unit 36: A New Heaven and a New Earth
(Rev. 4–5; 19–22)

HOW TO USE THE DAILY DISCIPLESHIP GUIDE

*Central to your personal
and group experience with
The Gospel Project for Adults
is the Daily Discipleship Guide.
Here's how to make the most
of your time with it:*

BEGIN WITH PERSONAL TIME IN THE WORD

We recommend beginning your week with the daily devotions. These devotions lay a foundation for what will be explored and discussed in your group time as you build healthy rhythms of personal discipleship.



DAY 1

READ:
Exodus 11-3:5

FOCAL PASSAGE:
Exodus 3:1

NOTES

VOICES from
THE CHURCH

"Moses, after his major, life-shattering failure and all those years of obscurity that followed, certainly must have felt like an unusable vessel. He couldn't imagine God's picking up a rejected vessel such as himself, and finding any use in it. To him, the idea was ludicrous. Then one normal, ordinary, desert day, he stopped to look at a particular bush, and nothing was ever normal and ordinary for him again."
-Chuck Swindoll

When people recall the September 11th terrorist attacks, they probably begin by thinking, "It was an otherwise ordinary day." But history has a way of sneaking up on us.

This was the case with Moses. He didn't climb Horeb that day looking for a miracle. It was a mundane morning as he led his father-in-law's livestock. What a stunning culture shift it had been for the former prince of Egypt. Once he was the talk of the town, a renowned son of Pharaoh, a man who commanded armies and enjoyed the luxuries of royalty. Now, he was a failed leader, having sought to act on behalf of his people only to alienate both Egypt and Israel at the same time.

The wilderness has a way of sanding down the edges of our ego in ways that God can use for unexpected opportunity. What Moses didn't see that day was how God was working in the silence. He was preparing His messenger in ways the messenger didn't even see. And so it is with us. God often moves us through grinding monotony in order to prepare us for leadership.

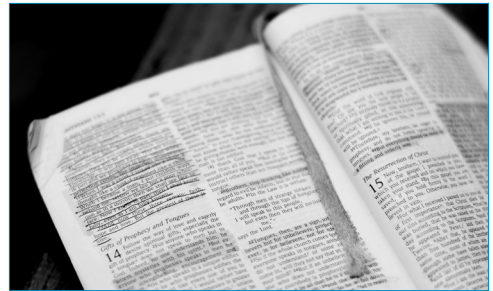
It would be on this day, of all days, a most ordinary day, that Horeb became the place where God appeared in a dramatic way and revealed His greatness and a bit of His white-hot glory to the least likely of servants. An 80-year-old man on the backside of the desert was God's long-awaited answer to the hurt and pain and bondage of His people.

What does the ordinariness of this moment tell us about the way God works in human history?

17

STUDY THE BIBLE WITH YOUR BIBLE

Reading and studying the Bible is absolutely life-changing, and we believe the best way to study the Bible is to use the Bible you own. Whether you read from the CSB, ESV, NIV, KJV, or many other translations, the Daily Discipleship Guide helps you engage with the session not only with our book but your Book.



GET BACK TO BASICS

As you read and study, we recommend using the tool found in your Daily Discipleship Guide called the “7 Arrows of Bible Reading.” The 7 Arrows guide both novice and experienced students of the Word through the basic mechanics of Bible study by asking a few key questions of any passage (see pages 10-11 for more information).

DISCUSS AND APPLY IN COMMUNITY

Each session concludes with a two-page discussion guide. This guide includes the key points of the session along with interactive questions and activities designed to address the needs of a variety of learning styles. Mark up the discussion guide, make notes, fill in the blanks, do the activities, write out questions and thoughts—make it yours!

7 ARROWS OF BIBLE READING

by Matt Rogers

There is often a vast disconnect between the awareness of the need for disciple-making and practical tools that actually aid in this work. Three factors are essential: Scripture, relationships, and time. Discipleship happens when the life-changing truth of Scripture is infused into genuine relationships over an extended period of time.

Our desire was to create a simple, reproducible strategy that would facilitate this process. This led us to develop a simply strategy for small clusters (2-3 people) to meet together regularly and talk about the Scriptures and apply them to their lives.

The seven arrows of Bible reading were an attempt at developing a tool for proper hermeneutics to power these relationships. We did not want our people to simply talk about the Bible. We wanted them to understand the Bible and know how to apply it to their lives. Each cluster would read a predetermined passage of Scripture and discuss it using these seven arrows.

↻

What does this passage say?

←

What did this passage mean to its original audience?

↑

What does this passage tell us about God?

↓

What does this passage tell us about man?

→

What does this passage demand of me?

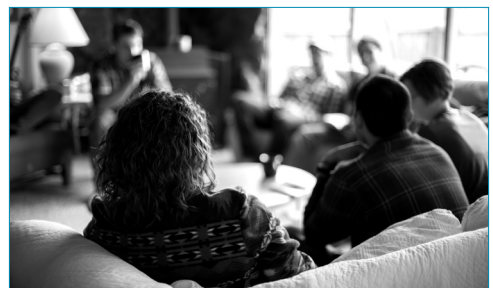
↔

How does this passage change the way I relate to people?

↻

How does this passage prompt me to pray?

10



7 ARROWS OF BIBLE READING

by Matt Rogers

There is often a vast disconnect between the awareness of the need for disciple-making and practical tools that actually aid in this work. Three factors are essential: Scripture, relationships, and time. Discipleship happens when the life-changing truth of Scripture is infused into genuine relationships over an extended period of time.

Our desire was to create a simple, reproducible strategy that would facilitate this process. This led us to develop a simply strategy for small clusters (2-3 people) to meet together regularly and talk about the Scriptures and apply them to their lives.

The seven arrows of Bible reading were an attempt at developing a tool for proper hermeneutics to power these relationships. We did not want our people to simply talk about the Bible. We wanted them to understand the Bible and know how to apply it to their lives. Each cluster would read a predetermined passage of Scripture and discuss it using these seven arrows.



What does this passage say?



What did this passage mean to its original audience?



What does this passage tell us about God?



What does this passage tell us about man?



What does this passage demand of me?



How does this passage change the way I relate to people?



How does this passage prompt me to pray?

ARROW 1: The goal was for the clusters to start by summarizing the main point of the passage as succinctly as possible, ideally in one sentence.

ARROW 2: Next, the clusters sought to discern authorial intent for the passage by asking what it meant to its original audience. Since a text of Scripture can never mean what it never meant, it is necessary to begin by discerning what the text meant. Often this may require the clusters to consult other study tools or cross-reference other biblical texts to arrive at the meaning of the text.

ARROW 3: Thirdly, we asked what the text tells us about the nature and character of God and specifically His work through the person and work of Jesus Christ.

ARROW 4: Fourthly, the text was analyzed to see what it tells us about humanity. Bryan Chappell refers to this as the “fallen condition focus” of the text. What does the text reveal about sin and humankind’s need for the gospel?

ARROW 5: Then we moved the clusters to application. Since we had rooted the clusters in the meaning of the text, they were now positioned to rightly apply it’s meaning to their lives.

ARROW 6: From there we wanted our clusters to apply the Scripture to their relationships with others. Ideally, they would discuss how the text shaped both how they related to other believers and how they lived on mission in the world.

ARROW 7: Finally, the clusters rooted their prayers in the Scriptures. Hopefully, the previous six arrows kindled the flames of passionate prayer in the lives of the clusters—both for their own sanctification and for their mission to the lost.

With this model, we touched on three important areas for discipleship:

Scripture—Disciple-making was rooted in a rightful understanding of Scripture and not in simply doing life together, unpacking another sermon, or dependance on classroom instruction.

Simplicity—Disciple-making was simple enough for everyone to get involved. All believers could take these principles, a Bible, and a relationship with a young Christian and get to work.

Stickiness—Disciple-making through understanding and applying Scripture was etched in the minds of our young church. They could use these same arrows not only to guide their cluster discussions but also their personal Bible study, small group leadership, and comprehension of sermons.

These arrows have proven to be a unique tool in our disciple-making toolbox that the Lord is using to call and build faithful and fruitful followers of Jesus.

Matt Rogers is the teaching pastor at The Church at Cherrydale in Greenville, South Carolina. His church developed the Seven Arrows tool to help people read and understand Scripture within their small groups. The concept has gone on to form the basis of a 52-week devotional for teens from Lifeway Students, the Seven Arrows Bible from B&H, and is now featured in The Gospel Project for Adults and Students.

UNIT 4

+

OUT OF EGYPT

I CALLED

MY SON

“I Will Be Your God”

by J. A. Medders

Iconic. That’s one of the first words that comes to mind when I think about the Book of Exodus. Maybe you’ve seen the multiple movies depicting one of the most epic scenes in our sacred Scriptures. Water spreading, ground drying, Israelites marching. The parting of the Red Sea will be high on the list of most requested footage in the New Jerusalem.

Exodus is filled with famous scenes, such as baby Moses floating down the river to escape Pharaoh’s genocide of Hebrew boys, only to end up raiding Pharaoh’s fridge while growing up in Pharaoh’s house. You may recall the account of Moses killing an Egyptian and fleeing into the desert, where he eventually encountered a burning shrub that would not burn up as it burst forth with the voice of God. Here, Moses was charged with the mission and the words, “Let my people go” (Ex. 5:1). And it was here in the Book of Exodus that God revealed His personal name—YHWH (pronounced Yahweh). Before long, we see this covenant God devastate Egypt with plagues, litter

the land with frogs and hail, cover the skies in darkness and death, and lead His people on an exodus toward their holy land.

The incredible scenes of Exodus get imprinted on our imagination, and that’s kind of the point. The pyrotechnics in Exodus serve a spiritual purpose.

GOD IS THE MESSAGE

God worked His wonders in Exodus to set His people free, yes, and also to make an announcement to every Israelite, to every Egyptian with their pantheon of gods, to Pharaoh and his palace, and to everyone who would ever read Exodus. That message: There is no one like God.

- To the Israelites, God declared them to be His people, and He promised that they would know Him as the Lord their God who brought them out from their slavery in Egypt (Ex. 6:7).

God delivered His people from the chains of Egypt—and He delivered them to Himself. God wants people to know Him.

- At the conclusion to the plague of frogs, Moses gave Pharaoh the honor of deciding when Moses was to pray for the plague to end so Pharaoh would know the uniqueness and power of the God of the Hebrews (Ex. 8:10).
- The Lord declared to Pharaoh that He could have struck and killed the king at any moment, but He hadn't for a purpose—so God's power would be shown in Egypt and God's name would be known throughout the earth (Ex. 9:16).
- God performed His wonders against Egypt so that the Israelites and the generations after them would know that the Lord alone is God (Ex. 10:2).

- God parted the Red Sea for His people to pass through and planned to bring it back together to the destruction of Pharaoh's army, which would result in God's glory among the Egyptians (Ex. 14:18).

The verses identified above illuminate for us that Exodus is also about how God gives an exodus, a deliverance, a freedom from spiritual ignorance. God delivered His people from the chains of Egypt—and He delivered them to Himself. God wants people to know Him. God is the subject of the exodus: His power, His might, His mercy, His provision, His glory, His attention, His invitation to know Him.

An exodus can only be an exodus if there is a destination. So the Book of Exodus is both departure and arrival. It is leaving Egypt to walk with God. Leaving darkness to walk in the light. Exodus is a blueprint for Christian spirituality—God's mercy sets sinners free to make them His people. This ancient account is part of the believer's testimony. It's more than Bible stories; it's your story in Christ.

This ancient account is part of the believer's testimony. It's more than Bible stories; it's your story in Christ.

If we don't learn from our history, our spirituality
will continue to be sluggish, floundering,
and lack the zeal we truly desire.

YOUR SPIRITUAL LINEAGE

There is a reason for the existence of multiple services that will trace your ancestry, piece together your family history, or provide your genetic makeup with a kit in the mail. We want to feel connected. We desire a discovery of meaning in our histories. The apostle Paul wanted us to take that same approach in our intake of Exodus. Fight to overcome the gap of time, space, place, culture, and customs. Fight any familiarity you have with Exodus that could breed apathy. Paul told every disciple of the risen Lord Jesus that Moses wrote these events down—both the good and the bad—for our spiritual health (see 1 Cor. 10:1-6).

Paul wanted us to learn our family history so we won't be doomed to repeat it. It's not uncommon for people in small groups and studies to throw their heads back in disbelief at the Israelites, saying, "They saw these amazing things in Egypt, saw all that God did, and they still whined and complained!" But are we sure we would have been much different? We have full and finished Bibles, ones wrapped in cowhide and ones in apps on our phones, and we still struggle. We have shelves of books, hours of sermons that have hit our

ears, and we still manage to get tripped up in our walk with Jesus. Paul gave us his warning in 1 Corinthians 10 because he knew that if we aren't careful, then we will answer our temptations just like our spiritual ancestors did. If we don't learn from our history, our spirituality will continue to be sluggish, floundering, and lack the zeal we truly desire.

So what can we do? Know the Lord. Trust His deliverance, redemption, and power. Get ready to drink from the spiritual rock, who is Christ the Lord. While you pay attention to the narrative, the movements, and the plagues found in Exodus, also pay attention to your discipleship with the same Jesus who saved a people out of Egypt (Jude 5). Follow your Lord God who was crucified and raised for you, who provided His blood to deliver you from sin, Satan, and death, and who calls you to know Him and the power of His resurrection. Recall how you have been delivered to a new destination—an abundant life in Christ and filled with His Spirit. This is your life, your story, your God.



GOD SHARES HIS NAME

+ SESSION IN A SENTENCE:

God heard the cries of His people in distress and responded by raising up Moses, the one He would send to provide deliverance.

+ BACKGROUND PASSAGE:

Exodus 1–4

+ SETTING:

Through Joseph's influence, God's people initially lived in Egypt as honored guests. But a new Pharaoh came to power who did not remember Joseph. As a result, God's people suffered under brutal oppression in Egypt for generations. But the covenant-keeping God heard their cries and prepared to demonstrate His power on their behalf. He would do so through an unlikely messenger—a Hebrew man named Moses, Egypt's fallen prince, who was grinding out his existence in obscurity, shepherding on the backside of nowhere.

DAY 1

READ:

Exodus 1:1–3:5

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Exodus 3:1

NOTES

VOICES from THE CHURCH

"Moses, after his major, life-shattering failure and all those years of obscurity that followed, certainly must have felt like an unusable vessel. He couldn't imagine God's picking up a rejected utensil such as himself, and finding any use in it. To him, the idea was ludicrous. Then one normal, ordinary, desert day, he stopped to look at a particular bush, and nothing was ever normal and ordinary for him again."¹

—Chuck Swindoll

When people recall the September 11th terrorist attacks, they probably begin by thinking, "It was an otherwise ordinary day." But history has a way of sneaking up on us.

This was the case with Moses. He didn't climb Horeb that day looking for a miracle. It was a mundane morning as he led his father-in-law's livestock. What a stunning culture shift it had been for the former prince of Egypt. Once he was the talk of the town, a renowned son of Pharaoh, a man who commanded armies and enjoyed the luxuries of royalty. Now, he was a failed leader, having sought to act on behalf of his people only to alienate both Egypt and Israel at the same time.

The wilderness has a way of sanding down the edges of our ego in ways that God can use for unexpected opportunity. What Moses didn't see that day was how God was working in the silence. He was preparing His messenger in ways the messenger didn't even see. And so it is with us. God often moves us through grinding monotony in order to prepare us for leadership.

It would be on this day, of all days, a most ordinary day, that Horeb became the place where God appeared in a dramatic way and revealed His greatness and a bit of His white-hot glory to the least likely of servants. An 80-year-old man on the backside of the desert was God's long-awaited answer to the hurt and pain and bondage of His people.

What does the ordinariness of this moment tell us about the way God works in human history?

DAY 2

READ:

Exodus 3:1-5

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Exodus 3:2-5

NOTES



ESSENTIAL DOCTRINE #2: SPECIAL REVELATION

Special revelation refers to God revealing Himself to humanity through historical events, His Word, and through Jesus Christ. Through special revelation, human beings learn about God's character, His will, His purpose for creation, and His plan of redemption. Special revelation shows us the nature and character of God, and because God has revealed Himself in this way, we can know Him—through a saving relationship with Him in the person and work of Jesus Christ.

Imagine Moses's shock that day. Suddenly the ordinary became extraordinary. Moses didn't do a double take because a shrub was in flames. That would not catch the attention of this shepherd. No, what startled him was the fact that the bush would not burn.

It's significant that God appeared here as fire. This is a symbol for His holy presence. Israel would be led by a pillar of fire (Ex. 13:21). Later, God would descend on this same mountain in fire and smoke (Ex. 19:18). Sacrifices in the tabernacle would be consumed with fire (Lev. 9:24). And we cannot forget the flaming tongues of fire on the Day of Pentecost, which represented the coming of the Holy Spirit upon Jesus' disciples. Fire is a metaphor for God's holiness. He's a "consuming fire" (Heb. 12:29), and the only right response is to worship Him.

It's hard for us to accept a God of "consuming fire." We've domesticated God down to a social-media buddy or a jogging partner. We love God as long as He ratifies our life choices and endorses our endeavors. But God revealed Himself to Moses with flaming fire and demanded that he remove his shoes and stand barefoot on ground made holy because God was present. This is the God who was about to act with power on behalf of His people in bondage in Egypt.

Scripture says that knowing and fearing God as He presents Himself is the pathway to wisdom (Prov. 9:10). Moses had to turn his face away from the glory of God. Today, we can access God directly through Jesus, who walked through the fire of God's wrath on our behalf and reconciles us to the Father. While we continue to fear God's holiness, we don't have to fear God's wrath because that was poured out on His Son. If you are in Christ, this fiery God of wrath and judgment is on your side.

What are some ways you fear and revere the Lord in your life?

DAY 3

READ:

Exodus 3:6-10

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Exodus 3:7

NOTES

There are three words that describe God's compassion for His people in bondage in Egypt. He observes, He hears, and He knows. Think about this: While Moses was talking to God on the backside of the desert, a ruthless dictator was exploiting the free labor of an oppressed people. All the promises a king of Egypt had once made to Israel because of Joseph's influence had now been erased and forgotten. If you were a common Hebrew slave, laboring under the hot sun while taskmasters whipped your back, you might think your plight was hopeless and that rescue would never come. But what Israel didn't know, what Pharaoh didn't know, was that God saw everything, heard everything, and knew everything. And He was about to "come down" and save His people.

It's important that we understand this about God: Nothing escapes His vision. No injustice, no hurt, no wrong is unheard. The God who heard Abel's blood cry from the ground sees every last bit of injustice in the world.

What's more, God "came down" in the person of Jesus Christ, who defeated sin, death, and the grave and is making the world new. The gospel tell us we are both the oppressed and the oppressor. Sinners are in bondage to sin, a ruthless taskmaster, but we also are the ones doing the sinning, committing egregious acts against God and against our fellow human beings. Yet Romans 5:8 tells us that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. This is what we celebrate every Sunday—indeed, every day—a God who sees, hears, and knows and who came down to save us from the bondage of sin.

What does the active work of God to save Israel from Egypt tell us about the nature of God's heart, and how does this point us forward to Jesus?

DAY 4

READ:

Exodus 3:11-15

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Exodus 3:11-15

NOTES

In school, we often were told that there is no such thing as a wrong question. Of course, it's not hard to think of a classmate who disproved this thesis. There are wrong questions, and Moses began his response to God by asking one of them. When God said that Moses was the man for this mission to Egypt, Moses asked, "Who am I?" In other words, Moses was reminding God of how far he had fallen, as if God needed Moses's updated resume with his epic failures and his advanced age.

But it didn't matter who Moses was. It mattered who God is. Moses wouldn't be going to Egypt on a lark; he would be going with the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Now God was giving Moses His resume. This was the God who made an unbreakable covenant with Abraham to make his offspring as numerous as the stars, and God was going to keep this promise.

What's more, God revealed Himself as "I AM WHO I AM." This also could be interpreted as "I will be who I will be." God is the pre-existent One. He is uncreated and needs nothing to complete Him. He is the Creator and Sustainer of the universe. This is who was going with Moses. So it didn't much matter who Moses was—it mattered supremely who God is.

Later, Jesus would describe Himself, declaring to the religious leaders, "Before Abraham was, I am (John 8:58)." And this Jesus sends us to declare the good news that God is rescuing sinners. Jesus declared in Matthew 28:18-20 that we could go and make disciples throughout the world because He would be with us until the end of the age.

This is why ordinary, flawed Christians can join Jesus in His mission: We are going with the great "I AM."

How does God's declaration of His name inform the way we think about the mission of God?

DAY 5

READ:

Exodus 3:16–4:31

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Exodus 3:19–22

NOTES

God was upfront with Moses about the difficulty of his assignment. Even though he went with the power of God, he would be facing a king whose heart was hardening fast away from God and toward evil. God even told Moses what to say and that Pharaoh would reject it. Imagine that? And yet, Moses's mission wouldn't be a failure because God would use the king's stubbornness to display God's power and might over the false Egyptian gods. The king might not convert, but many in Egypt would look up in awe and despair at the God of Israel, who had true power over creation, unlike the false deities of the age.

The sovereignty of God is a much-discussed theological topic. It invites much consternation among theologians. But it's not just an interesting theological discussion; God's sovereignty is an invitation to awe and worship. Moses could be comforted by the fact that nothing he would face in Egypt would surprise God. There were no developments on the ground that stunned the courts of the Almighty.

Today, we can rest in that same knowledge. God's sovereignty helps us process difficult and hard tragedy. It helps us avoid being shaken by world events, from trembling when we scroll our news feeds and read alarming headlines. It keeps us from fixating too much on trying to change earthly circumstances out of our control.

The sovereignty of God doesn't excuse inaction. Moses still had to go and obey the call of God. But he could go knowing that God was going with him. We too can rest in knowing that God goes with us. He knows what evil men are doing and what they will do. And yet, just as He did in Egypt, He is able to use even the hardened Pharaohs of this world to demonstrate His power and glory.

In what areas of your life are you struggling most to yield to the will and plan of God?

GROUP

NOTES

VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

"For God and Lord is a name of majesty, a name of power, even as God himself says, 'The Lord is my name,' and as in another place the prophet declares, 'The Lord almighty is his name.' He is God, therefore, and Lord, either because his rule is over all or because he beholds all things and is feared by all without exception."²

—Ambrose (d. 397)

POINT 1: God reveals His holiness to His servant (Ex. 3:1-5).

Horeb was an insignificant place in the wilderness, but because _____ appeared there, it became _____ ground.

ESSENTIAL DOCTRINE #2: SPECIAL REVELATION

Special revelation refers to God revealing Himself to humanity through historical events, His _____, and through Jesus Christ. Through special revelation, human beings learn about God's _____, His will, His purpose for creation, and His plan of _____. Special revelation shows us the nature and character of God, and because God has revealed Himself in this way, we can know Him—through a saving relationship with Him in the person and work of Jesus Christ.



Why is it important that we learn about God's holiness from His special revelation?

POINT 2: God reveals His identity to His servant (Ex. 3:6-15).

The great "I AM"—Yahweh, the Lord—is a compassionate God, a _____ God, a _____ God, and the eternal, _____, all-powerful Creator God.



What did God's name have to do with the plight of His people in Egypt?

POINT 3: God reveals His power to His servant (Ex. 3:19-22).

Pharaoh's hand over the Hebrews was _____ ,
so Moses's mission would not be easy-going. But
God's hand is _____ still, and He would
accomplish what He sent Moses to do, just as He said.



How have you seen God's sovereign power on display?

God's power would liberate the Hebrews from their _____ , and He would also bless them through the gifts of the Egyptians. Similarly, Jesus liberates believers from _____ and blesses them with spiritual gifts.



Why do we need God's power through Jesus to save us from our sin?

MY RESPONSE

Because God has revealed Himself to us in Christ so that we might be freed from the oppression of sin, we strive to make Christ known to those around us, conscious of and burdened by the plight of the oppressed in our world.

- **HEAD:** How might God be sending you on mission to declare the good news that He rescues sinners?
- **HEART:** In what areas of your life are you refusing to trust to the great "I AM"? Repent now and obey in faith.
- **HANDS:** Who in your sphere of influence needs to hear the good news of the gospel? Where are you being sent for God's glory?

NOTES

VOICES from THE CHURCH

"God does not stand on ceremony in requiring a formal invitation before making a grand entrance onto the stage of human history. God determines in himself to create, covenant, and commune with his creatures, even when they are steeped in ignorance, stupefied by idolatry, and sullied with sin. God's self-communication is entirely gracious. It follows, then, that God's revelation of himself is chiefly redemptive."³

—Michael Bird

GOD SHOWS HIS POWER

+ **SESSION IN A SENTENCE:**

God is faithful to bring deliverance from bondage, but that deliverance came at a price.

+ **BACKGROUND PASSAGE:**

Exodus 5–12

+ **SETTING:**

Moses accepted the call to be God’s messenger in Egypt, going to Pharaoh with the full authority and power of God, the great “I AM.” But upon arrival, his message was met with resistance and retaliation by Pharaoh, which resulted in near-rejection of Moses’ leadership by the people of God. Yet God reaffirmed His covenant with Moses. God’s power would be demonstrated in full force as He unleashed a series of plagues, culminating in the death of Egypt’s firstborn sons and the sparing of Israel’s through the Passover sacrifice.

DAY 1

READ:

Exodus 5:1–6:4

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Exodus 6:2-3

NOTES

When you begin watching a good fireworks show, you are captivated by the first bright displays. But you also know those early shots pale in comparison to what is coming, culminating in a grand finale. Similarly, this describes God's plan to rescue Israel and lead them out of the land of Egypt to the land of Canaan. In fact, God's entire covenant framework works this way: a gradual unfolding of greater and greater displays of God's power.

This is what God meant when he said to Moses that He revealed Himself to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob as "God Almighty"—El Shaddai—but He made Himself known to Moses and His suffering people in Egypt as "the LORD"—Yahweh. God had made an everlasting covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and showed Himself in mighty ways, but the rescue of the Hebrew slaves in Egypt would be something those patriarchs never experienced.

This was an encouragement to Moses to trust in the midst of seeming impossibility. And it is an encouragement to us today. God has given us a new covenant in Jesus, who has rescued us from sin, death, and the grave. And yet, we are told that there is something even better to come when Jesus returns to lead us to our promised land, the New Jerusalem.

We can trust God because we've seen Him work: in rescuing His people from Egypt, in sending Jesus as our Savior, in myriad little ways in which He sustains and blesses us. And we can trust that He will fulfill His promises in the future.

Which promises of God do you have the hardest time trusting? What reasons do you have for trusting God?

DAY 2

READ:

Exodus 6:5–7:25

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Exodus 6:5-6

NOTES

God told Moses that He “heard the groaning” of the people of Israel. God was not immune nor indifferent to Israel’s suffering. For God to “hear” is different than our hearing. Sometimes humans can hear in a literal sense and yet be powerless to do anything. But when God said He heard Israel, it meant He was poised to act. God Almighty—the great “I AM”—would act.

How would God act? “With an outstretched arm.” In Scripture, God’s arm is representative of God’s power. All through the Old Testament, especially in the prophets and the Psalms, the writers referenced God’s mighty arm or mighty hand. This is a reference to God’s ability and power to do something strong.

Pharaoh—the most powerful person in the world at the time, who commanded armies and who snapped his fingers and sent enemies to a quick death—would be no match against the power of God’s outstretched arm. His money, his status, and his gods couldn’t save him.

This was more than a mere rescue of Israel. This was a spiritual battle in the heart of the world’s most prosperous nation. Those who put their trust in false gods found their faith misplaced and their foundations shattered. Those who put their trust in Yahweh, however, found strength.

Today, it seems evil is on the march and wicked rulers will reign forever. But we should remember that their power has an expiration date. They are no match for the outstretched arm of the Almighty. We should take heart and put our trust not in princes but in the God who hears His people’s groans and who stretches out His hand in righteousness and justice.

How does it affect you knowing that God hears and responds to the groaning of His people?

DAY 3

READ:

Exodus 11:1–12:11

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Exodus 12:5-8

NOTES



ESSENTIAL DOCTRINE #59: CHRIST AS PROPITIATION

Because of God's righteousness and holiness, humanity's sins must be atoned for in order for people to be reconciled to God. As the propitiation for sins, Christ's death is the appeasement or satisfaction of God's wrath against sin. Christ's propitiation for our sins demonstrates both God's great love toward sinners (1 John 4:10) as well as the necessary payment that results from the penalty of sins (Rom. 3:26).

When we read about the Passover in Exodus, it seems to make sense to those of us who are aware of the Bible's stories. But for the Hebrews, this would all be new. They were to take a one-year-old lamb or goat and kill it at the appropriate time. Then they were to cook and eat the meat as a special Passover meal and apply the blood of the animal to their doorposts. If they did this, God's judgment against Egypt would pass over their homes. God's people were to obey every aspect of God's special instructions.

Why this strange practice? There is much important symbolism here. First, to atone for the sins of the guilty, an innocent sacrifice was required by God. This points back to the first couple, Adam and Eve, who were covered in their shame by the skins of an innocent animal, and it points forward to the final sacrifice, Jesus, the Lamb of God who was slain for the sins of the world.

The judgment of death was coming to every family that quiet night. Yet Israel escaped death, not because of their own righteousness but because of the covering of the innocent lamb. And so it is today that God's judgment is coming for the world, and those who apply Jesus' blood to the doorposts of their hearts will escape God's wrath.

Egypt was warned by Moses and by the plagues. They could have turned to God in repentance and escaped His judgment. Today, salvation is available for all those who believe, who turn from their gods, who repent, and who trust in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ to atone for their sins.

Why does God require an innocent sacrifice to atone for sin?

DAY 4

READ:

Exodus 12:12-28

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Exodus 12:12-14

NOTES

VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

"The doorposts of the Jews were marked with the blood of a slaughtered animal. Our foreheads are marked with the blood of Christ. And that sign, because it was a sign, was said to keep the destroyer away from the houses marked with the sign. The sign of Christ drives the destroyer away from us insofar as our heart receives the Savior."¹

-Augustine (354-430)

God was telling the people of Israel what was about to happen in Egypt. The plagues had taken a severe economic and physiological toll on Egypt, each a direct strike at the false deities of this pagan nation. But what was about to happen would bring this world superpower to its knees. Yet Israel would be saved, not by their own ingenuity or grit but because they had a God who heard their groaning and extended His outstretched arm on their behalf.

God told Moses that the blood would be a distinguishing mark for them. This sign of blood on the doorposts would save the firstborn in Israel from God's righteous judgment against Egypt. And this one-time occurrence would begin their new calendar and form the rhythms of their new life of freedom. God was not merely rescuing them from oppression, He was calling them out as a new people.

Today, God is making a new people, a new creation. We, like Israel, have blood as our distinguishing mark. We were bought with "the precious blood of Christ," like that of a lamb without blemish or spot (1 Pet. 1:19). God has stretched out His arm on our behalf, sending His own Son to the cross and raising Him from the dead for our salvation from sin.

God is warning the world that another judgment is coming, but there is salvation available. We believers are those tasked with sharing this news with the world. Anyone who calls upon the name of the Lord is saved from death and welcomed into God's new people, the church.

How should the reality of God's judgment and grace change the way we think about those who have not yet believed the gospel?

DAY 5

READ:

Exodus 12:29-51

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Exodus 12:29-32

NOTES

Moses got the middle-of-the-night call he had been waiting for. Pharaoh, whose heart had hardened even in the face of increasing demonstrations of God's power, was broken enough to relent and let Israel go. But this came at a great cost. Every firstborn child in Egypt was dead, from the child of the king to the child of the prisoner. God's judgment didn't discriminate based on social class or economic status.

Pharaoh, we know, never did acknowledge Yahweh. He asked for Moses to bless him but never expressed remorse or sorrow for his sin. He wanted salvation on his terms. The sight of his stricken son caused him sorrow but not repentance.

Today, many seek relief from their circumstances. They cry out to God in desperation. And yet, few are willing to see God as more than someone who can rearrange their troubles. They fail to see Jesus as their Savior and their Lord. They want God on their terms. This same mind-set would lead to Pharaoh's ultimate demise in the Red Sea.

The threat of judgment and the need for salvation, like it was in Egypt, doesn't respect wealth or social class or even religiosity. From the wealthiest celebrity to the most impoverished pauper, everyone needs the mercy of God. The good news is that God's grace is available for all those who believe, who see Jesus Christ as the Lamb whose blood can cover their sins and save them from God's judgment.

What is the difference between the remorse expressed by Pharaoh and the genuine repentance expressed by believers?

GROUP

NOTES

VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

"Once we have set ourselves to be pilgrims and strangers on the earth, which is what Christians are meant to be, it is incongruous for us to continue to insist upon the sort of security the world tries to guarantee. Our security lies not in protecting ourselves from suffering but in putting ourselves fully into the hands of God. The desire for physical and material security makes us sly and hard. No. We must be like little children. The child in its father's arms is not worried. It lies quietly at rest because it trusts its father."²

—Elisabeth Elliot (1926-2015)

POINT 1: God remembers His covenant with His people (Ex. 6:2-8).

God's covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob was _____ forgotten and would be honored with God's _____ involvement.



How has God's self-revelation in Scripture since the creation account increased our knowledge of Him?

Because God is "the Lord," He acts faithfully and powerfully to keep His covenant and deliver His people from their _____, just as Jesus powerfully saves _____.

POINT 2: God requires a perfect sacrifice from His people (Ex. 12:2-7).

God's plan for the deliverance of the Hebrews from slavery involved fashioning a new _____ for them. Their lives were to be _____ by the faithfulness of God on their behalf.



What are some ways believers in Jesus are marked by the faithfulness of God on their behalf?

ESSENTIAL DOCTRINE #59: CHRIST AS PROPITIATION

Because of God's righteousness and holiness, humanity's sins must be _____ for in order for people to be reconciled to God. As the propitiation for sins, Christ's death is the appeasement or satisfaction of God's _____ against sin. Christ's propitiation for our sins demonstrates both God's great _____ toward sinners (1 John 4:10) as well as the necessary _____ that results from the penalty of sins (Rom. 3:26).

POINT 3: God releases judgment in the midst of His people (Ex. 12:12-13,29-32).

God's judgment upon Egypt was severe, but it was not capricious. The Lord is _____ and _____, and He will make His glory known throughout the nations in the _____ of His people.



Why is it important to recognize the just judgment of God against sin?

No human can escape the judgment of God, regardless of wealth, status, or privilege. God's _____ can break stubborn hearts, but salvation can only be found through _____ and _____ in God.



How has God worked to bring you to a biblical understanding of His just judgment and salvation by grace?

MY RESPONSE

Because we have been rescued from sin and death through Christ's sacrifice, we exercise our freedom in Christ by living for His glory, telling others of the good news of salvation through the Lamb slain for the sins of the world.

- **HEAD:** How might you declare the good news of the gospel to those who are in danger of God's righteous judgment?
- **HEART:** What are some ways your group can work together to share the gospel in your community?
- **HANDS:** What practical steps can you take to engage in a gospel conversation this week?

NOTES

VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

"And the only way I know for any man or woman on earth to escape the sinner's payday on earth and the sinner's hell beyond—making sure of the Christian's payday on earth and the Christian's heaven beyond the Christian's payday—is through Christ Jesus, who took the sinner's place upon the Cross, becoming for all sinners all that God must judge, that sinners through faith in Christ Jesus might become all that God cannot judge."³

—R. G. Lee (1886-1978)

GOD SAVES HIS PEOPLE

+ **SESSION IN A SENTENCE:**

God is the One who wins the victory for His people.

+ **BACKGROUND PASSAGE:**

Exodus 13–15

+ **SETTING:**

The many years of cruel oppression the Hebrews experienced at the hand of a new Pharaoh were coming to an end. God had heard their cries and sent an unconventional deliverer with unconventional methods. There were no armies, but the outstretched hand of God rained down plague after plague upon the world's strongest and most confident superpower. The final blow—the death of the firstborn sons—brought Egypt to its knees, so Pharaoh commanded Israel to go. God's people were finally free, but still more opportunities for the Hebrews to trust the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob lay ahead.

DAY 1

READ:

Exodus 13:1-19

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Exodus 13:17

NOTES

VOICES from THE CHURCH

"We are on life's journey, and there are many dangers. We have a Guide who knows the road and can take us safely to our promised land—the New Jerusalem. God led the children of Israel by cloud and fire. In our time, God provides the Holy Spirit as the perfect guide to lead us. The cloud and fire to lead us on our journey is also the Bible. It is our compass to show us the way by night and day so that we will not lose our way."¹

—Africa Study Bible

The easy way, the well-traveled way, from Egypt to Canaan would go around, not through, the Red Sea. But God often doesn't allow us to take the way that makes the most sense to us at the time. Consider the hard and difficult paths God often led His servants to travel.

Abraham and Sarah would wait twenty-five years for God's promise of a child. Joseph would experience two decades of betrayal, slavery, and imprisonment before his dreams were fulfilled in leading and rescuing His family. Moses himself would spend forty long years in the wilderness before God called him to lead the Hebrews out of Egypt. David would be chased by King Saul for years before he would rightfully assume the throne of Israel. The apostle Paul would endure hardships like stoning, imprisonment, and even a shipwreck for sharing the gospel.

Ultimately, Jesus set the perfect example we should follow. He didn't take the easy way out but accepted the cup of God's wrath and endured the cross so we could have salvation. Because He did this, and because we have His Holy Spirit with us to strengthen us, we can endure our own long roads, follow our paths through difficult waters, and bear our own crosses.

The Christian life is one that often takes us not around but through hardship and trial. We can endure because we know that the God of Israel, whose outstretched hand delivered His people, is the same God who empowers us today. We can go through, not simply around, the valley of the shadow of death because He is with us and He comforts us (see Ps. 23).

What paths in your life are difficult to endure right now? How does the faithfulness of God help you to keep going?

DAY 2

READ:

Exodus 13:20-22

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Exodus 13:21-22

NOTES

Imagine being Israel in this moment. They had been enslaved for hundreds of years, kept in grueling servitude, and exploited for free labor. Then God acted mightily in raining down plague after plague on the most powerful nation on earth. Now the Hebrews were getting their wish—freedom from Pharaoh's grasp; freedom to be their own people.

But where would they go, and how would they go? They knew they belonged in Canaan, the promised land, but how would they make that journey? The short answer was the God who freed them.

God demonstrated His presence with His people by guiding them during the day with a massive cloud and with a pillar of fire at night. Imagine this! The tangible, awesome presence of God going before you, leading the way.

And yet, though we don't physically see a pillar of fire and cloud today, God's presence does guide us in an even more direct and personal way—through the ministry of the Holy Spirit.

If it were hard for us to imagine a literal pillar of cloud and fire leading Israel out of Egypt, it would be harder for the Hebrews to imagine God in us through the ministry of the Holy Spirit. And yet, this is what every single Christian experiences. Upon salvation through repentance and faith in Jesus, the Spirit of God indwells you and empowers you and equips you to obey the voice of God and go where He leads.

Why might we wish for a pillar of cloud and fire to lead us? What does this say about our understanding of the Holy Spirit's role in the lives of believers?

DAY 3

READ:

Exodus 14:1-14

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Exodus 14:13-14

NOTES

The Hebrews were pinned against the Red Sea and the approaching army of Egypt. They had nowhere to go. It's easy for us to read Exodus from the comfort of a padded chair in an air-conditioned building, sipping a perfectly brewed cup of coffee. But we need to put ourselves in the sandals of the Israelites who were staring at danger on every side.

Crossing a large body of water was impossible. Perhaps some could swim, but could they hope to reach the other side with their families and all of their possessions? No.

Similarly, defeating the mightiest nation on earth, who rode with the weapons of war, was impossible. A ragtag, untrained, undisciplined army wouldn't stand a chance.

So the voices of complaint and criticism began: "Did we make a mistake? What was Moses thinking? Maybe we should go back to Egypt?"

Back to Egypt? Where they'd been under the thumb of Pharaoh, where their lives were not worth anything? But in the midst of their despair, they forgot who was with them—the great "I AM." On their own, from a human perspective, their situation was impossible, even tragic. Nothing, however, is impossible with God. This is why Moses told them to stand still and see the salvation of the Lord.

Standing still is the hard part. We want to fight and claw and act and push. But when our backs are against the Red Sea and we face an overwhelming enemy, the only weapon we have is the greatest weapon we own: our faith in the sovereign Lord of creation.

What impossible situation are you facing today? How does the all-powerful God help you to stand in faith?

DAY 4

READ:

Exodus 14:15-22

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Exodus 14:21

NOTES



ESSENTIAL DOCTRINE #33: MIRACLES

A miracle is an event in which God makes an exception to the natural order of things, or supersedes natural laws, for the purpose of demonstrating His glory and/or validating His message. Miracles are recorded throughout Scripture; miraculous signs and wonders were oftentimes evident when a prophet or an apostle was speaking God's message to the people. Because we believe God to be all-powerful and personally involved in this world, we believe He can and does perform miracles.

Imagine being Moses in this moment. He had seen God appear in a burning bush. He had seen God act powerfully, humiliating the most powerful nation on earth with a series of plagues designed to show the futility of their false worship. And now the Lord commanded Moses to lift up his staff and stretch out his hand over the Red Sea.

Let's stop for a moment and think about the previous times Moses stretched out his arm at the Lord's command. At the burning bush, God turned Moses' rod into a snake and commanded Moses to stretch out his hand to pick it up by the tail, the most dangerous place to grab a snake. But in that moment, the snake became a staff once more. Furthermore, through Moses' outstretched hand, God brought hail, locusts, and darkness upon Egypt. Yet these small miracles would be but a foretaste of the hand of God through Moses in this moment.

In response to a raised staff and a human hand, both stretched out in faith, the Lord of creation peeled back the sea, creating a dry pathway for Israel to cross over an impossible natural boundary. There have been a lot of attempts to explain this, but the only way to see it rightly is that God temporarily suspended His own laws of creation on behalf of His people. It was a miracle. Yet even this mighty miracle was but a foretaste of the greatest miracle that would come, when God stretched forth His hand and raised Jesus from the dead.

What should our responses be to the miraculous and mighty acts of God?

DAY 5

READ:

Exodus 14:21–15:21

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Exodus 14:22

NOTES

Imagine what it must have been like taking that first non-soggy step into the sea, to see walls of water on both sides! After centuries of oppression, Israel could now only see Egypt in their rearview mirror as they left behind a great and fearful weight. God's mighty hand pulled back the waters, and His breath blew a wind that provided a dry pathway for them to walk forward toward salvation.

This would be one of the defining moments for the people of Israel. If you read the rest of the Old Testament, you can underline in your Bible hundreds of passages that reference the crossing of the Red Sea and the Israelites' miraculous escape from Egypt. And as hard as it is to believe, this monumental miracle was only a foretaste of an even greater rescue to come—one that accomplishes our own salvation.

One day, another son of Israel would escape from "Egypt," crossing over the waters of death and leading His people to salvation. Just as God led Israel to the promised land, so today, God is leading believers home to eternal life with Him.

Jesus has made a way for sinners to be restored to their loving Creator, a path through sin and death and brokenness. But there is only one way to escape the waters of eternal judgment, to be wrested from the grasp of sin and Satan. Jesus declared Himself to be "the way, the truth, and the life"; no one comes to the Father except through faith in Him (John 14:6).

How does the exodus of the Hebrews compare and contrast to Jesus' rescue of sinners?

GROUP

NOTES

INTRODUCTION

Start	—	—	Finish
-------	---	---	--------

POINT 1: God directs His people (Ex. 13:17-22).

God led His people out of Egypt but took them on an unconventional pathway. The _____ way was a _____ measure and an opportunity to strengthen the Israelites' _____.



How have you seen God work in your life through a difficult path to bring about your good?

God led the Israelites with a pillar of cloud and a pillar of fire, a visual reminder of His _____, _____, and _____.



What are some ways God leads us as believers today?

POINT 2: God fights for His people (Ex. 14:10-14,19-20).

The Israelites blamed Moses, and God, for their predicament, but God remained in _____. They only needed to _____ still because God would _____ for them.



Why might we find it difficult to stand still and wait for the Lord's salvation?

The Lord _____ the Israelites. Through the same cloud, He gave _____ to His people and covered His enemies in _____.

VOICES from THE CHURCH

"Even when things seem to be going wrong, they just could be going right because when you're in God's will, the negatives are part of his positive program."²

-Tony Evans

POINT 3: God delivers His people

(Ex. 14:21-22,26-31).

ESSENTIAL DOCTRINE #33: MIRACLES

NOTES

A miracle is an event in which God makes an exception to the natural order of things, or supersedes natural laws, for the purpose of demonstrating His _____ and/or validating His _____. Miracles are recorded throughout Scripture; miraculous signs and wonders were oftentimes evident when a prophet or an apostle was speaking God's message to the people. Because we believe God to be _____ and _____ involved in this world, we believe He can and does perform miracles.

Through _____, God performed a great miracle to deliver His people. Through _____, God secured an even greater rescue—salvation from sin.



How does the crossing of the Red Sea compare to our salvation through faith in Jesus?

MY RESPONSE

Because we have been delivered from sin through Jesus, we worship Him at all times, showing others that God is of utmost worth so that they too might be compelled to trust in Christ and be saved from their sin.

- **HEAD:** What are some mighty acts of God that you can worship God for this week?
- **HEART:** What are some ways you doubt God's providence in your daily life?
- **HANDS:** With whom will you share the gospel of Jesus, about the hope of salvation from sin?

VOICES from THE CHURCH

"You are not saved because of the quality of your faith. You are saved because of the *object* of your faith: the Redeemer, the God who is fighting for you. Everything about this text says, 'Grace, grace, grace, grace' ... When you try to add to God's salvation, you subtract. If you try to merit God's salvation, you haven't believed in God at all; you are trusting yourself, even if you try to do only a little bit."³

—Tim Keller

GOD SHOWS HIS FAITHFULNESS

+ SESSION IN A SENTENCE:

God is faithful to keep His word, demonstrated most of all in the fulfillment of His promise to provide Christ Jesus.

+ BACKGROUND PASSAGES:

Psalms 51; Lamentations 3; Matthew 1–2

+ SETTING:

When Moses brought the Israelites out of Egypt, God led the way and won the victory because God is always faithful to His people—He keeps His promises. We can see this truth throughout the Bible and throughout history. What He says is true, and what He says He will do, He will do. The Bible consists of stories of God's faithfulness even when things looked bleak. Though at times God's people thought He had abandoned them, God was still there. He is always there working on behalf of His people, ultimately so the Savior, the Messiah, will restore His people from their brokenness.

DAY 1

READ:

Lamentations 3

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Lamentations 3:19-24

NOTES



ESSENTIAL DOCTRINE #16: GOD IS FAITHFUL

God's faithfulness means He keeps His word and always fulfills His promises (1 Cor. 1:9; 2 Tim. 2:13; 1 Pet. 4:19). God's faithfulness is demonstrated in His fulfillment of the promises He made to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. The apostle Paul linked the attribute of "faithful" to God's coming through on His word: "He who calls you is faithful; he will do it" (1 Thess. 5:24). We reflect God by keeping the promises we make to Him and to others.

Sometimes life doesn't turn out the way we planned it. With a disobedient child, a disagreement with your spouse, a job loss, or the loss of a loved one, it's easy to fall into despair. In the midst of the pain, you wonder, "Can I cry out to God about these things? Can I share with Him my sadness, even while knowing 'Rejoice!' is a command in Scripture?"

The answer is yes! God wants to hear our cries, our laments, our tears. He already knows how we feel anyway. He wants to walk alongside us in our sorrow because He is the only One who can offer us true hope, not just wishful thinking or pure speculation. Because God is faithful, One who does what He says He will do, we can know that our hope is assured (Heb. 10:23).

Like the writer of Lamentations, we can cry out to God in our anguish. We can be transparent before Him with our emotions. As believers, we must have hope in God in the midst of our afflictions because He is God and we are not (Lam. 3:21). He is in control and we need to let go of control. He is faithful even when we are faithless (2 Tim. 2:13). He writes the story and we await the conclusion that always ends in His victory and glory and our good.

Our despair when life hits hard reminds us that we live in a broken world wrecked by sin and the Fall. But we can take comfort in knowing we are not left alone in our brokenness. God provided Jesus to save us from sin and death and the brokenness of this world. In Christ we will always have hope (1 Pet. 5:10).

How do you normally view God when you're struggling and things aren't going your way? How do you view Him now after reading the Lamentations passage?

DAY 2

READ:

Matthew 1–2

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Matthew 2:1-8

NOTES

“O Little Town of Bethlehem” is one of my favorite Christmas carols because it reminds me how little and insignificant Bethlehem was. Yes, Bethlehem was the birthplace of David, but other than that, it was a small town with nothing else to its name. It was insignificant, but God chose it to be the birthplace of His Son. As we remember David’s “little” birthplace, we also remember that David himself was insignificant when chosen to be king. He was the youngest and smallest of his brothers and was just a mere shepherd. The prophet Samuel imagined that one of David’s older brothers, who looked the part, would be chosen. But God had different plans (1 Sam. 16).

For God, nothing is insignificant. Anything could be used by Him for His purposes. And often He uses the simple, the small, and the weak to remind us that bigger isn’t always better. Even the underdog can fulfill God’s purposes. Through His choices, especially the confusing ones, God shows us that He is in control of all events and is faithful to accomplish His purposes and plans, even with little resources and insurmountable odds.

We see this truth in the Christmas story. A young couple? A somewhat scandalous situation? A Roman census? An innkeeper? A manger? A couple years later, astrologers from the East? A supernatural star? Such a haphazard assortment of characters and events, yet all used to accomplish God’s provision of a Savior. Add into that story a murderous king and religious leaders who were supposed to be the good guys and it would be easy to think the story could end up disastrous. But it doesn’t. It’s fulfilled. It’s accomplished. God is writing the story and He is faithful to fulfill His promises. And “the hopes and fears of all the years” were met in Christ for God’s glory and our good.

How can God use you, not in spite of but because of your weakness, for His purposes?

DAY 3

READ:

Matthew 2

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Matthew 2:9-12

NOTES

VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

"Come, Thou long-expected
Jesus, Born to set Thy people
free; From our fears and sins
release us; Let us find our rest
in Thee. Israel's strength and
consolation, Hope of all the
earth Thou art; Dear desire
of ev'ry nation, Joy of ev'ry
longing heart."¹

—Charles Wesley (1707-1788)

As a teenager, I loved following my favorite bands. I bought the posters and T-shirts and blasted their music wherever I went so others could share my joy. If I saw band members in person, I would be in awe and tell them how much I loved their band. My life was consumed by them. You could almost say I worshiped them.

We all worship something because God created us to worship. But we tend to worship things that are unworthy of our worship—for example, money, power, relationships, and stability. Yet we have a God who is the only One worthy of our worship.

When the wise men first met Jesus, they saw the toddler King, and though their knowledge was incomplete, they were compelled to worship Him, offering Him their treasure without any expectations. He was just a child; what could He give them? What could He offer? Nothing, they thought, but they worshiped Him anyway. Little did they know that He would secure everything for them: life, salvation, and freedom from sin, guilt, and shame.

Sometimes in our worship, we have ulterior motives. We pray, praise, and obey because we think God will answer our prayers the way we want. We're hoping for comfort, success, and the good life as defined by the world, not by God. In this, our worship is skewed. We've only worshiped Him to get something for ourselves.

But faced with Jesus, we should desire to worship Him just for who He is because Jesus is God. He is holy, faithful, good, just, and perfect. He deserves our all, and though we don't deserve anything, He gives us His all. God's greatest gift to us was Himself in Jesus, in His life and His death. We need to be in awe. We need to have our lives consumed by Him. We need to be wise men and women who worship Jesus in spirit and truth.

What are some ways you can worship our faithful God without any expectations?

DAY 4

READ:

Psalm 51

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Psalm 51:1-2

NOTES

For a time, my family lived overseas, and more often than we liked, the kids in school came home with lice. The stigma overseas was little to none compared to perceptions in the United States, so it wasn't a big deal socially. However, the washing and cleaning involved, from their bodies to their clothes to their sheets, were overwhelming. We had to clean and disinfect everything. If not, we could have an infestation.

God is faithful to forgive us and cleanse us from all unrighteousness when we repent. But when we don't repent, sins tend to multiply. And yet, God still is faithful to forgive when we come to Him.

King David loved God, but he also was a sinner. In fact, he was among the worst kind according to most social standards: he was an adulterer and a murderer. How can that be? He ruled Israel and was chosen and beloved by God. But he was also human, and he let one sin lead to the next. In Psalm 51, however, we see his heart, his sorrow, his crying out to God for forgiveness. He asked for cleansing and washing from God because he knew only God could forgive sin. And he knew God would forgive him because of His steadfast love and mercies.

When we look at ourselves and others, it would be easy to judge and say God can't or won't forgive a certain sin. But God is beyond our understanding and desires to forgive all who come to Him with a repentant heart. God can create a clean heart and renew a right spirit in anyone (v. 10). He desires to make all things new and clean again. We just need to let Him do it.

What sins do you need to repent of? Pray through Psalm 51 right now.

DAY 5

READ:

Isaiah 53

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Isaiah 53:5-12

NOTES

One day our six year old got in trouble for disobeying. We told him to sit in the time-out chair in the corner of the room, and with his arms crossed, he hesitantly went over and plopped himself in the chair. Out came his eight-year-old brother who saw “little brother” in the corner. With his compassionate heart, he went up to his brother and said, “Don’t worry. I can sit in the chair for you. I can sit for your sins.” Of course, we didn’t let him. We wanted the six year old to understand discipline and the consequences for disobedience.

Sometimes we don’t understand how God could be merciful, just, and fair all at the same time. Shouldn’t adulterers be condemned? Shouldn’t murderers remain unforgiven? But if we let ourselves go to the logical conclusion, we might answer ourselves with some more personal questions: Shouldn’t prideful people be condemned? Shouldn’t those who are not perfect remain unforgiven?

All of us have sinned because of the Fall. Yet from that first sin in the garden of Eden, God has been faithful to promise to bring a Deliverer, a Ruler, a Savior to forgive us for our sins and restore our relationship with Him. Isaiah prophesied about a coming Messiah, a Savior who would sacrifice Himself for His people. He would be pierced, crushed, punished, and wounded for our sins (v. 5). In His faithfulness, God sacrifices all to fulfill His promise—He sacrificed His Son. This is how God is fair, or rather, God is beyond fair. He is merciful.

There may be people in your life whom you deem unforgivable. Perhaps a family member who stole money, or a pastor who lacked integrity, or a friend who betrayed you. Seeing them as God sees them will help you forgive. We are all sinners in need of a Savior. We are all sinners in need of forgiveness. And in His faithfulness, God forgives.

Who do you need to forgive? With whom can you share about God’s faithfulness to forgive?

GROUP

NOTES

VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

"God is faithful in disciplining His people. He is faithful in what He withholds, no less than in what He gives. He is faithful in sending sorrow as well as in giving joy. The faithfulness of God is a truth to be confessed by us not only when we are at ease, but also when we are smarting under the sharpest rebuke."²

-A. W. Pink (1886-1952)

POINT 1: God is faithful to love the afflicted (Lam. 3:19-24).

No matter the reason for our afflictions, we can trust God, both with our _____ and the _____ that He is always there.

ESSENTIAL DOCTRINE #16: GOD IS FAITHFUL

God's faithfulness means He keeps His _____ and always fulfills His _____.
(1 Cor. 1:9; 2 Tim. 2:13; 1 Pet. 4:19). God's faithfulness is demonstrated in His fulfillment of the promises He made to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. The apostle Paul linked the attribute of "faithful" to God's coming through on His word: "He who calls you is faithful; he will do it" (1 Thess. 5:24). We _____ God by keeping the promises we make to Him and to others.



What are some ways you have seen God's faithful love in your life when you were struggling?

POINT 2: God is faithful to provide the Messiah (Matt. 2:1-12).

God uses events that seem _____ and even _____ to accomplish His purposes and fulfill His promises, as seen clearly in God's provision of the Messiah for _____ who come and _____ Him.



What are some ways we can worship the Messiah?

POINT 3: God is faithful to forgive the repentant (Ps. 51:1-2).

God's faithful love _____ us to come to Him in _____ to find forgiveness for our sin.

NOTES



What does it mean to have a repentant heart?

Ultimately, God's forgiveness of sin, even David's adultery and murder in the Old Testament, is accomplished through the _____ of Jesus Christ on the cross, _____ for our sin in our place.



Knowing that God is faithful to fulfill His promises and faithful to forgive us when we repent, how should we live?

MY RESPONSE

Because the Lord is faithful in all of His ways, we seek to live likewise, striving to be faithful to God so that others might come to trust in Him as well.

- **HEAD:** How have you been influenced as a witness to God's faithfulness in Scripture, in your life, and in the lives of others?
- **HEART:** What sins do you need to repent of and confess today, knowing that God is faithful to forgive?
- **HANDS:** What are some ways your group/church can be God's hands and feet in showing His faithfulness to those in need in your community so that they may come to know Jesus as Lord and Savior?

VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

"The glory of God's faithfulness is that no sin of man has ever made Him unfaithful."³

-Charles Spurgeon (1834-1892)

UNIT 5

+

TO DWELL

IN THE HOUSE

OF THE LORD

“I Will Be with You”

by Micah Fries

We turned the corner, through the gate, into the driveway of the small, white house, just off the dusty dirt road. The yard was filled with children playing. We noticed a patio to our left as we parked. On the patio was a table, and at the table were six or seven children playing a game of cards. One of the young children was wearing a Kansas City Royals T-shirt, and we knew immediately—that was our son.

We had been in the process of adopting for four long, hard years. We knew that God wanted us to adopt, but the process had been agonizing. Finally, we got word that the adoption was official, and we could leave the next week to go pick him up. In advance of our arrival, we sent a care package to him: a box filled with clothes and pictures and other items that we thought he might enjoy. As big fans of the Kansas City Royals baseball team, we sent a shirt and a hat, which is how we identified him as our new son upon our arrival.

When we brought him into our home, his entire world changed: He changed locations, moving to the U.S. He changed languages, learning to speak English. He changed sports teams, being introduced to U.S. football and baseball. And he changed his family and name, assuming our last name and becoming a part of a nuclear family after growing up in an orphanage until that point. There is very little of his world today that is similar to his previous life in Lesotho. He now had a family, he had a home, and he was safe and secure in his new identity.

RUNNING FROM GRACE

In the latter part of the Book of Exodus, we see God establishing Israel as His people, calling them to dwell with Him and giving them His expectations for them to live as His family. He gave them the law. He granted them His provision. He helped them understand how to live with each other in love.

The deeper our awareness of our own sin becomes, and the more intensely we understand God's grace, the more we should find ourselves running to worship Him.

In return, God commanded them to behave as members of His family. They were to stop worshiping idols. They were to function in God-honoring ways toward each other. They were to dwell with Him and to declare Him to the world around them.

The Lord kept His end of the commitment. Unfortunately, Israel did not. Everything changed for them in a wonderful way as they left slavery in Egypt, but in spite of God's care, His family struggled to honor Him rightly.

God's people who had been given such great privileges, and for whom He had assigned great responsibility, did what we humans always do—they ran away from God and His covenant privileges. They failed in the wilderness: they broke God's law, they worshiped idols, and so on.

We do the same thing today. God gives us His grace, and we are prone to run away. This is why the hymn writer Robert Robinson penned these words in "Come, Thou Fount of Every Blessing":

Prone to wander, Lord, I feel it,
Prone to leave the God I love;
Here's my heart, Lord, take and seal it;
Seal it for Thy courts above.¹

We are all prone to wander. But when we see Israel wandering, we see God pour out even more grace. In Exodus 16–17, they run away from Him in fear, complaints, and despair, yet God remains gracious in His responses. As we see ourselves in the contemptuous Israelites, then, we should find welling up in us a desire to worship our Lord. The deeper our awareness of our own sin becomes, and the more intensely we understand God's grace, the more we should find ourselves running to worship Him.

My own kids, both biological and adopted, have blessings and privileges that come with being a part of our family, and they also have responsibilities. Yet even when they fail in those responsibilities, they do not fail to be loved.

God is the perfect Father: loving, patient, and gracious. He holds out chance after chance for His people to learn and obey so they will share in the joy of His responsibilities and privileges. And even when they fail, God's love never fails (1 Cor. 13:8).

Robinson was right in his assessment: If he (or we) are to have hope for the eternal future, it will only be because God, in His grace, has secured our future in spite of our stumbling. We are terribly flawed and broken sinners. And God still loves, pursues, and works to perfect us.

THE GREATEST PROMISE

For quite some time I have been convinced that the single greatest promise in all of Scripture is the promise of God being with us. It's a dominant theme in the Bible, from the garden of Eden, where God walked with Adam and Eve and then removed them from His presence as a penalty for their disobedience, to the construction of the tabernacle, and later the temple, where God's presence could dwell with His sinful people.

We see God's promise of His presence in the coming of Jesus, the ultimate example of God coming to us, and, of course, the coming of the Holy Spirit after Jesus' ascension. Finally, though, we see it in the eternal promise of what is yet to come in Revelation 21:3-4, when Jesus comes again and God's dwelling is with humanity forevermore and nothing will be able to separate us from Him or diminish our joy in His infinite, holy presence.

This is the remarkable promise of God to those who are His children. He will be with us, and He desires to be with us so much that He secures us twice—first through creation and then through adoption. By faith in Jesus, we are made a part of His family. In the end, He will again come to us, and we will live forever in eternity with Him. Until that time, we are called to live as His representatives, as members of His family. And when we fail in that responsibility, we watch as He loves us anyway, and that love leads us to worship.

When we fail in our
responsibility to
represent God,
we watch as He
loves us anyway,
and that love leads
us to worship.



FAILURE IN THE WILDERNESS

+ SESSION IN A SENTENCE:

The Lord provides for His people even when they are undeserving.

+ BACKGROUND PASSAGE:

Exodus 15:22–17:16

+ SETTING:

God brought His people out of the slavery of Egypt and through the Red Sea by His mighty hand, simultaneously crushing the Egyptian army. This omnipotent God displayed His goodness by saving Israel in keeping with His covenant to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Now on the other side of the Red Sea, they were in the wilderness, and they quickly found themselves in need of resources. Israel was tested as their water and food supplies ran low. Israel would need to trust in the God who saved them, but they were also tempted to grumble against that same God.

DAY 1

READ:

Exodus 15:22–16:8

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Exodus 16:1-8

NOTES

VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

"Discontent is a sin that is its own punishment and makes men torment themselves; it makes the spirit sad, the body sick, and all the enjoyments sour; it is the heaviness of the heart and the rottenness of the bones. It is a sin that is its own parent. It arises not from the condition, but from the mind. As we find Paul contented in a prison, so Ahab discontent in a palace."¹

—Matthew Henry (1662-1714)

"There's nothing to eat!" At some point, every parent of hungry teenagers hears this cry. The pantry and the refrigerator may be well stocked with good food, but the cravings of a hungry teenage stomach seem to reverberate with these words: "I want what I want! Now feed me!"

The Israelites' complaint about a lack of food questioned the goodness of God. Surprisingly, they reminisced about the good old days, imagining Pharaoh's slave buffet supplying good meat and endless bread. What they had forgotten was their groans and cries to the Lord because of the oppression and slavery they experienced. So they directed their complaints against their leaders: Moses and Aaron.

How often we complain against the Lord. We look at our circumstances and confuse our needs and our wants. We judge the goodness of God by how our life is going. If troubles and hardships arise, we are tempted to question the love that God has for us.

Our tendency is to take out our dissatisfaction and discontentment on someone who is close to us. Like Israel's complaints against Aaron and Moses, our complaints toward others express our displeasure about any trial and testing. We forget that the Lord is working to strengthen our dependence upon Him. In reality, what we are looking for can only be satisfied by His good and gracious hand. When we know that God is working for our eternal joy and that it is found only in Him, we can understand the apostle Paul's instructions to rejoice always, pray constantly, and give thanks in everything (1 Thess. 5:16-18).

Why do we need to be reminded that all of our grumbling is ultimately directed against God?

DAY 2

READ:

Exodus 16:9-20

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Exodus 16:16-20

NOTES

Sometimes it is a struggle to part with belongings, even when they are long past their usefulness. Some people hang on to clothes that don't fit them in the hope that one day they will be able to wear them again. Others have collections that at one time were meaningful but have long since been forgotten in storage.

A few recent television shows have brought an awareness to some of the most extreme forms of hoarding—homes that are stuffed and overflowing with possessions, collections, and belongings, not to mention the trash and filth. The desire to keep something because it might be useful in the future, carries an emotional significance, or provides the feeling of safety by having future supplies can become paralyzing to one's well-being.

When the children of Israel were instructed to collect enough food for the day, they were learning that God was powerful and sufficient to provide for their daily needs. God had promised that He would rain down bread from heaven and supply their daily needs (Ex. 16:4; Ps. 78:24-25). But if they attempted to keep some bread beyond the allotted time, the food would spoil and become inedible (16:19-20).

It is wise to plan for the future (see Prov. 6:6-11). But our planning should never replace our trust in our good and sufficient God to meet all of our daily needs.

Furthermore, the Lord has reminded us that we are to share what we have with those who are in need (2 Cor. 8:14-15). A generous heart reminds us that every good and perfect gift is from our unchanging Lord (Jas. 1:17). By sharing with those who are in need, we show that our trust is in the Lord, not our belongings. Giving fosters contentment with what we have because God has never left us nor forsaken us (Heb. 13:5-6).

How does generosity cultivate a heart of trust in the Lord?

DAY 3

READ:

Exodus 16:21-36

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Exodus 16:22-30

NOTES



ESSENTIAL DOCTRINE #21: GOD IS OMNIPOTENT

God is all-powerful. There is nothing God cannot do so long as it does not contradict His own nature or law. God has power and authority over the universe He created, from the largest solar system to the smallest particle. Affirming that God is all-powerful does not mean that God can sin—since that would go against His perfect moral nature. As Christians, we rest in the belief that the God who has all power is good, and we gain great comfort by knowing that an all-powerful God is working for our good and joy.

When Alexander Graham Bell, the inventor of the telephone, made his first call in 1876, his assistant, Mr. Watson, answered the phone to hear Graham exclaim, “Mr. Watson, come here—I want to see you.”² With the further development of smart phones and mobile technology, the pressure to be available, ready, and active every moment of every day is only a buzz or ring away.

If ever there has been a time when we need the gift of God’s rest, it is today. Ask someone how they are doing and you’ll likely hear them say, “I’m so busy.” Our schedules are filled, and our lives are stressed to exhaustion. Christians struggle to find time to pray, to read God’s Word, and to serve others. We say we are overloaded, yet the taskmaster in our pocket keeps us from resting from our work.

When Israel left Egypt, God had freed them from the moment-by-moment pressure to work. Through His act of creation, God had given work and rest as gifts, but in Egypt, the people had only known the endless strain of labor. Now freed from this daily tyranny, Israel was called to work six days and trust the Lord’s provision for the seventh so that they might enjoy rest. Yet some struggled to cease from their work, doubting that God would provide for them in the wilderness with a double portion on the sixth day of the week (16:27-30).

The gift of rest is received by faith. The temptation to keep going and finish one more job may be strong, but the Lord calls us to remember His salvation and rest in His good and generous provision. His gift of rest will never come at your expense but will come with His renewing presence.

What temptations keep you from resting from your work and enjoying the salvation of the Lord?

DAY 4

READ:

Exodus 17

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Exodus 17:1-7

NOTES

When the circumstances of life go wrong or when life doesn't meet our expectations, humans are very quick to blame God and demand that He fix things. If God's response doesn't measure up to our approval, humans are prone to justify their unbelief, their bitterness, and their resentment.

In Exodus 17, the children of Israel put God on trial in their hearts. They accused Moses of following God's leading to bring the entire nation out into the wilderness to die. Moses reminded the people that they were testing God and that this action was sinful.

Yet God is abundantly gracious. God didn't interrupt the conflict between Moses and the people with raw, angry power. Instead, He acted with abundant, gracious provision, letting water flow for the millions of men, women, children, and livestock. His heart was full of compassion to deliver His people from their trouble even when they multiplied their troubles with false accusations against God.

God provided for His people by taking the blow of judgment. Standing between Moses and the rock, the Lord took the blow from the staff and let streams of abundant water flow in the desert (see Ps. 78:15-16). And in the same way, Christ is the One who takes the blow of judgment for us, receiving all of the accusations we heap upon Him, bearing our sin in His body, so that by His wounds our souls may be healed (see Isa. 53:5; 1 Pet. 2:24).

What does the death of Christ teach you about the way the Lord deals with your accusations against Him?

DAY 5

READ:

Psalm 103

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Psalm 103:6-14

NOTES

“What comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us.”³

This powerful comment opens A. W. Tozer’s classic book *The Knowledge of the Holy*. Tozer explains that our view of God—what we believe God is like in the deepest part of our hearts—is the belief that shapes the direction of our lives.

What do we believe God is like? Is He a reluctant God who forgives because that’s what He is supposed to do? Or does He love to lavish His mercy and grace upon the repentant to display the extravagant riches of His grace in kindness toward those who believe (Eph. 2:4-7)?

When reflecting upon the wayward, grumbling hearts of the Israelites, it may appear like God’s hand had been forced. The people demanded water. They grumbled about God’s leaders (Ex. 17:2-3). And God responded. Each time Israel cried out, whether from oppression or complaining, God acted as a merciful father to his son (see 4:22).

A son may describe many details about his father—his job, his hobbies, his physical appearance, his favorite food. But what does a son say is the character of his father toward him as a son? It is one thing to describe the appearance and the tasks of a father. It takes the depth of the relationship to see the intentions of a father’s heart for his son.

Knowing the doctrine of God is vital and good. What is crucial is to know the intentions of God’s heart, which overflows in mercy so that His children might know Him and enjoy Him forever.

What attribute of God is the first one to come into your mind? How does that affect the way you live?

GROUP

NOTES

VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

"My dear Christian reader, will you not try this way? Will you not know for yourself, if as yet you have not known it, the preciousness and the happiness of this way of casting all your cares and burdens and necessities upon God? This way is as open to you as to me ... every one is invited and commanded to trust in the Lord, to trust in Him with all his heart, and to cast his burden upon Him, and to call upon Him in the day of trouble. Will you not do this, my dear brethren in Christ?"⁴

—George Müller (1805-1898)

POINT 1: The Lord's provision tests His people's obedience (Ex. 16:2-5).

The root of all grumbling, whether against God or others, is a _____ of the truth that the Lord is _____, blaming Him for our circumstances.



Why is the root of all grumbling ultimately a complaint about God?

The trials in our lives _____ us and _____ us to trust God's Word and to find satisfaction and _____ in His provision, not our resourcefulness.



Why does obedience to God matter so much?

POINT 2: The Lord's provision continues despite His people's failings (Ex. 16:13-20,27-30).

ESSENTIAL DOCTRINE #21: GOD IS OMNIPOTENT

God is all-powerful. There is nothing God cannot do so long as it does not contradict His own nature or law. God has _____ and _____ over the universe He created, from the largest solar system to the smallest particle. Affirming that God is all-powerful does not mean that God can sin—since that would go against His perfect moral nature. As Christians, we _____ in the belief that the God who has all power is good, and we gain great comfort by knowing that an all-powerful God is working for our _____ and _____.



How have you experienced God's undeserved faithfulness?

POINT 3: The Lord's provision is gracious in response to His people's demands
(Ex. 17:2-7).

In their complaining to _____, the Israelites were putting _____ on trial. They failed God's test by testing God, who is always holy and _____.



What do we reveal about our hearts in our complaints?

God's _____ comes to His people through _____. As Moses struck the rock upon which God stood, God was symbolically taking the punishment that the people deserved so that they could live. This is what _____ did for us.

MY RESPONSE

Because we have experienced God's grace through the striking of His Son, we receive God's faithful provision for our daily needs with gratitude as we testify of His kindness to others so that they too may come to trust in Him.

- **HEAD:** What reasons do you have for trusting in God even when your circumstances tempt you to grumble?
- **HEART:** How does your attitude toward God need to change so you will worship Him instead of complain?
- **HANDS:** With whom will you share the Lord's kindness through practical service and the good news of our gracious Savior, Jesus Christ?

NOTES

VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

"Are not you amazed sometimes that you should have so much as a hope, that poor and needy as you are, the Lord thinketh of you? But let not all you feel discourage you; for if our Physician is almighty, our disease cannot be desperate; and if he casts none out that come to him, why should you fear? Our sins are many, but his mercies are more: our sins are great, but his righteousness is greater: we are weak, but he is power."⁵

—John Newton (1725-1807)

THE WAY OF FAITHFULNESS

+ SESSION IN A SENTENCE:

God's law reveals who He is and how to live faithfully with Him and one another.

+ BACKGROUND PASSAGE:

Exodus 19–20

+ SETTING:

By the deliverance of the Lord, Moses led God's people out of the land of slavery, bringing them through the Red Sea and destroying the Egyptians who were chasing them. Then they entered the wilderness, where God tested them and provided for them. All the while, He was leading them to Mount Sinai, or Horeb, the mountain where God first appeared to Moses in the burning bush. There arrival was a fulfillment of the Lord's promise to be with Moses (Ex. 3:12). At this holy mountain, the Israelites would worship the Lord who had saved them.

DAY 1

READ:

Exodus 19

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Exodus 19:4-6

NOTES

How we understand the goal of salvation is of crucial importance. Our view of God's work will shape the rest of our lives in profound ways. If the goal of salvation were simply to make a moral people, then the result would be a fixation on rules and rule-keeping. If it were just an escape ticket from trouble and hell, then God would become a genie to help in times of trouble.

But the goal of God's saving work is to restore what was lost in the garden of Eden: to draw God's image-bearers to Himself. Before sin entered the world, God walked in the garden in the cool of the day to enjoy fellowship with His people (Gen. 3:8). Sin, however, broke this relationship. Adam and Eve trusted in their own wisdom rather than the command and truthfulness of God.

The rest of the Bible is the plan of God's work to restore fellowship with humanity. His salvation delivers us from sin and death, removing the penalty for sin. He breaks the power of sin's grip and gives us commands to follow Him. By cleansing us from all unrighteousness and purifying us, God's deliverance results in renewed fellowship with God.

The Westminster Shorter Catechism begins with the famous question: "What is the chief end of man?" In other words, "What is God's goal for people?" The answer, while easily recited, is profound: "To glorify God and enjoy Him forever."

God's salvation plan has His glory and our enjoyment of Him as the goal. He rescued Israel out of Egypt, carrying them on eagles' wings to bring His people to Himself. He breaks the power of sin and gives His commands not to be a burden but a faithful and truthful guide for a righteous life. These gifts from God have the great goal of God and humanity enjoying a relationship together.

How does fellowship with God reorient your view of God's commands?

DAY 2

READ:

Read Exodus 20:1-17

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Exodus 20:1-2

NOTES



ESSENTIAL DOCTRINE #18: GOD IS TRUTHFUL

The Scriptures are clear that in God there is no falsehood (Titus 1:2; Heb. 6:18). God represents things as they really are. Everything He says can be trusted because God guarantees the truth of everything He tells us. The call for humans to be honest and not to bear false witness is rooted in the utter truthfulness of our Creator. Telling the truth is one way we bear the image of God, whose Son is “the way, the truth, and the life” (John 14:6).

For some people, the Ten Commandments are like a ladder to climb to God. Being religious is perceived to be about rule-keeping—doing good things and avoiding bad things. By obeying the commandments and doing more good deeds than bad, some people think that God will be pleased with them and love them.

Before listing His commandments, God said, “I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt,” out of the land of their slavery (20:1). God’s commands are not given as a ladder to climb up to reach Him. They are a gracious revelation of His character given to people who have already experienced His saving power.

God is gracious. He didn’t give His commandments to the Egyptians but to the people who had been liberated from slavery. He doesn’t give His instructions to people who are trying to be accepted but to those who have been called “my people” (3:7) and “my firstborn son” (4:22). His commandments are good for everyone, but they are specifically for those who have experienced God’s liberating grace. They remind His people what He is like:

- God’s beauty and glory are infinitely great and cannot be contained in an image.
- God satisfies the soul and provides rest.
- God is Father, the source of all authority.
- God is faithful.
- God is generous and will provide.
- God is wholly true.

The commands of God are not a ladder to reach God but a gracious revelation of who He is. And when God’s character is seen as good and gracious, the human heart looks at God and others with different eyes.

What do the Ten Commandments reveal about God’s character?

DAY 3

READ:

Romans 3

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Romans 3:19-20

NOTES

Ask someone how many of the Ten Commandments they can name and they will probably be able to name a few of them. Ask how many they have kept and many people can say that they have kept most of them. They've never worshiped an idol. Murder? Nope! Maybe a white lie here or there. Overall, most people think they have done a pretty good job at obeying God's law.

Press further, however, and a different story begins to emerge. When the spirit or the intent of the commandment is explained, suddenly people respond differently. Have they wanted to destroy someone's reputation? Have they been wholly truthful? What about that item they took and now call their own due to someone else's forgetfulness? What desires motivate their purchases?

When pressed with the heart behind the commandments, everyone suddenly finds themselves falling short. People try hard to be good. With a little reflection and consideration, however, it is not difficult to see how breaking one commandment means that the others have been broken as well. A little lie is told to protect one's reputation. A stolen item came from a covetous heart. An inability to rest one day a week flowed from a fear that there might not be enough time tomorrow to finish everything.

Paul said that by knowing the law we become conscious of sin. Like a mirror, the law shows us our dirty hearts. It does not make our hearts clean but causes us to desire the water that can wash us clean. This is how the law serves us: it shows us our need for a Savior.

What does the law teach you about your need for a Savior?

DAY 4

READ:

1 John 5

FOCAL PASSAGE:

1 John 5:1-4

NOTES

Love. People sing about it. Movies portray it. Romance novels fantasize about it. But what is it? In Western society, love is a feeling. It is the experience of being overwhelmed and overcome with intense emotion for another person. Love is sentimental, filled with gooey and mushy thoughts and heart palpitations.

In an age when everything is expressed in therapeutic language, it can be hard to imagine loving God. How can you have overwhelming, sentimental feelings for an unseen and transcendent Being?

The Bible is clear that loving God is connected to obeying God's commands. John wrote explicitly that loving God means keeping His commands (1 John 5:3). The heart can love the feeling of God's presence and adore all of His good gifts. All the feelings in the world, however, are insufficient to love God if there is no obedience to His commands.

The Lord gave His law to His people to teach them how to love Him. He was specific and clear—love for Him would be expressed in both feelings and actions. Being devoted to Him means worshiping Him alone. Loving Him means representing His name as holy. Trusting Him is reflected in resting from work one day a week and relying on the Lord to meet those daily needs.

Love expresses itself as faith in action. Love for God looks like trust in Him, for He is our only hope. It believes that He is our good and generous provider. It relies upon Him as a faithful God who keeps all of His promises.

What are some ways love for God might look like in action?

DAY 5

READ:

Exodus 20:12-21

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Exodus 20:12-17

NOTES

VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

"Those who have love are children of God, and those who do not are children of the devil. Have anything else you like, but if you lack this one thing, then all the rest is of no use to you whatsoever. On the other hand, you may lack almost anything else, but if you have this one thing, you have fulfilled the law."¹

—Bede (c. 673-735)

Ask someone to define what it means to love people and you may get a response that says, "Just be nice." If someone is not nice, they are not loving. But what does being nice mean? Some people think niceness is simply affirming everything that someone says or does. According to this definition, to be loving is to never question anything someone does, even if he or she is doing something morally wrong.

When Jesus was asked to sum up the law, He defined it as loving God and loving your neighbor as yourself (Matt. 22:36-40). With these two statements, Jesus summarized the first four commands as love for God and the last six as love for neighbor. By giving us this simple formulation of love, Jesus clarified that love is more than mere "niceness." It is rooted in gracious, truthful interactions with others. Love does not cause harm to our neighbor but seeks to help them out in their time of need. Love acts with purity in thought and actions toward others. Love respects our neighbor's belongings and helps them to improve and protect what they have. Love does not betray, slander, or speak ill of our neighbor but speaks well of them. And love does not try to get what our neighbor has but helps us to use what we have for their benefit.

Loving our neighbor is not merely avoiding evil and wrongdoing; love seeks our neighbor's good. When love is conceived of in these ways, there is more than a vague niceness being shown. Loving others means acting in ways that display how we would want to be treated.

In what ways do the commandments teach us how to love others as ourselves?

GROUP

NOTES

VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

"I must act in a holy manner, not for reward or appearance, but because of God's nature. The Law continually reminds me that commandments are to be kept, not for their own sake, but for God's sake. I will be righteous then, because God's nature is such. His character determines my conduct."²

-Jim Elliot (1927-1956)

POINT 1: God gave the law to show His love
(Ex. 19:3-6; 20:1-2).

The Lord rescued and _____
His people in the exodus so they could have
_____ with Him.

God made His covenant with the Israelites by giving
them His law, expecting their _____.
to it. But we cannot miss the fact that God's _____
preceded His law, and yet both reflected His _____.



Why should God's love for us motivate our obedience?

**POINT 2: God gave the law to show how to
love Him** (Ex. 20:3-8).

God's people are to love Him with all of their heart,
soul, mind, and strength. This entails worshiping God
_____, worshiping Him as Himself, and always
honoring His _____.



**What are ways we might be guilty of making and
worshiping idols?**

Our love for God is also shown through following
His _____ example: resting in Him and
_____ Him to provide for our needs and
our _____.



**What are some reasons we struggle to rest in
honor of God?**

POINT 3: God gave the law to show how to love one another (Ex. 20:12-17).

The last six commandments show how we are to _____ God in our _____ for the interests of others, not merely our own.

ESSENTIAL DOCTRINE #18: GOD IS TRUTHFUL

The Scriptures are clear that in God there is no falsehood (Titus 1:2; Heb. 6:18). God represents things as they really are. Everything He says can be trusted because God guarantees the truth of everything He tells us. The call for humans to be _____ and not to bear false witness is rooted in the utter truthfulness of our _____. Telling the truth is one way we bear the _____ of God, whose Son is “the way, the truth, and the life” (John 14:6).



What are some ways obeying the Ten Commandments displays God’s character to the world?

MY RESPONSE

Because Jesus has fulfilled the law in our place, we are now free to please God and display His redemptive purpose in our relationships with others.

- **HEAD:** How might obedience to God’s commandments put believers at odds with the world?
- **HEART:** What are some ways God’s commandments are revealing sin in your life? Repent in prayer now.
- **HANDS:** How will you live differently so that your words and actions point to the glory of the Lord who loves us and gave Himself for us?

NOTES

VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

“Now once a man has thus been humbled by the Law and brought to the knowledge of himself, then he becomes truly repentant; for true repentance begins with fear and with the judgment of God. He sees that he is such a great sinner that he cannot find any means to be delivered from his sin by his own strength, effort, or works.”³

–Martin Luther (1483-1546)

FAITHLESSNESS AT THE MOUNTAIN

+

SESSION IN A SENTENCE:

God judges idol-worshippers for giving the worship due Him to something or someone else, but He also offers grace.

+

BACKGROUND PASSAGE:

Exodus 32–34

+

SETTING:

After the Israelites arrived at Mount Sinai and had prepared themselves, God spoke His Ten Commandments to them directly. This frightened the people, and they requested that Moses speak to them for God. So Moses climbed up Mount Sinai twice, entering the burning darkness of God's glorious presence. His second ascent lasted forty days and nights as the Lord gave him His law and the tablets containing the Ten Commandments for the people of Israel. But in Moses's absence, the Israelites grew restless and forgetful.

DAY 1

READ:

Exodus 32:1-14

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Exodus 32:4-6

NOTES



ESSENTIAL DOCTRINE #22: GOD IS OMNIPRESENT

God's omnipresence refers to His presence in all time and all places simultaneously. Because God exists apart from and outside of time and space, He is not limited by their constraints (1 Kings 8:27; Acts 17:24). He is present with us wherever we are, and sees all that occurs; nothing escapes His attention (Pss. 33:14; 139:7-10; Isa. 57:15; Jer. 23:23-24; Matt. 18:20). God's omnipresence is a deterrent for sin and a source of great comfort and hope for believers.

When we hear God's commands to worship Him alone and not make, bow down to, or worship an idol, most people do not feel tempted to break this command by setting up a statue. Most likely you've never made an image or statue with the intention to worship it.

Idolatry, however, is much more subtle than revering a statue. Idols claim the loyalty of your heart that only God alone deserves. Idolatry can even masquerade as the worship of the Lord God, but these are attempts to constrain the omnipresent God to a single location for a selfish purpose. When Aaron made the statue of the golden calf for the people of Israel, they declared that the statue before them was their gods, the ones who had brought them out of the slavery and bondage of Egypt. In response, Aaron built an altar and declared that the next day would be a feast to the Lord. Mixing together the people's idolatry and the worship of the Lord, Aaron confused true and proper worship with false and destructive festivities.

God is the Creator and Lawgiver. He is the true focus and object of worship. Therefore, God alone has the right to say how He is to be worshiped. Worship must consist of prayer and praise, hearing and reading God's Word, professing faith and confessing sin, and celebrating the Lord's saving work through baptism and the Lord's Supper. Other forms of worship may be appealing to us and attractive to others, but if not directed to and for God, they run the danger of being worship of our preferences. Any worship that is primarily concerned about personal preference and style will begin to fashion God into our image, even if it is only done in the imagination and heart.

What are some ways the modern church needs to resist distorted worship?

DAY 2

READ:

Psalm 115

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Psalm 115:4-8

NOTES

People reflect things in their culture—sometimes consciously and other times unconsciously. Looking back to high school or college, we can see how we imitated our peer groups. Certain brands or fashions that were popular became the “must-have” item in order to fit in. Others associated with their athletic group and attempted to look the part. Still others got caught up in a crowd that led them to participate in behaviors that were harmful, and soon the effects of their poor choices began to show outwardly.

Over time, people begin to look like the things that they adore and pursue. Shaped by their quests, people are transformed, little by little, from one image to another. Because the heart is wired by God to worship, humans will find something to latch on to, either for good or for ill.

Idolatry has the same effect. What you worship you will mimic. The psalmist warned that those who make idols become like the idols they worship. Lifeless, senseless, motionless idols are not harmless. Over time, idol worship transforms a life to its detriment. For the Israelites, their worship of the golden calf (Ex. 32) caused them to become like a rebellious, ornery calf: stiff-necked, wild, and untamed. This distorted worship corrupted them inwardly and transformed them even further.

But the good news about the worship of God is that He will transform and conform you into His image and likeness—particularly as He has been revealed in Christ—remaking you and changing you from one degree of glory to another (2 Cor. 3:18). The next time you worship God, even right now, delight in Him, for He is forming you to look more like His Son!

What captures your time, energy, emotions, and money, and how might that be shaping your soul?

VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

“Idolatry is worshiping anything that ought to be used, or using anything that is meant to be worshiped.”¹

—Augustine (354-430)

DAY 3

READ:

Exodus 32:11-35

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Exodus 32:11-14

NOTES

If you were to receive an invitation to an influential person's home for a conversation and discussion about something important, you probably would not hesitate to respond. You wouldn't forget or delay in getting back to that person. And if more than one invitation came, you might find yourself in awe that someone of such stature was inviting you to dialogue with him or her.

Every day, the Lord invites His people to come to Him in prayer. The Bible is full of the Lord's calls to come and fellowship with Him in prayer. Sometimes He calls us by way of our needs; other times we feel the burden to pray for the troubles that others are experiencing.

God has given us numerous examples in His Word to know how to approach Him in prayer. As Moses prayed for Israel, he prayed in light of God's character: God is all-powerful and able to save and rescue His people. Further, Moses prayed that as the Lord dealt with Israel, God's reputation among the nations would be seen as great and glorious and that He would not be blasphemed nor seen as wicked and evil. He appealed to the tender affections of the Lord's heart, crying out for the Lord to remember His people. And he prayed in light of God's covenantal promises that had been made to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

God's invitation to pray is an invitation to look again at His character and trust in His faithfulness. As we look to the Lord, our eyes will see that the Lord is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. So we can pray that the Lord's mercy would triumph over judgment (Jas. 2:13).

How might a focus on God's character change the way you pray for your needs and the needs of those around you?

DAY 4

READ:

Exodus 33:1–34:14

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Exodus 34:5-7

NOTES

If you were to describe the glory of God in the Old Testament, images of power, might, strength, and authority most likely come to mind. Images of lightning and thunder or the vastness of the universe that God has created are depicted in artwork. These pictures are consistent with the Lord as Creator and Redeemer. God's glory is displayed in rescuing His people out of Egypt by the use of the plagues (Ex. 7:5) and defeating the armies of Pharaoh in the Red Sea (14:4). But when God revealed His glory to Moses, what He displayed was all of His goodness, lovingkindness, and mercy toward sinners.

When Moses asked God to show him His glory (33:18), the Lord responded by saying that all of His goodness would pass before Moses (33:19). This response is not our natural expectation of glory. Because of sin, we expect God to be thundering and judging. Even when we think that God is loving, there is a deep suspicion that God isn't truly loving of us. We know that there is an ugliness within us; the corruption of sin taints our thoughts, words, and actions.

In one of the most remarkable passages about God's character in all of the Old Testament, God does not attempt to "balance out" His attributes. He does not attempt to give equal time to how His goodness is displayed in both mercy and judgment. Since Genesis 3, humans have been suspicious of God, that somehow He is untrustworthy and withholding good things from us.

What God revealed about Himself to Moses on Mount Sinai is astounding. To a people who have been stiff-necked (34:9) and broken His covenant (32:1-6), God comes with abounding mercy. When we look at the glory of God, there is much more than power and might. There is His power to forgive sinners and restore covenant-breakers to a relationship with Him.

How does the mercy of God change your view of God's glory?

DAY 5

READ:

John 1:1-18

FOCAL PASSAGE:

John 1:14

NOTES

At the birth of a child, every parent has spent hours thinking about an appropriate name for the baby. Every name is chosen with thoughtfulness and intentionality: How will this name get shortened? Is it appropriate for a child and an adult?

God has revealed his name to us. He is “the LORD.” When the Lord revealed Himself to Moses at the burning bush, He told him that His name, Yahweh, meant that He would be who He would be (Ex. 3:14). His name would be understood by His mighty deeds of deliverance, by His power, and by His glory that revealed His self-sufficient nature. But this was not the only way that God would be known. After God had delivered Israel, brought them out into the wilderness to worship Him, given them His law, and watched His people break the covenant after promising to obey it, Moses pleaded with the Lord to show him His glory.

In an act of great mercy, the Lord again revealed His name to Moses. But this time, the Lord told Moses that He is gracious, compassionate, slow to anger, abounding in love and truth, and forgiving. When Israel deserved wrath and punishment for sin, God responded to Moses’s prayer with His name. This description is one of the most repeated expressions of who God is throughout the Old Testament.

Yet God would again reveal Himself to us as full of mercy and grace. John tells us that the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen His glory. And what does this glory look like? He is full of grace and truth (John 1:14). These words echo God’s display of His name to Moses in Exodus 34, which would later be clearly seen at the cross. As Christ suffered and died, God’s name was fully revealed to us in His greatest redemptive work. Taking the punishment for sin and death, Christ died to give us freedom and life, mercifully and graciously exchanging our sin with His righteousness (2 Cor. 5:21).

What has the coming of Jesus taught you about the mercy and justice of God?

GROUP

NOTES

VOICES from THE CHURCH

"Sometimes we sense God more palpably in our lives than at other times. When His presence feels more distant, if not completely gone, we must resist the temptation to substitute the tangible things that we can touch and feel for the God we temporarily can't sense."²

-Kelly Minter

POINT 1: Idol-worshippers distort the worship of God (Ex. 32:1-6).

The Israelites' demand for "gods" in the absence of Moses involved them breaking the _____ and _____ Commandments.



Does the quickness of the people's rebellion against God surprise you? Why or why not?

The people's distorted _____ led to distorted ways of _____ that were not obedient to the rest of God's commands.



How does the true worship of God protect us from distorted lives?

POINT 2: Idol-worshippers deserve the judgment of God (Ex. 32:7-14).

ESSENTIAL DOCTRINE #22: GOD IS OMNIPRESENT

God's omnipresence refers to His presence in all _____ and all _____ simultaneously. Because God exists apart from and outside of time and space, He is not limited by their constraints (1 Kings 8:27; Acts 17:24). He is present with us wherever we are, and sees all that occurs; _____ escapes His attention (Pss. 33:14; 139:7-10; Isa. 57:15; Jer. 23:23-24; Matt. 18:20). God's omnipresence is a deterrent for _____ and a source of great comfort and hope for believers.

The reality of God's just judgment invites God's people to _____ for others so they may be _____ .



How have you seen prayers for God's glory and the salvation of sinners be answered?

NOTES

POINT 3: Idol-worshippers depend on the grace of God (Ex. 34:1,4-9).

God was gracious to reaffirm His _____ with the Israelites and to re-establish the _____ with Israel that they broke.

The Lord's glory is wrapped up in His _____ , which is on display in His overflowing grace, love, and forgiveness. Apart from His grace, we could not withstand His holy _____ against sin.



How does God's self-revelation here compare with the life and ministry of Jesus Christ?

MY RESPONSE

Because Jesus has brought us to God as our mediator, we intercede for others who are in need of salvation, praying for their redemption as we point them to Jesus.

- **HEAD:** How has God's self-revelation in Exodus 34 challenged your understanding of who God is?
- **HEART:** What sins do you need to confess so that you can experience the Lord's abounding grace and mercy toward you?
- **HANDS:** Who will you pray for, asking our gracious, compassionate, forgiving Lord to save?

VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

"When he solemnly declared his nature by his name to the full, that we might know and fear him, he doth it by an enumeration of those properties which may convince us of his compassionateness and forbearance, and not till the close of all makes any mention of his severity, as that which he will not exercise towards any but such as by whom his compassion is despised."³

—John Owen (c. 1616-1683)

THE PLACE OF MEETING

+ SESSION IN A SENTENCE:

God desires to be with His people and declares to the world that He has made a way for sinners to be forgiven and made holy.

+ BACKGROUND PASSAGES:

Exodus 25–31; 35–40

+ SETTING:

After pleading with God to have mercy upon the people of Israel for their sin of idolatry, God promised to be with Moses and the Israelites. Yet restoration of the covenant would involve obedience to God's commands. While on the mountain, the Lord had given Moses detailed instructions on the construction of the tabernacle, its furniture, and the garments for the priests who would serve there. The tabernacle would be the portable tent where God would dwell in the midst of His people. After spending over half a year building God's dwelling place, the tabernacle was set up and consecrated for worship.

DAY 1

READ:

Exodus 40:1-11

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Exodus 40:1-2

NOTES

The details that are given about the construction and set up of the tabernacle seem repetitive and boring (Ex. 25–31; 35–40). But when the original audience heard the plans for God’s dwelling, they would have noticed a pattern to its development.

First, seven speeches detailed the construction, its symbolism, and God’s provision of skilled workers, and each section began with “The LORD said ...” (25:1; 30:11,17,22,34; 31:1,12). The final speech addressed the continued observance of Sabbath rest throughout the tabernacle’s construction.

Upon further reflection, we discover that God was speaking like He did at creation (“God said ...”; Gen. 1:3,6,9,14,20,24,26). There are many parallels between the tabernacle and Eden (see Gen. 2:11-12/ Ex. 25:3,7; Gen. 3:24/Ex. 26:31-33). Just as the creation culminated in the seventh day of rest, so the tabernacle was designed to recall the creation and to call the people to Sabbath rest (Ex. 31:12-17).

The tabernacle’s entrance faced east. As you moved further into the tabernacle to the entrance of the Most Holy Place, the veil covering the entrance had cherubim woven into it (36:35). The furniture included a lampstand that looked like a tree full of life, and its lamps were to shine bright always. These details resembled Eden, which had the cherubim guarding the east entrance back into the fruitful garden and the tree of life.

God’s dwelling among Israel was His promise to re-create Eden for the benefit of all humanity. Since humanity sinned and was separated from God’s presence, God said, “I will make a way for you so that you can return to Me, and we will walk and talk together.”

How does the tabernacle remind you of God’s desire to meet with you?

DAY 2

READ:

Exodus 40:12-33

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Exodus 40:12-13

NOTES



ESSENTIAL DOCTRINE #82: PRIESTHOOD OF THE BELIEVER

God's intention for humanity is that we be a kingdom of priests, not just a kingdom *with* priests. Although God set up the priestly system in the Old Testament due to the sinfulness of humanity and people's need for a mediator, His ultimate purpose is that we come to God directly, through the mediating work of Jesus Christ, thus eliminating the need of another priest. Because of the work of Christ on the cross, exemplified in the tearing of the curtain that prevented access into the holy of holies, Christians are free to approach God with boldness (Rom. 5:1-5; Heb. 4:14-16).

If you were to die today, would you be able to say, "I can face death without any condemnation, fear, or worry because I know I am forgiven"? Jonathan Edwards, the American pastor and theologian of the 1700s, wrote down several resolutions by which he tried to live. In one resolution, he said: "Resolved, Never to do any thing, which I should be afraid to do, if it were the last hour of my life."¹ Edwards wanted to live with such integrity, holiness, and purity that he could have a clear conscience before God. But as a sinful human being, of course, he failed often.

Regardless of how hard we try, there will always be some way that we fall short of God's glory. A little lie may have slipped out. A jealous or envious thought may nag you. Subtle anger toward someone who said a harsh word may brew in your heart. There are two ways that people respond to these kinds of sins and temptations: either their hearts grow indifferent to them or they become more sensitive toward sin.

No one is worthy to come into God's presence to worship Him. Everyone falls short. Even those whom God calls into His service are inadequate for the task. The Lord had called Aaron to be a priest and minister in the tent of God (28:1), yet Aaron would break the covenant and disobey God's command. By fashioning an idol in the name of the Lord (32:1-6), Aaron was unworthy to come into God's presence to worship.

Mercifully, God made a way for Aaron. Through sacrifice and washings, Aaron and his household were forgiven of their sin and enabled to come into the presence of a holy God. True worship delights in God's gracious forgiveness of sins.

Why is it important that as part of our worship we delight in God's forgiveness?

DAY 3

READ:

Exodus 40:34-38

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Exodus 40:34

NOTES

At the end of *The Chronicles of Narnia* series, C. S. Lewis brings his readers to the finale in *The Last Battle* with these words: “Now at last they were beginning Chapter One of the Great Story which no one on earth has read; which goes on forever; and which every chapter is better than the one before.”² As the Book of Exodus comes to a close, we find a similar sentiment—God has descended in all of His glory, filling the tabernacle, and He is present with His people. After suffering under bondage and servitude to Pharaoh, Israel now stands on the verge of a new chapter as they serve and worship the Lord.

The glory of God changes everything. When Israel lacked food and water, they questioned if God was truly with them (17:7). When Moses was gone for forty days up on the mountain to receive the instructions about the tabernacle, the people doubted Moses’s leadership (32:1). But now God had descended with such glory that His presence filled the tabernacle (40:34).

When God seems inconsequential to us through our apathy and our sin, His truth seems irrelevant and His grace appears dull. There is no fear of God because His judgment doesn’t carry any weight and His gospel doesn’t sound very good. But when God descends, His Word produces life, His grace is amazing, His awesomeness produces holiness, and His good news makes the heart sing. To know the glory of God is to have your heart lit ablaze with a passion to know Him and love Him forever, and this knowledge only increases your desire to love Him more than the day before.

What are some reasons you need to be reminded about the glory of God?

DAY 4

READ:

John 1:1-18; Hebrews 7-8

FOCAL PASSAGES:

John 1:14; Hebrews 8:5

NOTES

VOICES from THE CHURCH

"The tabernacle, like the later temple, is a sign of God's presence with Israel. It announces His intention for His glory to dwell among His people. It foreshadows the incarnation of the Logos (John 1:14) and God's majestic presence that will come to earth in the new Jerusalem (Rev. 21-22)."³

-Michael Bird

The writer of the Book of Hebrews wanted to remind Christians that Jesus is better than everything the Old Testament has to offer because Jesus is the fulfillment of what the Old Testament taught. The sacrifices, priests, and tabernacle were merely shadows of the heavenly things that were to come. Though the people of Israel could see and experience the tabernacle and hear and smell the sacrifices, these things were merely copies of the heavenly things that the Lord had shown Moses (Heb. 8:5). Though the presence of God descended upon the tabernacle and the glory of the Lord was present, better things lay ahead.

Even better than the blueprints and copies of the heavenly things, God sent His own Son. The apostle John tells us that the Word that was with the Father, the Word that created the world, took on flesh and blood and dwelt among us (John 1:14). Figuratively, John tells us that the Word pitched His tabernacle and lived in His tent among us. Just like God's tent had been set up in the center of the camp of Israel (Ex. 25:8-9), Jesus' incarnation was evidence that God would keep His promise to live among His people (Lev. 26:11-12).

Further, John makes the connection between the glory of the Lord descending upon the tabernacle with the presence of Jesus, about whom we have observed the glory of the one and only Son of God (John 1:14). The ultimate display of glory walked and talked, healed and taught, and went to the cross to suffer for sinners. In Jesus Christ, all of God's glory is clearly seen. Whenever we wonder if God truly loves us and will be with us, we need only look at Christ, in whom all the fullness of God dwells (Col. 1:19).

What has the coming of Jesus taught you about the glory of God?

DAY 5

READ:

1 Corinthians 6

FOCAL PASSAGE:

1 Corinthians 6:19-20

NOTES

Knowing that God is with us strengthens us to walk in holiness of life so that we glorify Him in everything that we do. When Paul wrote to the Corinthian believers, he appealed to them to live in such a way that was holy and pleasing to the Lord. Some had fallen into sexual sin. Others were in conflict with one another and were taking each other to court. And there were those who were enjoying their abundance while others were in need.

The reason Paul gave to the Corinthians as to why they could glorify God with their lives was simple: Because of their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, their bodies were not their own. They could not treat their bodies as though sin didn't matter because the Spirit of God had taken up residence in their lives, making them a holy dwelling place.

When we understand that God has saved us and taken up residence in our lives, we ought to glorify Him in whatever we do. For Christians, our bodies matter to God. How we live reflects to others what we think about God's presence. When we neglect our physical well-being, abuse our bodies through improper eating habits or using substances that cause us to lose self-control, we dishonor God. But when we live and act as people in whom God dwells, the fruit of the Spirit will be displayed in our lives. And furthermore, our witness to the world around us will exhibit that the message of the gospel is powerful and that the presence of God is life-transforming, changing us from one degree of glory to another (2 Cor. 3:18).

Why do we need to be reminded that God dwells within us?

GROUP

NOTES

POINT 1: Worship of God centers on His holiness (Ex. 40:1-11).

The construction of the tabernacle represented a culmination of God's redemptive work in the _____ and a fresh beginning of their experience of God's saving _____.



What are some ways we celebrate and remember the Lord's salvation?

The tabernacle was designed by _____ with increasing levels of _____ as one proceeded inward toward His presence.



Since God is holy and pure, how should this affect our worship?

POINT 2: Worship of God centers on His forgiveness (Ex. 40:12-15).

God's choice of Aaron as a priest was a great act of _____ and demonstrates God's desire to cleanse and use _____ people for His _____ work.



How should the Lord's choice of Aaron as a priest encourage us?

ESSENTIAL DOCTRINE #82: PRIESTHOOD OF THE BELIEVER:

God's intention for _____ is that we be a kingdom of priests, not just a kingdom with priests. Although God set up the priestly system in the Old Testament due to the sinfulness of humanity and people's need for a mediator, His ultimate purpose is that we come to God _____, through the

VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

"Holy, holy, holy! though the darkness hide Thee, Though the eye of sinful man Thy glory may not see; Only Thou art holy; there is none beside Thee, Perfect in power, in love and purity."⁴

-Reginald Heber (1783-1826)

mediating work of Jesus Christ, thus eliminating the need of another priest. Because of the work of Christ on the _____, exemplified in the tearing of the curtain that prevented access into the holy of holies, _____ are free to approach God with boldness (Rom. 5:1-5; Heb. 4:14-16).

POINT 3: Worship of God centers on His presence (Ex. 40:34-38).

The cloud that had led the people filled the tabernacle, revealing that the holy God of _____ is unapproachable apart from His _____.

The tabernacle was a temporary measure for God to dwell with His people. The eternal fulfillment is found in _____ and the _____.



What are some ways we are hindered from worshiping in the presence of God?

MY RESPONSE

Because we are the people in whom God dwells, we manifest His glorious presence and bear the fruit that comes from the Holy Spirit as we live in our culture, calling on others to place faith in Christ as well.

- **HEAD:** What are some ways you can remain mindful of the presence of God each and every day?
- **HEART:** How will you choose to live and worship because you are a dwelling place for the holy God?
- **HANDS:** With whom will you share the good news of God's glory in Christ?

VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

"God wants worshipers before workers; indeed the only acceptable workers are those who have learned the lost art of worship."⁵

—A. W. Tozer (1897-1963)

THE MEANS OF WORSHIP

+ SESSION IN A SENTENCE:

The Old Testament sacrifices showed God, and others, His people's commitment, gratitude, and confession of sin.

+ BACKGROUND PASSAGE:

Leviticus 1–7

+ SETTING:

When the Israelites left Egypt, God spoke to Moses and gave him instructions for His people. God set up the tabernacle so He could dwell with His people as He reminded them of His holiness, forgiveness, and presence. He also gave them specific instructions for the sacrificial system with its various offerings so they could worship Him, remaining close with Him in their covenantal relationship. Through the sacrificial system laid out in the law, God's people showed Him their commitment, gratitude, and confession of sin through worship.

DAY 1

READ:

Leviticus 1:1-17; 6:8-13

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Leviticus 6:12-13

NOTES



ESSENTIAL DOCTRINE #90: WORSHIP

While many reduce worship to an event or the singing of worship songs, worship is first and foremost something of the heart and extends to all areas of life. The aim and focus of worship is God, giving Him the exact due of praise and adoration that He deserves. Worship should be carried out not only at a personal level within a Christian's life but also in joining with other Christians in the corporate act of worship and stewarding our gifts for the glory of God. Corporate worship serves to edify and strengthen other Christians, but it also serves as a witness to non-believers of the greatness of God.

Have you ever tried to keep a fire burning? It's not as easy as it seems. If you've been camping or have had a fire pit in your backyard or enjoy grilling, you know you need to tend to the fire. Add more kindling. Add more wood. Make sure it doesn't get too big or too small. So imagine tending to a fire all day and night!

In Leviticus, God showed the people of Israel how they were to worship Him through the sacrificial system. He told in exact detail how the sacrificial rituals were to be enacted so the Israelites could make atonement for their sins and remain in relationship with God. God Himself laid down the rules for His people and the priests, those set aside to do God's work.

The instructions for the priests involved dedication and commitment. Concerning the burnt offering, the priests were to make sure the fire never went out. God repeated this instruction three times to emphasize the importance of this enduring fire as a symbol of God's people's enduring faithfulness and constancy (vv. 9,12,13).

Today, sometimes we come to worship with a nonchalant and carefree attitude, whether it's in corporate worship or in the way we worship through our daily lives. Perhaps we don't pursue worship with the idea that it's hard work or takes discipline or involves a holy God. Leviticus reveals to us, however, that this shouldn't be the case. We need diligence and reverence in our worship. Of course, our worship can't be legalistic—it doesn't earn us anything. But when we are faced with a holy God, our worship should adjust itself to honor the magnitude of that holiness. Easy worship that doesn't cost us anything isn't worth much to God either.

How do you think you can worship God with more reverence and diligence?

DAY 2

READ:

Leviticus 2:1-16; 6:14-23

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Leviticus 6:15

NOTES

Our sense of smell, though not essential to life, brings joy to it. The smell of flowers, the ocean, new babies, and new cars all bring a pleasing aroma to our souls.

Throughout Leviticus, when God gave instructions for His people for the sacrificial rituals, He mentioned that the burning at the altar was “a pleasing aroma to the LORD” (v. 15). Of course, the smell itself was not all that was pleasing. Primarily, God was pleased with the symbolism of what the burning meant. A blood offering was usually for the purpose of atoning for sin. It repaired the relationship the Israelites had with God when sin entered their lives, and that atonement was pleasing to the Lord. A grain offering was different in that it would work more as an offering of thanksgiving, reminding the Israelites of God’s provision, faithfulness, holiness, and care for His people.

Today, because of Christ, we no longer need to burn sacrifices. But corporately, we can sing songs of praise and thanksgiving to the Lord. More importantly, when we live our lives as a “living sacrifice,” striving to be holy and pleasing to God, Paul says that this is true worship (Rom. 12:1). This worship involves being thankful, although this characteristic is sometimes underplayed in our lives. Yet thanksgiving anchors us to Christlike characteristics such as humility, patience, mercy, and love.

As the people of Israel burned their grain offerings and thought of how God had always been faithful in providing for His people, they had no other response than humility and joy and love. Through thanksgiving, we respond in awe of God and with a desire to be faithful to Him as He is faithful to us, and this is a pleasing aroma to the Lord.

Write down in a journal or recall all the things you are thankful to God for in this past week.

DAY 3

READ:

Hebrews 7:23-28

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Hebrews 7:27

NOTES

Reading about the sacrificial laws may not be that exciting to you. They may seem irrelevant for our times. “That’s the Old Testament,” some might say; “It’s the New Testament that’s important.”

But we cannot truly understand the New Testament without understanding the Old. We cannot fully appreciate what Christ offered for us unless we understand the magnitude of what He fulfilled for us.

Every other high priest was a man who sinned and needed to offer sacrifices for himself. Jesus, however, did not sin, and thus, His sacrifice was purely for us, a completely selfless act (v. 27). Not only was it selfless, it was sufficient. His “once for all” act of laying His life down on the cross for our sin made the sacrificial law unnecessary for us. Without this act, we would still be burning animals for the forgiveness of our sins to restore our relationship with God, and that only in an incomplete way.

Imagine what our spiritual lives would be like if Jesus didn’t offer His life for our sins. If we cared enough and had access to Scripture, we perhaps would be trying to fulfill the law on our own without being able to do so. We would constantly be doubting whether God truly loved us and if we’d ever be worthy enough. We would struggle with the idea that God is holy and we are sinful and that chasm between the two would be too wide to cross.

In imagining this scenario, we’re able to see how much the gospel story reveals the glory of God and the magnitude of His love! How much it shows God’s pursuit of us, even in our sin! How much God’s mercy and faithfulness endures for the love of His created beings!

What do you think your spiritual life would be like today without Christ’s sacrifice?

DAY 4

READ:

Leviticus 4:1–5:13; 6:24–30

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Leviticus 6:25

NOTES

Part of a diamond's price is dependent on its clarity, its lack of inclusions and blemishes. On a diamond clarity scale, "flawless" is the best with no inclusions and no blemishes visible under 10x magnification. Even still, no diamond is made perfect.

Like diamonds, though some may seem like it on the outside, none of us are perfect on the inside. If we think we are flawless, we deceive ourselves (1 John 1:8). Perhaps some of us live more uprightly than others or have had less struggles, but still, we are never perfect. God sees beyond the 10x magnification and sees the selfishness in our thoughts or the love of the world that exists in our hearts. And if we proclaim otherwise, then we are calling God a liar—which He isn't—and showing that we are far from Him (1 John 1:10).

The Israelites understood this and came to God with their worship and sacrifices, which included confession of sin. The sin offering was God's prescribed way for His people to restore their relationship with Him because He is holy and cannot abide sin.

Worship, then, corporately or individually, should involve confession of sin. We cannot worship well until we confess the specific sins we are dealing with and acknowledge how we fall short. We know God forgives us, but in worship, we show our sorrow for sin and acknowledge Christ's sacrifice in removing sin's stain from us. When we lay our sins at Christ's feet, we also acknowledge the work of the Holy Spirit to guide us toward Christ-likeness, not depending on our own power but His alone.

We worship God when we confess our sins because we recognize the holiness of God and how reconciliation would be impossible without Christ.

What have you learned about worship and confession that you didn't realize before?

VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

"For nothing good have I
Whereby Thy grace to claim;
I'll wash my garments white In
the blood of Calv'ry's Lamb.
Jesus paid it all, All to Him
I owe; Sin had left a crimson
stain, He washed it white
as snow."¹

—Elvina M. Hall (c. 1818–1889)

DAY 5

READ:

Romans 8:1-11

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Romans 8:3

NOTES

Sisyphus, the king from Corinth in Greek mythology, was so full of trickery that Zeus punished him in Hades by forever having him roll a big boulder up a hill just to have it fall down again and need to be rolled up again endlessly. Like Sisyphus, humankind without Christ would continually be trying our best to fulfill the laws of God without ever succeeding because of our sinful nature and how we are bound by our fleshly desires.

Yet Paul tells us that no condemnation exists for those who are in Christ Jesus (Rom. 8:1). Because of Christ, we are set free. Jesus accomplished this for us through His sacrifice on the cross as a sin offering (8:3). In the Greek myth, Zeus sent Sisyphus to an eternal punishment. Similarly, and not a myth, God punishes sinners for eternity in hell. But in contrast, God has provided a way for us to escape from eternal punishment, to free us from bondage and condemnation. And beyond that, He has provided a way for us to be a part of His family and His kingdom.

The ritual laws of old could not fully satisfy the requirement of God's condemnation of sin. But since God sent His Son "in the likeness of sinful flesh," as a human being, He was the perfect sin offering, fully sufficient and powerful enough to fulfill the law and restore human beings to God. We no longer are bound by the forever drudgery of trying to do and be better, hoping to make it to the top of whatever hill we think will give us meaning and purpose. We no longer are hypnotized by that life. Instead, God has given us freedom to walk with Him, with purpose and grace and with kingdom mission in mind.

What has Christ set you free from in your own life?

GROUP

NOTES

VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

"God does not only 'demand' praise as the supremely beautiful and all-satisfying Object. He does apparently command it as lawgiver. The Jews were told to sacrifice. We are under an obligation to go to church. But this was a difficulty [for me] only because ... I did not see that it is in the process of being worshipped that God communicates His presence to men."²

—C. S. Lewis (1898-1963)

INTRODUCTION

ESSENTIAL DOCTRINE #90: WORSHIP

While many reduce worship to an event or the singing of worship songs, worship is first and foremost something of the _____ and extends to all areas of _____. The aim and focus of worship is _____, giving Him the exact due of praise and adoration that He deserves. Worship should be carried out not only at a personal level within a Christian's life but also in joining with other Christians in the corporate act of worship and stewarding our gifts for the _____ of God. Corporate worship serves to edify and strengthen other Christians, but it also serves as a witness to non-believers of the greatness of God.

POINT 1: The sacrifices showed dedication to God (Lev. 6:8-13).

God's instructions for the burnt offering reminded the Israelites that worship involves _____ for and _____ to God.



Why would God require an unblemished animal sacrifice to atone for sin?

The specificity of God's instructions for the priests emphasized God's expectation of _____ and _____ as part of people's worship.

POINT 2: The sacrifices showed thankfulness to God (Lev. 6:14-23).

The grain offering had a focus on _____ God and expressing _____ to Him.



What are some ways to remember God's provision in our lives so we can be thankful?

Our greatest reason for thankfulness to God is an _____ to regular sacrifices because _____ laid His life down for us.

NOTES

POINT 3: The sacrifices showed confession to God (Lev. 6:24-30).

The sin offering required _____ along with a sacrifice to make atonement. In the New Testament, we learn that Jesus came as the sin offering for our _____ and _____ from condemnation. We receive this relationship from God when we repent and believe.



Why should confession be a part of our worship of God?

MY RESPONSE

Because we have been forgiven of all of our sins through Christ's sacrifice, we seek to be living sacrifices, serving Jesus and making Him known among the nations.

- **HEAD:** What are some ways God has prescribed for His people to worship Him now that Jesus has come?
- **HEART:** Do you regularly confess your sins as part of your worship? Why or why not?
- **HANDS:** How will you be a "living sacrifice" this week because of Jesus, who became a sin offering for your salvation?

VOICES from THE CHURCH

"Are we trying to atone for our sins? We can't. Only Jesus can, and He already did. Don't try to repeat the atonement—just accept it! Embrace God's forgiveness. Relax. Rejoice."³

—Randy Alcorn

UNIT 6

+

BE HOLY,

BECAUSE

I AM HOLY

“I Will Give You Rest”

by Sarah Walton

I was seventeen, and my world was falling apart.

A patient on suicide watch, I walked back to my lonely white room after a visit from a pastor, sat down on the bed, and stared at the Bible in my hands that he had given me. I was at a crossroads: I wanted to feel in control of my life, but I no longer wanted to live it. A battle was waging within me, and I knew something had to change, but I felt helpless to do anything about it. Deep down, I knew—although I desired to follow the Lord, my rebellious heart was constantly rearing its ugly head, demanding its own way. Now I was experiencing the consequences, discipline, and cost of a hurting and unsubmitive heart.

God, in His severe mercy, was allowing the pain of my own choices to come crashing down upon me, through not in cruelty or disdain. With profound love, the heavenly Father was not only seeking my holiness but pursuing my heart.

THE REBELLION OF OUR HEARTS AND THE HOLINESS HE DEMANDS

As we read through the Old Testament, it doesn't take long to see God's relentless pursuit of His people to pour out upon them the blessings of walking faithfully in trust and obedience. Yet despite God's loving pursuit, humanity's sinful, rebellious, and stubborn hearts are bent on going astray and demanding our own way (Rom. 3:12).

After the miraculous rescue of the Israelites from their slavery of Egypt, God called His people to walk with Him in faith and obedience as He led them toward the promised land. Yet time and time again, God's people responded to their Savior with doubt and disobedience, trusting in what they could see rather than the God who had rescued them from captivity. They accused Him of leading them into the wilderness to die. And they rebelled against Moses' God-ordained leadership.

With profound love,
the heavenly Father
was not only seeking
my holiness but
pursuing my heart.

But despite all of this, God was faithful. He led them to the land He prepared for them, a good land where they could find rest and peace. But when faced with the opportunity to enter and receive this blessing from God, they refused. They could only see the might of those already living in the land, and like those nations, the Israelites chose to be blind to God's ability to hand them over to His people (Num. 13:31–14:4).

This final act of unbelief—this last straw—cost them everything, and they would die in the wilderness as a result, with the promise of rest in the land given to the next generation (Num. 14:5–38). Even Moses, their faithful-but-flawed leader, would face this consequence for sin. He would see the land from a distance, but he would not enter it (Num. 20:1–13).

When the Israelites realized the cost of their faithlessness on the edge of the promised land, they tried to take the land by their own effort. Ignoring Moses's pleas and proclamation that God would not go with them, they charged ahead anyway, and of course, they failed (Num. 14:39–45). They could not enter and conquer the promised land by their own power any more than they could escape the painful consequences of their lack of faith in God and His promises.

Now here I was, experiencing my own painful consequences of a lack of faith in God's promises and a heart bent on its own way, despite God's relentless and loving pursuit of me. But in His kindness and mercy, God allowed me to feel the consequences of my choices in order to draw me to repentance—to see my sin for what it is and to see my helpless estate. I needed to be rescued not merely from my suffering but from my own deceptive and rebellious heart.

GOD'S GREAT RESCUE

As I sat on that hospital bed, a broken and hurting seventeen-year-old, I opened the Bible and found the words of Isaiah 55 calling me to come to the Lord and listen to Him. I was told to seek the Lord and

One day, the weariness of the wilderness will
fade in the distance as we enter our eternal rest.

Our hope doesn't lie in the strength of our faith or our obedience but in the perfect righteousness of Christ alone.

to call upon Him while He is near, a command coupled with the instruction for the wicked person to forsake his or her evil thoughts and ways. Rather than consequences, the one who returned to the Lord would find His compassion and His willingness to forgive completely.

Like an arrow that pierced my heart, I knew—God was holy and I was not. When life was difficult, I wanted His rescue, but when life was comfortable, I wanted my own way. Like the Israelites, I was suffering the temporal consequences of my own rebellion, faithlessness, and wandering. But in His great love and mercy, Jesus took upon Himself the eternal consequences of God's wrath and judgment that I deserve as He was beaten, crushed, and crucified on the cross. In God's great love, He drew my heart to repentance that day, and He met me with the abundant forgiveness, strength, and peace of His Spirit.

We all fall short of God's holiness. Yet in Christ, when we come to Him in repentance, we stand forgiven in Him and are cloaked in His perfect righteousness. Although we may still experience the discipline of the Lord in order that we

may reflect the holiness of our Savior, we can rest in this: Through salvation in Jesus, we are declared righteous and made ready for our eternal promised land (2 Cor. 4:16-18).

One day, the weariness of the wilderness will fade in the distance as we enter our eternal rest, where faith will turn to sight, rebellion will turn to worship, doubt will turn to confidence, and sorrow will turn to unimaginable joy as we taste and see the glories of our heavenly home. Until then, may we strive to live holy and faithful lives in the strength of Christ, all while resting in the promise that because of His death and resurrection, our hope doesn't lie in the strength of our faith or our obedience but in the perfect righteousness of Christ alone (Isa. 53:5).



A REBELLIOUS PEOPLE

+ **SESSION IN A SENTENCE:**

Rebellion occurs when God's ways and authority are despised.

+ **BACKGROUND PASSAGE:**

Numbers 13–14

+ **SETTING:**

After the exodus, receiving the law at Mount Sinai, and constructing the tabernacle, the Book of Numbers moves the narrative forward as the Israelites follow God's lead out into the wilderness, headed to the promised land. The early stages of this leg of their trip were again marked with strife, however, as the people began to grumble and complain and some of Moses's own family members began to question his leadership. These events foreshadowed the trouble to come in the wilderness of Paran.

DAY 1

READ:

Numbers 13

FOCAL PASSAGES:

Numbers 13:1-3, 27-33

NOTES

“Out of sight, out of mind” is a common expression used to describe one’s forgetfulness. The descriptor was apt for the people of Israel too. By this point in Numbers 13, the Israelites have already been delivered from Egypt and have reached their promised possession of a new land, one flowing with milk and honey (Ex. 3:17). But often in the midst of their journey to Canaan, they were prone to forget God’s promise.

In Numbers 13:1-3, the Lord instructed Moses to send out leaders from among the camp to spy out the new land. In verses 27-33, the spies returned with their report. The majority of them were paralyzed by fear of what they had seen and pessimistic at what was before them. Two of the spies, however, held out hope. Caleb, with Joshua alongside, brought a much-needed reminder of the Lord’s faithfulness to His people.

One ministry leader recently shared a unique way of reminding himself of the faithfulness of God. He picked out an ordinary object he knew he would encounter in some way every single day and determined that when the encounter occurred, he would think about the faithfulness of God. When he was younger, the object he chose was an old grandfather clock in his childhood family room. Every hour, the clock would chime, a perpetual reminder of God’s kindness to him. But the clock had no way of knowing what he was going through on a particular day. The clock chime caught him in moments of excitement over good grades and Little League wins. It also caught him in tough times, such as receiving the news of a family member’s illness and when he felt like he had let down his parents once again. Despite life’s ups and downs, the clock still chimed.

Such is the faithfulness of our trustworthy God—a steady chime of calm and respite in the midst of our ever-changing circumstances.

What is one consistent object or experience you can set in place to remind yourself each day of God’s faithfulness to you through Christ?

DAY 2

READ:

Numbers 14:1-4

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Numbers 14:1-4

NOTES



ESSENTIAL DOCTRINE #38: SIN AS REBELLION

Because the Bible portrays people as responsible beings, called to respond in faith and obedience to God's revelation, the Bible often portrays sin in terms of defiance and rebellion toward God the King. Isaiah 1:2 is one of many passages that describes sin in terms of rebellion against God: "I have raised children and brought them up, but they have rebelled against me." Seen in this light, sin is personal and willful disobedience, the raising of a clenched fist toward the One who made us.

Words are powerful. They can build up or tear down, liberate or stifle, comfort or damage. Words can communicate hope, healing, and restoration, or they can project displeasure, discontent, and gloom. Words can win and lose political elections, start and end wars, build careers and reputations or demolish them in one fell swoop. It is no wonder, then, that the apostles James and Paul instructed us to control our tongues (Jas. 1:26) and to let no foul language come from our mouths (Eph. 4:29).

The "trickle-down" effect of our words can be both positive and negative. Individuals can be encouraged and lifted up by the actions, words, and attitudes of others, or they can be disheartened. In Numbers 14:1-4, the latter was the case for the Israelites. Most of their leaders had returned from scouting out the promised land with a pessimistic report, and the people succumbed to fear and worry upon hearing it. Their anxiety blossomed into full-on sin against God and the leaders He had set in place over them. Further, they convinced themselves that they knew better than God.

The Israelites' response is lamentable, and the pessimistic spies were culpable for it. Because they did not wield their influence and words wisely and faithfully, a whole nation turned in rebellion away from God.

Today, we can decide how we will wield our influence and our words in the presence of others. Whether on social media or in the workplace or at home, our words have power, and they can be used for good or ill. Paul wrote in Ephesians 4:29 that our language as believers should serve the purposes of grace, to build others up and never tear them down.

Who are three people you can encourage and build up with your words? Take time to go and encourage them today.

DAY 3

READ:

Numbers 14:5-45

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Numbers 14:5-10

NOTES

VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

"This promise has been proved to me, this covenant has been proved true. I have thumbed my Bible many a year; I have never yet thumbed a broken promise. The promises have all been kept to me; 'not one good thing has failed.'"¹

—Charles Spurgeon (1834-1892)

In our culture, confidence is not easy to come by. In an age in which we grow up in a stream of self-doubt, image maintenance, and cancellation, saying something or doing something bold feels too costly, doubly so when it comes to speaking and acting boldly for Christ. The reality that drumming up confidence by oneself is nearly impossible must mean that such confidence needs to come from elsewhere, from a different source.

In Numbers 14:5-10, the leaders of Israel—Moses, Aaron, Joshua, and Caleb—needed to make a bold stand, and to our great benefit, they knew the right source from which godly confidence is derived. At first, their responses seem strange. Moses and Aaron fell prostrate before the Lord, while Joshua and Caleb ripped their clothes. These were acts of contrition, heartbreak, and lament on behalf of the rebellious Israelites. The leaders were humbly acknowledging the failure of the people before a holy God. A bold suggestion for a way forward was needed; thus, they tapped into the Source.

Joshua and Caleb delivered a stirring message to the people, reminding them that God's promised land was good and further that He had promised His presence and guidance along the way to their possession of it. They put the imposing threat within the land in its proper context and expressed confidence in the Lord's ability to overthrow any who would stand in their way. The gist of their message? "The Lord is with us! Don't be afraid!"

Are you fearful today? Are you doubting the Lord's presence, provision, and protection? Are you unsure of His love and care for you? Look to Christ, the author and finisher of our faith (Heb. 12:2). He will gird you up and give you the confidence needed to stand boldly in the face of adversity.

Are there areas of your life in which you doubt God's ability to provide? Confess them in prayer and ask the Lord to help you with your unbelief.

DAY 4

READ:

Psalms 42–43

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Psalm 42:1-5

NOTES

A wedding anniversary is a special occasion. It provides a formal time of year for spouses to express, in a tangible way, their affection and commitment to one another. The tenor of the celebration can change, however, based on one's motivation. A husband sending flowers to his wife's workplace in tenderness and love is quite different than a husband who leaves a box of chocolates on the dining room table with a small note that reads: "Figured I had to do this."

The genuineness of the anniversary experience rests in the balance between delight and duty. Men delight in their wives, and women delight in their husbands, which yields a sweet sort of weightlessness to the duty of going out and buying a gift. When the delight is absent, however, the duty feels more like a grind, as if it has to be forced.

Obedience to God is cast in similar hues. As John Piper notes, these two things—duty and delight—are not at odds in the Christian life.² At times, the duty precedes the delight. "I don't feel God in my Bible reading," says the man who feels distant from the Lord. "I don't sense any sort of connection," says the woman who feels estranged from her Savior. To these individuals, we might say: "Put yourself in front of the Word of God and pray with all your might that God would yield in you a change of heart." And He will. God grants that sincere desire in the hearts of His people when they come to Him acknowledging they feel far from Him but earnestly desiring closeness instead.

Psalm 42:5 is the perfect picture of the posture needed in a spot like this. The downcast soul of the psalm writer still finds his hope in God and still commits to praise Him who saves him.

**How do you relate to various parts of Psalms 42–43?
Jot down the parts of the psalms that restore your hope
and trust in God today.**

DAY 5

READ:

Acts 2

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Acts 2:37-47

NOTES

Remarkable events are recorded in the Book of Acts. As Luke recounts the beginning and spread of the early church, it is impossible not to let our minds drift to the task ahead of us even now as believers plugged in to local-church contexts. In the course of Christian discipleship, the spread of the gospel does not cease with any one person. If the gospel has been shared with you and you have received it by faith, then it is meant to go through and from you to someone else. This is the crux of the Great Commission (Matt. 28:18-20).

In Acts, we find the launch of that commission. In Acts 2, specifically, Peter delivered a stirring message to the crowd gathered around him. He recounted both age-old prophecies and recent and present realities concerning the person and work of Jesus.

The hearers' hearts were opened to the message of the gospel, and one among them asked a poignant question: "What should we do?" Peter told them to repent and be baptized in the name of Jesus so they could receive forgiveness for their sins and the gift of the Holy Spirit. He urged them to be saved for their sake and the sake of their posterity. Upon accepting the message of the gospel, three thousand people were added to the kingdom and baptized. Verse 42 then captures what everyday life looked like for the new disciples.

This scene is a needed reminder of what can transpire when we heed the call to obey Christ's command to go to the nations to share the gospel and make disciples. But we need not wait until there are three thousand souls gathered to proclaim the good news. Perhaps there are three people within your sphere of influence who need to hear it. Go to those three. Even if it is just one, what is stopping you?

**Who is one person you desire to share the gospel with?
Make plans to sit down with that person to have a conversation within the next week.**

GROUP

NOTES

VOICES from THE CHURCH

"Often in a state of rebellion against God, one loses the benefit of spiritual mooring, whereby wisdom and discernment become elusive and proper decision making is made extremely difficult. Worry and fear dominate one's thought patterns."³

-R. Dennis Cole

POINT 1: Rebellion occurs when God's promises are forsaken (Num. 13:1-3,27-33).

The Lord gave a command for _____ and a sure promise for His people's _____. The promised land was theirs for the taking.



How have God's promises strengthened you to obey His commands?

Ten of the spies sent into the land returned with a negative report because they _____ or _____ God's promise when faced with the difficulties in the land.

POINT 2: Rebellion occurs when God's plans are scorned (Num. 14:1-4).

The spies' negative report affected the whole community, leading the Israelites to _____ God's plan and _____ Him of malicious intent.



What are some signs that we may be guilty of rejecting God's plan for our lives?

Rejecting God's plan will result in rejecting the godly _____. He has _____ to shepherd His people.



What role have godly leaders played in your life to help you obey the Lord and grow in your faith?

POINT 3: Rebellion occurs when God's authority is rejected (Num. 14:5-10).

Moses, Aaron, Joshua, and Caleb believed God's promise regarding the land and pleaded with the

Israelites to put aside their _____ of others and to _____ to God's authority. But the people chose rebellion.



What are some ways we can encourage others to submit to God's authority?

NOTES

ESSENTIAL DOCTRINE #38: SIN AS REBELLION

Because the Bible portrays people as responsible beings, called to respond in faith and obedience to God's revelation, the Bible often portrays sin in terms of _____ and rebellion toward God the King. Isaiah 1:2 is one of many passages that describes sin in terms of rebellion against God: "I have raised children and brought them up, but they have rebelled against me." Seen in this light, sin is _____ and _____ disobedience, the raising of a clenched fist toward the One who made us.

MY RESPONSE

Because we have experienced forgiveness through the Son's obedience, with gratitude and joy, we seek to obey God's call for us to proclaim His kingdom among the nations.

- **HEAD:** What are some ways God has demonstrated His faithfulness in your life?
- **HEART:** Under what circumstances and in what areas of your life are you prone to rebellion against God? How will you direct your heart toward humble submission to God instead?
- **HANDS:** For whom will you intercede and plead that they will choose obedience instead of rebellion?

VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

"For faith is only real when there is obedience, never without it, and faith only becomes faith in the act of obedience."⁴

—Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1906-1945)

AN UNFAITHFUL PROPHET

+ SESSION IN A SENTENCE:

The unfaithfulness of people always comes at a great cost—the judgment of a holy God.

+ BACKGROUND PASSAGE:

Numbers 20

+ SETTING:

Because Israel rebelled and refused to enter and conquer the promised land as God had said, they were punished with forty years of wandering in the wilderness, one year for every day the spies were in the land. That generation was condemned to die in the wilderness outside of the promised land, but the next generation would claim the land by God's grace. Still, the people continued to succumb to discontent and disobedience, a failing that affected their leaders as well.

DAY 1

READ:

Numbers 20:1-13

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Numbers 20:1-5

NOTES

Bad habits are easy to form and difficult to get rid of. For good habits, the converse is often true. Popular opinions on the formation of habits suggest it takes anywhere from 21 to 66 days to form a routine. On the other hand, some particularly harmful habits take a lifetime to break.

For the people of Israel, sin and rebellion was not a one-time occurrence. They could not disregard their poor behavior and unbelief as a mere symptom of their unusual circumstances. Their sin was habitual. Unfaithfulness over time had led to patterns of sin.

In Numbers 20:1-5, the Israelite people were discontent once again with their circumstances, and their unhappiness had manifested itself in constant groaning and complaining. They were even convinced that their former condition in bondage in Egypt was better than their current situation. In a stunning series of grievances, the people questioned both God's plans and Moses's leadership—a catch-all complaint that signaled their disobedience and would ultimately be their leaders' undoing.

Sin left unchecked festers and grows into deadly patterns of discontent and disobedience. This is why it is critical for believers constantly to check themselves with regard to their actions and their heart's posture toward God and their circumstances. The devil is not sitting passively but actively searching for prey to fall to his schemes (1 Pet. 5:8). As John Owen quipped, it is important for the Christian to “be killing sin or it will be killing you.”¹

Thankfully, in Christ we have all we need to do battle. He has won the victory over sin and its temptations, and he faithfully provides a way of escape for us (1 Cor. 10:13).

Is there sin in your life that is left unchecked and roaming free? Confess your sin to God and to a trusted friend who can help you along the way.

DAY 2

READ:

Numbers 20:1-13

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Numbers 20:6-11

NOTES



ESSENTIAL DOCTRINE #36:

SIN AS MISSING THE MARK

One aspect of sin is missing the mark of God's standards set for humanity. This missing of the mark is not a simple mistake but a falling short of God's glory through conscious choosing of sin. We may refer to sin as a failure on the part of humans to live according to God's standards, but we must recognize this failure is intentional. We miss the mark when we deliberately choose to cast aside God's intention for us.

Before the days of GPS systems, smart phones, and Internet map services, traveling was an adventure. You may remember days on the road when your mom or dad took up the passenger seat post with paper maps and crumpled notes sprawled across the dash. These days it is hard to believe anyone actually got where they intended to go.

Clear directions are invaluable, and doubly so with God. In His Word, He has clearly spelled out the "terms of agreement" for life as a believer. There are indicative statements that remind us of our sure status and identity in Christ. There also are imperative statements that give us marching orders, helping us know what we ought to say and do.

In Numbers 20:6-11, Moses and Aaron were reminded of their status as anointed leaders in the sight of God when they met with Him at the tent of meeting. Then they were given directives related to God's provision for His wayward people. As the story often goes, however, Moses and Aaron failed to follow the Lord's commands and they sinned against Him by taking matters into their own hands. Moses, with Aaron alongside, demonstrated an obvious lack of trust in God's plan for the restoration of His people, and in so doing, the two became "rebels" themselves. The pair's unfaithfulness resulted from a failure to trust God.

The psalmist said God's Word is a lamp for our feet and a light on our path (Ps. 119:105). The writer of Hebrews said the Word is living and active, a faithful judge of what is going on in our hearts (Heb. 4:12). Paul reminded Timothy that all of Scripture is inspired by God and serves the purposes of teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness (2 Tim. 3:16-17). Will we heed God's Word today, or will we ignore it and do our own thing?

How has your time in God's Word been lately? Pick up your Bible with a fresh devotion today. Find a quiet place, turn to Psalm 119, and read it aloud.

DAY 3

READ:

Numbers 20:1-13

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Numbers 20:12-13

NOTES

VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

"[Moses] wavered only slightly, yet for this alone he immediately received the threat that he should not enter into the land of promise ... When I behold this man asking and not obtaining pardon, when I see him not deemed worthy of forgiveness because of those few words, even in consideration of so many righteous deeds, truly I discern, in the words of the apostle, 'the severity of God.' I am fully persuaded that these words are true: 'If the just man shall scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear [1 Pet. 4:18]?'"²

-Basil the Great (c. 330-379)

Have you ever been to a major theme park? There is nothing quite like walking through the turnstiles to the smell of funnel cakes and cotton candy and the sound of screaming roller coaster riders piercing through the carnival noise intermittently. The towering roller coaster rides are usually the main attraction: You strap into a small seat as your heart beats wildly. The safety bar, which seems a little loose, falls over your shoulders, and before you know it, you're off, racing through the summer breeze, completely out of control yet tethered to the tracks.

This can feel like life with God sometimes. Complete surrender means a loss of control, yet we are called to trust that His ways are better than ours.

In Numbers 20:12-13, the result of Moses and Aaron's failure to trust God completely was devastating. They learned they would not make it to the promise land after their decades-long journey toward it. In their zeal, Moses and Aaron disobeyed God, thinking His holiness was theirs to assert. They failed to see, however, that obeying God's commands is the primary means of demonstrating His holiness. This is a stark reminder to us that even what we perceive as righteous anger may not actually be obedience to the Lord's commands. Rather, He calls us to trust Him despite what we think is best. This isn't blind trust; over and again, the Lord has proven Himself trustworthy.

Christian, the Lord will not withhold what is best for us. He is faithful to keep His promises, and He does so in His timing, which also is best for us.

**What situation do you need to trust God with today?
Pray and ask for His guidance and His help in
trusting Him more.**

DAY 4

READ:

Colossians 3

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Colossians 3:1-4

NOTES

Throughout the Book of Numbers, we bear witness to the Israelites' disobedience and discontent. Doubt in God's faithfulness and provision hardened the people's hearts over and over again, to the point they had trouble seeing past their worry to God's goodness.

Yet we should not take the Israelites' plight as an indication that every bit of discontent and worry in and of itself is an affront to God that will immediately incur His judgment. Rather, the discontent and worry we often feel is a sign of our brokenness and proclivity toward sin. Therefore, it is good and right to take discontent and worry to the Lord, trusting that He can and will alleviate it in due time.

This is what repentance looks like: knowing the sinful inclinations of the flesh and confessing these sinful impulses to the Lord, asking Him for forgiveness and help to keep fighting the good fight. This is also the tension we see in chapter 3 of Paul's Letter to the Colossians. The believer experiences a constant toggling and reorienting, putting off the old things that lead to death and putting on those things that give life.

In the opening verses of the chapter, Paul spelled out the foundation believers stand upon in their battle against sin—we have the vantage point of having been raised with and hidden in Christ, who was raised from the dead and has ascended to the right hand of God the Father (Col. 3:1-4). Therefore, we can now look away from earthly things and toward heavenly things, confident that what we will find there will be the fulfillment of every desire of our longing hearts.

What can you do today to peel your eyes from earthly things and redirect your gaze to heavenly things?

DAY 5

READ:

Luke 8:26-39

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Luke 8:38-39

NOTES

Giving children birthday or Christmas gifts is one of the simple pleasures in life. Yes, the act of gift-giving itself is fulfilling, but such transactions with kids are next-level due to their response. They often cannot contain their joy, and they fully embrace the need to tell everyone what they have received! If you have never been lovingly tasked with marveling in exaggerated fashion at an ordinary ball or toy car, you are missing out.

C. S. Lewis commented on this phenomenon in his *Reflections on the Psalms*. He observed this response not merely in children but in adults from every walk of life: “I had never noticed that all enjoyment spontaneously overflows into praise ... The world rings with praise—lovers praising their mistresses, readers their favorite poet, walkers praising the countryside, players praising their favorite game.” He concluded that such ordinary praise is rooted in and completes one’s pure enjoyment of a person or place or certain thing: “I think we delight to praise what we enjoy because the praise not merely expresses but completes the enjoyment; it is its appointed consummation.”³ Praise is not just telling someone about the gift; our shouting completes our enjoyment of the gift.

Recall the demon-possessed man in Luke 8. After his deliverance encounter with Jesus, chatter filled the town and countryside. The people were fearful, wondering who this Man could be. In their fear, many of the people begged Jesus to depart from them. But not the man Jesus set free. Verses 38-39 tell us that man begged to be with Jesus, but Jesus told him to go home and tell everyone what God had done for him. So the man went off and did exactly that. The man’s praise, evidenced in his sharing the good news about Jesus, brought his joy in Christ to a high point. It completed his joy.

**Are you joyful for what Christ has done for you?
With whom will you share that joy and the good
news of Jesus?**

GROUP

NOTES

VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

"In this world, one thirsts on a waterless road. But let us thirst that we may be filled. For 'blessed are they who hunger and thirst for justice; for they shall have their fill.' And our thirst is filled from a rock in the wasteland. For 'the rock was Christ.'"⁴

-Augustine (354-430)

INTRODUCTION

POSITIVE LEADER QUALITIES	NEGATIVE LEADER QUALITIES

POINT 1: Unfaithfulness leads to a pattern of sin (Num. 20:1-5).

Failure to deal faithfully with disobedience leads to patterns of _____ and _____ .

? Why do you think we gravitate to the same types of sin over and over again?

Generations of Israelites rebelled against God, _____ about their circumstances, _____ against their leaders, and desired to return to their previous life of _____ .

? What does dealing faithfully with sin look like?

POINT 2: Unfaithfulness results from a failure to trust God (Num. 20:6-11).

Moses and Aaron approached the Lord in _____ , and the Lord responded with _____ for the people to provide them water through their leaders speaking to a rock.

ESSENTIAL DOCTRINE #36: SIN AS MISSING THE MARK

One aspect of sin is missing the mark of God's _____ set for humanity. This missing of

the mark is not a simple mistake but a falling short of God's glory through conscious choosing of sin. We may refer to sin as a _____ on the part of humans to live according to God's standards, but we must recognize this failure is _____. We miss the mark when we deliberately choose to cast aside God's intention for us.



What are some lessons we ought to learn from Moses and Aaron's example?

POINT 3: Unfaithfulness brings the judgment of a holy God (Num. 20:12-13).

Moses and Aaron suffered a severe _____ because they did not honor God's _____.



Why does God's severe discipline of Moses and Aaron not sit well with many of us?

God demonstrates His holiness in His _____ and in His _____, seen especially in the person and work of His Son, Jesus Christ.

MY RESPONSE

Because we have experienced the good provision of God in Jesus, we strive to trust Him no matter our circumstances, knowing that He works all things for His glory and our good.

- **HEAD:** In what areas of life are you struggling to trust God? Confess these to God in prayer now.
- **HEART:** How will you obey the Lord today because of His holiness displayed in Christ on the cross?
- **HANDS:** What are some ways you will love, serve, and lead others so they can know Jesus by faith?

VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

"When we walk with the Lord
In the light of His Word, What
a glory He sheds on our way!
Let us do His good will; He
abides with us still, And with
all who will trust and obey.
Trust and obey, For there's
no other way To be happy in
Jesus, But to trust and obey."⁵

—John H. Sammis (1846-1919)

AN UNGRATEFUL PEOPLE

+ SESSION IN A SENTENCE:

God is right to judge sin, yet He is gracious to provide a way of salvation.

+ BACKGROUND PASSAGE:

Numbers 21

+ SETTING:

The Israelites had been confronted afresh with God's holiness through His grace in providing them with water and His punishment of their leaders. Aaron soon died in the wilderness on Mount Hor as a result of his disobedience at the rock, but not before the priesthood had passed on to his son, Eleazar, so the people's relationship with the Lord might be preserved. Aaron's death was yet another tangible testimony of God's commitment to and expectation of holiness, and the people mourned him there for thirty days. And then the Lord provided them with their first victory over an enemy nation. Yet Israel remained undeterred, and they would soon sin again.

DAY 1

READ:

Numbers 20:14–21:5

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Numbers 21:1-5

NOTES



ESSENTIAL DOCTRINE #39: SIN AS SELFISHNESS

When we sin, we are acting out of a selfish attitude and mind-set that assumes our action will lead us to more happiness than if we were to obey God. Because sin is manifested in our tendency to be “curved inward” toward self, it is the opposite of love. Love looks outwardly to place others before oneself, operating from the mind-set that others are more important (Phil. 2:3). Where sin selfishly seeks personal gratification and happiness, love works for the joy of others in the hope of making others happy in God.

There is no shortage of home improvement reality shows on television these days. Shiplap and demo days have become all the rage. However, the stories not often told on pieced-together, overly-produced episodes are how difficult in-home projects actually are, how much time they truly take, and how much they truly cost. Often upon setting out on one’s own renovation journey and encountering such difficulties, people find it is easier, in the end, merely to do a cosmetic touch-up rather than get at the bones of a structure to shore up what needs to be fixed.

In the Book of Numbers, this sort of surface-level transformation plagues the Israelite people. The people’s affections for God ebb and flow, and their obedience follows suit. In Numbers 21:1-5, we are privy to the nation’s first successful military conquest—a God-wrought victory over the Canaanites. But moving from verse 3 to verse 4, the Israelites shift from celebrating the Lord’s power and goodness in their victory to growing impatient and discontent. What seems to be a reaction to external circumstances is, in actuality, much deeper. Often outward circumstances seem to warrant our complaint and distrust in God, but in reality, they effectively take our focus off the real issue at hand. The Israelites’ problem was not merely that their needs were not being met; they had heart-level issues that needed to be cured.

The plight of the people of God is a stark reminder to us to be diligent in addressing heart-level issues in our own lives. We ought not be content with merely skating on the surface of a life lived for a holy God—we must go deeper. Christ has given us all we need to ask the hard questions, to repent, and to receive sweet relief.

Are there heart-level questions you need to ask of yourself today? How is seemingly insignificant outward sin manifesting itself from the deeper level of your heart?

DAY 2

READ:

Numbers 21:4-9

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Numbers 21:6-7a

NOTES

Corrective action is often unpleasant. Whether a parent disciplining a child or a superior in the workplace reprimanding an employee, the conflict is usually difficult to navigate, not to mention the fallout that inevitably results. Yet we know discipline can be a good thing too. A parent's correction of a child's behavior over time typically helps shape him or her into a productive and thoughtful adult. Done rightly, a boss's stern words can help build character and maturity in an employee, traits which cultivate virtue and reach far beyond the bottom line. What can be true about earthly discipline is true of God's discipline.

In Numbers 21:6-7a, God's discipline looks strange, if we are honest. The Israelites have rebelled yet again, only this time God was not content to provide for their needs and simply reaffirm His faithfulness. His judgment fell upon Israel in the form of poisonous snakes that bit many of the people, and many perished from their wounds.

Despite the harshness of the punishment, we know God does not discipline for discipline's sake. God is right to judge sin on account of His holiness, yet He is not pleased to unleash an arbitrary punishment, contrary to some ill-motivated caricatures of Him. Rather, God intends to restore a right relationship between Himself and His people. The Lord desires that His people would repent of their sin and return to Him. Thankfully, in this case, the people did so.

Don't take God's kindness toward you for granted. Though His wrath toward sin is often not immediate, as it was here, the seeming delay is not an encouragement to dig your heels in further. Rather, God's kindness and patience are meant to lead us toward repentance (Rom. 2:4), just as His kind and quick discipline is designed to do as well.

How has the Lord been kind to you? Reflect today on the many ways He has been faithful to His promises.

DAY 3

READ:

Numbers 21

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Numbers 21:7b-9

NOTES

VOICES from THE CHURCH

"Jesus became what was killing us—sin itself—when he was lifted up on the cross and thereby became the remedy for sin."²

—Nancy Guthrie

The longest bridge in the world—the Danyang-Kunshan Grand Bridge—spans 102 miles between the Chinese cities of Shanghai and Nanjing. The bridge required a workforce of 10,000 workers over four years to build at a cost of \$8.5 billion.¹

Sometimes drastic measures are needed for people to get from one place to the next. Because of Israel's persistent disobedience, the Lord sent serpents into their midst. Naturally wanting relief from the situation, the Israelites pleaded with Moses to go before the Lord on their behalf, asking Him to rescue them.

This request for God's help was not altogether unusual, but the circumstances certainly were. A significant piece of this encounter was Israel's motivation for seeking the Lord's help. Apart from a physical rescue, which they certainly desired, Israel's plea was marked by contrition and remorse. Their request was a sign of their repentant hearts.

So the Lord instructed Moses as to the means of deliverance, a bronze statue of a serpent to which the people were to look for rescue. Upon acknowledging God's means of saving them, the people were healed.

Later in Scripture, in John 3, Jesus used this episode as an example when talking with Nicodemus. The gist of Jesus' message? He cast Himself as the true and better bronze serpent to be lifted up before all humanity so that we will look up at Him and acknowledge Him as the God-sent means of deliverance and salvation from sin.

Though we are born into sin, the Lord has graciously provided a way of rescue for us. Our acknowledgment of Christ's death on the cross as the way of our salvation is key, both in the moment we are saved and perpetually as we are being made more like Him in His resurrection (1 Cor. 15:1-4).

How does our faith in Christ on the cross compare with the Israelites' faith in God to look to the bronze serpent?

DAY 4

READ:

2 Corinthians 5

FOCAL PASSAGE:

2 Corinthians 5:21

NOTES

At times the gospel is hard to comprehend, though not necessarily in the content of its message. We are well acquainted with our sin and depravity; we inherently act from it most days, or every day. We may also be convinced of the truth that Jesus Christ came, lived a sinless life, and died to redeem those who would put their faith in Him, followed by His resurrection from the dead. These two points of theology are reasonable enough to the regenerate mind.

The difficulty arises in the gospel's application, at the intersection of these two realities. We are sinful; Christ died for sinners; but did He really die for me?

Reread 2 Corinthians 5:21 slowly: God made Christ, who was sinless and perfect, to be sin for us. He took upon Himself the punishment we deserved for our sin. The amazing truth that Christ took our place is a fact we should never tire of hearing, but that still is not the entire gospel story. The verse continues: "so that in him we might become the righteousness of God." Christ took our place so we could take His and all the rights and entitlements that go with it.

Martin Luther referred to this glorious transaction as the "wonderful exchange," writing:

This is that mystery which is rich in divine grace to sinners: wherein by a wonderful exchange our sins are no longer ours but Christ's, and the righteousness of Christ not Christ's but ours. He has emptied himself of his righteousness that he might clothe us with it and fill us with it; and he has taken our evils upon himself that he might deliver us from them.³

By faith in Jesus, our sins are no longer ours and we will not suffer for them, and Jesus' glory is not only His, it belongs to us as well. What wonder and joy fills the heart that responds to this good news with humility and gladness!

Who will you bless with a reminder or a declaration of this "wonderful exchange" through faith in Jesus?

DAY 5

READ:

1 Corinthians 1

FOCAL PASSAGE:

1 Corinthians 1:17-18

NOTES

Picking a favorite college football team is serious business in the South. The region is known for its large stadiums and raucous crowds. On game days, southern college towns are practically painted in their local squad's team colors. For SEC football fans, when allegiances are formed, loyalty is everything.

In 1 Corinthians 1, Paul was addressing allegiances of a different kind. Believers within the church at Corinth had begun to pick sides, aligning themselves with a particular gospel messenger in some sort of opposition to others. Paul challenged their divisions, insisting on the unity that exists at the core of the gospel message.

Using baptism as an illustration, Paul contended it was a good thing that he had baptized very few people, since it meant no one could claim they were baptized in his name rather than in Christ's. Further, Paul clarified his role within the kingdom: He had not been sent by Jesus only to baptize; he had been sent to preach the gospel. But it was the kind of preaching Paul noted that is most fascinating.

Paul's preaching of the gospel was not done with "eloquent wisdom." Fancy words and clever turns of phrase are not necessary to get the job done of communicating the gospel. If such extras were required, the cross, as Paul says, would be emptied of its effect or power (1:17). Therefore, the cross will do the work; the gospel message can stand on its own because it is backed by the power of God.

Let Paul's words be of great comfort to you. Now that you have heard the gospel and embraced its truth, and because it does not require eloquence or sophistication, you can go and share the good news with others with boldness and confidence!

With whom will you have a gospel conversation this week?

GROUP

NOTES

VOICES from THE CHURCH

"Because we often focus on our sins to the exclusion of the One we have sinned against (Ps. 113:4-6), we fail to remember that all of our sins—even the 'small' ones that don't seem to harm anyone—are acts of rebellion against our Creator. We fail to understand that what is deemed culturally appropriate changes from generation to generation, but God's Word remains unchanged."⁴

—Shaq Hardy

POINT 1: The Lord's people sin, despite His gracious provision (Num. 21:1-5).

The Lord graciously provided a military _____ for His people, in addition to the _____ and _____ He had provided throughout their wilderness journey.



How does reflecting on God's gracious provision help us not to sin against Him and others?

ESSENTIAL DOCTRINE #39: SIN AS SELFISHNESS

When we sin, we are acting out of a selfish _____ and mind-set that assumes our action will lead us to more happiness than if we were to _____ God. Because sin is manifested in our tendency to be "curved inward" toward _____, it is the opposite of love. Love looks outwardly to place others before oneself, operating from the mind-set that others are more important (Phil. 2:3). Where sin selfishly seeks personal gratification and happiness, love works for the joy of others in the hope of making others happy in God.

POINT 2: The Lord's people are disciplined, drawing them toward repentance (Num. 21:6-7a).

The Lord responded to this instance of His people's rebellion _____ and _____.

The punishment of snakes also reminded the people of their oppression in Egypt.



How should this punishment of Israel cause us to think about our own sins?

The Lord's discipline always has a purpose of leading His people to _____ and _____. This is God's mercy and grace.



What should our repentance of sin entail?

NOTES

POINT 3: The Lord's prophet intercedes, prompting the means of healing

(Num. 21:7b-9).

The Israelites acknowledged God's _____ to save them as they pleaded with Moses to _____ for them, which Moses graciously did.



Why might we doubt God's ability to save us?

By God's command, the Israelites could _____ their sin and death for healing and life by looking upon the bronze serpent. Similarly, we are to look upon _____ for our salvation.

MY RESPONSE

Because we have been spared from punishment of sin through the intercession of Jesus, we plead with others to look upon the cross and receive salvation through Christ Jesus.

- **HEAD:** How will you intercede and pray for others this week? Begin right now.
- **HEART:** What heart-level issues in your life keep you downcast and distant from God? Repent and look afresh to Jesus for your salvation and healing.
- **HANDS:** Who are people you have sinned against, and how will you seek restoration of those relationships for the glory of Christ?

VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

"This is wonderful news to believe that salvation lies outside ourselves. I am justified and acceptable to God, although there are in me sin, unrighteousness, and horror of death. Yet I must look elsewhere and see no sin. This is wonderful, not to see what I see, not to feel what I feel."⁵

—Martin Luther (1483-1546)

A HOLY PEOPLE

+

SESSION IN A SENTENCE:

As God is pure in all of His ways, He calls His people to live likewise in response to all He has done for them in Christ.

+

BACKGROUND PASSAGE:

1 Peter 1

+

SETTING:

Throughout the Israelites' time in the wilderness, both the year of rescue and the remaining forty years of punishment, God's people found occasion after occasion to rebel against their sovereign Savior. Yet God remained holy in all His interactions with His people because that is who He is—God is holy. He displayed His holiness through His abundant patience, His faithful provision, His swift discipline, and His good law. In all of this time, God worked to make for Himself a holy people because God's image-bearers should be holy as He is holy, a principle picked up in the New Testament book of 1 Peter.

DAY 1

READ:

1 Peter 1:1-16

FOCAL PASSAGE:

1 Peter 1:13-16

NOTES

VOICES from THE CHURCH

"God's ways are distinct from the ways of a fallen world, and he does not deal with the world on its own terms ... Therefore, his people are to identify with him by being set apart and by relating to the world on the terms that God prescribes."²

-Karen H. Jobes

It is no secret—there is an obvious correlation between our beliefs and our actions. If someone whom you had no reason to distrust told you there were ten \$100 bills in a hidden location and gave you simple instructions to find them, you most likely would take the time to search for the hidden cash. What you do corresponds with what you believe.

In 1 Peter 1:13-16, Peter was spelling out this correlation in the lives of believers. His primary point was that as believers, we are called to be holy and pure in our conduct because we have been called by a holy and pure God. The basis for our pure and holy conduct is our understanding and embrace of who God is. To obtain and keep this right perspective, Peter mentioned the importance of keeping our minds ready for action, and he related the importance of being sober-minded.

As believers, we cannot let our thoughts run away from us and expect that we will be holy as a result. As pastor Matt Chandler noted: "People don't stumble into godliness; they don't wake up one day knowing Jesus deeply and pursuing the conformity that Jesus commands and the Spirit empowers."¹ Rather, we are to avoid falling back into our old ways of thinking, when we did not seriously consider the things of God. And instead, we are to pursue by grace those things that profoundly reorient our thinking and, as a result, change our actions.

As believers, we are to recall the revelation of Jesus Christ, the freeing gospel by which we have been called. Then, with a whole new perspective grounded in faith and humility, we are able to walk in obedience. We seek to be holy because the God who called us is holy. What we believe about God will influence the way we strive to live for Him.

What practices help you reorient your thinking and get your focus back on the things of God?

DAY 2

READ:

1 Peter 1:13-25

FOCAL PASSAGE:

1 Peter 1:17-21

NOTES

Fear is often thought of as a negative emotion, one we seek to avoid at all costs. However, fear can be positive and powerful motivator too. Throughout the Old Testament, God frequently interacted directly with His people, providing for and protecting them and disciplining them when they went astray. Some people portray God in the Old Testament as a mostly vengeful deity, seeking to assert His dominance. When detached from the covenantal context of the Old Testament narrative, it wouldn't be difficult to cast God in this light, but doing so would be a mistake. To represent God accurately, one must acknowledge His holiness and consider what a proper response to His holiness should be.

In 1 Peter 1:17-21, Peter was addressing churches that were facing persecution. He reminded these believers of their status as “strangers” or “exiles”—earthly sojourners who were here temporarily but who were journeying steadily toward their heavenly home. The temptation to bend toward culture for acceptance and escape from persecution is palpable, yet the Christian life is, in most respects, antithetical to the ways of the world. These believers knew fear in the tangible, earthly sense—fear of those who could destroy their body—and yet, they were challenged with regard to their fear to respect the One who looked after their body and soul (Matt. 10:28).

God has gone to great lengths to restore our relationship with Him. Peter pointed out that we have not been saved by mere perishable currency, such as gold or silver. Rather, we have been redeemed by the shed blood of Christ, a payment for sins that endures forever. Reflecting on Christ's sacrifice and situating the events at Calvary within the eternal plans of God ought to give us great confidence in pursuing holiness out of reverence for our holy God.

How should thoughts about God's holiness affect the way you live?

DAY 3

READ:

1 Peter 1:22–2:10

FOCAL PASSAGE:

1 Peter 1:22-25

NOTES

Everyone's experience of church on Sunday is different. For some, the hurried walk through the front doors of the sanctuary is marked by forced smiles after tense family conversations during the van ride earlier that morning. For others, church attendance seems obligatory, but if they are honest, they just aren't "feeling" it anymore. Still others are joyful at the prospect of being gathered with everyone once again.

One miracle of Sunday morning gatherings is the picture of a God-wrought conglomeration of people from different ages, backgrounds, and social statuses. Truly only God could piece together the stories represented in your local congregation. Attentiveness to the people around you there and the story God is continuing to tell through your congregation collectively is key.

In 1 Peter 1:22-25, Peter turned his attention from giving out directives for individual believers to relating the impact one's pursuit of holiness should have on others. The aim of Peter's instruction to the congregations was to encourage brotherly love among them—sacrificial, giving love demonstrated for the good of others. This sort of love should absolutely characterize believers gathered together. After all, the picture of a tight-knit community bent on demonstrating brotherly love to one another stands in stark contrast to the backbiting and selfish posture of the culture at large.

This kind of love is not easy to give, however. Sometimes it is difficult to receive too. Thankfully, we have an incredible model of sacrificial love given to us in the person and work of Jesus Christ. The word of the Lord—the gospel of Jesus Christ—is, for us, an enduring example and constant motivation for the kind of love we are to demonstrate toward others.

What is Christ's love compelling you to do for someone else today?

DAY 4

READ:

Ephesians 2

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Ephesians 2:8-10

NOTES

Sailboats are a sight to behold. Commanding one of these vessels can be simplified, but mastery over them can be a lifelong pursuit. Familiarizing yourself with points of sail, proper knot-tying techniques, and how to manage sail trim will go a long way in keeping a boat pointed in the right direction and its occupants relatively dry. Yet with all the preparation and work onboard, only one thing can truly make the sailboat go: the wind. Without the preparation, the work of the sailor, or the wind guiding the vessel along, sailing would be a miserable and boring experience.

Living a life of godliness is similar to sailing. While we are freed through the gospel of Christ to live free from the grip of sin, pursuing holiness means making conscious decisions to do what is right in the sight of God. Yet we do not work in this regard to earn grace. Rather, we are motivated by grace to walk in step toward godliness. Author Dallas Willard puts it this way: “Grace is not opposed to effort, but is opposed to earning.”³ Grace and effort work in tandem: We have been redeemed by God through the blood of Christ; now, the gospel informs and motivates us to strive toward godly living.

Perhaps you’ve heard a different version of this message. Maybe you have heard that by being good, you are brought into the good graces of God. This, however, is contrary to the gospel of Christ. Paul wrote in Ephesians 2:8-10 that our salvation is a function of God’s grace through faith and not something we can earn or boast about for ourselves. Furthermore, our salvation by grace is the ground for our good works, not the other way around.

Believer, you’re unburdened now. Nothing you can offer God will do the trick. Instead, bring your “nothing” to God and in that moment find He is your everything.

Who in your life could use this reminder of the truth of the gospel? Who can you think of that needs to hear the gospel for the first time?

DAY 5

READ:

Isaiah 6

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Isaiah 6:1-8

NOTES



ESSENTIAL DOCTRINE #12: GOD IS HOLY

God's holiness refers to His uniqueness in being separate from all He has created. The Hebrew word for "holy" means "separate" or "set apart."

God's holiness also refers to His absolute purity. God is unstained by the evil of the world. His goodness is perfect, and the moral code we find in the Scriptures is a reflection of His holy nature. As people made in God's image, we are called to holiness.

At the 2003 Passion OneDay Conference, John Piper recounted the story of preaching a different kind of sermon once at his church in Minneapolis, Minnesota. He felt led to preach a particular passage but strangely felt no urge to include points of application. Typically, preachers will explain the background of a text, perhaps discuss what the text meant for the original audience receiving it, and then will move on to making modern applications of the text, seeking to find situations in the present-day where the principles found in Scripture readily apply. This time around, Piper was content simply to preach the text as it was found, reveling in its truths about the holiness of God and leaving the "application" to the work of the Holy Spirit in the lives of congregants in the days and weeks that followed.

Unbeknownst to John, a family in his congregation was going through an especially difficult season in life, marked by unimaginable tragedy and trauma. Three months after the sermon was preached, the husband and father in the family reached out to John. He mentioned that his family had been through the worst few months of their entire lives. He told John that the only thing that had gotten them through, that helped them hold on, was John's sermon on Isaiah 6 and the vision of God's holiness laid out before the church three months prior.

At times, we complicate the issue, don't we? We suppose the Word of God ought to be form-fitting to our exact situations or else is has nothing for us. In reality, Scripture puts forth again and again a grand vision of God. If we really knew and understood it, it would change our lives for good.

How does the vision of the holy God seated on His throne strengthen you for the circumstances you face?

GROUP

NOTES

VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

"Holiness is the habit of being of one mind with God, according as we find His mind described in Scripture. It is the habit of agreeing in God's judgment—hating what He hates—loving what He loves—and measuring everything in this world by the standard of His Word. He who most entirely agrees with God, he is the most holy man."⁴

—J. C. Ryle (1816-1900)

POINT 1: God's people are to be holy, having been called by a pure God (1 Pet. 1:13-16).

Peter wrote his letter to Christian believers who were struggling with _____ and _____, not unlike the ancient Israelites. Our shared hope is found in the _____ promises of God.



Why should Jesus' second coming impact our lives today?

ESSENTIAL DOCTRINE #12: GOD IS HOLY

God's holiness refers to His _____ in being separate from all He has created. The Hebrew word for "holy" means "separate" or "_____." God's holiness also refers to His absolute _____. God is unstained by the evil of the world. His goodness is perfect, and the moral code we find in the Scriptures is a reflection of His holy nature. As people made in God's _____, we are called to holiness.

POINT 2: God's people are to live reverently, having been redeemed by a pure sacrifice (1 Pet. 1:17-21).

God's people are to pursue _____ with a posture of reverence toward God. But we do so _____. Jesus has redeemed us from our sin with His own blood.



How does a pursuit of holiness honor God?

Jesus is central to God's sovereign _____ over creation and to our _____. So we should believe in Him and desire to be like Him.



What has been your favorite foreshadowing of Christ in the exodus narratives? Why?

NOTES

POINT 3: God's people are to love sincerely, having been given a pure heart (1 Pet. 1:22-25).

The holiness granted to us through faith in _____ and the work of the _____ should overflow in love for one another in the church.

The reason we can love others like Jesus is because we have been _____ to be like Jesus through the gospel. Believers are a holy, loving people blessed with the promise of _____ life.



How should we, as people changed by the gospel, show love to others?

MY RESPONSE

Because we have been forgiven of our sin through Christ and credited with His perfect righteousness, we strive to live as a holy people before God and the watching world, showing God's power and work in our lives.

- **HEAD:** How will you think about yourself now in light of God's holiness?
- **HEART:** Does God's holiness lead you to fear for yourself or worship for God, or both? How will you purify yourself in light of God's holiness?
- **HANDS:** What are some ways you will show the holy love of God to others this week?

VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

"Christian community is not an ideal we have to realize, but rather a reality created by God in Christ in which we may participate. The more clearly we learn to recognize that the ground and strength and promise of all our community is in Jesus Christ alone, the more calmly we will learn to think about our community and pray and hope for it."⁵

—Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1906-1945)

LAY YOUR BURDEN DOWN

by Aaron Armstrong

I'll never forget Easter weekend in 2009. I was making a sandwich on Sunday after church, exhausted after weeks of working seemingly nonstop in my job with a Christian ministry. I slept poorly. I worked long hours. I barely took any time off. But it was worth it; after all, it was all "for the mission."

But this was my first real weekend in a long time, so long that I didn't know how long it had been. I didn't serve anywhere at church. All my work was caught up for the moment. I didn't have an extracurricular project to do. I was doing this strange thing called relaxing. It was great. And then, as I reached for a knife to cut my sandwich, I saw that my hand was shaking. It wouldn't stop. So, sandwich uncut, I went outside to the backyard and talked to my wife about what was happening. Then I set about researching what could be the problem. The answer seemed to be adrenaline exhaustion, also known as burnout.

It took me weeks to recover: to not be exhausted all the time; to get out of the habit of doing too much not feel like I had to be doing something at every moment. I learned a lesson, and I've had to learn the same lesson again and again.

THE HEART OF A LACK OF REST

I've read dozens of books and articles on resting well. I've listened to sermons and watched videos reminding me of the importance of the work-and-rest rhythm that God created for us to live in and to enjoy. This rhythm is for our good and is one of His commandments (Gen. 2:2; Ex. 20:8-11; 31:17; Heb. 4:1-11). I remember the many examples of Jesus resting—even during a great storm—and how He is a model of rest for us. I believe all this.

But my life and my beliefs weren't in line. You've probably experienced this too, all too many times. Maybe you're experiencing it now in this moment.

So what is at the heart of this denial of rest? Why do we keep pushing ourselves to the edge of burnout or beyond? A few different issues to consider:

- Some of us live under the crushing belief that our standing before God is dependent upon our performance and actions.
- Some of us are trying, consciously or unconsciously, to earn the respect and admiration of others, who likely don't really care all that much.

- Some of us are being taken advantage of by others who are unwilling to bear their share of the burden or won't equip us for the task we've been given.

I know these because I've experienced all of them. Fundamentally, all of these are rooted in a culture that has been shaped by bad theology or bad actors, and in many cases both. These scenarios are directly opposed to the gospel, which means their solution can only be found in the gospel. And that's exactly what Jesus gives us.

JESUS SAVES US TO REST

In Matthew 11, after dealing with others' doubts and lamenting the faithlessness and unresponsiveness of that present generation, Jesus invited people to come to Him and give Him their burdens so that He could give them rest (Matt. 11:28-30).

In addressing the burden that the religious leaders of His day placed upon weary sinners, Jesus gave us the key to how we can begin to rest. Jesus is the answer. Unlike any other so-called savior—whether another religious figure or ourselves—Jesus does not place a burden upon us that is too great to bear. He does not say to His people, “In order to be My people, you do the following.” That's not how He works.

Instead, Jesus says, in effect, “I know you're burdened. I know you're overwhelmed. I know that your sins and your efforts to justify yourselves are crushing you. Give them to Me. I will take them from you, and I will give you rest.”

DISCOVERING—AND REMOVING—OUR BURDEN THAT PREVENTS REST

Far too many of us are living with a weight we cannot carry and were never meant to. So how do we discover and remove the burdens that prevent rest?

- **Pray for God's help.** We may not be able to identify what's at the heart of our unrest, but God can. Ask Him to help you see what's really going on, why you're so tired all the time, and what needs to be done about it.
- **Tell someone.** Many of us suffer in silence when we are overwhelmed. But we need people around us who can identify our blind spots, pray for us, challenge us, and encourage us as we pursue rest.
- **Take action.** Perhaps set appropriate boundaries, such as taking your email off your phone and having a forced technology fast. You might need to confront a ministry partner, or even a boss, about a tendency to take advantage of others. Or perhaps we need to repent of the “acceptable” sin of busyness, which is really idolatry. You might even need to step away from a ministry role for a season.

Removing the burdens that prevent rest is not easy. Many of us are so conditioned to see them as natural that we don't even try. But living under the weight of a lack of rest, of trying to meet impossible expectations or please impossible people, is too much for any of us to bear. This is not what Jesus wants for us. So, lay the burden down, and He will give you rest.

REFERENCES

UNIT 4

Session 1

1. Charles R. Swindoll, *Moses: A Man of Selfless Dedication* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1999), 94.
2. Ambrose, On the Christian Faith 1.1.7, quoted in *Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy*, ed. Joseph T. Lienhard, vol. II in *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture: Old Testament* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2001) [Logos].
3. Michael F. Bird, *Evangelical Theology, Second Edition* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2020) [eBook].

Session 2

1. Augustine, *Tractate on the Gospel of John*, 50.3, quoted in *Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy*, ed. Joseph T. Lienhard, vol. II in *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture: Old Testament* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2001) [Logos].
2. Elisabeth Elliot, *A Lamp unto My Feet* (Gospel Light, reprinted 2004), 227.
3. Robert G. Lee, "Payday Someday," *News for Christians*, May 11, 2021, <https://www.newsforchristians.com/clser1/leerg001.html>.

Session 3

1. Africa Study Bible (Oasis International LTD, 2016), 102.
2. Tony Evans, *Our God Is Awesome* (Chicago, IL: Moody, 1994), 163.
3. Tim Keller, "Get Out! Tim Keller on the Exodus Story," *The Gospel Coalition*, June 18, 2019, <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/get-out-keller-exodus>.

Session 4

1. Charles Wesley, "Come, Thou Long-Expected Jesus," in *Baptist Hymnal* (Nashville, TN: Lifeway Worship, 2008), 176.
2. Arthur W. Pink, *The Nature of God* (Chicago, IL: Moody, 1999), 62.
3. Charles Spurgeon, *God's Gift to You* (New Kensington, PA: Whitaker House, 1997), 23.

UNIT 5

Introduction

1. Robert Robinson, "Come, Thou Fount of Every Blessing," in *Baptist Hymnal* (Nashville, TN: Lifeway Worship, 2008), 98.

Session 1

1. Matthew Henry, *An Exposition of the Old and New Testaments*, vol. 1 (New York: Henry C. Sleight, Clinton Hall, 1883), 864.
2. Randy Alfred, "March 10, 1876: Mr. Watson, Come Here ...," *Wired*, March 10, 2011, <https://www.wired.com/2011/03/0310bell-invents-telephone-mr-watson-come-here>.
3. A. W. Tozer, *The Knowledge of the Holy*, in *Three Spiritual Classics in One Volume* (Chicago, IL: Moody, 2018), 13.
4. George Müller, *A Narrative of Some of the Lord's Dealings with George Müller*, 4th part, 4th ed. (London: J. Nisbet & Co., 1886), 168.
5. John Newton, in *The Works of the Rev. John Newton*, vol. II (London: n.p., 1808), 140-41.

Session 2

1. Bede, On 1 John, quoted in James, 1-2 Peter, 1-3 John, Jude, ed. Gerald Bray, vol. XI in *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture: New Testament* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2000), 201.
2. Elisabeth Elliot, *Shadow of the Almighty* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1958), 151.
3. Martin Luther, in *Luther's Works*, vol. 26 (Saint Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 1955), 131.

Session 3

1. Augustine, On the Psalms, in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, First Series*, ed. Philip Schaff, vol. 8 (New York: Cosimo, reprinted 2007), 477.
2. Kelly Minter, *No Other Gods* (Nashville, TN: Lifeway Press, 2017), 53.
3. John Owen, *An Exposition of the Epistle to the Hebrews*, vol. 4, ed. W. H. Goold (Edinburgh: Johnstone and Hunter, 1854), 462.

Session 4

1. Mark A. Noll, "Resolutions of Jonathan Edwards," *Christianity Today*, June 7, 2021 <https://www.christianitytoday.com/history/issues/issue-8/resolutions-of-jonathan-edwards.html>.
2. C. S. Lewis, *The Last Battle* (New York: HarperCollins, 1994), 211.
3. Michael F. Bird, *Evangelical Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2013), 503.
4. Reginald Heber, "Holy, Holy, Holy," in *Baptist Hymnal* (Nashville, TN: Lifeway Worship, 2008), 68.
5. A. W. Tozer, in *Tozer on Worship and Entertainment*, comp. James L. Snyder (Camp Hill, PA: Wingspread Publishers, 1997) [eBook].

Session 5

1. Elvina M. Hall, "Jesus Paid It All," in *Baptist Hymnal* (Nashville, TN: Lifeway Worship, 2008), 249.
2. C. S. Lewis, *Reflections on the Psalms*, in *The Beloved Works of C. S. Lewis* (New York: Inspirational Press, 1958), 178.
3. Randy Alcorn, *The Grace and Truth Paradox* (Colorado Springs, CO: Multnomah, 2003), 84-85.

UNIT 6

Session 1

1. C. H. Spurgeon, in *Sermons of the Rev. C. H. Spurgeon*, of London (New York: Sheldon, Blakeman & Company, 1858), 287.
2. John Piper, *Desiring God: Meditations of a Christian Hedonist* (Sisters, OR: Multnomah, 2003), 299-301.
3. R. Dennis Cole, *Numbers*, vol. 38 in *The New American Commentary* (Nashville, TN: B&H, 2000) [Logos].
4. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship* (New York: Touchstone, 1995), 64.

Session 2

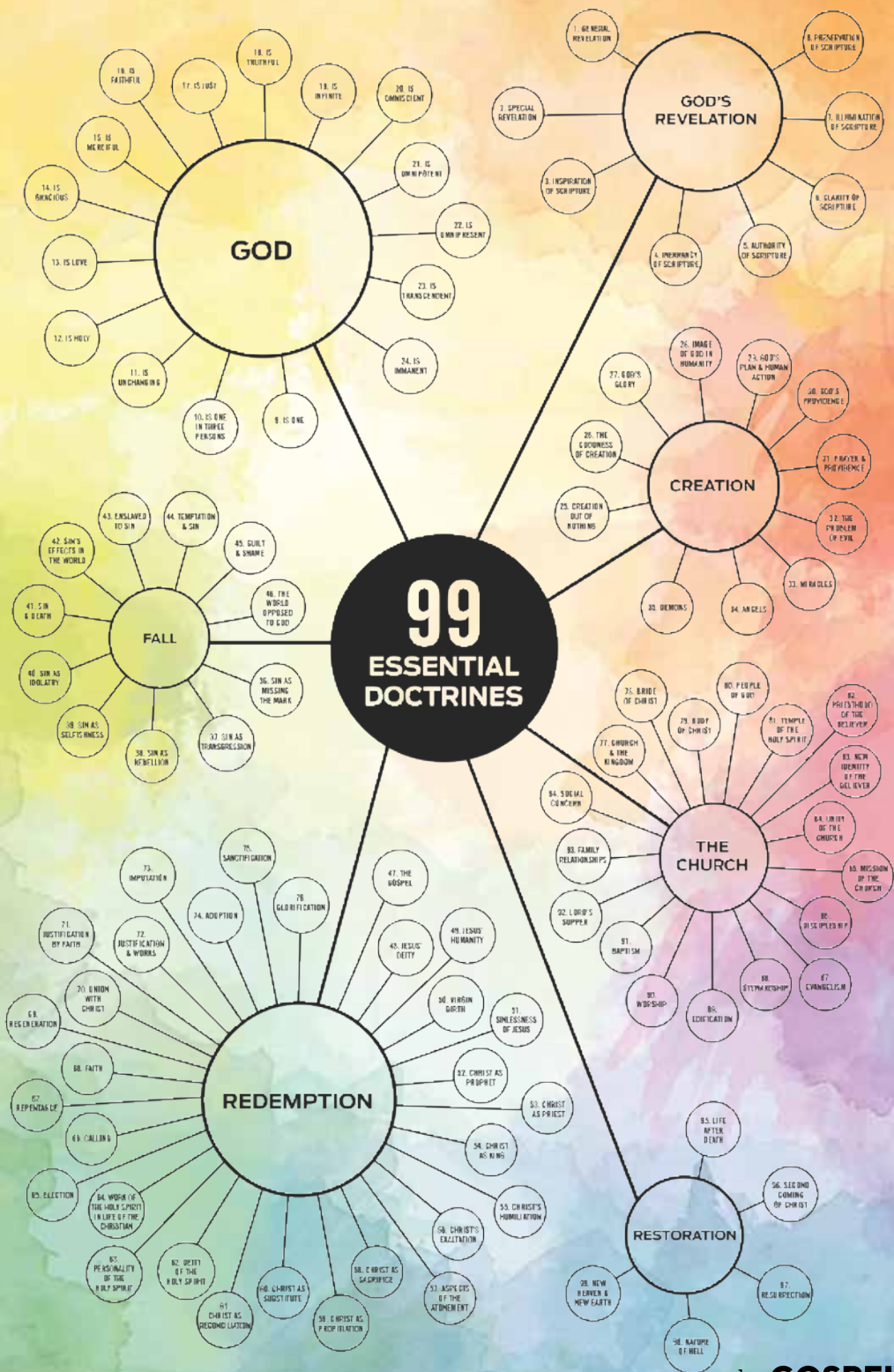
1. John Owen, *Of the Mortification of Sin in Believers*, in *The Works of John Owen*, vol. VI, ed. William H. Goold (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1862), 9 [Logos].
2. Basil the Great, *Preface on the Judgment of God*, quoted in *Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy*, ed. Joseph T. Lienhard, vol. II in *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture: Old Testament* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2001) [Logos].
3. C. S. Lewis, *Reflections on the Psalms* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1958), 93-97, cited in "Reflections May 2012—God Invites Us to Enjoy Him," C. S. Lewis Institute, May 2012, https://www.cslewisinstitute.org/God_invites_Us_to_Enjoy_Him.
4. Augustine, *Tractate on the Gospel of John* 28.9.4, quoted in *Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy*, ed. Joseph T. Lienhard, vol. II in *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture: Old Testament* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2001) [Logos].
5. John H. Sammis, "Trust and Obey," in *Baptist Hymnal* (Nashville, TN: Lifeway Worship, 2008), 500.

Session 3

1. Mark Benson, "World's Longest | Danyang Kunshan Grand Bridge," *Engineering Clicks*, April 27, 2019, <https://www.engineeringclicks.com/danyang-kunshan-grand-bridge>.
2. Nancy Guthrie, *The Lamb of God* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 234.
3. Martin Luther, *Werke*, 5:608, quoted in "What Did the Cross Achieve?: The Logic of Penal Substitution," by J. I. Packer, in *In My Place Condemned He Stood*, eds. J. I. Packer and Mark Dever (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2007), 85.
4. Shaq Hardy, "The Promise of God's Provision," *The Gospel Project: Adult Leader Guide* (Spring 2019): 20.
5. Martin Luther, quoted in *Here I Stand - A Life of Martin Luther*, by Roland Bainton (United States: Read Books Limited, 2014) [eBook].

Session 4

1. Matt Chandler, "Weapons of Grace," *Acts* 29, September 10, 2012, <https://www.acts29.com/weapons-of-grace>.
2. Karen H. Jobes, 1 Peter, in *Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2005) [Logos].
3. Dallas Willard, *The Great Omission* (San Francisco, CA: HarperCollins, 2006), 166.
4. J. C. Ryle, *Holiness* (Lafayette, IN: Sovereign Grace Publishers, Inc., 2001), 22.
5. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, in *Life Together and Prayerbook of the Bible*, in *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works, Volume 5* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1996), 38.



To see short videos about these 99 essential doctrines of the Christian faith, visit gospelproject.com/99-essentials

the **GOSPEL**
PROJECT

FROM CAPTIVITY TO THE WILDERNESS

As God called Moses, delivered His people, and parted the Red Sea, He remained faithful to His promises. The Ten Commandments further displayed God's faithfulness and goodness as the foundation of our worship. Through this study, your group will see that God's holy, merciful, and loving nature is worthy of all our praise.

Lifeway adults

gospelproject.com

RELIGION/Biblical Studies/Bible Study Guides

