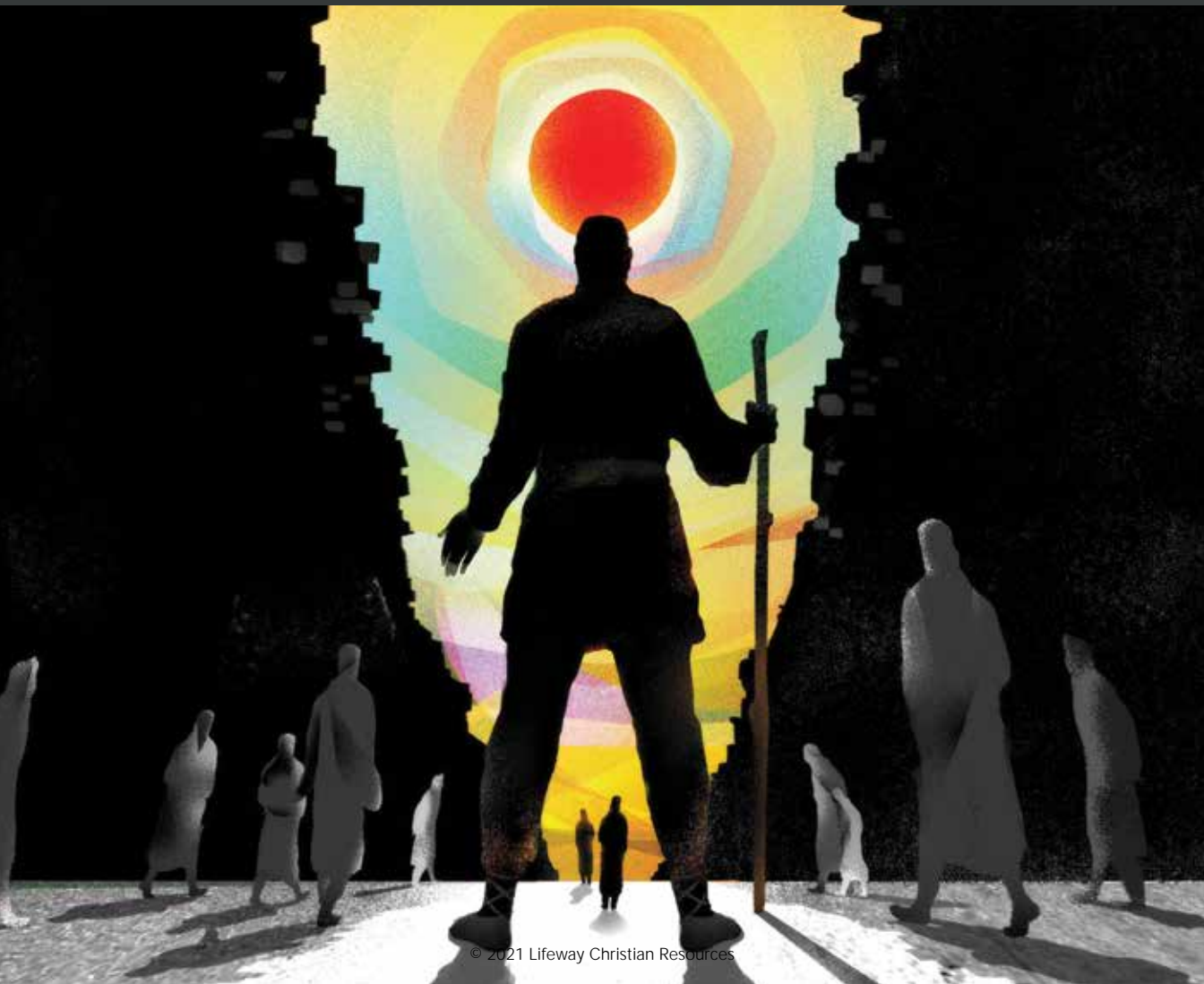




the **GOSPEL**PROJECT.

FROM CONQUEST TO A KINGDOM

ADULTS / DAILY DISCIPLESHIP GUIDE / SPRING 2022 / VOL. 3



GOD'S WORD TO YOU

A SUMMARY OF THE BIBLE

In the beginning, the all-powerful, personal God created the universe. This God created human beings in His image to live joyfully in His presence, in humble submission to His gracious authority. But all of us have rebelled against God and, in consequence, must suffer the punishment of our rebellion: physical death and the wrath of God.

Thankfully, God initiated a rescue plan, which began with His choosing the nation of Israel to display His glory in a fallen world. The Bible describes how God acted mightily on Israel's behalf, rescuing His people from slavery and then giving them His holy law. But God's people—like all of us—failed to rightly reflect the glory of God.

Then in the fullness of time, in the person of Jesus Christ, God Himself came to renew the world and restore His people. Jesus perfectly obeyed the law given to Israel. Though innocent, He suffered the consequences of human rebellion by His death on a cross. But three days later, God raised Him from the dead.

Now the church of Jesus Christ has been commissioned by God to take the news of Christ's work to the world. Empowered by God's Spirit, the church calls all people everywhere to repent of sin and to trust in Christ alone for our forgiveness. Repentance and faith restores our relationship with God and results in a life of ongoing transformation.

The Bible promises that Jesus Christ will return to this earth as the conquering King. Only those who live in repentant faith in Christ will escape God's judgment and live joyfully in God's presence for all eternity. God's message is the same to all of us: repent and believe, before it is too late. Confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe with your heart that God raised Him from the dead, and you will be saved.

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THE EDITOR

If a non-Christian asked you to point to a book or section of the Bible that proved it was true, which would you choose? Most of us would probably choose one of the Gospels. Perhaps it would be the Psalms, which put the full human experience of faith on display, demonstrating ecstatic joy, heartbreaking sorrow, and everything in between. But there's another section of the Bible I would encourage you to consider for this purpose: the time of the conquest through the period of the judges (Joshua through the early chapters of 1 Samuel).

Counterintuitive? Maybe. But hear me out: This period within the Bible's narrative is challenging to many. It's violent. It's full of judgment and, frankly, some pretty wicked deeds. Yet God's people are shown at their most faithful, with astounding miracles occurring in their midst. But it also reveals the Israelites at their most faithless, doing what was right in their own eyes.

And that's exactly why I would point a non-Christian to this section of Scripture. It doesn't gloss over the human condition. It doesn't present the people in the Bible as being any different than people today. Humans are still as equally capable of great faith as they are the vilest of blasphemies. We are all still prone to do what is right in our own eyes, no matter the consequences. But just as He was then, God is still good. He is still at work. He is still working out His plans according to His purposes, using broken, imperfect people to continue His gospel project—taking the good news of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection to the ends of the earth, calling all who hear it to believe in the God who saves and uses broken, imperfect people.

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The Gospel Project

The Gospel Project®

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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:
Joshua 7:1-5

FOCAL PASSAGE:
Joshua 7:1-5

NOTES

VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

"Does it make sense to pray for guidance about the future if we are not obeying in the thing that lies before us today? How many momentous events in Scripture depended on one person's seemingly small act of obedience? Rest assured: Do what God tells you to do now, and, depend upon it, you will be shown what to do next."¹

—Elizabeth Elliot (1926-2015)

No matter the area of life, it is tempting to assume our past performance is an indicator of future success. Whether at work or in school, in professional or personal circumstances, we assume that if we just keep doing what worked once, we'll experience the same results. Naturally, there's a problem with this line of thinking: it's just not true because what we don't know changes things.

Joshua and the Israelites were riding the high of their victory—or rather, God's victory—over Jericho (Josh. 6). By faith, they obeyed God's commands, marching around the city walls and blowing their horns each day. And when the walls fell, they destroyed the city. They devoted everything to destruction, as God commanded. Except they didn't.

Unbeknownst to the rest of Israel, Achan, a member of the tribe of Judah, took for himself some of what was set apart for God. And the Lord's anger burned against not only Achan but all of Israel as a result, just as God had said (Josh. 6:18-19).

Joshua didn't know this. He saw the fruit of their faithfulness in the conquest of Jericho and assumed this success would continue. But when his troops returned from attacking Ai, a small city, with news of their defeat and thirty-six dead, he and all the Israelites lost heart.

It is easy for us to see fruit, evidence of God's work in our lives and ministries, and believe we're living and acting in faith, which may be true. But because of our sin, we are also prone to being deceived by our successes. As a result, if we are not watchful, testing ourselves and our fruit to see if we are in the Spirit, then we can become complacent and find ourselves acting unfaithfully for our own glory rather than faithfully for God's.

Where are you tempted toward complacency in your faith? Ask God to reveal these places to you.

53

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

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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 7

+

LORD,

TEACH ME

YOUR STATUTES



“I Will Be with You”

by Daniel Ritchie

One of the greatest struggles I have fought against my whole life is the feeling that I am all alone. Much of that has been rooted in the reality that I was born with a disability—I was born without arms in a world that is designed for people with arms.

Far beyond the struggle of living physically was the struggle of feeling so incredibly different than everyone else I encountered. No one knew the struggle of opening a door with their feet. No one knew the painful leg cramps that came from learning to write with my feet. It was hard enough to tackle the difficulties of my disability, but it was even more painful to have to face these struggles while feeling like no one else understood what I was going through. That feeling of isolation stretched on well into my teen years, and it was becoming a heavy burden that I could not simply shrug off.

In the midst of that dark and isolated time in my life, God put a faithful youth pastor in my life who took the time to

explain that I was not alone in having to face the struggles in my life. He took the time to explain the presence of God in my life by unfolding the truths of Psalm 139. He told me God knew exactly what I was going through in regard to my disability because, as the psalmist says, God is the One who formed and fashioned me in my mother’s womb (Ps. 139:13). God knew all of the mountains and valleys I had traveled through. There is nowhere I can go that can limit the presence of God in my life (139:7-12).

Seeing the all-encompassing presence of God through every aspect of my life helped lift me out of my darkness and isolation. Knowing that God had always been with me and was never going to leave me gave me the courage to embrace what lay in front of me in the days and weeks to come. It is that same promised presence that we are about to see as we study through the first few chapters of the Book of Joshua.

The well of strength
Joshua was to draw
from was the same well
Moses drew from: the
Creator and Sustainer
of the universe.

HE IS WITH YOU

The Book of Joshua begins with Joshua coming to grips with the reality that he was now the man who would lead the people of Israel. The mantle of leadership came with the pressure of having to lead the entire legion of Israelites into the promised land, but Joshua had the added pressure of having to step into the gigantic shoes of Moses, the previous leader of the Israelites.

In the face of all this pressure, God encouraged Joshua by telling him, “I’ve got you.” Moses was not the once-in-a-lifetime type leader. He was an example of what can happen when a human being trusts God with all that he or she has. The well of strength Joshua was to draw from

was the same well Moses drew from: the Creator and Sustainer of the universe.

God promised to be with Joshua. That same promise—a promise meant to give strength and courage—applies to us as the church today. He is with us day in and day out. It is no accident that in the beginning of the Gospel of Matthew we see Jesus was to be called Immanuel, which means “God is with us” (Matt. 1:23). That promised presence of God being with the people of God carries through that entire Gospel, and in the last chapter of Matthew, Jesus tells His disciples, “I am with you always” (Matt. 28:20). Jesus’ promise to be by our side is meant to be the fuel that pushes us forward in the long race Jesus has set before us.

HE IS GOING BEFORE US

God, in both His kindness and power, not only pushes us forward, He also goes before us. He leads us and provides for us as He paves the way for His glory to be made known throughout the world. God, in His grace, worked wonders miraculous and providential so that the Israelites could begin their journey into the promised land while also giving them a plan to follow all along the way.

No mountains or valleys will stand
between us and our heavenly Father.

God is not going to leave His children without His hope, His plan, or His presence.

Again, the presence of God with His church means that His grace and providence is going before us day after day. It is by His grace that we are adopted into the family of God (Eph. 2:8), and it is also by His grace that He has laid out opportunities for us to glorify Him (Eph. 2:10). God's grace is going before us in order to spur us on, but it is also incumbent upon us in the presence of the Spirit of God to find ways to faithfully and practically live in view of that grace.

HIS WORD IS WORKING IN US AND ON US

God's initial charge to Joshua in leading Israel also included writing the law of God on his heart. He was to "be strong and very courageous" by observing carefully the whole of God's instruction; he was to meditate on it day and night so he could obey everything written in it (Josh. 1:7-8). Joshua's path forward was built on everything God had said and would soon say.

Our way forward is paved with the promised presence of God that goes with us no matter the circumstance. There are many times in our lives when we doubt God is with us or we feel like God has

left us. It is in those times that God has given us the encouraging and powerful words of Scripture to be able to draw on. God has given us His Word so we may be instructed in His wisdom and His ways, so we may have hope in our dark days and be encouraged to endure, knowing that God is still with us (Rom. 15:4).

God is not going to leave His children without His hope, His plan, or His presence. No mountains or valleys will stand between us and our heavenly Father. He's not going to walk away; He's always going to walk with us. He's not going to forsake us; He always wants to use us as a part of His plan of redemption.

Count on the promise of God's presence so that you can move forward today and every day with God's purpose in full view.



GOD'S PRESENCE WITH JOSHUA

+ **SESSION IN A SENTENCE:**

God's Word is a source of guidance, strength, and hope to His people.

+ **BACKGROUND PASSAGE:**

Joshua 1

+ **SETTING:**

Moses led the Israelites through the wilderness for forty years because of the people's failure of faith in refusing to take the promised land a generation earlier. Now a new generation had arrived on the edge of the promised land, but Moses would no longer lead them, for he too would die outside the land for his own disobedience. So this next generation would need a new leader, and God had raised up Joshua in the shadow of Moses to fulfill this role. In the midst of a climate of disappointment, failure, and death, God set the stage with Joshua to demonstrate His faithful commitment to His people despite their sinfulness.

DAY 1

READ:

**Deuteronomy 34:1–
Joshua 1:1**

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Joshua 1:1

NOTES

Death often feels unfair to those who are left behind. It can seem cruel to grow in the trenches of love with someone just to say goodbye. And yet, because of the curse of sin, no one is exempt from the reality of death, Moses included. The first verse of Joshua amplifies this reality: “After the death of Moses ...”

Deuteronomy 34 describes Moses’ death more ceremoniously, recounting the special relationship Moses had with the Lord along with the miraculous deeds God performed through Moses for the benefit of the Israelites. The Book of Joshua, on the other hand, simply notes the circumstance. What makes Moses significant in Joshua 1:1 isn’t his resume of impressive deeds but his identity in relation to God—He was the Lord’s servant. There is great significance packed within this brief obituary.

In the same way, we should consider it a great honor to be described as we are related to the Lord. On our own, we are marred images of the eternal God; we are plagued with the stench of sin and incapable of escaping death. Yet because the eternal Lord sent His holy Son to clothe Himself with humanity and mortality and die a sinner’s death, we sinners have the opportunity to put on the undefiled clothes of Christ and live forever through our resurrected King.

Through the victory over sin and death that God’s people have in Christ, we are enabled to love freely and forever without regret. We can look death in the face without intimidation or fear. The death we formerly deemed to be unfair (which in reality was perfectly just), we can now behold as a grace that enables us to gain far more than we deserve (Phil. 1:21). We can humbly live as servants knowing that this is who Jesus identified Himself to be (Mark 10:45).

May we embrace what it means to be God’s servants and yearn to be identified as such (Matt. 25:21).

What does it look like to live a life dedicated in service to God?

DAY 2

READ:

Joshua 1:1-5

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Joshua 1:2-4

NOTES

Imagine a father promising to take his son out for ice cream. The son is so overwhelmed with anticipation that his mouth salivates at the very mention of its creamy goodness. Yet as each day passes, the son never gets to behold his long-awaited scoop. Opportune moments such as birthdays and summer parties come and go, all of them absent of the son's wish. And still the father continues to defer the fulfillment of his promise. Justifiably, the son grows weary in his heart because of his father's inaction and negligence.

Thankfully, God isn't like the aforementioned father who keeps his child waiting to no end. He isn't a father who reneges on his word. He isn't a father who passively twiddles his thumbs in hopes that his children forget what was promised to them. Nor do God's children have to be plagued with sick hearts, weary from hope deferred (Prov. 13:12). God is faithful! Like the ultimate Father that He is, when He gives His children a promise, the entire universe conforms to His will. Absolutely nothing and no one stops God. If He says it, consider it done.

In the opening words of the Book of Joshua, we see this faithful God at work. For generations, the people of Israel had waited in anticipation for God to fulfill the promise He had made to their forefathers—the inheritance of the promised land. Though Israel had a track record of complaining, angering God, and turning away, God remained in the promise-keeping business. He hadn't drop the ball; He hadn't forgotten about His people. He was right by their side all along, and now He would use Joshua to bring to fruition what He had promised. If this God—who is, who was, and who is to come (Rev. 1:8)—demonstrated His faithfulness in such undeniable ways to the people of Israel, then God's people can be absolutely certain that all of God's promises will be fulfilled with a resounding “yes” in Christ (2 Cor. 1:20)!

Why does the fulfillment of God's promises matter so much?

DAY 3

READ:

Joshua 1:5;

Matthew 28:18-20

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Matthew 28:18-20

NOTES

VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

"We need never shout across the spaces to an absent God. He is nearer than our own soul, closer than our most secret thoughts."¹

—A. W. Tozer (1897-1963)

The Great Commission, as Matthew 28:18-20 is affectionately called, is a well-known passage among Christians—as it should be! Jesus, “the faithful witness” (Rev. 1:5), passed the “witness baton” to His followers, commanding them to make disciples of all nations, baptizing them and teaching them to obey God. Though it is an honor to continue Christ’s work on the earth, some may feel intimidated by this call. One may ask: “What if I haven’t been trained?” “What if I struggle with sin?” “What if people ridicule and rage against me?” Such honest questions should be acknowledged, but nevertheless, the reality is that in the face of feelings of incompetence and doubt, Jesus has equipped us with Himself.

Sometimes we overlook the last line of Jesus’ commission, but it is perhaps the most important line—Jesus promises to be with His witnesses! Without Jesus’ presence, we do stand incompetent, burdened, and incapable of doing what He has called us to do. But what is impossible for us is more than possible with God.

Similar to how God assured Joshua with the promise of His presence so the people of Israel could obtain the land He had promised, God’s people—the church—have the assurance that Jesus’ presence will help believers to make disciples in the face of overwhelming opposition. This Jesus serves as the ultimate mediator between God and man, and He did what Joshua and Moses were incapable of—secure eternal rest for the people of God. Joshua and Moses both died, but Jesus put death to death and has promised never to leave His people (1 Cor. 15:55-57). The Jesus who promises to be with us is the God who promised to be with Joshua! This Jesus, Immanuel—God with us—has already conquered the enemy and given us all we need for life and godliness (Heb. 2:14; 2 Pet. 1:3). The presence of Jesus in our lives makes all the difference.

How should the reality of Jesus’ presence help you to obey His commands, including the command to make disciples of all nations?

DAY 4

READ:

Joshua 1:6-9

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Joshua 1:8

NOTES



ESSENTIAL DOCTRINE #3:

INSPIRATION OF SCRIPTURE

The inspiration of Scripture refers to God's direction of the human authors of the Bible so that they composed and recorded His message to humankind in their original writings (2 Tim. 3:16; 2 Pet. 1:19-21). Occasionally this inspiration was achieved through dictation, where God spoke directly to the original authors. Most of the time, however, this inspiration was achieved through the supernatural influence of the Holy Spirit through the personalities of the authors so that their writings can be considered the very words of God.

The phrase "You are what you eat" refers to the fact that the foods we place in our body through eating affect the function of our bodily systems. Eating healthy foods consistently most likely will result in healthy bodily responses showing vitality. But eating junk food all day most likely will result in drowsiness and unhealthiness. Though food can be viewed as disposable once it enters the body, never to be seen again, its consequences are anything but. The aftermath of eating, whether healthy or unhealthy, has a direct impact on our overall physical state.

In the same way, what we "eat" spiritually matters. In Joshua 1:8, God instructed Joshua to meditate on, or "eat," the word of God's law day and night. This way, Joshua would be so filled with God's good instructions that God's words would constantly be on Joshua's lips and in his heart. As Jesus reminds us in Luke 6:45, a person's mouth speaks out of the abundance of the heart.

Every day, whether we realize it or not, we are being filled with something. Just as it is in our physical nature to desire food, it is in our spiritual nature to desire sustenance as well. Because of our sinful nature, however, we have an inclination to overlook and sometimes bypass God altogether in an idolatrous pursuit of seeking our sustenance elsewhere. Whether we have a tendency to keep the television on constantly or an itching impulse to scroll mindlessly through a social media newsfeed, it is necessary to identify the things we know will never satisfy and turn from them so we may be properly nourished by the only One who does satisfy.

Truly, whether we realize it or not, even in a spiritual sense, in so many ways "we are what we eat." And what we eat affects us both now and in eternity.

**What idolatrous "foods" have you been consuming?
How can you train your heart to crave God's
Word instead?**

DAY 5

READ:

**Joshua 1:10-18;
Hebrews 3-4**

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Joshua 1:12-15
NOTES

It is interesting that as Joshua gave instructions to the Reubenites, the Gadites, and the half-tribe of Manasseh, he associated the land God promised Israel with rest itself (Josh. 1:13,15). How can the concept of rest be used almost interchangeably with a piece of land?

The older generation of Israelites, who were freed from bondage in Egypt, wandered in the wilderness because they were continually disobedient and lacked faith. God had declared they would not enter the promised land, or “enter [God’s] rest” (Ps. 95:11). The next generation of Israelites also endured the consequences of their fathers’ iniquities by wandering in the wilderness for forty years (Num. 14:33). But they learned from their parents’ mistake and trusted that God would enable them to enter and possess the land flowing with milk and honey (Ex. 3:17).

The poison of unbelief breeds misfortune in those who consume it. Not only do they lack faith, making it impossible to please God (Heb. 11:6), they also forfeit true rest. They are debilitated by anxieties, aimless in direction, burdened by work, and consumed with defeat. Their hearts are hardened because, though they have God’s promises accessible to them, they willfully choose rebellion instead (Ps. 95:7-8). To the surprise of many, rebellion doesn’t always appear overt and militant. Rebellion can look like choosing to do your own thing instead of what God has said, or even a quiet disbelief in the capabilities of God because of the magnitude of your circumstances.

Thankfully, God’s promise of rest still remains (Heb. 4:1). Today, He reminds us not to harden our hearts and succumb to rebellion against Him (4:2-7). Today, we have an opportunity to turn from our sinful ways and choose instead to believe in God, His good instructions, and His promises. Today, we have an opportunity to cling to the giver of eternal rest—Jesus Christ—if only we would believe.

Today, how will you obey and walk by faith in God’s promises instead of in disbelief and rebellion?

GROUP

NOTES

VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

"A readiness to believe every promise implicitly, to obey every command unhesitatingly, to 'stand perfect and complete in all the will of God,' is the only true spirit of Bible study."²

—Andrew Murray (1828-1917)

POINT 1: God gives direction and comfort through His presence (Josh. 1:1-5).

Moses had died, but God's promises had not failed. Now was the time for the Israelites to rise up and move forward in _____ and _____ behind Joshua.



What are some ways God reminds us that He is still at work in our lives, regardless of our circumstances?

God's promise of His _____ with Joshua guaranteed _____ and provided _____ for the work that lay ahead of the people.



What does the promise of God's presence mean for believers today (see Heb. 13:5-6)?

POINT 2: God gives strength and courage through His word (Josh. 1:6-9).

Joshua was to be strong and courageous on account of his _____ in _____ and His _____, not because of any self-confidence he could muster.



What are some future promises that help believers be strong and courageous today?

ESSENTIAL DOCTRINE #3: INSPIRATION OF SCRIPTURE

The inspiration of Scripture refers to God's _____ of the human authors of the Bible so that they composed and recorded His _____ to humankind in their original writings (2 Tim. 3:16; 2 Pet. 1:19-21). Occasionally this inspiration was achieved through dictation, where God spoke

directly to the original authors. Most of the time, however, this inspiration was achieved through the supernatural influence of the _____ through the personalities of the authors so that their writings can be considered the very words of God.

NOTES

POINT 3: God gives hope and victory through His promises (Josh. 1:10-18).

Joshua relayed _____ commands and called for his people to keep their promises so they all could enjoy _____ in God's promised land.



Why did Israel have reason to have confidence in Joshua's instructions?

The Israelites responded to Joshua in _____, obedience, hope, and _____ because the _____ behind Joshua is always faithful to keep His promises.

MY RESPONSE

Because God has given us what we need in the Scriptures to know Him and live for Him, we seek not only to study the Scriptures but to live out God's commands so that others might see our love for Him.

- **HEAD:** What are some ways you can reflect the faithfulness of God in your life?
- **HEART:** How should your attitude and perspective on life change because of God's presence with His children by faith?
- **HANDS:** Because of God's presence with you, with whom will you share the good news about Jesus, who came to save us and give us eternal rest?

VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

"God is only truly known in the soul as we yield ourselves to Him, submit to His authority, and regulate all the details of our lives by His holy precepts and commandments."³

—A. W. Pink (1886-1952)

GOD'S PRESENCE WITH HIS PEOPLE

+ **SESSION IN A SENTENCE:**

The Lord goes before His people in power to lead them where He desires.

+ **BACKGROUND PASSAGE:**

Joshua 3–4

+ **SETTING:**

God appointed Joshua to lead the Israelites into the promised land, and He gave His representative instruction and encouragement by the assurance of His presence. As the new mediator between God and God's people, Joshua obediently relayed God's command that the people would cross the Jordan River and conquer their enemies so that they could obtain the land God had promised them. Now three days later, the people were prepared to take their first steps of obedience through a raging river.

DAY 1

READ:

Joshua 3:1-8

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Joshua 3:5

NOTES

A young child often bubbles over with anticipation the night before Christmas. Unaware of what the next day will hold yet hopeful of the surprises they will soon unveil—children generally can't contain themselves. It's not uncommon for them to wake up in the wee hours of Christmas morning to open gifts or to have a difficult time going to sleep in the first place due to their erupting joy.

We can imagine the Israelite people having a similar feeling of anticipation in light of Joshua's declaration in Joshua 3:5 that God would do His wonders among them. In fact, Joshua gave them an instruction that would have motivated and propelled the Israelites to have this expectant posture.

Anticipating the wonders of the Lord can cause a whirlwind of emotions. From excitement that God was fulfilling His long-awaited promises to potential fear of the unknown to relief that the land given to them wasn't far off, a wellspring of feelings surely was flooding the Israelites' hearts at this time. However, in order to have the right kind of anticipation for what was to come, Joshua invited God's people to actively prepare for the venture. By consecrating themselves, or setting themselves apart from sinful and/or common things, they were cleansing themselves, which would enable them to have the correct posture and anticipation to behold all that God would do.

God is holy, and in order for us to behold the wonders of His person and actions, we need to be cleansed. We have dirty hearts that are consumed with dirty passions that prevent us from seeing God rightly or wanting Him at all, for that matter. But Jesus boldly proclaimed that the pure in heart are blessed because they will see God (Matt. 5:8). It is only by first being cleansed and consecrated by Jesus' sacrifice that we can grow deeper in our knowledge of God and thereby behold His wonders.

How do you need to consecrate yourself so you can see the Lord's works more clearly?

DAY 2

READ:

Joshua 3:9-17

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Joshua 3:10-11

NOTES

VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

"Never be afraid to trust
an unknown future to a
known God."¹

—Corrie ten Boom (1892-1983)

Gospel singer Tye Tribbett sings the popular song "If He Did it Before ... Same God." The lyrics are relatively simple and make for a catchy musical track, but the theological implications behind the song's message are life-changing. The crux of what this song seeks to convey is taught throughout Scripture, with Joshua 3:10-11 providing a great example.

As Joshua relayed God's message to the people, Joshua made it known that "the living God" of the present, whose presence went ahead of His people to make a way for them, was the same God of tomorrow who would grant them victory over their enemies! And the God who led His people to cross through the Red Sea on dry ground was the same God who would defy nature once again and cause His people to cross through the Jordan River on dry ground. The God back then was the same God who was with the Israelites right now, as they were poised to enter the promised land.

Only a God who is both alive and consistent in character could have a track record so reliable that would compel His people to trust Him through the unknown for their future. A dead god is unable to act, and a flaky god only brings disappointment. These were the kind of false gods that Israel's enemies were used to. But the Lord—the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—is living, faithful, and always committed to His people.

This is the same God who sent His divine Son to live the life of a peasant, die the death of a criminal, and rise from the dead to rule as King, all so we could be redeemed. Let us be assured that even when we can't make sense of what God is doing, He is doing something and it's always for our good and His glory! We can trust the God who is the same yesterday, today, and forever.

How does God's past work in your life help you better trust in His character for the future?

DAY 3

READ:

Psalm 33

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Psalm 33:6-9

NOTES



ESSENTIAL DOCTRINE #24: GOD IS IMMANENT

When we say that God is immanent, we mean that God is personable and relatable to those made in His image, while remaining completely distinct and unique from all of His creation. It means that God is not a distant deity (as imagined by the deist) who only sits on His heavenly throne with no interaction, but instead, He is a personal God who created people in His image to be in personal relationship with Him.

You don't have to gaze at the expanse of the Grand Canyon or behold the wonder of cascading waterfalls to feel small amongst the grandeur of creation. Even in the ordinary, the magnitude of God's creation undeniably testifies to the handiwork of its Creator (Rom. 1:20).

Not only should we view God as Creator but also Lord over His creation. As the master artist of His divine portrait, He's in control of every element. He positions the earth and sun exactly where they ought to be so we have the sun's warmth but not its fire. He paints rainbows in the sky as a reminder of His grace. And He commands the wind to move by the power of His word. Psalm 33 speaks about God's lordship over His creation in poetic detail (see Ps. 33:6-9).

As Joshua 3:11 reminds us, God is the Lord of the whole earth. This reality shouldn't be taken lightly. According to the psalmist in Psalm 33, it should invoke in us a reverential fear and awe for the Lord. How amazing is it that this God who created both the visible and the invisible—the Lord over the whole earth—was pleased to be with His people as they prepared to cross the Jordan River? How infinitely more amazing is it that the Lord of the whole earth would decide to dwell upon the earth that He created, wrap Himself in flesh, and allow His tangible presence to exist among us?

This Jesus, the star of the redemption story, is the Lord of the whole earth. This is a sobering reality. Jesus supersedes the majesty of any natural element that could amaze, intimidate, or threaten. He is the Lord—the Lord of all the earth—who has demonstrated divine allegiance to His people even in the face of tumultuous adversity. This is the Lord whom we can count on today—the Lord whose presence is with us to the end of the age (Matt. 28:20)!

How does seeing God as Creator help you better view Him as Lord?

DAY 4

READ:

Joshua 4:1-7

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Joshua 4:4-7

NOTES

Without warning, a man is laid off from his job of twenty years. Having dedicated countless hours of overtime and many evenings away from his family of five, he is furthermore offended that he didn't receive a reasonable explanation for his termination. He approaches his car with swollen eyes and a broken heart. In tears he begins to pray, "Lord, although I'm broken, I have to trust You to provide. I have no other choice. Amen."

Throughout the week of applying for jobs, the man continues to pray persistently for God to come through for him and his family. Suddenly, he receives a phone call. It's from a former coworker who now has his own business. The co-worker remembered the man's work ethic and found him to be a prime candidate for the role he was looking to fill within his organization, so he offered this man a job on the spot. With gratitude, the man gladly accepted the opportunity and hung up the phone. He immediately spewed out praises unto the Lord for His kindness in providing for him in this way. Yet after working at the company for six months and receiving a promotion, the man seemed to forget what the Lord had done. Pride ripened in his heart, and he began to attribute his achievements to his own merit.

As disturbing as the man's forgetfulness and pride in the above illustration are, we and the Israelites in so many ways are no different. So in Joshua 4, we see God's perfect wisdom poured out to His people through His instructions to remember the Lord's works by collecting twelve stones from the middle of the Jordan River.

May we reject the tempting heart posture to be like a desperate man who witnesses God's kindness and soon forgets God's hand in his life. May we instead choose to intentionally create spaces and reminders that force us to look back at God's works in gratitude for what He has done and continues to do!

What are some reminders that would compel you to remember God's works in your life?

DAY 5

READ:

Joshua 4:8-24;
1 Corinthians 11:23-26

FOCAL PASSAGE:

1 Corinthians 11:23-26
NOTES

From the outside looking in, it may seem peculiar to observe a group of people eating a small portion of bread and drinking grape juice or wine for any purpose other than partaking in an appetizer. Out of curiosity, this peculiarity can summon the attention of many. For the well-meaning child who wants to know what their parents are doing as they eat and drink without them to the person who hasn't placed their trust in Jesus and is perplexed by the sight of what appears to be a meaningless ritual, communion (or the Lord's Supper) can be quite the conversation starter.

For those who have placed their trust in Christ, however, communion is so much more than an organized snack. It was instituted by our Lord Himself so we would remember Jesus' death until He comes back for His people (1 Cor. 11:26). Communion is a symbolic act that looks back to Jesus' real sacrifice. His body was literally broken and His blood was actually poured out so that those who trust in Him would receive forgiveness of sins. It is by the shedding of Jesus' blood that a new covenant was established, affording those who have faith in Christ the opportunity to be part of the family of God. Christ's death is nothing to gloss over, as His life, death, and resurrection are the crux of the Christian faith. So we observe the Lord's Supper over and over again because Jesus commands us to but also because we need the constant reminder that our gruesome sin deserves a gruesome penalty—and Jesus took that penalty for us.

Just as the Israelites were commanded to remember the Lord's wonders for generations as He caused His people to cross the Jordan River on dry ground, we have a responsibility to remember the Lord's death until He comes back for us. Remembrance is powerful, as it has the power to rejuvenate our faith and reorient our sight. Let our fixated sight forever be set on Christ, our coming King.

Do you more often see communion as something you have to do or something you get to do? Why?

GROUP

NOTES

POINT 1: God's people are to anticipate the Lord's provision (Josh. 3:5-8).

Consecration and preparation in our lives helps us to see God's _____ rightly and to recognize our _____ in them.



What are some things you can do to better prepare your heart to observe and bear witness to God's work in your life?

The Lord works through appointed _____ to help His people _____ and prepare to experience the works of God.



How did God prepare His people to receive His provision in this passage?

POINT 2: God's people are to follow the Lord's guidance (Josh. 3:9-17).

ESSENTIAL DOCTRINE #24: GOD IS IMMANENT:

When we say that God is immanent, we mean that God is personable and relatable to those made in His image, while remaining completely _____ and unique from all of His creation. It means that God is not a distant deity (as imagined by the deist) who only sits on His heavenly throne with no interaction, but instead, He is a _____ God who created people in His image to be in personal _____ with Him.



What are some ways you have seen your faith in God's guidance become sight?

VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

"Your faith may be just a little thread. It may be small and weak, but act on that faith. It does not matter how big your faith is, but rather, where your faith is."²

-Billy Graham (1918-2018)

POINT 3: God's people are to remember the Lord's works (Josh. 4:1-7).

At first, it seems like God was commanding the representatives of His people to do a random, meaningless act, but God's commands are _____ and always for a _____ .

Just as important as preparing themselves to _____ God's works, God's people were instructed to _____ God's works for the sake of their faith and that of future generations.



What are some ways the church has been instructed to remember the Lord's works?

MY RESPONSE

Because Christ has gone before us in death and resurrection to provide salvation, we recount all of God's mighty works to others so that they too might trust Jesus and be received into His kingdom.

- **HEAD:** What actions would help bear witness to your faith that God is alive and active in your life?
- **HEART:** How should looking forward to dwelling with Jesus in eternity inform your faith and actions now?
- **HANDS:** What memorial might you set up so that you can remember God's saving grace in your life and have opportunities to share that grace with others?

NOTES

VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

"The way we live ought to manifest the truth of what we believe."³

-Elisabeth Elliot (1926-2015)

GOD'S PRESENCE IN HIS WORD

+ SESSION IN A SENTENCE:

The Scriptures are the standard of authority for the believer, providing the message of salvation and guidance for how to live.

+ BACKGROUND PASSAGES:

Psalms 119; 2 Timothy 3

+ SETTING:

Joshua heard the Lord appoint him to leadership over the Israelites in the place of Moses. He received God's encouraging word to "be strong and courageous" because God promised to be with him and the people of Israel. Furthermore, the Lord gave Joshua instructions about their entry into and conquest of the promised land that he was to lead the people to obey. Because God is our holy and good Creator, His Word is authoritative, declaring God's plan for our salvation and His expectations for our obedience. In this session, we will delve into our great need for God's Word and discover His intended purposes for it.

DAY 1

READ:

2 Timothy 3

FOCAL PASSAGE:

2 Timothy 3:14-15

NOTES

In our information-sharing age, it is probably more vital than ever to emphasize that sources matter. With the ease of a click, information can be manipulated, causing otherwise legitimate information to be polluted with lies. Sadly, after being indoctrinated with such lies, truth can become harder and harder to identify.

Paul didn't want this kind of indoctrination to happen to Timothy. So Paul made it clear to Timothy that he should continue in what he had learned and been convinced of because Timothy was walking on the path of truth.

Like the present day, there were people who were deceiving and being deceived—spreading lies to the vulnerable and trying to choke the truth out of those who had sound belief (2 Tim. 3:13). To combat this, Paul pointed to what Timothy had learned but also placed a spotlight on the sources from whom Timothy had learned those truths in the first place. He made it clear that those who taught Timothy God's Scriptures were legitimate sources because their lives and teaching aligned with the truth. Sources such as Paul himself and Timothy's mother and grandmother played integral roles in Timothy's spiritual formation (1:5). Their faith, integrity, and commitment to the truth provided a constant reminder of the integrity of the gospel and the legitimacy of his own faith in Christ.

It is with great fervor that we should take heed to Paul's instructions within our own lives and also seek to be legitimate sources that testify to the truth of God's Word. In so many ways, actions really do speak louder than words. May our lives point to Christ so that others would be reminded of our faith-filled legacy and be encouraged to continue trusting in the Way (John 14:6; Acts 9:2; 19:9,23).

Who are the people that have influenced your faith by their adherence to and teaching of the Scriptures?

DAY 2

READ:

2 Timothy 3:16–4:8

FOCAL PASSAGE:

2 Timothy 3:16-17

NOTES

Some might view God's Word as a handbook of some sort, a resource with many do's and don'ts infused with advisable literature on how to please God. Others might view it as a book about heroes whose lives are the blueprint we should emulate and from whom we gain inspiration. Then there are those who see God's Word as a handy GPS that will take them to a heavenly destination if only they follow its directions to perfection. Furthermore, there are people who see Scripture as a good luck charm, something accessible to hold onto when desperate.

Each of these analogies falls drastically short of what God's Word actually is. In 2 Timothy 3:16, Paul lets us know that all Scripture comes from God—not from crafty human minds but from the Holy Spirit, who used human beings to inscribe God's messages (2 Pet. 1:21). Because all Scripture has God's signature on it, we should not regard it as an ordinary book. The Bible tells the divine story of God's plan to redeem humanity through the sacrifice of His Son. It is the only story that involves all broken people and one perfect God who makes a way of salvation for the most undeserving—like you and me.

As Paul teaches in 2 Timothy, Scripture is not a buffet where you can eat what you prefer and leave the rest. Rather, Scripture is an “eat it all or eat nothing at all” type of meal. All of its contents are nonnegotiable and absolutely necessary for both our earthly and eternal livelihood. Through faith in God's Son, Jesus, and the Spirit-inspired Scripture, God's people have all that they need to be “equipped for every good work” (2 Tim. 3:15-17).

What are some ways Scripture has taught you, rebuked you, corrected you, and trained you in righteousness?

DAY 3

READ:

Psalm 119:1-8

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Psalm 119:1-2

NOTES

Society would suggest that there are many ways to achieve ultimate fulfillment and happiness. Our pleasure-seeking nature attempts to find happiness in all things tangible. We may seek happiness by spending copious amounts of time with family, but when they don't pick up our phone calls, we may decide to watch a movie. When the movie is over, we might go to sleep, only to get up the next day, go to work, and work overtime hours in an effort to earn a promotion. When that "merited" promotion is never granted, we continue on the slippery slope of trying to find happiness in something or someone—even if it's ourselves. Time and time again, life constantly reveals that "the next best thing" that we pursue lacks complete satisfaction in the end.

Yet true happiness and blessing, as described in Psalm 119, is marked by a life that follows God's Word. By walking in the way of the Lord, those who choose to obey God are on the winning path. Their happiness, which in other contexts is fleeting, never ceases. Their happiness is an eternal happiness anchored in the Giver of all joy.

As we aim to please God by obeying what He has said in His Word and seeking Him with all our hearts, our diligence is not in vain because God rewards us for doing so (Heb. 11:6). Ultimately, faith propels us to take God at His Word, and love for Him ignites our obedience to it so that we find ourselves blessed and truly happy.

Without knowing it, society yearns for this happiness—a true happiness that is ferociously untamed and very much accessible in Christ.

How does true happiness in Christ differ from the imitation of happiness that society offers?

DAY 4

READ:

Psalm 119:1-8

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Psalm 119:4

NOTES



ESSENTIAL DOCTRINE #5: AUTHORITY OF SCRIPTURE

Since the Bible is the inspired Word from God, God's special revelation to humanity, the Bible is the ultimate standard of authority for the Christian. Because it is truthful in everything that it teaches, Scripture is humanity's source for wisdom, instructing us on how to live life well to the glory of God. Submitting to the authority of Scripture means that we are to believe and obey God by believing and obeying His Word.

A jubilant toddler dances to her favorite summer tune while in the front yard with her family. Without a care in the world, the music blasting through her mom's bluetooth speakers and the sun's piercing rays are the only things commanding her attention. She is enthralled by the simplistic wonder of it all. Yet unaware of her trajectory, she finds herself gliding from the grass to the road. Her mother shouts at the top of her lungs, "Aniah, get out of the street!" Stunned, Aniah is perplexed by her mother's apparent rage, but Aniah knows from the reverberations of her mother's shout that she means business! Aniah immediately directs her body to the realm of safety.

Though confused about her mother's rationale behind the command, Aniah knew her mother wasn't offering a suggestion. She knew that if she didn't move, she would be in big trouble. What she didn't understand was that her mother's voice was being used to safeguard the daughter's life. Aniah wouldn't have just been in "big trouble" had she not obeyed her mother's instructions—her disobedience could have led to her demise.

Similar to the mother who loves her daughter enough to express, with life-saving urgency, the command to get out of the street, God also gives His children commands for their well-being. He does not give nonnegotiable instructions because He is a divine dictator. Instead, He has provided us with His Word, full of His wisdom-saturated commands and precepts, because He wants the best for His children. Sometimes, as God's children, we might not understand the rationale behind His commands. Thankfully, we aren't called to understand but rather to obey, knowing that our Father knows exactly what He's doing, as His thoughts and ways supersede our own (Isa. 55:8-9).

What are some ways you will diligently keep God's precepts this week?

DAY 5

READ:

Psalm 119:9-16

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Psalm 119:9-16

NOTES

VOICES from THE CHURCH

"Reading the Bible is the cornerstone of our personal time with God. But we should do much more than just read the Bible. God wants us to read it (Deuteronomy 31:11-12), study it (Joshua 1:8; Ezra 7:10), meditate on it (Joshua 1:8; Psalm 1:1-3), pay close attention to it (2 Peter 1:19), memorize it (Psalm 119:11), and put it into practice. James tells us, 'Don't just listen to God's word. You must do what it says. Otherwise you are only fooling yourselves' (James 1:22-25)."

—Africa Study Bible

Marinated meat almost always tastes better than meat that has only recently been seasoned and then exposed to heat for cooking. There is something to be said about the combination of flavorful spices that have had the opportunity to blend together in harmonious synergy within the fibers of a marinated steak. Typically, the longer the meat has had time to soak up the marinade, the more tender and delicious the end product becomes. It is fascinating that one simple step can make the difference between a taste-bud-dancing marathon or, quite literally, a tasteless experience.

Meditating on God's Word in some ways functions similarly to a good marinade. When we read, study, speak, pray, and ponder upon God's Word, we allow the rich flavors of Scripture the opportunity to soak in the fibers of our being. We are enabled to store God's Word in our heart as our greatest treasure and so guard ourselves from sin. Alternatively, when we don't meditate on God's Word, sometimes even reading it with good intentions can be as disappointing as a bland filet mignon. This doesn't happen because God's Word is disappointing but rather because we haven't prepared our hearts for it. We ought to linger long in God's Word and seek God Himself for the meaning of His message (Ps. 119:12).

The psalmist in Psalm 119 certainly desired to marinate in God's life-giving Word. It was his ultimate delight (v. 16). We can imagine that the very essence or "smell" of the goodness of Scripture would make his mouth salivate. We too have the opportunity to be completely captivated by the satisfying aroma of God's Word. Furthermore, we have the opportunity to soak in His truth so that we would ultimately be transformed into the likeness of His Son.

How has meditating on Psalm 119:9-16, filling your heart with God's Word, affected your outlook on this day?

GROUP

NOTES

VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

"The vigor of our spiritual life will be in exact proportion to the place held by the Bible in our life and thoughts."²

—George Müller (1805-1898)

POINT 1: God's Word provides wisdom for salvation (2 Tim. 3:14-17).

God's Word helps us to see Jesus Christ as the _____ of salvation and to know that we must have _____ in Him to find salvation.



Who are some people that have taught you the Scriptures, helping you to find salvation in Jesus?

ESSENTIAL DOCTRINE #5: AUTHORITY OF SCRIPTURE

Since the Bible is the _____ Word from God, God's special revelation to humanity, the Bible is the ultimate _____ of authority for the Christian. Because it is _____ in everything that it teaches, Scripture is humanity's source for _____, instructing us on how to live life well to the glory of God. Submitting to the authority of Scripture means that we are to believe and obey God by believing and obeying His Word.



Why is the Bible deserving of our obedience and full submission?

POINT 2: God's Word provides instruction for a life of fulfillment in God (Ps. 119:1-8).

We have many options as far as paths to take in life, but God's Word always leads us down the _____ path of _____ God's commands so we find fulfillment in Him.



When we think about fulfillment in life, why should God and His Word immediately come to mind?

The perfection of God's instruction exposes our _____ hearts so we will come to Him in _____ and _____ for His holiness and grace.

NOTES

POINT 3: God's Word provides precepts for pure living (Ps. 119:9-16).

We should desire a pure life that _____ our holy Creator, and God's _____ is the key to our battle against sin.



What are some ways we can treasure God's Word in our hearts?

The ways we use—or don't use—God's Word to _____ for purity in our lives will reflect the status and _____ of our relationship with the Lord.

MY RESPONSE

Because the Bible is our ultimate source of authority, we seek to read it, believe it, and obey it in full submission, knowing that our obedience is for God's glory and our good.

- **HEAD:** What are some ways you will prioritize listening to and interacting with God's Word?
- **HEART:** What sins do you need to confess to God and others so you can rejoice and delight in the blessing of God's Word?
- **HANDS:** What good works are you being called by God to do, having been equipped through the gift of God's Word?

VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

"Nobody ever outgrows Scripture; the book widens and deepens with our years. It is true, it cannot really grow, for it is perfect; but it does so to our apprehension. The deeper you dig into Scripture, the more you find that it is a great abyss of truth."³

—Charles Spurgeon (1834-1892)

UNIT 8

+

FEAR THE

LORD AND

WORSHIP HIM

“The Lord Was Fighting for You”

by Andrea Burke

My five-year-old son has no idea he is five. He's ready to move out and spend his days “building walls.” He wants his own house, his own car, and his own “real saw” so he can do “real work.” Of course, we all know these things are impossible. He has neither the maturity, stability, nor ability to do the things he wants to do. On most days, he is a ball of unfocused energy. It's not uncommon to find him swinging his hammer against anything that looks like a nail. He is comically bumbling and adorably inept and committed to becoming the grown man he is convinced he already is.

During a bathroom remodeling project, while my husband drills and runs electrical wire, my son is equipped with a bucket of contractor's mud to smear and thin over the wall. He works diligently. He is focused. He asks to use his hammer; we say no. Yet when the bathroom is finished, it won't be because of my five-year-old but because his father did the work and let him join in.

WHEN OBEDIENCE LOOKS SILLY

If I'm being honest, I can't help but see Israel's work in entering the promised land as being little different from a five-year-old with a spackling knife and a small can of plaster. When obedience happens, it may look silly or not even make sense, but it results in the Father's work being accomplished.

God's work for Israel in giving them the land flowing with milk and honey had very little to do with their skills or abilities. In fact, it's fairly evident in the victory over Jericho that the most the Lord wanted out of Israel was obedience to His plan. Marching multiple times around a city didn't make a lot of sense as a military strategy, nor did it require any act of great strength or fortitude. Yet their obedience to do the thing God asked of them—no more, no less—was absolutely necessary.

When I read through the stories of the conquering of Jericho and the sun standing still and then see the Gibeonite deception and the sin-wrought loss at Ai, I cannot help but see how God's faithfulness carried His people every step of the way. God upheld His name and His glory and fulfilled the promises made to His people even when they returned to their old habit of grumbling, when they sinned or were afraid, and when they were outnumbered and overpowered.

God's people had spent a generation's worth of time wandering in the desert because of their lack of trust and confidence in what God was doing. If God's people had any chance of being successful in taking the land, they needed to have their hearts anchored in something beyond their own perceptions, ideas, and abilities. That something would be God Himself.

GOD GOES TO BATTLE FOR US

I think we often forget that God does not merely equip us to fight the battles we face. Most of us are familiar with the euphemism that is probably stitched on

one of my grandmother's pillows, which says, "God will not give you more than you can handle." The truth is that statement is patently false (sorry Grandma). God absolutely gives us more than we can handle, and then He goes to battle for us.

The nation of Israel saw firsthand in their battles how the Lord went before them, causing panic among the enemies, throwing stones from heaven, and even stopping the sun in the sky. God did not tell them, "Don't do anything; I'll handle it," as He had at the Red Sea (Ex. 14:13-14). This time He prodded them to obedience by saying, "Don't fear, for I have given them into your hands." We can be assured that whatever the Lord calls us to face, we can move forward without fear knowing that even the most overwhelming, impossible tasks are in God's capable hands. The Lord is able to do miracles that cannot be explained by common logic or science because every atom is in His control, every spinning planet He holds in balance, and every minute of every day exists because He tells it to be so (Col. 1:16-17). Nothing happens outside of God's sovereign power.

God absolutely gives us more than we can handle,
and then He goes to battle for us.

When obedience happens, it may look silly or not even make sense, but it results in the Father's work being accomplished.

We see in the Book of Joshua the shadows of what God will ultimately do through the death and resurrection of Jesus. We cannot secure our salvation. Our enemies are giants in the land. Sin threatens to conquer us completely. Yet when Jesus was on that cross, God's enemies panicked, the rocks were split, and the sun was darkened. When He beat death and the grave, the Son rose, and now the radiance of God's glory in Christ will forever be held up for all to see.

WHERE OUR GREATEST JOY AND PEACE ARE FOUND

The story of God's people in Joshua is our story. A weak people, prone to sin, stumbling out of the wilderness, taste and see the abundant goodness, merciful provision, and covenant-keeping nature of God. This is the work God continues to do in our lives. Following the Lord wherever He calls us might mean we cannot see how He's going to do the work. It might mean we'll feel a bit foolish. We might even feel like a child with just enough faith to trust that our Father knows the work that must be done. Yet our greatest joy and peace will be found

in our obedience. The invitation to follow God into the places He is taking us is always about His ability to uphold His covenant to His people, not our ability to be impressive enough in the process. And in our humility, we rejoice in the magnitude of our God.

When our bathroom is done, when the paint dries and the flooring is laid out, there is no doubt in my mind that my son will boast of the work he did. He will point at the wall (where he nearly took out the new drywall) and tell us that's where he used his hammer. He will point at the surface where he spread the mud and stand a bit taller. He will be joyfully confident in the work he participated in, and his father's joy is that he was there with him the whole time.



WITNESSING GOD'S MERCY

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SESSION IN A SENTENCE:

God provides salvation to all who trust in Him and makes them part of His people.

+

BACKGROUND PASSAGES:

Joshua 2; 5–6

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SETTING:

The Israelites had crossed the Jordan River, on dry ground, no less, and had entered into their promised land. With renewed strength and the comfort of God's promises, the people of God set up camp and looked forward to a hopeful future. With the all-powerful God on their side, their enemies stood no chance. But though God would use Israel as the weapon of His judgment against the Canaanites, He remains the God of perfect mercy and grace, even holding out salvation to His enemies who trust Him for it. God's mercy is not limited to one group of people but extends out to all peoples and to the ends of the earth.

DAY 1

READ:

Joshua 2:1-7

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Joshua 2:1-3

NOTES

C. S. Lewis famously explained why courage is an essential virtue for a godly leader: “Courage is not simply one of the virtues, but the form of every virtue at the testing point.”¹

In the first chapter of Joshua, God called the new leader of Israel to be strong and courageous. This call echoes over and over throughout the book, indicating how essential it was for Joshua to possess the virtue of courage. The people of God are a people of faith. That faith walks in obedience with God and His mission, and that mission cannot be accomplished without courage.

But God never calls us to do anything apart from His work in us and for us. Every command He wants us to obey is also the means He uses to grow us, to stretch us, to mature us into the men and women He calls us to be.

We see this in Joshua’s leadership and in His relationship with God. God didn’t leave Joshua guessing as to how he would accomplish the task of leading God’s people into the land they would inherit. The very foundation for Joshua’s strength and courage is found in Joshua 1:9. Whatever weaknesses Joshua had, no matter how big an army he had to lead, and no matter how intimidating their enemies might seem, God would be with Joshua to give him courage.

In Joshua 2:1, we see Israel’s new leader resting in this promise of God by embarking on the conquest of the land before them, beginning with Jericho. The commissioning of the two spies was his first step forward in courageous leadership in the face of an enemy who had heard of Israel’s deliverance, knew their plans to overtake Jericho, and would do everything to stop them.

How does resting on the promise of God’s presence produce courage in the Christian life?

DAY 2

READ:

Joshua 2:1-7

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Joshua 2:4-7

NOTES

In 1804, Lewis and Clark were commissioned to lead the “Corps of Volunteers for Northwest Discovery,” an expedition across the then uncharted lands of the Louisiana Purchase—an over eight-thousand-mile journey. They catalogued at least three hundred and twenty plant and animal species, made contact with around fifty Native American tribes, and traveled terrain from the Mississippi River to the Pacific Ocean that had never been seen by European colonists.

During their journey, they were joined by a French-Canadian fur trader and his wife, Sacagawea. Because of her indigenous ethnicity, Lewis and Clark quickly found her to be an invaluable interpreter and navigator. Notably, with her help, the expedition was able to secure horses and guides from the Shoshone, Sacagawea’s tribe from whom she had been kidnapped at the age of 12. With these resources, Lewis and Clark were able to reach and cross the Continental Divide deep in the Rocky Mountains. It is believed that without Sacagawea’s assistance, the expedition may never have succeeded.²

In Joshua 2, we read of another expedition that benefited from unexpected help. Joshua sent two spies into Jericho, a prominent city in the land they would inherit from God. Rahab, a prostitute and a Canaanite, a woman who would have been considered an enemy of God, helped the spies escape the threat of the king of Jericho. She hid them and covered for them, sending the soldiers on a wild goose chase. Rahab potentially risked her own life with her own people in an effort to rescue two spies who would have been making plans on their expedition about how to take her life in Israel’s conquest of the promised land. Why would someone make that choice? In a word, as we’ll see later—faith.

How have you been the recipient of unexpected help to accomplish God’s works?

DAY 3

READ:

Joshua 2:8-24

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Joshua 2:8-13

NOTES



ESSENTIAL DOCTRINE #68: FAITH

Biblical faith is the resting, or trusting, in Christ alone for salvation (John 3:16-21). More than being simply a mental agreement of historical facts, genuine faith begins with a recognition and confession of the truth of the gospel (1 John 4:13-16), followed by a receiving of Christ as Lord and Savior of one's life (John 1:10-13). Biblical faith is not blind faith, for it rests on the historical life, death, and resurrection of Christ.

My two-year-old, Judson, is fearless. He'll jump off furniture, glide on a skateboard, and dive on the grass and then laugh all the boo-boos away. He's a brave one—except when it comes to dogs. Several months ago, he was knocked over accidentally by a big dog that was just eager to play with him. Now he's terrified of dogs. The bigger they are, the more scared he is around them.

More recently, some neighbors came over to visit with their full-sized Labradoodle. We greeted them out front, and as soon as their dog saw my small son, he started galloping in our direction. My son, of course, cowered in fear, running in the other direction and darting behind a bush.

In some ways, this is a picture of how God's majesty and holiness can affect us. He is big. He is powerful. He can appear scary—especially if we are running away from Him or trying to go against Him by retreating behind some other hope. But if we will rest in the grace that He gives and the relationship that He desires with us, He will be our friend, our protector, and our source of joy.

The Bible tells us that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom (Ps. 111:10; Prov. 9:10). The fear of the Lord is pure (Ps. 19:9), and it characterizes the way we ought serve the Lord (Ps. 2:11). Godly fear is a mark of faithfulness both here on earth (Heb. 11:7) and in heaven (Rev. 19:5).

Rahab responded faithfully to the fear of the Lord. While others in Jericho may have responded to the testimonies about Israel's God by placing their hope in their city or their king or in pretending the Lord away, Rahab responded with repentance and faith. She knew that the only way she could be spared from God's judgment was if she became a recipient of His kindness.

How does having a holy fear of the Lord make us want to run toward God instead of away from Him?

DAY 4

READ:

Joshua 6:1-21

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Joshua 6:15-21

NOTES

Many people have a hard time making sense of this difficult passage of Scripture, and other similar ones, since God commanded Joshua and the Israelites to leave no survivors (with the exception of Rahab and her family), even among the animals.

To make sense of this, we need to understand that God shows mercy, to some degree, on all people through what is called “common grace.” While “saving grace” is what God’s people experience in the forgiveness of our sins, “common grace” is God’s kindness that is experienced by all people, regardless of their relationship to Him.

God makes the sun shine and the rain fall on both the wicked and the righteous (Matt. 5:45). But on the other side of death, common grace ends and the judgment of God comes down. And every once in a while, God’s hand of justice comes down upon those who presently enjoy His undeserved common grace. This happened with the worldwide flood, with the plagues in Egypt, and here with the conquest of Canaan. The truth is that apart from the sheer grace of God, we are all citizens of Jericho and deserving of His judgment to fall upon us.

Sadly, in our experience, miscarriages of justice do occur among human beings. A good judge makes his or her decisions in order to keep evil from continuing, but bad judges neglect to administer justice, opting for bribes, favors, fame, or power.

God is a perfect judge. Jericho and the rest of Canaan had done great evil against God, and He patiently endured their rebellion until the time was right and He finally put a stop to it.

What does the judgment of God teach you about His nature and character?

DAY 5

READ:

Joshua 6:22-27

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Joshua 6:22-25

NOTES

You don't need a large flame to light up an entire room. In the same way, you don't need a huge faith to save you from the darkness. Rahab had few spiritual advantages. She was a woman of questionable repute in a pagan city. Yet in spite of all that, she had a pure faith in a perfect God, a faith that prompted her to serve God's people by hiding Joshua's messengers.

This small act of kindness was enough to confirm her genuine faith (see Heb. 11:31; Jas. 2:25-26). This faith drew her to God's truth, caused her to heed God's warnings, humbled her before God's holiness, and spared her by God's mercy. And it was enough faith to spare her entire family.

What separated Rahab from the other citizens of Jericho was not her superior ethics. It wasn't her praiseworthy life. It wasn't her cunning wisdom. It was her pure faith. While God rightfully judges sinners, He happily spares those who have genuine faith in Him. The scarlet cord Rahab hung out her window as a mark of her faith (Josh. 2:17-21) points forward to the scarlet blood of Christ by which she was saved. In the same way the cord was a sign that she should be spared, those of us who identify with the blood of Jesus shed on the cross for our sins are spared from God's judgment to receive His mercy and grace instead.

What are some ways we signify that we trust in the Lord's promises to spare us today?

VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

"These three be all one,
'perfect faith,'—'assured hope
and confidence in Christ's
mercy,'—and 'undoubted
trust in God, in his words
and promises.'"³

—Thomas Cranmer (1489-1556)

GROUP

NOTES

VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

"Rahab's faith was imperfect. All she knew was that the Lord had promised Israel the land. She knew God had dried up the Red Sea when they came out of Egypt, and she knew God had destroyed the kings of the Amorites, Sihon and Og, on the other side of the river. But what she knew, she believed and accepted."⁴

—W. A. Criswell (1909-2002)

POINT 1: An enemy appeals for kindness from the Lord's people (Josh. 2:1-3, 8-13).

_____, a Canaanite and a prostitute, committed _____ against her king and city by protecting the Israelite spies.

ESSENTIAL DOCTRINE #68: FAITH

Biblical faith is the _____, or trusting, in Christ alone for salvation (John 3:16-21). More than being simply a mental agreement of historical facts, genuine faith begins with a recognition and _____ of the truth of the gospel (1 John 4:13-16), followed by a receiving of Christ as _____ and Savior of one's life (John 1:10-13). Biblical faith is not blind faith, for it rests on the historical life, death, and resurrection of Christ.



How does the Christian's faith compare with Rahab's?

POINT 2: An enemy is spared from destruction by the Lord's people (Josh. 6:15-21).

God gave the Israelites a strange _____ for conquering the city of Jericho. They could _____ break the walls down, but God Himself would.



Why do you think God often uses seemingly foolish or strange means to accomplish His purposes?

The fearsome judgment of God was _____ destruction for Jericho, yet this magnifies God's great _____ to Rahab and her family, and to _____.

POINT 3: An enemy becomes part of the Lord's people (Josh. 6:22-25).

Joshua's two spies who had been _____ by Rahab were given the opportunity to fulfill their oath and return the favor by escorting Rahab and her family out of Jericho to live _____ of Israel's camp.

NOTES



Why is it important for God's people to keep their word?

Rahab moved from living _____ the camp to living _____ Israel because she became part of the chosen people of God by faith. Rahab exemplified what it means to have _____ faith.



How should Rahab's story affect the way we think about those who seem far away from the Lord?

MY RESPONSE

Because we have been welcomed into the people of God through Jesus, we tell people of every tribe and nation about Jesus so they too might trust in Him and become part of the bride of Christ, the church.

- **HEAD:** What are some places in your life where you need to more readily align yourself in faith with God and His ways?
- **HEART:** How does the story of Rahab the prostitute, whose story is ours as well, magnify your understanding and awe of God's amazing mercy?
- **HANDS:** What are some relationships in which you will plead with people to repent and believe in Jesus and be reconciled to the God of amazing mercy and grace?

VOICES from THE CHURCH

"To be a child of God requires one thing—Christ—and when we place our faith in Him, we are all counted as equal children. He's got a colorful family, and therefore so do we."⁵

—Trillia Newbell

EXPERIENCING GOD'S JUSTICE

+ SESSION IN A SENTENCE:

God wins the victory for His people, who must follow Him in faith.

+ BACKGROUND PASSAGE:

Joshua 7–11

+ SETTING:

The Lord won the battle of Jericho on behalf of His people, the Israelites. He collapsed the wall and handed the city over to Israel for its total destruction and required that all the precious metals be devoted for His use in the tabernacle. He warned that if the Israelites did not honor this command, then destruction and trouble would come upon the disobedient and the entire camp. Against the backdrop of Israel's faithful obedience at Jericho and Rahab's faithful actions toward the spies, and the blessings of God's reward, one man chose to transgress God's command. And soon, his secret sin found him out.

DAY 1

READ:

Joshua 7:1-5

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Joshua 7:1-5

NOTES

VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

"Does it make sense to pray for guidance about the future if we are not obeying in the thing that lies before us today? How many momentous events in Scripture depended on one person's seemingly small act of obedience! Rest assured: Do what God tells you to do now, and, depend upon it, you will be shown what to do next."¹

—Elisabeth Elliot (1926-2015)

No matter the area of life, it is tempting to assume our past performance is an indicator of future success. Whether at work or in school, in professional or personal circumstances, we assume that if we just keep doing what worked once, we'll experience the same results. Naturally, there's a problem with this line of thinking: it's just not true because what we don't know changes things.

Joshua and the Israelites were riding the high of their victory—or rather, God's victory—over Jericho (Josh. 6). By faith, they obeyed God's commands, marching around the city walls and blowing their horns each day. And when the walls fell, they destroyed the city. They devoted everything to destruction, as God commanded. Except they didn't.

Unbeknownst to the rest of Israel, Achan, a member of the tribe of Judah, took for himself some of what was set apart for God. And the Lord's anger burned against not only Achan but all of Israel as a result, just as God had said (Josh. 6:18-19).

Joshua didn't know this. He saw the fruit of their faithfulness in the conquest of Jericho and assumed this success would continue. But when his troops returned from attacking Ai, a small city, with news of their defeat and thirty-six dead, he and all the Israelites lost heart.

It is easy for us to see fruit, evidence of God's work in our lives and ministries, and believe we're living and acting in faith, which may be true. But because of our sin, we are also prone to being deceived by our successes. As a result, if we are not watchful, testing ourselves and our fruit to see if we are in the Spirit, then we can become complacent and find ourselves acting unfaithfully for our own glory rather than faithfully for God's.

Where are you tempted toward complacency in your faith? Ask God to reveal these places to you.

DAY 2

READ:

Joshua 7:6-15

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Joshua 7:6-12

NOTES

When Israel was defeated at Ai, Joshua and the elders lamented. Why did they cross the Jordan into this land only to die? Did they misunderstand God, or worse, had He deceived them? These questions likely seem familiar. If we're being honest, we've all asked them at one time or another. When everything seems to be going wrong, we are quick to turn on God. We've all done it, even if only for a moment. When difficulty comes, we instinctively respond with doubt and unbelief:

Where was God when...?

Why didn't God stop this?

Did God deceive me?

We all have experiences that don't make sense to us, moments far more complicated than cause-and-effect thinking allows, moments that challenge our attempts to categorize our lives. But even though life is more complicated than that, this doesn't mean there aren't moments when the truth of cause-and-effect applies. Joshua and Israel learned this with a rebuke from the Lord. He did not deceive them, and He wasn't leading them into Canaan to destroy them. Achan stole that which was set apart for God. He disobeyed God's command, and Israel was collectively experiencing the consequences.

God wants His people to pursue holiness—to be committed to living as His set-apart people in this world. And He loves us too much to allow us to settle for anything less. While we should not view every negative experience in our lives as the direct result of sins committed, we would be wise to see them as an opportunity to examine our hearts and lives. They just might be a Father's loving rebuke to His wayward child.

How has God used your circumstances to reveal a pattern of sin in your life?

DAY 3

READ:

Joshua 7:16-26

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Joshua 7:20-26

NOTES

Few of us are comfortable with the idea of God's judgment. While sometimes our discomfort has to do with our awareness that we deserve God's judgment, much of the time it's rooted in false distinctions: God is either loving or He is wrathful. He is either gracious or He executes judgment. But the story of Israel's conquest of the promised land and God's judgment of Achan reminds us that judgment is far more complicated and nuanced than we might first believe.

When we read about the consequences of Achan's sin, it's tempting to view this whole scenario as overkill. After all, Achan "only" stole a few objects (that were expressly set apart for God or for destruction). His sin was not merely theft. His sin was an act of defiance, of rebellion, against God—Achan dishonored the Lord. Achan's story, therefore, is a reminder of God's righteous judgment against rebellion. The penalty he received illustrates the gravity of sin. So if we have a problem with the punishment, then our problem actually might be that we don't understand the gravity of our sin.

But even as Achan's story reminds us of God's judgment and righteousness, it also reminds us that such demonstrations of His holiness are not typical. We often observe the opposite: Those who chase after personal pleasure often seem to be the most happy and successful, at least temporarily. But God's severe judgment here is intended to point us to the much greater eternal judgment that awaits all those who would ignore God's covenant. It would do us well, therefore, to avoid following in Achan's missteps and instead to obey God and follow Him wholeheartedly.

What are some reasons we might be tempted to lessen the gravity of sin?

DAY 4

READ:

Joshua 8:1-13

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Joshua 8:1-2

NOTES



ESSENTIAL DOCTRINE #61:

CHRIST AS RECONCILIATION

Ever since the fall of the first man and woman in the garden of Eden, God and human beings have been estranged. Sin resulted not only in an estranged relationship with God but also in enmity between God and humanity. Sin is an infinite offense against an infinite God. Thankfully, God loves His enemies and has sent Christ to be the reconciler between us and God. Through Christ's death, God provides the means whereby that broken relationship is restored and renewed (Rom. 6:23; 2 Cor. 5:18-19).

Do not be discouraged. Imagine Joshua hearing these words while preparing for battle after all that had transpired: An incredible victory at Jericho. An astounding defeat at Ai. The execution of Achan and his entire family because of his sin. How could Joshua not have been discouraged? This time was different though. When the Israelites first attacked Ai, there was no promise of God's presence because of sin in the camp. But now God's wrath against Achan's sin was satisfied; atonement had been made. So now God would be with them. There was no need to be discouraged.

Once atonement has been made for sin and accepted by God, what was done in the past stays in the past. True, there may still be temporal consequences we experience for our choices, but our eternal relationship with the Lord has been restored. We must take responsibility for our sin before God through repentance, but then we can look forward to living out His great purposes for us. That's what happened here as Joshua prepared to lead the people into battle, and that's what happens for us through Jesus. When we sin, we do not have to fear that God is against us, that He is far off or looking to punish us. That misses the point of the gospel altogether. The death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus brings permanent peace with God and the promise of His eternal presence with us.

In other words, through Jesus, God is always for us. So we do not need to be discouraged, even in our darkest moments. Instead, we can look to Him in faith. When God is not for you, there is no hope for victory in the truest sense of the word. But when He is for you, then you have all the hope you need and more.

**Do you believe that because of Jesus, God is for you?
Why or why not?**

DAY 5

READ:

Joshua 8:14-35

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Joshua 8:14-21

NOTES

The way Ai's king and army responded to the situation before them demonstrated the success of the trap and the wisdom of God's plan. When Joshua and the warriors of Israel reappeared in front of the city, ready for battle, the army of Ai hurried down toward them, confident of a second victory. Joshua and his soldiers then fled, giving the appearance of a second rout. The attackers from Ai followed after them, which left the city undefended. So Israel's army laying in ambush entered the city and set it ablaze, leaving no place for the people of Ai to retreat. The strategy worked just as the Lord had planned, and Israel won and celebrated in victory because of God's faithfulness to His people and their faithfulness to God.

The pattern of Israel's experience here is a picture of their whole history. Obedience leads to victory. Victory is followed by blessing. Blessing is taken for granted and pride and disobedience take root. That disobedience leads to defeat and judgment. That judgment is followed by repentance. Repentance bears fruit in obedience. Obedience leads to victory. Repeat as necessary.

This pattern is also the spiritual reality for many followers of Christ today. While that might seem discouraging, it's the reality of life in a fallen world. Because of our struggle with sin, we will inevitably take the victories and blessings God gives us for granted. We will disobey Him, and we will experience the consequences of our disobedience. But God doesn't leave us there. As our loving Father, He draws us back to Himself, toward repentance and obedience. And He will do it again, every time, until the day we stand before Him perfect and holy, clothed eternally in the righteousness of Christ.

Where do you see this pattern in your life? What steps will you take to live faithfully and obediently?

GROUP

NOTES

VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

"Do you not see these wars?
Do you not hear of these
disasters? Do you learn no
lesson from these things?
... If hell does not bring us
to our senses, yet let these
things. What, are these too
mere threats, are they not
facts that have already
taken place? Great is the
punishment they have
suffered, yet a greater still
shall we suffer, who are not
brought to our senses even by
their fate."²

-Chrysostom (c. 347-407)

POINT 1: Unfaithfulness leads to defeat (Josh. 7:1-5).

Achan's sin was much more than petty _____, it
was a matter of faithful _____ and a matter of
_____ and _____.



How do human beings typically evaluate the gravity of sin?

Achan's sin affected all of Israel, such that they lost a
_____, they lost _____, and they lost _____.



What are some ways believers' sins affect the church?

POINT 2: Sin leads to judgment (Josh. 7:20-26).

Achan thought he could _____ and _____ his
rebellion, but the Lord sees all, knows all, and brings
hidden sins to _____ and _____.



Why do we try to hide our sin, or think we can?

ESSENTIAL DOCTRINE #61: CHRIST AS RECONCILIATION

Ever since the fall of the first man and woman in the garden of Eden, God and human beings have been estranged. _____ resulted not only in an estranged relationship with God but also in _____ between God and humanity. Sin is an infinite offense against an infinite God. Thankfully, God loves His enemies and has sent Christ to be the reconciler between us and God. Through Christ's _____, God provides the means whereby that broken relationship is restored and renewed (Rom. 6:23; 2 Cor. 5:18-19).

POINT 3: Faithfulness leads to victory

(Josh. 8:1-2,14-21; 11:23).

Where _____ had once caused defeat and death, faithful _____ now resulted in victory because of the faithfulness of God. The Lord fulfilled His promise of giving Israel the _____ and giving them _____.

NOTES



What are some ways believers today experience victory through their faithfulness?

MY RESPONSE

Because Christ fought the battle against sin and death and won the victory on our behalf, we proclaim Him to others so that they too may find peace through Him.

- **HEAD:** How should we view our sin in light of God's wrath and judgment against Achan, his family, and against Israel?
- **HEART:** What sinful actions and attitudes will you repent of so you can obey the Lord with faith and joy?
- **HANDS:** What confessions will you make this week: seeking forgiveness for a sin against another; confessing faith in Jesus Christ for salvation; sharing your faith with others so they will repent, believe, and be saved?

VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

"[To have faith in Christ] means, of course, trying to do all that He says. There would be no sense in saying you trusted a person if you would not take his advice. Thus if you have really handed yourself over to Him, it must follow that you are trying to obey Him. But trying in a new way, a less worried way. Not doing these things in order to be saved, but because He has begun to save you already. Not hoping to get to Heaven as a reward for your actions, but inevitably wanting to act in a certain way because a first faint gleam of Heaven is already inside you."³

—C. S. Lewis (1898-1963)

REMEMBERING GOD'S FAITHFULNESS

+

SESSION IN A SENTENCE:

God's people must remember the great things He has done as they obey His commands today and look forward to the fulfillment of His promises tomorrow.

+

BACKGROUND PASSAGE:

Joshua 23

+

SETTING:

Through the direction, work, and provision of the Lord, the Israelites graduated from the phase of conquest to the phase of distributing the spoils of their new land and finally to the phase of resting from war. While God was faithful and merciful in giving them this promised land, He also is the holy One who could take it all away if they chose to be unfaithful to His covenant with them. So Joshua, in his old age, summoned all of Israel to plead with them to obey the covenant that they might honor their Lord and continue to enjoy His blessing upon them.

DAY 1

READ:

Joshua 10:1-15

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Joshua 10:14

NOTES

The stories of the Old Testament can seem so unreal to us at times: Did the Red Sea really separate to allow the Israelites to cross on dry ground? Did water really pour out of a rock? Did the sun really stand still when Joshua commanded it to?

And of course, the answer is yes. Yes, these things happened. Yes, the Red Sea did part. Yes, water poured forth from a rock. Yes, the sun truly did stand still. The truthfulness of these accounts isn't really the reason we ask the questions we do. There's another question, one behind all our other questions, one that we don't even want to admit that we need the answer to. But it's one that we find the answer to at the very end of the account of Israel's battle against the king of Jerusalem.

After Joshua called on the sun to stand still, we are told that this was a unique event in history. It was, and remains, the only time the Lord heeded the voice of a man. But God didn't listen to Joshua on account of the Israelites' faithfulness. God did so because of His own faithfulness. He was fighting for Israel. He was there with them. He was committed to their victory in the conquest of Canaan.

That's why these stories are present in the Bible. They are pictures of His faithfulness, of His absolute, unrelenting commitment to fulfill His purposes and fight for His people. But this faithfulness wasn't just for the past—the Lord is faithful right now. God was, is, and always will be faithful to His people. He is for them—He is for us. And we know this because of Jesus, whose life, death, and resurrection provided the greatest example of God's absolute and unrelenting commitment to His people. We are victorious over sin because of Jesus. We are more than conquerors in Christ. We are His people—and He will never leave nor forsake us.

In what circumstances do you need to be reminded of God's faithfulness today?

DAY 2

READ:

Joshua 12–13; 21:43–45

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Joshua 21:43–45

NOTES

The Book of Joshua, despite including harrowing tales of conquest and miraculous demonstrations of God's power and faithfulness, is filled with lists. About half the book, from chapters 12–21, is almost exclusively made of lists that detail how the promised land—Canaan—was divided between the twelve tribes of Israel: which tribe was appointed to which region, which cities were places of refuge, and so forth. For those expecting the same kind of action seen up through chapter 11, these chapters can feel like a letdown.

But from a better and right perspective, these chapters are incredibly beautiful because they are not simply lists—they are a promise fulfilled. God promised when He brought Israel out of Egypt that He would give them rest. And at the end of chapter 21, we read that this is exactly what God did. All of God's promises came to pass; not even one failed. Everything, absolutely everything, God promised was fulfilled.

That's how faithful God is. Not a single promise of His will ever fail. Not a single promise will be left unfulfilled. And that is good news for us today as we look at the world around us marked by unrest and strife, pain and suffering, sorrow and death. Just looking at the state of the world, it's tempting to despair. But God has given us a promise—a promise of eternal rest that all who are weary and burdened by sin can enjoy forever (Matt. 11:28). Eternal rest is found in the eternal presence of Jesus, in a world made new, free from sin and sorrow forevermore (Rev. 21:1–4). And while that promise has yet to be fulfilled, we know it will be someday. Jesus will return, and we will enjoy rest with Him forever. Because we have the proof of God making good on all His promises in the past, we know He will make good on this one as well.

How does being reminded of God's past faithfulness give you hope for today and tomorrow?

DAY 3

READ:

Joshua 23:1-5

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Joshua 23:1-5

NOTES



ESSENTIAL DOCTRINE #70: UNION WITH CHRIST

At the heart of our salvation is our union with Christ. The Bible describes salvation as entering into a covenant relationship with God and also describes the church (which is made up of believers) as the bride of Christ (2 Cor. 11:2; Eph. 5:23-32). Christians believe that Christ dwells in our hearts through faith (Christ in us) and that we are simultaneously dwelling in Him (Eph. 3:17; Col. 1:27; 3:1-4). This union is indissoluble; it will last for all eternity.

In virtually every epic film, there's a rousing speech given to motivate, encourage, and strengthen the heroes to face the challenges that lie ahead. Independence Day had Thomas J. Whitmore's famous "This is our Independence Day" rallying cry as he called upon the world to fend off an alien invasion. Avengers: Endgame had Captain America's time-heist pep talk. And who could forget Aragorn's call for his army to stand strong and fight at the Black Gate in The Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King.

Joshua 23 is, in many ways, Joshua's epic rallying cry. But it didn't come before a great battle. It came after many years of relative peace in the promised land. He was old, perhaps 110, and near the end of his life. The Israelites would soon be without their leader, the successor to Moses. So he reminded them of God's faithfulness to them: how the Lord had fought for them, had given them the land He promised, and how He would continue to fight for them and fulfill His promises. But why did they need this rallying cry, this metaphorical call to arms? Because Israel would soon be at a crossroads—they would have to choose between remaining obedient to the God who had been faithful to them or to abandon Him and go their own way. Joshua's rallying cry was a call to faithfulness, to trust and obey the Lord with thoughts, feelings, and actions grounded in a knowledge of who He is and what He has done.

This is what God wants for Christians today as well. It's why we need to consider God's story of redemption so we can remember how we have seen God's faithfulness in our own salvation, both in rescuing us from sin and in conforming us more and more to the image of His Son and our Savior, Jesus.

What is one area of your life where you will pursue greater obedience to God?

DAY 4

READ:

Joshua 23:6-13

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Joshua 23:11-13

NOTES

VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

"For faithful is he who has promised that 'a thousand shall be chased by one,' and that 'ten thousand shall be put to flight by two,' victory in battle being due not to numbers but to righteousness."¹

—Gregory of Nyssa (c. 335–395)

Leadership experts typically describe culture as being the result of the positive behaviors we reward and the negative behaviors we tolerate, and this is certainly true. What we experience, both positively and negatively, shapes how we interact with the world around us and with one another. This is, in part, why we need to take seriously the many calls in Scripture to watch our life and doctrine closely (see 1 Tim. 4:16). We need to pay attention to what we say we believe and to how we live in light of it. If our stated beliefs and our lives aren't relatively in sync, there could be cause for concern.

This problem isn't unique to our time, or even to the time of the early church. The issue of culture's effect on the faith of God's people has been present since the days of Joshua, and even before that. When we read Joshua's warning against intermarrying with the people of the land of Canaan, we need to recognize it for what it is—a caution against tolerating that which would lead the Israelites away from faithfully following Yahweh, the God of Israel. The surrounding peoples worshiped false gods with no life or power, gods that were not gods at all.

This problem still exists today. There are influences all around us trying to draw us away from our love for Christ. But only a few are the sort of overt influences that might come to mind quickly. Most are far more subtle: the messages we allow to wash over us in pop culture; the small thrill we get when we hear (or spread) a bit of gossip; the dopamine hit when someone likes our hot take on social media. All of these threaten to draw us away from the Lord, and our answer in response must be the same as Joshua's: Turn away! Because if we don't, what we tolerate will eventually become what we celebrate.

How will you address the influences in your life that have the potential to draw you away from faithfulness to God?

DAY 5

READ:

Joshua 23:14-16

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Joshua 23:14-16

NOTES

As children, many of us no doubt said something like this in a moment of anger: “When I grow up and have kids, I’m going to let them do whatever they want!” None of us enjoyed being disciplined by our parents. It was unpleasant. It didn’t seem fair. It was too much—even when it was too lenient. But it wasn’t until we grew up, and perhaps became parents ourselves, that we began to see the truth. Discipline is far from unloving or unkind. Discipline, when handled correctly, is an act of love, a way of saying, “I love you too much to allow you to live this way.”

When we read the Bible and are confronted by accounts of God’s judgment and His discipline of His people, we’re probably transported back to the childish mindset that shaped our view of discipline. “How could God—a God who is love—do this?” we might ask. And when we ask, we need to remind ourselves of the truth: God is so devoted to His people that He will not let them easily backslide into behavior that will hurt them and hurt their relationship with Him. He will discipline His children when they need it, not out of cruelty but out of love.

And so, when we experience discipline today, we need to view it through this lens—as an act of correction given by a faithful and loving Father. God will use testing, trials, and suffering to draw us back to Himself in repentance and faith. The good news is that His loving discipline serves to fortify our faith and renew our relationship with Him (Jas. 1:2-4). This loving act of God’s faithfulness can be counted as yet another blessing to add to our list of His faithful acts on our behalf!

How have you experienced discipline or correction from the Lord in the past? How did it draw you closer to Him?

GROUP

NOTES

VOICES from THE CHURCH

"God doesn't need your help revising Scripture; he knew exactly what he wanted to say when he put together his Word. Your job is to believe what you find in it and, with the help of the Holy Spirit, to obey it."²

—Tony Evans

POINT 1: A Call to Reflect on All That the Lord Has Accomplished (Josh. 23:1-5)

Joshua urged all Israel to remember _____ that the Lord had done for them. The _____ —not Joshua nor the Israelites—had won the promised land and given it to them.

? What are some things the Lord has done for you, particularly in the last week?

Joshua wanted Israel to remember what the Lord had done so they would _____ to _____ the Lord in the _____ as they took full possession of the promised land.

POINT 2: A Call to Recommit to Obey All That the Lord Has Commanded (Josh. 23:6-13)

Joshua connected remembering God's faithful actions with _____ God, being _____ to God, and _____ His commands.

? What are some ways believers need to take care to ensure they are loving the Lord?

Sinful associations with pagan nations would threaten to separate Israel from their _____ and thus their _____.

? How should believers navigate their relationships with others?

POINT 3: A Call to Remember All That the Lord Has Promised (Josh. 23:14-16)

_____ is a universal consequence for every sinful human being, and yet, like Joshua, we will find that the Lord has _____ been faithful to fulfill every one of His promises.

NOTES

ESSENTIAL DOCTRINE #70: UNION WITH CHRIST

At the heart of our salvation is our union with Christ. The Bible describes salvation as entering into a _____ relationship with God and also describes the church (which is made up of believers) as the bride of Christ (2 Cor. 11:2; Eph. 5:23-32). Christians believe that Christ dwells in our hearts through _____ (Christ in us) and that we are simultaneously dwelling in Him (Eph. 3:17; Col. 1:27; 3:1-4). This union is indissoluble; it will last for all _____.



Why is the believer's promise of sure salvation in Christ not a license to sin?

MY RESPONSE

Because we rest in the completed work of Jesus for our salvation and relationship with God, we seek to obey God out of love and gratitude while warning others to turn from their sin and turn to Christ alone for their salvation.

- **HEAD:** What are some ways believers can reflect the faithfulness of God?
- **HEART:** How will you reevaluate your present circumstances in light of God's faithfulness?
- **HANDS:** What are some specific ways you will obey the Lord's commands this week?

VOICES from THE CHURCH

"The Bible explains that the Lord is good and the Lord never betrays his own fundamental character of love. His actions are out of love, including his discipline of his people (Ps. 145:9; Heb. 12:5-6; 1 Pet. 2:3). As for judgment against the wicked, if the Lord does not respond to evil by appropriate measures of retribution, then he is not acting justly. Justice is as essential to the character of the Lord as is his love. If there is no justice, then love is empty sentimentality."³

—Kenneth Mathews

RENEWED BY GOD'S POWER

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SESSION IN A SENTENCE:

God's miraculous signs and wonders, of which the resurrection of Jesus is the greatest, demonstrate His glory and draw people to Himself through Christ.

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BACKGROUND PASSAGES:

Joshua 24; Mark 16; Luke 7

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SETTING:

At the conclusion of the Book of Joshua, all of Israel is gathered together by Joshua to make an important decision: Will they serve the Lord alone or not? Joshua makes his final case for choosing the Lord, and part of his evidence for this case is the miracles the Lord had performed on their behalf in the exodus, in the wilderness, and in the conquest. God's miracles serve the purposes of drawing people to Himself, of revealing His glory and bringing Him glory, and of vindicating His words. The greatest miracle of all is the resurrection of Jesus Christ, securing for us the promise of eternal life.

DAY 1

READ:

Joshua 24:1-13

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Joshua 24:1-13

NOTES

One of the most repeated commands in Scripture is Remember. In both the Old and New Testaments, God's people are called dozens of times to remember God's work in the past—to remember His goodness, His grace, and His mercy toward them. Sometimes this command is explicit, but often it is indirect, as when Joshua once again recounted the story of God's faithfulness to His people:

- how He led Abraham to the land of Canaan and promised it to him;
- how He gave Abraham an heir in Isaac;
- how He sent Moses and Aaron to deliver the Israelites from captivity in Egypt; and
- how He ultimately led the Israelites to victory over the people of Canaan.

Why did Israel need this reminder of their history, including the events they had just experienced—and why do we need these reminders as well? Because the Israelites were prone to forget. And when they forgot, what happened? They began to question God's goodness. They doubted His character. They ultimately denied Him and went their own way, worshiping and serving false gods instead of the One who had given them everything.

And we are no better. Our memories also are far too short when it comes to God's acts of faithfulness, including His miraculous and ordinary work on our behalf. That's why we need both the constant reminders from Scripture of all His deeds and also to remember how we have seen God act in our own lives: how He has shown us His goodness and faithfulness time and time again; how we have seen our lives transformed because of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection.

We need to remember so that we don't forget. Because when we forget, we lose.

What is one way you have seen God's faithfulness in your life?

DAY 2

READ:

Joshua 24:14-33

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Joshua 24:14-15

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.

Why do people worship the Lord? That might seem like a strange question, all things considered. But it's actually an important one we need to consider, not only for ourselves but also for the people in our communities who don't know Jesus.

When Joshua called the Israelites together one final time, He challenged them to make a decision—to worship the Lord or to worship the false gods of their ancestors and the people of Canaan. Make your choice, he said. But if you're going to worship the Lord, then actually worship Him. Not Him and some other gods—worship Him alone! When the people declared their commitment to worshiping the Lord, they based their commitment on what He had done. He had brought them out of Egypt and performed great signs and miracles before their eyes. He protected them along the journey to the promised land. He drove out the people who lived in Canaan. He was their God because of all He had done.

Reading this passage in the moment, you can't help but feel stirred by it. After all the grumbling, all the faithless acts, they finally seemed to get it. And in a sense, that's right. The miraculous works of God, the signs and wonders He performed in their presence, were drawing them to Him. But reading in hindsight, we know that their commitment wouldn't last. Their hearts were fickle, and Joshua's prediction that they wouldn't worship God was right.

This is still true today. Miraculous demonstrations of God's power create engagement and excitement; they pique our curiosity. But miracles can't be the foundation of lasting worship. We need something else, a greater, internal miracle, the greatest miracle of all—a new heart given by faith in Jesus alone. Only the gospel of Jesus, by which we receive this new heart, allows us to worship God the way He intends—in sincerity and truth (Josh. 24:14).

What are some ways your life reflects a sincere worship of Jesus?

DAY 3

READ:

Matthew 8

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Matthew 8:28-34

NOTES

“If we had been there ...”

Whenever we read biblical accounts of miracles like the ones in Matthew’s Gospel, these five words inevitably come to mind. We can’t help it. We prefer to believe that unlike the people of the region of the Gadarenes, we wouldn’t have asked—no, begged—Jesus to leave after He freed the demon-possessed men from their bondage. If we had been there, we would have recognized the truth in the terrified words of the demons that here was the Son of God in the flesh. If we had been there, we would have dropped to our knees and worshiped Him as God in the moment.

Except we probably wouldn’t have.

The people of the region, the people who begged Jesus to leave because of the power they saw at work in Him, were far more like the Israelites of Joshua’s day (Josh. 24:19) than perhaps they would have thought. Jesus’ demonstration of His power confronts us with His identity—He is the Son of God. He is God in the flesh, dwelling among us, the One whom even the demons fear! And the people’s instinct was to drive Him away—to depart from His presence because His power and holiness was too much for them. And by nature, it is too much for us as well. We have a tendency to follow in our predecessors’ footsteps, even as we look back and down upon them. We are far more like them than we want to admit. Give us our smaller “gods,” the ones that are far safer even if they are not good, or even real. But Jesus is too good for that as well. By choosing to dwell among us, He rejects our attempts to push Him away. He helps us to see that yes, we would have done just what our predecessors did, and perhaps even more. But He draws us to Himself so that we see His holiness—far from being a source of fear—is the source of our hope.

In what areas of your life do you try to send Jesus away? What would welcoming His holy presence accomplish?

DAY 4

READ:

Luke 7:1-17

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Luke 7:11-17

NOTES

There are few words that are more beautiful than these: “He had compassion on her.” The “He” in this case being Jesus. The “her” being a widow whose son had just died. And Jesus did something incredible when He saw her mourning as her son’s body was carried out of the town. He had compassion on her—and He gave her son life again. The most compassionate act Jesus could take was to do the impossible: to raise the dead.

Jesus did what only God can do. All who saw this incredible act responded in the only way that made sense: they worshiped the Lord. They glorified God, giving thanks to Him for the undeniable power they saw at work in Jesus. They were amazed by His power and spread the word about this Man who had power like the prophets of old, like Elijah and Elisha, who healed the sick and raised the dead (see 1 Kings 17:17-24; 2 Kings 4:18-37). And they were right to be amazed. We all should be amazed at the power of Jesus in every way it is demonstrated. He is the Lord—the One who lived and died and lived again so that we can live forevermore with Him.

But we should be equally amazed by Jesus’ compassion. We cannot demonstrate the same power that He did because we are not God. But we can show compassion as He did. We can avoid turning away from the pain and suffering around us and instead enter into it. And in doing so, we can take advantage of opportunities for God to be glorified as we show compassion and kindness to those who suffer.

How will you show compassion to someone today?

DAY 5

READ:

Mark 16:1-8

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Mark 16:1-8

NOTES

VOICES from THE CHURCH

"It's no overstatement that if Jesus didn't rise from the grave then there would be no Christianity. But again and again the apostles staked their lives on this crazy fact: their friend had been tortured, murdered, and buried, and then one day he showed up again in the flesh, complete with the scars to prove it."¹

-Andrew Peterson

What is the greatest of all God's miracles? There are many we could point to, of course: the parting of the Red Sea; Jesus' feeding a great multitude with a boy's meager meal; God's bringing the universe into being out of nothing. But all of these—even the miracle of creation out of nothing—pale in comparison to one: the resurrection of Jesus from the dead.

Jesus' resurrection has been the subject of debate since the day He came back from the dead. Did it really happen? Did He really even die in the first place? Did His disciples make up the whole thing? But there's a more important question that all people need to ask about the resurrection, this great miracle: If the resurrection is true, what are we going to do about it? The thing about the resurrection is that if it is true—and it is—it changes everything. Literally.

The resurrection means there really is a God and that we live in a very supernatural world. It means that the very real God really did create everything and sent His Son into the world to dwell among us as one of us (John 1:14). It means all of His miracles and all of His teachings and all of His promises are true. The resurrection vindicates every word Jesus ever spoke about Himself and every countercultural message He ever taught. The resurrection is God's greatest miracle, intended from the beginning to reveal the truth about Jesus to us.

And because it's true, we need to decide what we're going to do with it. Will we repent and believe, will we turn away from our sins and the pursuit of our own personal glory and submit our lives to Jesus? Or will we continue to go our own way and run headlong into disaster? The choice is yours and mine.

Do you believe the resurrection of Jesus is true? If so, what difference will this belief make in your life today?

GROUP

NOTES

VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

"It costs something to be a true Christian. Let that never be forgotten. To be a mere nominal Christian, and go to church, is cheap and easy work. But to hear Christ's voice, follow Christ, believe in Christ, and confess Christ, requires much self-denial. It will cost us our sins, and our self-righteousness, and our ease, and our worldliness. All—all must be given up. We must fight an enemy who comes against us with twenty thousand followers. We must build a tower in troublous times. Our Lord Jesus Christ would have us thoroughly understand this. He bids us 'count the cost.'"²

—J. C. Ryle (1816-1900)

POINT 1: God's miracles draw people to Himself (Josh. 24:14-18).

_____ and _____ the Lord solely and wholeheartedly is the only proper response to God's saving works.

ESSENTIAL DOCTRINE #33: MIRACLES

A miracle is an event in which God makes an _____ 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 _____ and _____ involved in this world, we believe He can and does perform miracles.



What are some ways the Lord has drawn you to Himself?

POINT 2: God's miracles bring Him glory (Luke 7:11-17).

Jesus, the divine Son of God in the flesh, displayed the miraculous power of God as the Giver of life by raising the widow's son from the dead. Jesus is the _____ and the _____.



What is the connection between God's miracles and God's compassion for human beings?

Jesus' miracle at Nain prompted the people to _____ God and give Him glory and to _____ others about what they had seen.



Why do you think the people were compelled to share the report of this miracle with others?

NOTES

POINT 3: God's miracles vindicate His words (Mark 16:1-8).

The miracle of Jesus' resurrection vindicated His prophecies of rising on the _____ day and confirms the truth of everything He said, especially about our _____ and _____ life in Him.



What are some truths that should guide our lives because of Jesus' resurrection?

Because Jesus rose from the dead, we should want to tell the _____ about the salvation Jesus won for us through His _____ and _____ .

MY RESPONSE

Because of the number of God's miracles recorded in Scripture, we believe that He can and does perform miracles today, always living with hope that nothing is beyond His power.

- **HEAD:** How should believers reconcile the realm of science and the truth that God performs miracles in the world?
- **HEART:** How will you allow the miracle of the resurrection to change your perspective on life?
- **HANDS:** Who is someone you will be praying to experience God's supernatural intervention resulting in repentance, faith, and salvation?

VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

"He died, but he vanquished death; in himself he put an end to what we feared; he took it upon himself and he vanquished it ... O life, O death of death! Be of good heart; it will die in us, also. What has taken place in our head will take place in his members; death will die in us also. But when? At the end of the world, at the resurrection of the dead in which we believe and concerning which we do not doubt."³

—Augustine (354-430)

UNIT 9

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THERE IS

NO FEAR OF GOD

BEFORE

THEIR EYES

“The Lord Raised Up a Judge”

by Matt Capps

As the people of God, we are faced with the daily choice between following God or following the spirit of our age. Too often we find that the spirit of the age is a powerful force like that of an undertow pulling unwitting victims out to sea. As a parent of small children, I am reminded of this often. There are times after my children make bad decisions that I ask them, “Why did you get in trouble?” I often hear this answer: “Well, everyone else was doing it, and I just followed along.” In response, I often remind my children, “Remember what I have taught you.” The reason all parents teach their children is for them to learn to discern right from wrong. The reason parents remind their children of their previous instruction and discipline their children for their rebellion is to make it clear that there are blessings in obedience and consequences to disobedience.

It is important to remember when reading the Old Testament that all instruction and warning from God flows from a heart of love, like a parent to a child. God warns

His people that spiritual decline—and eventually death—is inevitable if they do not remember God’s commands. We also need these reminders. It’s been said before, “People do not drift toward holiness.”¹ This was the heart of the message for ancient Israel in the time of the judges, a time when people did what was right in their own eyes (Judg. 21:25). Throughout the Book of Judges, we are introduced to the men and women God raised up in the midst of Israel for the task of rescuing and correcting His people. How did Israel get to this place?

A FAILURE OF TRUST

Decades earlier, Israel had crossed over the Red Sea on dry ground. After centuries of slavery in Egypt, they finally had been redeemed under the leadership of Moses and by the overwhelming power of the Lord. Later, after Moses’ death, Joshua became their leader, and they crossed the Jordan River on dry ground, yet another testament to God’s awesome power. The Israelites had entered the territory of the

God gives us a Judge and Savior who does what we cannot do for ourselves.

Canaanites, ancient enemies of God and His people. But at the same time, they had crossed over into their promised land, the inheritance the Lord had promised to give to the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

So the Israelites set out to drive out their enemies, trusting again in the power of God, who had declared, “I will be with you.” The Lord promised to give Israel the land, and He did. But the first chapter of Judges indicates the conquest was not complete; pockets of resistance remained. And then Joshua died, but no new leader had been appointed to take his place.

God’s people had failed to drive out all the inhabitants of their land, and those who remained became a source of corruption. Israel’s command from God to drive out the wicked Canaanites was the call of God for them to act as an agent of justice—God’s justice. Instead, Israel often intermingled and even intermarried with the Canaanites, leading to their foreign gods becoming Israel’s gods. Israel had failed to trust the promises of God and thus disobeyed the commands of God.

The great lesson we learn from Israel’s digression is that sin is a serious matter. We see this depicted even more clearly in the downward spiral that is the Book of Judges. After Joshua’s generation, another generation rose up who did not know the Lord or the works He had done for Israel. In forgetting God’s commands and promises, this newer generation began to slip away from the faith. What began as toleration eventually became apostasy.

It was the judgment of God that allowed Israel to face trials from their enemies. At the same time, it was God who raised up judges to save Israel from complete and total judgment. What a beautiful picture—even while Israel was suffering under the punishment for their unfaithfulness, God was still moved by love to rescue them.

What we see in the Book of Judges is that even as the people spiraled downward and failed to remember God’s word, God remained faithful to His word. God’s faithfulness is seen even in His warnings. After all, every warning before the final judgment is an act of mercy.

FAILURE POINTING THE WAY FORWARD

One of the things we will quickly see about the Book of Judges is a predictable cycle or progression. This magnifies the patience and grace of God! Israel's pattern goes as follows: First, Israel does evil in the eyes of God by abandoning Him and serving idols. Second, Israel's actions provoke God's anger, and God sends a foreign enemy to oppress Israel. Then Israel cries out to God for deliverance. As always, God raises up a deliverer to save Israel from their enemies. For a time, Israel and the land experience rest and peace. It's not long, however, before the cycle repeats! What is predictable in Judges is that Israel will eventually be unfaithful to God's word. At the same time, it is also predictable that God will be faithful to His word. God raises up judge after judge to call the people to repentance to save them from their ways. But with every judge, the situation seems to get worse and worse. The judges come, they deliver, but cannot bring about the salvation and blessing that Israel needs.

We are not much different than Israel, are we? We haven't completely obeyed, always remembered, or perfectly

worshiped. We too have patterns of obedience and disobedience. Thankfully, in the New Testament, we are introduced to the true and faithful Judge, Jesus Christ, the One who can end the deadly cycle of rebellion and captivity. But Jesus is not only our Judge, He is also our Savior. Jesus took on the judgment that we deserve for our sin. Christ did this not so we would receive partial relief like Israel under the judges but so we would receive, by grace through faith, a permanent and eternal solution.

God gives us a Judge and Savior who does what we cannot do for ourselves. God gives us a Judge and Savior who achieved what Israel's judges could not. Like Israel, we are great sinners, but Christ is the true and faithful Judge and our even greater Savior.



Every warning before the final judgment
is an act of mercy.

FOLLOWING THEIR OWN GODS

+ SESSION IN A SENTENCE:

Patterns of sin can develop a firm hold on people, but even though sin brings condemnation, God is gracious to provide deliverance.

+ BACKGROUND PASSAGE:

Judges 1–12

+ SETTING:

The people of Israel were now well established in the promised land. With the Lord on their side and fighting for them, the Israelites conquered and put to flight the pagan peoples of the land. Furthermore, the land had been allotted to the tribes so that they could settle down and make their homes. For all intents and purposes, the Lord had fulfilled all of His promises, but the Israelites began to fail in theirs. After Joshua and that generation died, a new generation rose up who had not been taught about the Lord and what He had done for them. The result: They did what was evil in the Lord's sight, again and again.

DAY 1

READ:

Judges 1–2

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Judges 2:11-19

NOTES

The movie *Edge of Tomorrow* tells a fictional story of Major William Cage, a military officer stuck in a time loop in which he dies fighting aliens only to reawaken on the same day. Day after day, Major Cage wakes up, fights invading aliens, and dies in battle. His life is stuck on repeat. Eventually, Cage partners with other soldiers, defeats the invading aliens, and breaks the time loop.

Like Major William Cage, the Israelites in the Book of Judges find themselves stuck in a “time loop” of sorts:

- The people would sin and abandon God.
- God would then use the surrounding nations to punish Israel for their idolatry.
- Next, the Israelites would groan and cry out to God for deliverance.
- Finally, God would raise up judges to rescue the people and ensure a time of peace. But the people would repeat this same cycle by abandoning God after the judge died and chasing after the idols of the surrounding peoples.

The cycle of sin that plagues humanity was in full force and on full display in Judges.

Many Christians can relate to Major William Cage and Israel. Each day, the same sins surface in their lives. They battle these sins—pride, lust, anger, impatience, and a host of other sins—only to find themselves defeated. Then they wake up the next day and begin the battle again. Their spiritual life is stuck in an endless “time loop.” Maybe you can relate and some indwelling sin repeatedly trips you up. Thankfully, God has given us everything we need for life and godliness (2 Pet. 1:3). God’s Word, His Spirit, His church, and His grace enable us to break the cycle of sin in our lives.

**What patterns of sin are present in your life right now?
What steps can you take to break the cycle?**

DAY 2

READ:

Judges 2

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Judges 2:8-10

NOTES

VOICES from THE CHURCH

"The greatest danger, because it is such a subtle temptation which enables us to continue as church members and feel that nothing is wrong, is not that we become atheists, but that we ask God to co-exist with idols in our hearts."³

-Tim Keller

According to the A.D.A.M. Medical Encyclopedia, memory loss—also known as amnesia—is “unusual forgetfulness,” such that a person “may not be able to remember new events, recall one or more memories of the past, or both.”¹ Sometimes people struggle to remember events in the distant past. Distance and age have a tendency to make our minds fuzzy about details. Other times people cannot remember events in the recent past, and this would seem to be the more concerning of the two.

The Israelites experienced “memory loss” in the Book of Judges. After Joshua and the generation that conquered the promised land died, the next generation did not know God or His works. They forgot about His gracious deliverance from slavery in Egypt. They forgot about His gracious provision in the wilderness. They forgot about His gracious gift of the land of Canaan. The people of Israel forgot God, and so they abandoned Him. They worshiped idols instead. In this, Israel shows us the danger of forgetting.

If Christians aren’t careful, they can forget about God. They can forget about His works in the past and His promises for the future. Both forms of forgetfulness are dangerous. When we forget about God’s works in the past, we are tempted to abandon Him and to pursue idols. When we forget about His promises for the future, we lose sight of what’s important and become “eternity amnesiacs” who live for what is temporary and seek for satisfaction where it cannot be found.² Let’s remember God and avoid spiritual amnesia.

As you reflect on God’s actions in your life, how can you use those memories to fuel your love for and devotion to God today?

DAY 3

READ:

Judges 2:1-23

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Judges 2:11-15

NOTES

Marvel's *The Incredible Hulk* franchise features a giant green rage monster. When the renowned physicist Bruce Banner's gamma radiation experiment fails, Banner is transformed into his alter ego, the Hulk. Any time Banner's heart rate rises or he finds himself in danger, he transforms into the Hulk and begins to destroy everything in sight. One emotion in particular seems to trigger Banner. When he becomes angry, Banner transforms into the Hulk and becomes incredibly strong, which is why one of Banner's famous catchphrases is "You wouldn't like me when I'm angry."

In Judges 2:11-15, God becomes angry with His people. The temptation is to read this passage and envision God like the Hulk, saying, "You wouldn't like me when I'm angry." But God's anger is not an unbridled rage that turns Him into a monster like the Hulk. God's anger is grounded in His holiness and His love. Because God is holy, He cannot allow sin to go unpunished. Because God is loving, His anger is kindled when His people disobey. When Israel abandoned God and worshiped idols, God's righteous anger was kindled, and He worked against His people instead of acting on their behalf.

Generally, Christians are less comfortable discussing God's anger than they are God's love, but Scripture teaches about God's anger toward sin. His wrath is being stored up until the day of wrath when God will execute His righteous judgment (Rom. 2:5). Thankfully, Christ is the propitiation—the wrath-bearing sacrifice—for our sins (1 John 2:2; 4:10). Jesus' death on the cross made reconciliation with God possible. Through Christ, believers move from being children under wrath (Eph. 2:3) to being adopted into God's family and made members of God's household (Eph. 1:5; 2:19). The knowledge of God's anger toward sin and Christ's sacrifice to rescue us from God's righteous judgment should motivate us to love God and run from sin.

Why should we reflect on God's anger toward our sin and our salvation from His judgment?

DAY 4

READ:

Judges 3

FOCAL PASSAGES:

Judges 3:7-8,12-14

NOTES



ESSENTIAL DOCTRINE #98: NATURE OF HELL

For those who are not found in Christ at the time of their death, the Scriptures say that God's condemnation remains upon them (John 3:36) and that they will be judged according to their deeds done on earth (Heb. 9:27). The punishment that awaits unbelievers in hell is an eternal, never-ending suffering that comes from sins committed against an infinite God (Matt. 25:41,46). In hell, sinners are forever separated from God.

God communicated the consequences of sin at the beginning of creation. He told Adam—and by extension, Eve—that if they ate from the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, then they would die (Gen. 2:17). In the very next chapter, Adam and Eve, along with creation itself, experienced the devastating consequences of sin. This was not an isolated incident. The rest of the Old Testament bears witness to the fact that sin leads to pain and suffering and death and a host of negative consequences:

- Moses struck the rock instead of speaking to it as God had said and was punished with not being able to enter the promised land (Num. 20:1-13);
- Saul kept the best of the flocks from a victorious battle instead of killing them as God had said, and he lost his rule over the kingdom (1 Sam. 15);
- David committed adultery, and the child born to him died (2 Sam. 11-12); and
- Gehazi, the prophet Elisha's assistant, lied and subsequently became a leper to his death (2 Kings 5:15-27).

Those who sin and rebel against God must face the consequences of their sin. For the Israelites in Judges, God used the pagans who remained in the land to punish His people. God was active in the process as He handed them over, sold them, was against them, and brought disaster on them (Judg. 2:14-15; 3:7-8,12-14).

The lesson is simple but important: Sin does not pay. When we disobey God, the fallout is always bad. Sin may provide temporary pleasure, but sooner or later the effects of sin will take their toll (cf. Heb. 12:25). Yet we are not without hope. If we confess our sin, God is faithful and just to forgive us and cleanse us (1 John 1:9). Let's remind ourselves of the consequences of sin, earnestly pursue holiness, and quickly confess our sins.

What are some practical ways you can remind yourself of sin's consequences in order to pursue godliness?

DAY 5

READ:

Judges 4–5

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Judges 4:1-3

NOTES

In July 1965, The Beatles released their single “Help!” The song was a hit in both the United States and the United Kingdom, holding the top spot in both countries for three weeks. The simple lyrics written by duo John Lennon and Paul McCartney expressed a common cry for help with which listeners resonated. We all struggle to some degree with the vulnerability required in asking for help, but we all need help nonetheless.

In the Book of Judges, the Israelites regularly needed help because their sin had incited God’s anger and led to His judgment (Judg. 2:14-15). Therefore, the other nations oppressed them so that they suffered greatly and groaned under the weight of God’s discipline (2:15,18). Furthermore, the Israelites were unable to deliver themselves from their enemies. They needed divine help, so they cried out to the Lord (4:3), and God graciously raised up human judges as His instruments to deliver them.

Christians need to be reminded regularly of their inability to save themselves, to forgive their own sins, or to clean up their own messes. We are not the solution—we are part of the problem. So we need outside help. The good news of the gospel is God intervened in the person and work of Jesus Christ. Through faith in Christ, our sins are forgiven. Through faith in Christ, we receive the Spirit of God and are enabled to obey the commands of Scripture. Through faith in Christ, Christians receive the help we so desperately need!

In what areas of your life will you ask for God’s help today? Do so now.

GROUP

NOTES

VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

"As God is the fountain of all righteousness, he must necessarily be the enemy and judge of man so long as he is a sinner."⁴

-John Calvin (1509-1564)

POINT 1: God's people are quick to abandon Him (Judg. 2:8-13).

It seems the Israelites failed in their _____ to pass on to the next generation the _____ of who God is and what He had done for them.

? What are some ways we can pass on to others the truth of who God is and what He has done for us?

When God's people _____ about God, they quickly _____ Him and worship other gods.

? What are some idols we are tempted to worship in place of God?

POINT 2: God's people face consequences for their sins (Judg. 2:14-15).

God's severe punishment of the Israelites for their rebellion and idolatry was in keeping with His _____ promises and for the people's _____.

? What are some of the consequences of sin?

ESSENTIAL DOCTRINE #98: NATURE OF HELL

For those who are not found in _____ at the time of their death, the Scriptures say that God's condemnation remains upon them (John 3:36) and that they will be judged according to their _____ done on earth (Heb. 9:27). The punishment that awaits _____ in hell is an eternal, never-ending suffering that comes from sins committed against an infinite God (Matt. 25:41,46). In hell, sinners are forever _____ from God.

POINT 3: God's people are saved through a rescuer He provides (Judg. 2:16-19).

God raised up judges to rescue His people, but the primary problem plaguing the Israelites was not one of _____ oppressors but of _____ idolatry.

God rescued His people because of His faithfulness and _____, but the people continually returned to their idolatry. The Book of Judges reveals the fleeting nature of human deliverance and the ultimate need for a deliverance of the _____, which we find in _____.



What are some ways Christians can reflect God's love and compassion for sinners?

MY RESPONSE

Because we have been forgiven of our rebellion through Christ, we identify and resist the prevailing idolatries in our society so that we may live as a peculiar people, supporting our proclamation of the gospel.

- **HEAD:** What are some ways you can remind yourself of the foolishness of sin and idolatry?
- **HEART:** What sins do you need to confess so God's compassion—rather than His anger—is kindled?
- **HANDS:** How will you live “distinctly” this week? Who will you tell about Jesus?

NOTES

VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

“For God is not gracious and merciful to sinners to the end that they might not keep his Law, nor that they should remain as they were before they received grace and mercy; but he condones and forgives both sin and death for the sake of Christ, who has fulfilled the whole Law in order thereby to make the heart sweet and through the Holy Spirit to kindle and move the heart to begin again to love from day to day more and more.”⁵

—Martin Luther (1483-1546)

FOLLOWING HIS OWN PASSIONS

+ **SESSION IN A SENTENCE:**

God is able to bring salvation to His people, even through the weaknesses of His chosen deliverer.

+ **BACKGROUND PASSAGE:**

Judges 13–16

+ **SETTING:**

During the time of the judges, the Israelites repeatedly sinned and faced God's judgment. In the midst of their suffering, they cried out for help, and God raised up judges to deliver them: Othniel, Ehud, Deborah and Barak, Gideon, Jephthah, and Samson, to name a few. God empowered these people to deliver Israel from their enemies. Yet these judges were flawed, just like the people they were sent to rescue. Gideon was afraid. Jephthah made a foolish vow. And Samson was much like the Philistines he was raised up to defeat. The judges were flawed "heroes," but God, the true Hero, used them despite their weaknesses.

DAY 1

READ:

Judges 13

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Judges 13:1-5

NOTES

In *The Phantom Menace* (the first *Star Wars* prequel), the Jedi knight Qui-Gon Jinn discovers a young boy on the planet Tatooine named Anakin Skywalker. Anakin possesses extraordinary strength in the force, and Qui-Gon believes he is “the Chosen One” who will bring balance to the Force. According to Anakin’s mother, his birth was miraculous, which strengthens Qui-Gon Jinn’s belief that Anakin is the Chosen One. Yet Anakin’s miraculous beginning leads to a tragic ending, as he becomes the infamous Darth Vader, a dark Sith lord committed to eradicating the Jedi Order.

Judges 13:1-5 recounts the beginning of the Samson narrative. Samson’s mother was unable to conceive and had no children, but God opened her womb and allowed her to have a son. Her son was to be a Nazirite, meaning he would be devoted to the Lord and not allowed to drink wine, touch dead bodies, or cut his hair. The story of Samson, which begins with a miraculous birth and a promise of salvation, however, ends in tragedy as Samson is blinded, enslaved, and killed in a final attack against the Philistines.

In the New Testament, we find another prominent miraculous birth. A young virgin named Mary conceives and gives birth to Jesus, the true Chosen One. Like Samson, Jesus too dies tragically. Although innocent, He is crucified for the sins of the world. But unlike Samson, He did not stay dead. Jesus rose from the grave in victory, fulfilling many of the promises of salvation made in the Old Testament and securing the others. Jesus died and rose again to save sinners, and all who repent of their sin and trust in Him alone for salvation receive forgiveness of sins and eternal life.

What are some ways you will express your gratitude for Jesus’ miraculous birth, sacrificial death, and victorious resurrection?

DAY 2

READ:

Judges 14–15

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Judges 14:1–4

NOTES

One of the most famous plays of all time is *Romeo and Juliet*, written by William Shakespeare. The drama focuses on Romeo Montague and Juliet Capulet, the two star-crossed lovers about whom the play is written. Sadly, the moving romance of this fateful play ends in tragedy.

Samson's pursuit of a young Philistine woman from Timnah was also tragic. Samson asked his parents to get him the young Philistine woman as his wife. His parents tried to persuade him to marry an Israelite, but Samson refused to listen to them. He pursued the young lady and threw a customary feast. At that time, Samson posed a riddle that thirty Philistine men were unable to solve. The Philistines then pressured Samson's wife to give them the answer to the riddle, which she did. Samson lost the wager he had made with the men, was forced to pay, and stormed off in a rage. Consequently, Samson's wife was given to one of the Philistine men. When Samson discovered this, he was angry and burned the grain, vineyards, and olive groves of the Philistines to the ground. To retaliate, the Philistines burned Samson's wife and her father to death. It's truly a tragic story with more to follow.

Samson made numerous poor choices that furthered this tragedy. But at the same time, God was working behind the scenes, even using Samson's self-absorbed desires to accomplish His will for the salvation of His people.

The tragedies of life are never easy to deal with, perhaps especially when they are the direct result of our sinful choices. But while difficult times can wreck us, we ought never to lose hope because our God is in the business of redeeming people and circumstances for His glory and our good. We should not become complacent in our sin, presuming upon God to clean up our messes, but neither should we write ourselves off from usefulness to God because of our failures.

What are some ways God has used you in spite of your flaws?

DAY 3

READ:

Judges 14:5-9

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Judges 14:5-9

NOTES

VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

"All men seek happiness. This is without exception. Whatever different means they employ, they all tend to this end. The cause of some going to war, and of others avoiding it, is the same desire in both, attended with different views. The will never takes the least step but to this object. This is the motive of every action of every man, even of those who hang themselves."¹

—Blaise Pascal (1623-1662)

At the beginning of Disney's original animated movie *Aladdin*, a disguised Jafar sends Aladdin into the Cave of Wonders to retrieve a magic lamp. Aladdin is given one simple instruction: Don't touch the treasure! While Aladdin follows this command, his pet monkey, Abu, does not. As a result, the cave entrance collapses, and Aladdin and Abu are trapped inside. The temptation to touch the magnificent treasure was just too much for Abu to resist.

Like Abu, Samson was unable to resist touching something he shouldn't have touched. Samson was a Nazirite, which meant, among other things, that he was not allowed to touch dead bodies so he would remain pure and holy to the Lord (cf. Num. 6:6). But Samson was a man driven by his appetites. When he found honey inside the corpse of a lion he had killed, he could not resist. He scooped the honey out of the lion and ate it, giving some to his parents as well. This meant that Samson and his parents were defiled and should have offered sacrifices to God, but Samson did not mention one word to his parents about the unclean origin of the honey. Samson was an undisciplined man who was unable to obey God's command and resist his sinful desires.

Christians are tempted to disobey God's commands and give in to their sinful desires as well. In the moment, the pleasure may seem worth it, but there are always spiritual consequences. For Samson, it was defilement. For us, we experience guilt, shame, and maybe a lack of assurance of our salvation, not to mention the numerous natural consequences that often come with our sin. We need to remember that God's commands are not only right, they are good and for our good (see Deut. 6:24)!

In what ways are you being tempted to disobey God's commands and yield to sinful passions? How will you fight these temptations?

DAY 4

READ:

Judges 16:1-21

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Judges 16:19-21

NOTES



ESSENTIAL DOCTRINE #43: ENSLAVED TO SIN

Because of the fall of Adam and Eve in the garden of Eden, all of humanity has inherited a sin nature that inclines them toward sin and rebellion. Human beings are enslaved to sin (Rom. 6:17), continually living with the propensity to transgress God's commandments whenever possible. It isn't until one experiences salvation through the work of Christ that he or she is able to overcome sin's enslavement through the power of the Holy Spirit (Rom. 8:2).

The Enron scandal is one of the most public scandals of the last several decades. The Houston-based energy company engaged in questionable business practices and financial slight-of-hand that resulted in the company declaring bankruptcy. The company's auditor, Arthur Anderson LLP, was also dissolved. Many of the executives at Enron were convicted of various crimes and spent time in prison for their roles in the scandal.² While their unethical practices provided temporary financial gain, the executives of Enron did not benefit from their business practices in the long run.

Samson lived a life of pleasure, giving in to his passions whenever they arose. He married a Philistine woman even though God had forbidden His people from intermarrying with idolaters. He took honey from inside a lion's carcass even though he was a Nazirite and was supposed to avoid dead bodies. He slept with a prostitute. And he shared the secret of his strength with Delilah, who had his head shaved. In the end, his life of pleasure did not pay off. When his hair was cut, the Spirit of the Lord left Samson, as did his strength. The Philistines then captured Samson, gouged out his eyes, enslaved him, and mocked him. As old preachers used to say, "Sin will blind you, bind you, and grind you."

Christians should pay close attention to Samson's story. His life reminds us of the devastating consequences of sin. When we yield to our sinful passions, we may receive satisfaction in the moment, but in the long run, we will always experience pain and suffering. There is a better way: train yourself for godliness (1 Tim. 4:7), resist sinful desires (Jas. 1:14-15; 4:7), and pursue Christlikeness daily (Luke 9:23).

What are some of the consequences you have suffered on account of your sinful choices?

DAY 5

READ:

Judges 16:16-31

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Judges 16:26-30

NOTES

In the 2018 College Football Playoff National Championship game, the Alabama Crimson Tide played the Georgia Bulldogs, facing off in one of the most memorable championship games in recent years. Entering the third quarter, Georgia led Alabama 13-0. In the second half, Alabama eventually tied the game and sent it into overtime, when freshman Tua Tagovailoa connected with future Heisman trophy winner DeVonta Smith for the winning touchdown. Although they trailed much of the game, the Alabama Crimson Tide came from behind to achieve a championship victory.

Although Samson's final victory may not be considered a comeback, it was certainly a reversal. His sin had resulted in his humiliation, as he was paraded in front of and mocked by the Philistines. At his lowest point, Samson asked God for a second chance. He asked God for strength to avenge himself. Then Samson pushed over the pillars of the temple of Dagon (the Philistine god) and collapsed the building, which resulted in his death and the deaths of thousands of his enemies. The narrator of Judges noted that Samson killed more Philistines at his death than he did in his life.

God is able to use anyone. Even Samson, with his sinful flaws and uncontrolled passions, was used by God to judge Israel and punish the Philistines. Christians should take comfort in the fact that God is able to use anyone for His purposes. We ought not think that the directions and choices of our lives don't matter, but neither should we obsess about our shortcomings. We do not have to be perfect. We do have to be available, and we must rely on God's grace. But if God can use Samson, He can use us too.

What opportunities for faithful obedience has God placed before you this week? How have you obeyed? How will you obey?

GROUP

NOTES

VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

"Let us no longer live in this world as we have been; in fact, let us no longer live to ourselves but let Christ live in us. When he has been restored to the honor of the head, the house of the devil will fall, and all our enemies will die with our sins in eternal destruction."³

—Caesarius of Arles
(c. 470-543)

POINT 1: God will save His people through a promised deliverer (Judg. 13:1-5).

True to form, the Israelites repeated their sinful cycle and did _____ in the Lord's sight, but they did not cry out for _____ this time. And still God showed them _____ through a promised deliverer.



How might this scenario in Judges foreshadow God's actions related to the gospel?

Samson would be a Nazirite, and he would begin to save his people from the Philistines. These details reveal the _____ of God to keep His promises and the _____ of Samson as a judge.

POINT 2: God will save His people through a flawed deliverer (Judg. 14:1-9).

ESSENTIAL DOCTRINE #43: ENSLAVED TO SIN

Because of the fall of Adam and Eve in the garden of Eden, all of humanity has inherited a sin nature that inclines them toward sin and _____.

Human beings are enslaved to sin (Rom. 6:17), _____ living with the propensity to transgress God's commandments whenever possible. It isn't until one experiences _____ through the work of Christ that he or she is able to overcome sin's enslavement through the power of the Holy Spirit (Rom. 8:2).

Samson was led by his self-centered passions and appetites in _____ of rather than _____ to the Lord, and still the Lord would use him.



What are some ways God has used you in spite of your flaws?

POINT 3: God will save His people through a vengeful deliverer (Judg. 16:21-22,26-30).

NOTES

Samson's pursuit of his sinful desires resulted in the Lord leaving him, but the Lord _____ abandoned Samson. God's _____ remained.



What are some consequences we may face by pursuing our passions?

Samson was more concerned about avenging _____ than defending _____, but God graciously used this vengeful judge to _____. His people.



How does Samson's death compare and contrast with Jesus' death?

MY RESPONSE

Because we have experienced victory over sin through Christ's humility and sacrifice, we live humbly before others as we call on them to turn away from their sins and turn to Christ for deliverance.

- **HEAD:** What are some ways your life should be affected because God cannot lie and He always keeps His promises?
- **HEART:** What are some ways you find yourself being self-centered, and how will you address those with the Lord?
- **HANDS:** How will you serve God this week because He is faithful and forgiving?

VOICES from THE CHURCH

"The ultimate deliverer, Jesus Christ, has no flaws. So his rescue of those who believe in him is complete and everlasting."⁴

—Michael Williams

FOLLOWING GOD'S GUIDANCE

+ **SESSION IN A SENTENCE:**

Faithful love is not focused inwardly but outwardly, seeking the welfare of others.

+ **BACKGROUND PASSAGE:**

Ruth

+ **SETTING:**

The Book of Ruth is a story within a story, namely, the one told in the Book of Judges (Ruth 1:1). The dominant narrative of Ruth's day was one of sin, suffering, and chaos. There was no king in Israel at the time, and everyone did what was right in their own eyes (see Judg. 17:6; 21:25). Sin spiraled out of control and reaped severe consequences. Amid the destruction, however, the Bible reminds its readers of the mission of God to save sinners and the world. The Book of Ruth is a surprising story of redeeming love that proves God has not abandoned His mission. His faithful love will never give up.

DAY 1

READ:

Ruth 1:1-7

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Ruth 1:1-5

NOTES

A key theme in the Book of Ruth hinges on her being a Moabite. The story of the Moabites is unpleasant, to say the least. Moab, the namesake of the people, was the son of an incestuous relationship between Lot and his daughter shortly after the destruction of their hometown of Sodom (see Gen. 19). The resulting nation was a place known for sexual perversion. In Numbers 21–25, the Israelites traveled close to but around the land of Moab on their journey to the promised land. In fear of the Israelites, the Moabites tried to curse Israel but had to settle for the Moabite women seducing the Israelites into sexual sin and idolatry. God judged His people for their sin with Moab and 24,000 people were struck down and killed. Needless to say, Moab was a place with a shameful, dreadful history.

This history makes it all the more startling that Elimelech would take his family there. Furthermore, a Bible reader is meant to be shocked when he or she then reads that Elimelech's two sons took Moabite wives. Israelites shouldn't have been in the land, much less intermarried with the people. By our reckoning, nothing good could come from such folly. But it is true the Lord works in mysterious ways.

Ruth's story is not that of a smitten widow finding love from a knight in shining armor. Hers is a story of a destitute outsider in need of salvation. So naturally, this is a fitting picture for the way God loves each of us. In our pride, we are all prone to elevate ourselves above the position of need. We don't like to think of ourselves as destitute and helpless, as outsiders in need of mercy. But that's exactly what we are. Paul wrote that we were far away from God in our sin but have been brought near to Him by the blood of Jesus, who died for us (Rom. 5:8; Eph. 2:13). Ruth is like all of us—a broken sinner in need of help. Thankfully, that's just what God provides.

With full honesty, what are some of the reasons you must rely on the Lord Jesus for salvation?

DAY 2

READ:

Ruth 1:8-22

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Ruth 1:19-22

NOTES

If you are familiar with the story of Ruth, you quickly notice the irony of Naomi's words in this passage against the overall theme of the book. Naomi said that life had been hard because the hand of God had been against her. Her bitterness is understandable. Her husband and their two sons had died, she was destitute and without hope, and she had returned home in scandal with a Moabite daughter-in-law.

You've probably been there a time or two in your life. Maybe you are there right now. You know those times and places when it seems like the weight of the world is on your shoulders. You might say something like, "I just can't seem to catch a break," or, "When it rains, it pours." It does seem like that at times. Sometimes it actually is like that. In a fallen world, there are days, weeks, months, and sometimes years when it seems the deck of life is stacked against us.

But Naomi went further. She knew these situations did not escape the care of God. Twice in two verses she described God as "the Almighty" (Ruth 1:20-21). The Lord is supreme over all things. He's in charge. He can do whatever He wants. And on top of that, He is good! Surely if He allowed such calamity, then He could sovereignly orchestrate the next scene in her life for her good. The foreshadowing of verse 22 provides the first glimmer of hope that this is just what God is doing as Naomi returns to Bethlehem after a long famine at the beginning of the harvest.

It's hard to believe that God is truly the Almighty when we move through places of deep pain. We're all prone to doubt God's care or blame Him for our suffering. We often lose hope that He is working all things together for our good (Rom. 8:28). We need to remember again and again that God is faithful—both in Naomi's story and in ours—to His promises to His people and that He will not abandon us in whatever we are going through at the moment.

Where in your life do you most need to remember that God is the Almighty?

DAY 3

READ:

Ruth 2:1-13

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Ruth 2:3-13

NOTES

Young children don't pick up on the illusion of a sock puppet and the reality of the invisible hand that's actually making the sock puppet work. The puppet talks and moves and the kids giggle with joy, thinking it's a make-believe monkey, but everyone else knows a hand brings the puppet to life.

The story of Ruth and Naomi takes on a similar feel. On the surface, all sorts of circumstances are seemingly attributed to chance or fate. It's stunningly unlikely that this Moabite outsider would happen to stumble into the field of the very person who could help her. And even more so, it is astounding that he would notice her and pursue her welfare so quickly.

These circumstances are meant to point our attention to the seemingly invisible hand of God moving all of these pieces into place to accomplish His perfect plan. The name of God is not used often in the Book of Ruth, but His handiwork is seen throughout the developing story. He's everywhere, if you know how to spot Him.

Like a young child watching a sock puppet, we can easily get captivated by the circumstances and miss God. We might attribute events to chance or circumstances and forget that God is always at work in our story. Sometimes God's ways might become clear over time, and sometimes we won't understand or see how God has worked until we're glorified in heaven. We might not always see His hand, but we can be assured that the Lord is at work for our good and His glory. As John Piper suggests: "God is always doing 10,000 things in your life, and you may be aware of three of them."¹

What are some ways you have seen God's hand at work in your life, even when your circumstances seemed stacked against you?

DAY 4

READ:

Ruth 2:14-23

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Ruth 2:14-20

NOTES

VOICES from THE CHURCH

"It cost Boaz to do what he did. And he is, in that, a wonderful picture to us of the Lord Jesus Christ. He was a kinsman. He had to be related to do what he did, and Jesus became like us in order that he might be the priest for our sins, a faithful High Priest. Boaz shared his bed with a penniless alien, making her his bride, and Jesus by redeeming us has made us his bride ... And Boaz provided for this young Moabitess a future and a hope. And the Lord Jesus Christ, as our Redeemer, has provided for us also a future and a hope, so that we look forward to the day when we will stand in glory and we will see his face."²

—Alistair Begg

It is easy to overlook a basic practice of Boaz throughout the Book of Ruth. He sees a need and meets the need. He steps into chaos and works to make things better.

Granted, Boaz had a family responsibility to honor. At least at the outset, however, he was not even sure this responsibility belonged to him. From what we are told, he merely saw a stranger gleaning in his field, learned of her plight and her faithfulness to Naomi, and went out of his way to step into her pain and show her undeserved mercy.

In this passage, that kindness took the form of Boaz giving Ruth a meal—table fellowship. A wealthy Israelite eating with a destitute Moabite outsider. She ate till she was full and then had more left over.

This would not be the last time God provided in this abundant manner. A later redeemer, Jesus Christ, came and stood on a hillside to offer thousands of people a meal from a few pieces of bread and a couple of fish (Matt. 14:13-21). They too would eat until they were full, and still there would be leftovers at the end of the meal.

All of this eating is meant to point to a bigger picture. In John's Gospel, Jesus says that He is "the bread of life" sent from heaven by the Father to satisfy a far deeper need than physical hunger (John 6:22-59). He nourishes the soul by offering forgiveness, freedom, and hope. Like Ruth and Naomi, may we be people who take joy in the fact that God serves us by meeting our needs and giving us far more than we deserve.

How will you give thanks to God for providing you with blessing today?

DAY 5

READ:

Ruth 3–4

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Ruth 3:6-11

NOTES



ESSENTIAL DOCTRINE #78: BRIDE OF CHRIST

The church is described as the bride of Christ, faithfully waiting for the day when Christ will return and heaven and earth will be one. Made up of all believers from all tongues and nations, the church is the bride that Christ redeemed. The picture of a bride also speaks to the permanence of Christ's relationship with the church, for marriage was intended by God to be a lasting covenant between a man and a woman (Gen. 2:24; Matt. 19:5).

The established arrangement of the books of the Hebrew Bible is different from the order of books in the Old Testament as we have it in our English translations. The Book of Ruth was placed in a later section called the Writings, along with books such as Psalms and Proverbs, rather than with the historical books as it is in our modern versions. This makes sense because the book reads a bit like a poetic love story, and some of its language overlaps with that of these other poetic books.

One such place of overlap is found in Ruth 3:11, where Boaz encouraged Ruth by sharing that the fellow townspeople knew her to be a worthy woman of noble character. That Hebrew phrase in Ruth matches the description of the woman of virtue in the oft-cited final chapter of Proverbs (see Prov. 31:10). Ruth, it would seem, was meant to be a living illustration of the character traits listed in Proverbs 31. How amazing is that? This Moabite outsider is forever held up as the picture of virtue among the people of God.

It seems Ruth's worthiness and nobility was connected, in large measure, to the way she treated Naomi. Back in chapter 2, Boaz mentioned that his favor toward Ruth stemmed from all that she had done for Naomi. On the basis of this faithfulness, she captured Boaz's attention and received the care of the larger community.

Not only is it true that our sin will find us out (Num. 32:23), it is also true that our virtue follows us into the future (Rev. 14:13). Often God uses past faithfulness, even in obscure circumstances, to position us for blessing down the road. Such virtue is evidence that God's Spirit is actively at work in us to make us the kind of person He loves to use.

In what areas of life are you presently being called to demonstrate virtue in obscurity?

GROUP

NOTES

VOICES from THE CHURCH

"For all who have trusted in Jesus, all who know God, who are children of God, who have trusted in God's grace to save them from their sins, to restore them into relationship with Him. For everyone who has done this, you have come to the God of the universe and under His wings you have refuge."³

-David Platt

POINT 1: Faithful love is loyal

(Ruth 1:6-9,16-17).

Naomi and Ruth found themselves in a brutal set of circumstances. They were without _____ and _____, and Ruth was a _____.



What reasons would Ruth have had to return to Moab with Orpah?

Ruth chose loyal love for Naomi over her own comfort. In this, she reflected the _____ of the God in whose _____ she was created.



What are some ways we can model the loyal love of God in our relationships?

POINT 2: Faithful love is gracious

(Ruth 2:2-3,8-12).

Ruth the Moabite knew she needed to _____ to provide for her and Naomi, but she also knew she would need favor, or _____, if they were to survive.

Boaz was a _____ of God's grace to Ruth and Naomi as he secured Ruth's provision and protection. In this, Boaz prefigured _____, who showers His grace on all who come to Him for _____.



What does it mean to find refuge in God?

POINT 3: Faithful love is redeeming

(Ruth 4:9-10,13-17).

ESSENTIAL DOCTRINE #78: BRIDE OF CHRIST

The church is described as the bride of Christ, faithfully waiting for the day when Christ will return

and heaven and earth will be one. Made up of all _____ from all tongues and nations, the church is the bride that Christ _____. The picture of a bride also speaks to the permanence of Christ's relationship with the church, for marriage was intended by God to be a lasting _____ between a man and a woman (Gen. 2:24; Matt. 19:5).



What are some ways believers resemble or ought to resemble Ruth?

The true love story of Ruth illustrates our need for redemption from _____, and Ruth's descendant, Jesus Christ, came to redeem the _____.

MY RESPONSE

Because we have been redeemed by an act of God's love, we extend the same kind of steadfast, gracious love to others so that they too might find redemption through Jesus Christ.

- **HEAD:** How could the metaphor of human marriage help you testify to the love of Christ for sinners?
- **HEART:** What are some ways you will express your thankfulness for who Jesus is and what He has done to love you?
- **HANDS:** What needs have you observed that you will now meet and so demonstrate the love of God in Christ?

VOICES from THE CHURCH

"Are we really redeemed (especially from our own self interest) if we are not passionate about passing on the fullness of God's love to those who do not yet know infinite spiritual freedom?"⁴

—Marva Dawn

FOLLOWING GOD'S TIMING

+ **SESSION IN A SENTENCE:**

God's people are to recognize and rejoice in His provisions while being quick to use what has been given for His purposes.

+ **BACKGROUND PASSAGE:**

1 Samuel 1–3

+ **SETTING:**

As the days of the judges were coming to a close, the people of Israel were mired in national tragedy as the downward spiral of the nation reached rock bottom. In those days, there was no king in Israel, and everyone did what was right in their own eyes (Judg. 21:25). But there was still reason for hope because God is faithful, so there always remains faithful people. For example, an ordinary man and his family were faithful to worship and sacrifice to the one true and living God (1 Sam 1:3). The story that follows this man's wife Hannah shows once again that God never gives up on His mission of restoration.

DAY 1

READ:

1 Samuel 1:1-18

FOCAL PASSAGE:

1 Samuel 1:9-11

NOTES

Waiting is a part of life. Not a fun part but a reality nonetheless. We spend a lot of time waiting for certain people or circumstances we find important. We wait for the right job, the right spouse, the right path forward. Often we have in our minds the ideal means of getting from where we are to where we want to be, but it sometimes seems that God drags His feet.

Hannah surely felt such sorrow. We are not given a timeline on the process that led to the birth of Samuel, but we know Hannah desired a son for years. She had watched others around her have children, and still she had none. She was depressed and despondent, a state of mind provoked and exacerbated by her rival, Peninnah, who had children.

Yet Hannah prayed.

Hannah's example here helps us distinguish between two forms of waiting: passive and active. Passive waiting occurs when we throw in the towel and just figure eventually something good might happen. We stop doing the practices that bring us to God, such as prayer and worship. We just resign ourselves to whatever happens and refuse to hope because we think God doesn't care.

Active waiting, on the other hand, is based on a firm confidence in the nature and character of God. Active waiters continue to take steps to do the right things, even when it might not seem that God is listening. Active waiters continue to pray, even when they ask for the same things year after year. They continue to worship God because of His character and not simply because He gives them what they want. They resist the temptation to hope less. Instead, they trust that God will providentially intervene in His time and in His way, and they trust that will be good, whenever and however it happens, because they know God cares.

How does your understanding of who God is affect the way you wait upon Him?

DAY 2

READ:

1 Samuel 1:19-28

FOCAL PASSAGE:

1 Samuel 1:20

NOTES

What's in a name? The answer, at the least in the Bible, is that names are packed with significance. In the days before Internet searches for top baby names, people chose names based off their meanings. The people of God often would base the names of their children on some aspect of God's character and activity in the world.

Samuel's name meant either "God has heard" or "The name of God." In either case, Elkanah and Hannah made a theological claim in the name they chose for their son. He was an answer to prayer, given to them by God and offered back to God for His purposes. Even before they took Samuel to be dedicated in the temple, they etched his life's mission in his name—he would be devoted to God.

Your name might have similar significance. Your parents may have selected your name on the basis of God's faithfulness or character. Or maybe yours is a family name based on a model whom your parents hoped you'd emulate. Whether there's significance in your given name or not, there is another name given to all of God's people.

As believers, we belong to Jesus Christ. We are "Christians" (Acts 11:26). This name denotes our life's mission. We are claimed by Christ to represent Christ in the world. We must not take this name in vain (Ex. 20:7). We are called to holy living because it's a right reflection of our holy God and Savior. We represent Jesus in this world, and conversely, we can misrepresent Him through waywardness and folly. Like Samuel, we bear the name of God, and we should strive to wear it well.

What would change about your life if you were more aware of the fact that you bear Christ's name?

DAY 3

READ:

1 Samuel 1

FOCAL PASSAGE:

1 Samuel 1:24-28

NOTES

Elkanah and Hannah offered a sacrifice of praise through the bull they brought to the Lord's house. These two ideas—sacrifice and praise—are connected through two themes in this passage. First, Elkanah and Hannah understood that approaching the holy God required a blood sacrifice. The ongoing worship system in the temple was supposed to etch this reality into the minds of all worshipers. Something must die because of sin. This family's sacrifice declared that Elkanah, Hannah, and even baby Samuel were born sinners who do sinful things. Though Samuel would serve God in the temple, his purity wasn't like God's. He was a sinner who could only worship because something had died in his place.

Second, worshipers were meant to see worship as costly. They were giving up something in order to worship God. The animals and goods they offered were not cheap. They weren't unused extras easy to discard. They were costly. The language of sacrifice denotes this reality. We give something up when we follow God.

This latter idea is important for us to consider on a regular basis. Jesus pointed out the costly nature of Christian discipleship. It involves self-denial, a proverbial cross, and the expectation—even reality—of losing one's life (Matt. 16:24-25). To follow Jesus is to live a life of costly sacrifice from the start of the Christian journey and throughout. Sacrifice is a mark of ongoing faithfulness to Jesus' way.

Worship is meant to come at a cost. The first cost was taken on by God Himself. The only means by which we can worship Him is because of the price He paid in the death of His Son. The next cost falls to us as we willingly sacrifice our rights, our resources, even our very lives to show the world that God is worth it.

How will you model sacrificial worship of God in your life?

DAY 4

READ:

1 Samuel 2:1-11

FOCAL PASSAGE:

1 Samuel 2:1

NOTES

VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

"This constitutes the pinnacle of human dignity, this is his glory and greatness: truly to know what is great and to cleave to it, and to seek after glory from the Lord of glory."¹

—Basil the Great (c. 330-379)

It's probably been a while since you've heard someone say, "My heart exults," or "My heart rejoices." We don't speak that way often. Interestingly enough, we are more apt to use language that communicates the opposite: "I'm discouraged, disheartened, depressed, defeated, and downcast." All of these words communicate the fact that our hearts aren't exulted.

The reason behind Hannah's claim that her heart rejoiced is the basis for our hope as well. She said that her heart exulted "in the LORD." Consider an alternative: "My heart exults in my circumstances." When good things happen, we naturally have an exulted heart. We feel good. Alive. Hopeful. But we clearly see the problem with a heart set on circumstances—they quickly change from good to worse. If the basis of our joy and hope is found in circumstances, then our heart fluctuates along with them.

Recall that Hannah had felt angry, resentful, and even despondent (1:8,10,15-16). She was barren with little hope for this to change. Yet she got up the next day after praying and worshiped the Lord (1:19). Is it possible to rejoice in the Lord when circumstances are unfavorable? Yes, if the exultation is actually in the Lord and not in the circumstances.

Unlike our circumstances, the Lord does not change. He is not fleeting. His character is steady and consistent. We do not have to wonder if God got up on the wrong side of the bed or if His love for us has waned. He's faithful to His promises and committed to accomplishing the salvation of His people. He's at work to finish the good work that He started in our lives (Phil. 1:6). It's not wrong to feel discouraged or depressed when life takes a hard turn, but we don't have to wait until our circumstances change to find joy. Our hearts should exult in the Lord, for He never changes.

What reasons do you have to rejoice in the Lord today, regardless of your circumstances?

DAY 5

READ:

1 Samuel 2:1-11

FOCAL PASSAGE:

1 Samuel 2:6

NOTES



ESSENTIAL DOCTRINE #30: GOD'S PROVIDENCE

Providence refers to God's continuing work and involvement in His creation. This includes, in various degrees, God's preservation of the created order, His governance, and His care for His people (Col. 1:17; Heb. 1:3; Gen. 8:21-22). Christians believe the world, and even the cosmos itself, is contingent upon God, incapable of existing apart from Him. Christians also believe in God's personal and direct intervention in the world—as opposed to a hands-off approach to creation—that affects not only the natural order but also the individuals and events within human history.

How often do you think about death? If you are like most people, you likely try to avoid thoughts of death until you are reminded of its inevitable approach, such as through losing a loved one or facing a looming, dire diagnosis. The ancient foe—death—is an unavoidable reality, but we'd still rather not think about it.

The Bible, however, takes another approach. Throughout the story of Scripture, we see continual mentions of the eternal fate of people in light of their sin and the holiness of God. First Samuel 2:6 reminds us that God holds the power over life and death. He gives life and He takes it away (Job 1:21). Such is the extent of God's control of the world and of all the things He has made.

What should grappling with the reality of death produce in people? There are two answers. First, the reality of death should produce repentance and faith. When asked about the tragic death of people who were crushed under a falling tower, Jesus said simply that their deaths should cause His hearers to repent because death comes for us all (Luke 13:1-5). God holds the power of life and death, and He has told us that the path to avoid eternal death is repentance and faith in Christ. Death should jar us to acknowledge our sin, turn from it, and trust in the work of Jesus to forgive (Mark 1:15; Luke 13:1-5; John 3:16).

Second, the reality of death should push us to share the good news of Jesus with all those on the wide path to destruction (Matt. 7:13-14). We know the brevity of life and the dire fate awaiting those who reject Jesus, so we should implore all people to turn to God in Christ and be saved before it's too late (2 Cor. 5:17-21).

Are you trusting in Jesus for your salvation and inviting others to find eternal life through Him? Will you begin today?

GROUP

NOTES

VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

"My advice to you is take your difficulty before God in prayer, and say, 'Speak, Lord; for your servant hears.' Do not ask God to confirm your opinion, but ask Him to make your opinion conformable with His Truth ... Follow the simple Word of God as you find it and rest assured you shall have the Light of the Holy Spirit streaming upon the sacred page. And as you read it you shall hear the Master say, 'This is My Word.'"²

—Charles Spurgeon (1834-1892)

POINT 1: The Lord's servant pleads for a son (1 Sam. 1:4-6,11-18).

The Lord intervened in the family of Elkanah in a way that might trouble us: He withheld the joy of children from Hannah. This led to much tension in Elkanah's family, yet we must _____ that God is _____ .

Hannah took her _____ to the Lord and begged Him for a son, whom she promised would serve the Lord. Her prayer led to a renewed sense of _____ and _____ in God.



How does prayer help us deal with our struggles?

POINT 2: The Lord's servant dedicates a long-awaited son (1 Sam. 1:19-20,24-28).

Hannah prayed to the Lord for a son in her grief, and the answer to her prayer _____ came according to God's perfect _____ .



How have you seen God's perfect timing on display in your life?

Hannah honored her vow to the Lord and dedicated her son to the Lord's _____. This reflected her commitment to _____ the Lord _____ .

POINT 3: The Lord's servant celebrates a divinely provided son (1 Sam. 2:1-2,6).

Hannah fulfilled her difficult vow because God is worthy of all _____ and _____. Only in the Lord do we find _____.



What are some things we should be able to do because of who God is?

ESSENTIAL DOCTRINE #30: GOD'S PROVIDENCE

NOTES

Providence refers to God's continuing work and involvement in His creation. This includes, in various degrees, God's preservation of the created order, His governance, and His _____ for His people (Col. 1:17; Heb. 1:3; Gen. 8:21-22). Christians believe the world, and even the cosmos itself, is contingent upon God, incapable of existing apart from Him. Christians also believe in God's _____ and direct intervention in the world—as opposed to a hands-off approach to creation—that affects not only the natural order but also the _____ and events within human history.



What are some ways God's providence in your life has prompted you to worship Him?

MY RESPONSE

Because we have experienced the power of the Word of God leading to our salvation, we listen carefully to what God says to us in His Word and share its truth with those around us.

- **HEAD:** What are some ways Old Testament deliverers fell short in their deliverance, and how is Jesus the better solution?
- **HEART:** What are some reasons you have to declare your praise to the Lord, and how might those opportunities open doors for the gospel to be shared?
- **HANDS:** How will you be an agent of God's activity in the world this week?

VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

"Speak, O Lord, Thy servant heareth, To Thy Word I now give heed; Life and spirit Thy Word beareth, All Thy Word is true indeed. Death's dread pow'r in me is rife; Jesus, may Thy Word of Life Fill my soul with love's strong fervor That I cling to Thee forever."³

—Anna Sophia of Hesse
(1638-1683)

FOLLOWING THEIR OWN DESIRES

+ **SESSION IN A SENTENCE:**

Faithlessness brings God's righteous judgment without exception.

+ **BACKGROUND PASSAGE:**

1 Samuel 2:12–7:1

+ **SETTING:**

The story of 1 Samuel opens with a note of hope. God has not forgotten His people, and He is continuing to work out His mission to deliver them, notably through raising up a leader for them. But this theme contrasts with the reality of Israel's leaders at the time—their priests. Eli the priest and his two sons were tasked with overseeing the worship of God at the temple dwelling in Shiloh. In fact, Elkanah and his family took their sacrifices every year to the sons, Hophni and Phinehas. But in contrast to Elkanah and Hannah, these priests were a picture of rebellion. God was about to judge them, and He was raising up Samuel to take their place as the leader in Israel.

DAY 1

READ:

1 Samuel 2:12-21

FOCAL PASSAGE:

1 Samuel 2:12-17

NOTES



ESSENTIAL DOCTRINE #37: SIN AS TRANSGRESSION

The word *transgression* means “to cross over” or “to pass by” and is often used in reference to transgressing God’s explicit commands. When God gives a specific command, as He did with Adam and Eve in the garden of Eden, and when that command is disobeyed, transgression has taken place (Rom. 5:14; 1 Tim. 2:14). In this sense, sin is law-breaking.

In passages like this one, it can be difficult to make sense of the Old Testament truth so it can be applied to our lives. Three-pronged forks of fatty meat seemingly have little to do with following Jesus today. This makes it all the more important that we have the ability to understand these cultural realities in light of the main truth of the biblical text.

At its most basic form, the issue in this passage is that God’s people were ignoring God’s holy standards and using Him for their own selfish pursuits. When you consider the passage in this light, it’s not as difficult to translate the situation and apply it to our lives as we might have first thought.

We are all prone to use God for our own designs. We can even try to use God to get what we want without thinking about what we are doing. It might be the subtle thought that if I just keep my nose clean and show up at church on Sunday, then surely God owes me a life free from pain and suffering. Or we might attempt to cover for our hidden sins by reading our Bible or presenting a polished persona when we are around our church friends. We might try to barter with God: “If I do this for You, then will You help me get what I want in this area?”

This kind of sin may be more acceptable because it is often hidden behind a facade of goodness and obedience, but it’s no less deadly. It should be unfathomable to treat God like a pawn we can manipulate rather than the God we must worship, but such is the twisted nature of sin. God refuses to bless our mockery—He sees our hearts, and He will judge our sin.

In what areas of life are you tempted to use God to get what you want?

DAY 2

READ:

1 Samuel 2:22-26

FOCAL PASSAGE:

1 Samuel 2:22-25

NOTES

There are many words in the Bible that we don't use in common dialogue today. "Intercede" in verse 25 is one such word. You are not likely to hear many speak of the need for an intercessor. However, we do understand the word picture here. An intercessor is one who speaks up for and advocates on behalf of someone else who has done wrong. Intercessors are found in courtrooms when a person takes the stand to advocate for the one on trial. We might not use the term "intercede," but we see the practice everywhere.

Eli's rhetorical question to his sons is packed with lingering power. There's hope for an intercessor if someone sins against another person because it's possible, in fact, likely, that both parties have some measure of fault in the conflict. Not so with God. Since God is always right, always pure, always good, if someone sins against God, then it's impossible for an intercessor to reach a conclusion in favor of the sinner. The issue is settled—God is right and the sinner is wrong, so the judgment should be swift and final.

Two New Testament passages are helpful here. Paul wrote in Romans 8:34 that Christ Jesus died and has been raised, and now He is sitting at the right hand of God interceding for us. The resurrected Jesus, innocent and vindicated, is the One who intercedes for sinners before the throne of God. Similarly, the author of Hebrews elaborated that Jesus is able to save completely all those who come to God through Him in faith since Jesus always lives to intercede for them (Heb. 7:25). The hope for sinners rests in the fact that God has appointed an intercessor—Jesus Christ—to advocate on behalf of those who have trusted Him through repentance and faith. Before God the Father, Jesus testifies that the sin of His people has been paid for and that they are forgiven and right with God because they've trusted in Him as a perfect substitute. Without this hope, Eli's question would echo throughout history with no satisfactory answer.

How should Jesus' ministry of intercession affect your worries regarding your struggles with sin?

DAY 3

READ:

1 Samuel 2:27-36

FOCAL PASSAGE:

1 Samuel 2:35

NOTES

VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

"Here arises a great doubt, given we know that God's promises are most certain and that his decree is immutable. How, then, does the Lord make a promise and then go back on it? The answer is that some of God's promises are absolute without any condition, as was the promise of the Messiah. However, others of God's promises are given to us conditionally, especially the temporal promises made to the Israelites. These conditional promises, such as the priesthood being promised to the family of Eli, depended on the condition of their obedience."¹

—Andrew Willet (c. 1562-1621)

If you read all of 1 Samuel 2 in one sitting you'll notice the contrast that the author intended. Though the tone of the chapter is overwhelmingly negative, there are hints of hope littered throughout.

In verse 11, we see a boy that we know to be Samuel is serving the Lord in the presence of Eli the priest. In verse 21, we're told this child grew up in the presence of the Lord. Later, in verse 26, the author indicated how Samuel grew: physically, spiritually, and relationally. And finally, in the verses we read today, God promised to raise up a faithful priest who would fulfill the role God intended for the priesthood (1 Sam. 2:35).

These hints of hope are reminders that God will never abandon His mission. The world looked bleak during the time of Hannah and Samuel, yet God sustained a remnant who were faithful to Him and His work in the world.

In the same way, the world can look overwhelming and dark in our day as well. Signs of immorality abound, and it doesn't look like God's work will prevail. But we must not lose hope. God has promised to build His church, and nothing, not even the gates of hell, will be able to prevail against His people (Matt. 16:18). Jesus assured us that we will have trouble in this world, but He also encouraged us to take heart because He has overcome the world and His people will as well (John 16:33). And God has promised to send Jesus again so we will finally be where He is for eternity (John 14:3). Therefore, we can have hope.

Whatever happens around us, God is still ruling and reigning and ensuring that He will protect a remnant of people—His church—who will worship Him rightly until Jesus returns.

Where do you see bright spots of hope because God is still working in our dark world?

DAY 4

READ:

1 Samuel 3:1–4:5

FOCAL PASSAGE:

1 Samuel 4:1-3

NOTES

Most people have been asked a question that seemed to have a common-sense answer: Why isn't there a seat at the restaurant? Because it's the most popular spot in the city and we came at prime time. Why did our car break down? Because you didn't change the oil for over a year? Why did I get fired from my job? Because you were late every other day. All you have to do is take a quick look at the situation and you'd be able to diagnose the issue in short order.

Here, the Israelites asked a common-sense question, and the common-sense answer should have occurred to them: Why did we get routed by the Philistines? Maybe because they'd turned their backs on God to such an extent that the priestly family was stealing the sacrificial offerings and engaging in sexual sin. You would think they would quickly assume that God was trying to get their attention.

But the way they responded gives us an indication that they weren't concerned about God's displeasure. Rather than humble repentance, they pursued a good-luck charm to take into battle. They didn't do the common-sense right thing; instead, they demonstrated their selfish rebellion all the more.

Do you ever do that?

We're all prone to miss the clear issues that are before us when God tries to get our attention. We might feel like God is distant when it's actually been months since we sought Him in prayer or through His Word. We might feel frustrated in our marriage when we know we've selfishly indulged our own lusts rather than pursued our spouse as we should. We could wonder if God loves us while neglecting the very means He provides us to assure us of His love. We would be wise to look around and consider what common-sense answer God might have for the challenges we are experiencing.

How might God be trying to get your attention right now?

DAY 5

READ:

1 Samuel 4:6-22

FOCAL PASSAGE:

1 Samuel 4:10-11

NOTES

The Word of God proves true—always. The prophet Isaiah said God’s Word will accomplish what God sends it to do and that it won’t return to Him empty (Isa. 55:11). As the opposite of empty, hollow, or void, God’s Word has substance. He means what He says and He’ll do what He says.

God promised to kill Eli’s two sons on the same day in judgment as a precursor of the coming destruction that awaited all of Eli’s family. We could imagine this as a vague threat, the kind a parent might make to a child: “If you don’t clean up your room, you are never watching TV again.” But God doesn’t make vague threats.

For us, there are at least two key points of application here: one for those who are not followers of Jesus and then one for those who are.

First, for the non-believer: It’s imperative that you understand that God’s call to repent, to turn to Jesus in faith, and to be saved lest you face the coming judgment is not just a hollow threat. You will not get to the judgment and find God changing His mind or presenting an alternative path to salvation. You should heed God’s warning now because His words aren’t empty.

Second, for the believer: Christian, God’s words are not empty for you either. The same words that called you from death to life are the words that should prompt your ongoing obedience. God knows what’s best for you, so whether it’s in the area of church involvement, Bible reading or prayer, evangelism, or any other area of faithfulness, you should take God’s warnings to heart and obey.

What will you do because you believe God’s words are not empty?

GROUP

NOTES

VOICES from THE CHURCH

"God wants us to bow before his holiness with respect and reverence. There is a danger in being in the presence of the Lord of Hosts, especially when we come into his presence with arrogance or apathy. We must come before his presence with quiet humility and brokenness."²

-Stephen J. Andrews and
Robert D. Bergen

POINT 1: The priest's evil sons are contemptible (1 Sam. 2:12-17,22-25).

ESSENTIAL DOCTRINE #37: SIN AS TRANSGRESSION

The word transgression means "to cross over" or "to pass by" and is often used in reference to transgressing God's explicit _____. When God gives a specific command, as He did with Adam and Eve in the garden of Eden, and when that command is _____, transgression has taken place (Rom. 5:14; 1 Tim. 2:14). In this sense, sin is _____-breaking.



What should we learn from God's response to the sin of Eli's sons?

POINT 2: The priest's evil sons are rejected (1 Sam. 2:30-34).

God had _____ Eli and his sons with their role as priests, but they _____ their privilege. Therefore, God would take the priesthood from them and give it to another descendant of _____.



What are some ways we can honor God?

The severe consequences God laid out for the sins of Eli and his sons serve as a _____ to all who would despise the _____ of God.



How should believers in Jesus Christ respond to the severity of God's consequences for Eli and his sons?

POINT 3: The priest's evil sons are judged
(1 Sam. 4:1b-11).

The sin of Eli's sons led to a _____ and then to a disaster—the Israelites sought a _____ of the Lord instead of the _____ Himself.



What are some ways our sins impact others?

True to His word, the Lord judged Eli's sons, and they died on the same day, proving God is _____, sin is _____, and God alone can _____.

MY RESPONSE

Because we have been spared from the judgment of our sins through Christ Jesus, we call on our evil generation to likewise repent of their sins and trust in Christ so that they too might be saved.

- **HEAD:** How does Jesus' death on the cross for our sin vindicate God's holiness?
- **HEART:** What do you need to repent of so that you will be restored to a right relationship with God through faith in Jesus Christ?
- **HANDS:** How will you use the resources God has given you to grow in your knowledge of God, your obedience to Him, and sharing about Jesus?

NOTES

VOICES from THE CHURCH

"Ultimately, God's judgment will come to all who refuse to submit to God's kingdom agenda and instead seek to set up their own little fiefdoms. God grants humans freedom to separate themselves from God. In the end, humans can have their final divorce from God both as a just judgment as well as the natural fruit borne out of a life lived without God."³

—Paul Copan

FOLLOWING THEIR OWN CORRUPTION

+ **SESSION IN A SENTENCE:**

Everyone is a sinner deserving death, but God has provided the means of rescue through Jesus Christ.

+ **BACKGROUND PASSAGE:**

Romans 1–8

+ **SETTING:**

In the beginning, God created everything good and perfect. But soon the choice of Adam and Eve in the garden of Eden unleashed the deadly power of sin upon God's good creation. The accounts of the judges make it abundantly clear that sin is a powerful force to be reckoned with—and we don't have the power to do so. Even the bright spots of Ruth, Boaz, Hannah, and Samuel were plagued by sin personally and dealt with a world marred by sin's effects, including famine, infertility, idolatry, and death. On our own, we are helpless before sin and death, but through the Savior sent for our salvation, we overcome.

DAY 1

READ:

Romans 3:1-12

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Romans 3:10-12

NOTES

According to their website, The Coca-Cola Company started small. Dr. John Pemberton served the first Coke at Jacob's Pharmacy in Atlanta, Georgia, on May 8, 1886. From their humble beginnings, the company has grown into a global powerhouse. No matter where you travel, you will likely find a place to purchase a Coke. Even their current slogan affirms their universal reach: "Refresh the World. Make a Difference."¹

Like Coke, sin is universal. Paul argued that both Jews and Greeks are under sin, meaning everyone is a sinner. There is not a single person who is free from the stain of sin. To prove his claim, Paul quoted from Ecclesiastes 7:20, Psalm 14:1-3, and Psalm 53:1-3: No one is righteous. No one seeks God. No one is good. Without exception, every person is a sinner. This sin problem is a worldwide phenomenon. No matter how far you travel, you will find the presence of sin.

While sin is universal, it is also personal. Sin is not simply "out there"; it is "in here"—it is in us! Each day, we are reminded of the reality of sin as we struggle to resist temptation and obey God. Each day, in big ways and in small ways, we sin against God and others. Thankfully, grace is available for those who repent and believe in Jesus Christ. If we confess our sins, God is faithful to forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness (1 John 1:9).

What sins do you need to confess today?

DAY 2

READ:

Romans 3:9-20

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Romans 3:13-18

NOTES

Jesse James is one of America's most notorious outlaws. The son of a slave-owning hemp farmer, Jesse joined a band of Confederate guerillas as a teenager. After the Civil War, James gathered a band of former "bushwhackers" to rob banks, stagecoaches, and trains. For nearly a decade, Jesse James and his gang of outlaws terrorized the Midwest. James was eventually murdered by Bob Ford, one of his gang members, on April 3, 1882, but the legacy of the violent outlaw lives on.²

Jesse James was an embodiment of the apostle Paul's words in Romans 3:13-18, especially verses 15-17: Surely his feet were quick to shed blood, and his path was marked by destruction as he took the innate human desire for peace and dismantled it for both himself and others.

Yet violence and conflict are not the only sins Paul mentioned. He also highlighted various sins of the tongue. While many people may not be able to identify with Jesse James or bloodshed, they can identify with lying, gossiping, and using venomous words. Sin is not committed with our hands alone; it is also committed with our mouths.

Our inability to control our tongues is a sign of spiritual immaturity; the mature human being controls his or her tongue (Jas. 3:2). Why does this matter? Because our words are powerful. We have the potential to build people up or tear them down depending on what we say to and/or about them. Let's ask God for the strength to use our words to build up others in need and to give grace to those who need to hear it (Eph. 4:29).

How will you focus on growing in the area of controlling your tongue?

DAY 3

READ:

Romans 5:12-21

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Romans 5:12-14

NOTES

VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

"Although through one man's sin death has passed to all men, him whom we do not refuse to acknowledge as the father of the human race we cannot refuse to acknowledge as also the author of death ... In Adam I fell, in Adam I was cast out of paradise, in Adam I died. How shall God call me back, except he find me in Adam? For just as in Adam I am guilty of sin and owe a debt to death, so in Christ I am justified."⁴

—Ambrose (c. 340-397)

On April 15, 1912, the luxury British steamship RMS Titanic sank in the chilly waters of the North Atlantic Ocean. More than 1,500 passengers and crew members died in the wreck. The most tragic part of the infamous event is that it could have been avoided if the crew had heeded the warnings sent by other vessels. Unfortunately, sporadic reports of ice from other ships were ignored, and the Titanic struck an iceberg, filled with water, and sank to the bottom of the ocean.³

In the garden of Eden, Adam was warned about the consequences of sin. God told Adam not to eat the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil or he would die (Gen. 2:16-17). Yet Adam ignored the warning, ate the fruit given to him by his wife, and plunged the entire human race into sin.

Romans 5:12-14 recalls Adam's act of disobedience and the entrance of sin and death into the world. The origin of sin and death is traced back to Adam's act of disobedience. From Adam onward, sin and death have plagued humanity.

Because of the universal nature of sin, death is unavoidable. Every person will die. As the author of Hebrews put it, each one of us has an appointment with death (Heb. 9:27). This means the real question is not "Will I die?" but "Am I ready to die?" The only way to be prepared for death is to trust Christ, the One who conquered death by dying for sin and rising again. Christ's resurrection demonstrates His power over death and assures His followers they will share in His victory over sin and death. On that day, for the believer found in Jesus Christ by faith, death will have lost its sting. "Thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Cor. 15:54-57)!

What are some ways Adam points forward to the coming of Jesus Christ?

DAY 4

READ:

Romans 7:14–8:4

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Romans 7:24–8:4

NOTES



ESSENTIAL DOCTRINE #41: SIN AND DEATH

The ultimate consequence for sin is death—physical death, spiritual death, and eternal death (Rom. 6:23). God was clear to Adam and Eve in the garden of Eden that if they ate from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, they would surely die (Gen. 2:17). The type of death that would result from the fall in the garden of Eden wasn't only physical death but spiritual death as well, the separation of a person from God. Spiritual death continues in a permanent state when someone dies apart from the reconciling work of Christ, who defeated death through His own death on the cross and subsequent resurrection.

On June 23, 2012, twelve boys entered the Tham Luang cave in Thailand with their soccer coach to explore. While inside the cave, the water began to rise, and the boys and their coach were trapped 4 km from the entrance of the cave. That evening, a search began for the boys, but they were not discovered until the ninth day. Rescuers were unsure “how to extract 13 people—some of whom couldn’t swim—from a winding, flooded 4km-long stretch of caves that even experienced divers would struggle with.”⁵ A plan was devised: Each boy was given a full-face oxygen mask and paired with a diver who helped navigate the boy through the tunnel and out to safety. All twelve boys survived the incident, as did the coach, but one of the divers died in the rescue operation.

In Romans 7:24–8:4, Paul praises Jesus Christ because only Jesus could rescue him from his “body of death” (7:24-25). In the early chapters of Romans, Paul painted a bleak picture of the human condition. All are sinners, and all deserve God’s righteous judgment. This sinful condition cannot be remedied by good works—people cannot save themselves. But God sent Jesus to save sinners by being a sin offering on their behalf (8:3). Through faith in Christ’s sacrificial death, hopeless sinners can be rescued from sin and its consequences. Christ has set us free from the law of sin and death (8:2)!

Christian, before Christ saved you, you were dead in your sins, a son of disobedience, and a child of wrath (Eph. 2:1-3). The outlook was bleak, but Jesus changed everything, paving the path to God by shedding His own blood so we could be near Him (Eph. 2:13)! Christ rescued you by giving His life to save you. Now He calls you to give your life to serve Him.

What are some practical ways you can express your gratitude to Christ for saving you?

DAY 5

READ:

Romans 8:1-17

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Romans 8:5-11

NOTES

In the Marvel Cinematic Universe, Tony Stark used an arc reactor to power his original Iron Man suit. The fusion-type power source featuring a palladium core provided the necessary energy to power the superhero's armor and weaponry. Without the arc reactor, the Iron Man suit lacked power and was not functional. With the arc reactor, the Iron Man suit was fully functional, enabling Tony Stark to fight bad guys and rescue people all over the world.⁶

Similar to how the arc reactor provided power for Stark's Iron Man suit, the Holy Spirit provides power for Christian living. In Romans 8, Paul contrasted the flesh and the Spirit. People who rely on their flesh lack the power to resist sin or obey the commands of God. It is impossible for them to follow God's law (Rom. 8:7). Christians, on the other hand, rely on the Spirit, so they have the necessary power source. The Holy Spirit gives life and spiritual vitality to Christians, enabling them to experience victory over sin.

How can a person tell if they are driven by the flesh or powered by the Spirit? Evaluate the "fruit." If we have a mindset of the flesh, then the works of the flesh will be obvious: sexual immorality, moral impurity, promiscuity, idolatry, sorcery, hatreds, strife, jealousy, outburst of anger, selfish ambitions, dissensions, factions, envy, drunkenness, carousing, and the like (see Gal. 5:19-21). That is quite the list!

On the other hand, the "fruit" of the mindset of the Spirit is also obvious. In the believer, the Spirit produces love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (see Gal. 5:22-23). The presence of these characteristics in your life is evidence of the Spirit's work in your life.

Do your attitudes and actions reveal the Holy Spirit's activity or absence in your life? How will you seek the development of good "fruit" in your life?

GROUP

NOTES

VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

"Adam is a type of Christ in that just as those who descended from him inherited death, even though they had not eaten of the fruit of the tree. So also those who are descended from Christ inherit his righteousness, even though they did not produce it themselves."⁷

—Chrysostom (c. 347–407)

POINT 1: All are guilty of sin against God (Rom. 3:9–18).

The problem of sin is _____. Every person, regardless of their background or heritage, is a sinner in their _____ and _____.



How should Christians process and understand the “good works” of people?

The problem of sin is extensive, affecting every part of us. Sin taints the way we _____, what we _____, and how we _____ the world.



How would you respond to someone who says, “I’m not as bad as the kind of people Paul describes in Romans 3:10–18”?

POINT 2: All are dead through sin against God (Rom. 5:12–14).

ESSENTIAL DOCTRINE #41: SIN AND DEATH

The ultimate consequence for sin is death—
_____ death, _____ death, and
_____ death (Rom. 6:23). God was clear to Adam and Eve in the garden of Eden that if they ate from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, they would surely die (Gen. 2:17). The type of death that would result from the fall in the garden of Eden wasn’t only physical death but spiritual death as well, the _____ of a person from God. Spiritual death continues in a permanent state when someone dies apart from the reconciling work of Christ, who defeated death through His own death on the cross and subsequent resurrection.

The fallout of Adam's sin covered all of humanity and creation in _____. But by God's grace, Adam is a type pointing forward to _____, whose impact brings _____ and overcomes death.

NOTES



What are some ways the gospel of Jesus addresses the fall of Adam and his descendants?

POINT 3: All can be rescued from sin and death in Christ (Rom. 7:24–8:11).

The cry of _____ for rescue from sin and death is answered only in Jesus Christ, the _____ of God to deliver us from _____ condemnation.

In addition to eternal life, believers in Christ receive God's _____, who enables Christians to resist _____ and live righteously in the present.



What will it look like to live according to the Spirit and not the flesh?

MY RESPONSE

Because God has rescued us from sin and death through the death of His Son, we seek to put sin to death in our lives and instead live in holiness out of love and gratitude for what Christ has done.

- **HEAD:** How does your understanding of sin and death shape your presentation of the gospel?
- **HEART:** How will you express your gratitude to God for saving you?
- **HANDS:** What is one specific step of obedience you will take this week as you rely on the Spirit for help?

VOICES from THE CHURCH

"Apart from grace, we were unable to obey [the law]. As recipients of grace, we are both capable of obedience and commanded to obedience—to eager obedience, to be precise. Whereas the law pointed us to our need for grace, now grace points us to our need for the law. Grace enables us to humbly submit to God's good government. And God gives grace to the humble that they may do just that."⁸

–Jen Wilkin

GOSPEL + SAFETY + TIME

by Aaron Armstrong

Every week, without fail—when we are ready to get down to business—my church community group begins the same way, with these words:

Because of the gospel, this is a safe place. What's said here, stays here. No one has anything to fear because if God is for us, who can be against us? Through the gospel, we are a family and you belong here. If one suffers, all suffer together; if one is honored, all rejoice together. To further the gospel, we are on mission together. We take responsibility to love our neighbors and declare the good news of Jesus together. This is a safe gospel family on mission together.

This relatively simple statement captures everything we're trying to be as a group and as a church—a culture and a community shaped by the gospel. A gospel culture, if you will.

COMMUNITY OF CLICHÉS

Many of us have heard or shared messages on the importance of community: “When we believe the gospel, we’re not simply saved from sin but into a people” is the common refrain. And this is true. But we

say it so often that it’s become a cliché. We can say this all day long and not really believe it. Too harsh? Maybe. But think about it. Our actions largely are the evidence of what we believe—they validate or discredit what we think is true about ourselves and our churches.

- When we say, for example, that our church is united as one body, but we allow politics and preferences to divide us, what do we really believe?
- We might say we want everyone to be known, but if people can attend anonymously for years, do we really believe it?
- We may say we want to be a safe place for everyone to be authentic and real, but if we only ever talk about “safe” struggles, then do we care about authenticity?

THE BUILDING BLOCKS OF GOSPEL CULTURE

Isn't the idea of a “gospel family” in my community group just another cliché? It could be. After all, using gospel as a qualifier to any kind of ministry or mindset (ex. The Gospel Project) has the potential of creating only a buzzword for something we deem important.

But when a church latches onto this idea—and I mean the whole church, not just one or two people within it—that what we believe about the gospel leads to a culture shaped by the gospel, there is nothing else like it in the world. So what does it take to actually do this? Three things: **Gospel + safety + time.**¹

- **GOSPEL.** It is impossible to have a gospel culture without the gospel itself. This doesn't mean we tack the gospel onto every conversation as though we were making some kind of evangelistic appeal at the end of a discussion. What it does mean is that when we have difficult conversations, we do so in light of the gospel, reminding one another of the hope we have in Jesus. It means we encourage one another in light of the gospel, celebrating how we see God at work in each other. In other words, when one of us is honored, we all rejoice together; when one suffers, we all suffer together (1 Cor. 12:26).
- **SAFETY.** Genuine community requires safety to be vulnerable, to let our guard down, and not come to church or community group with our “Sunday faces” on. This means we need to see one another not as problems to solve but people to know. Gospel culture means we are safe from fear and judgment. After all, perfect love drives out fear (1 John 4:18). Because of Jesus, God is for us, and if God is for us, who can be against us?
- **TIME.** Gospel culture—a culture where people feel genuinely safe and loved in and through the gospel—takes time.

This means there is no hurry when it comes to people. Again, people in our communities are not problems to solve but brothers and sisters to love. So we patiently let people experience the culture and be saturated in the gospel, praying and trusting that the Holy Spirit will work in them according to His timeline, not our own.

A FIRST STEP INTO GOSPEL CULTURE

When I first joined my church, I didn't know how much I needed this kind of community. People have rarely felt safe to me, even those who have genuinely tried to be kind. So for a long time, I kept my guard up. I watched as others opened up and celebrated as they did. And then one day, I let my guard down a bit. Years of hearing the message that we are a gospel family and seeing it week in and week out helped me take that step.

And do you know what happened? My group—my friends—didn't judge me. They rejoiced, not because I had done a good thing by opening up but because they saw this as God at work, and they were right.

That's what I'm talking about. That's the result of three things: **gospel + safety + time.** This is the kind of culture we all need—a life-giving culture that strengthens the weary and allows the “strong” to be weak. Where strangers, because of the gospel, can truly become family.

1. This understanding of gospel culture owes a tremendous debt to Ray Ortlund, founding pastor of Immanuel Church in Nashville, Tennessee, a parent church of my own.

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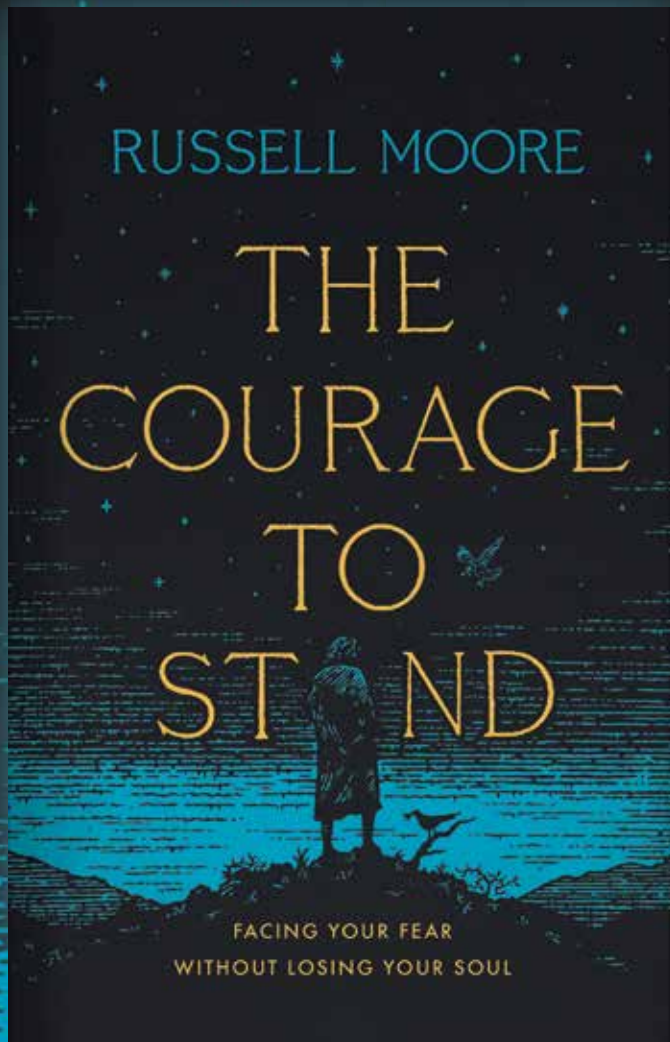
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