



the **GOSPEL**PROJECT.

# FROM REBELLION TO EXILE

ADULTS / DAILY DISCIPLESHIP GUIDE / FALL 2022 / VOL. 5



# 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

We have come a long way already in studying the storyline of the Bible. This very real and theological history of God's work in the world has spanned a few millennia, taken us from nothing to one couple to nations and peoples, and dragged us out of God's presence in the garden of Eden to a gracious restoration in the promised land. But the further on we go in the Old Testament, such as the narratives covered in this volume of The Gospel Project, the easier it is to feel depressed about the state of humanity in general and God's people, Israel, in particular. Sinful. Idolatrous. Rebellious. And no end in sight.

Following Solomon, we get king after king after king who chart their own course away from God, away from the relatively good example set by David. A few bright spots pop up here and there, but the listings and stories we find in 1 and 2 Kings and 2 Chronicles cast huge shadows over the land as the people choose to walk in darkness instead of God's light.

If we were in charge over these wayward people, we'd have given up long ago. The self-indictment in this statement is stunning because God should have abandoned each and every one of us as well. But the Lord is altogether different from us—He is constant, patient, slow to anger, and abounding in love. He sends prophets; He gives warnings; and when His words go unheeded, He does punish with exile. But His ray of hope remains. Even disaster upon His people cannot extinguish His plan to bring the Prophet, the King, the Savior of the world. So keep your eyes open because Jesus is coming.

## Daniel Davis

Content Editor

The Gospel Project for Adults

## The Gospel Project®

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

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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)

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## **VOL 5: From Rebellion to Exile**

(1 Kings–The Prophets) Fall 2022

**Unit 13:** Your Passions Wage War Within You (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:**  
1 Kings 15:25–16:34

**FOCAL PASSAGE:**  
1 Kings 16:33

NOTES



#### ESSENTIAL DOCTRINE #32: THE PROBLEM OF EVIL

Many atheists have argued that if God is all-powerful, all-loving, and knows everything, then evil would not exist in the world as humans know it today. But because evil exists in the world, God must not exist (or if He does exist, then He is not good or all-powerful). Despite its powerful rhetoric, appealing to evil as an argument against God fails first, because outrage over bad things in this world presupposes a "good" moral standard that does not exist apart from God; and second, because God could have a good reason (though unknown to us) for allowing evil and suffering to continue for a season. Given what we know about God's character and purposes, Christians can rest assured that even in the midst of evil, God is working all things for our good (Rom. 8:28).

God's anger can sometimes be difficult to understand. We know God is loving and kind. The first verse many of us memorized was John 3:16, about God loving the world so much that He sent His Son to give us life. But God can still express anger.

Anger is not an emotion we regularly view in a positive light. We see anger as something to avoid and something that is inherently wrong. Yet anger is just a neutral emotion that can cause us to sin or lead us to righteousness. Even Scripture says we can be angry and not sin (Eph. 4:26).

So God can be angry and not sin because He is angered by sin. God is perfect, holy, and just, so when He is angry, He is always angry about the right things and He always acts in accordance to His righteous character. We, on the other hand, many times react in sin when we are angry, thus portraying anger in more of a negative light.

God's anger is righteous. This means that He has every right to be angry. Because God is perfect and holy, He hates sin. Watching His people disobey and rebel angers Him. Here, Ahab's idolatry and sinfulness provoked God to anger, not because God hated Ahab but because God hates sin.

Understanding that God hates our sin and our sin angers Him should encourage us to avoid sin and seek to walk in obedience to God. This should also encourage us to know that God cares about justice in the world, and as we see evil, we know God will one day make all things right again. He has a perfect plan that we can't always see, but we can trust in His righteousness, goodness, and justice.

Fortunately for us as believers, by God's grace, even when He is angered by our sin, the blood of Jesus covers our sin and God looks on us with love.

**How should understanding God's anger change how you think about your sin?**

25



## 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).

### 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

## 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

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**What does this passage say?**



**What did this passage mean to its original audience?**



**What does this passage tell us about God?**



**What does this passage tell us about man?**



**What does this passage demand of me?**



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



**How does this passage prompt me to pray?**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## UNIT 13

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**YOUR PASSIONS**

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**WAGE WAR**

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**WITHIN YOU**

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# “If the Lord Is God, Follow Him!”

by Y Bonesteele

American Idol is a singing contest that promises to make the winner rich, famous, and ultimately an icon to be worshiped by many for his or her singing ability. In one sense, we all want to make idols of ourselves. We all want to be the center of our universe and sometimes the center of other people's universes. This is what we call idolatry. There can only be one supreme being at the center of the universe, however, and that is the triune God. If we put anyone or anything other than Him as the center, we have sinned against our Creator.

## **IDOLATRY FROM THE BEGINNING**

In the beginning, when Adam and Eve ate of the fruit that God told them not to eat, they were proclaiming that their wants were more important than God's commands, that they knew more than God, and that they could do whatever they wanted without any consequences. How wrong they were! Expelled from paradise and exiled from walking in daily

fellowship with the Lord, they exited Eden with shame and death on their backs as God had to kill an animal to clothe them. When we make ourselves idols or make idols for ourselves, God's intended natural order and goodness in the world goes askew, and brokenness and death are the natural consequences that appear at our doorstep.

God's chosen people had a habit of worshiping idols even when God explicitly gave them instructions not to. This eventually led to their demise as their kingdom split in two and both kingdoms fell under the leadership of mostly bad kings who did evil in the sight of the Lord. That's a phrase that occurs often in the Bible, characterizing ultimate evil. Whereas Adam and Eve knew well enough not to sin in front of the Lord, this new evil was so boastful that those who participated in it didn't even care whether God saw it or not. Of course, God sees everything, but the human authors were trying to convey that this evil was blatant, had no shame, and disregarded

When we follow idols,  
we exert energy  
toward something that  
will only turn to ashes,  
falling through our  
fingers like dust.

God in totality. Kings Jeroboam and Ahab, among others, did not even try to hide their evilness. Their “evil in the sight of the Lord” eventually led to death.

### **GOD’S COMPASSION AND PURSUIT**

In spite of all the evil of the kings and people of Israel and Judah, God continued to pursue them and to give them opportunities to repent and turn back to Him. He sent prophets and messengers to point out their sin, to show His power, and to instruct them to walk in the Lord’s ways. We read of Elijah and Elisha and how God used them as instruments to guide the people back. They performed miracles through the power of the Lord, they spoke judgment for those who did evil, and they called on people to repent.

Some listened. Some didn’t. But still God kept pursuing.

The Lord knows that people following idols is hurtful not only to Him as the Creator but also to all His image-bearers. Idolatry is evil, a violation against God’s good instructions, but it is also foolish, senseless, and purposeless. When we follow idols, we exert energy toward something that will only turn to ashes, falling through our fingers like dust. So God, who is slow to anger and abounding in love (Ex. 34:6), does all He can to draw us back to Him.

### **OUR MODERN IDOLS**

The idols of today include fame, fortune, sex, success, our homes, our happiness, among a myriad of other things. If we make these things central in our lives, if these are the things we worship, God will do what is necessary to bring us back to Him and help us see that only He is worthy of worship.

As we read about Jeroboam and Ahab, we find that nothing much has changed over thousands of years. We are still pursuing the same idols as the same God tries to direct us back to what is truly fulfilling and good for us.

---

The Lord is the only true God. He is the first  
and the last, the Alpha and the Omega.

# Jesus's work fulfills God's covenant to His people to multiply them, to redeem them, to save a remnant, and to call all nations to Himself.

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But God allows us to have a choice. He's not going to take over our minds and make us follow Him. He tries to persuade us with His own words, with messengers, and with consequences. Some of us may listen, and some of us may not. Those who don't listen refuse God's kindness because they have forgotten who God is, His faithfulness in the past, His presence in the present, and His hope in the future. Let the pages of old, the words of prophets and scribes, be a significant warning to us to remember that the Lord is the only true God. He is the first and the last, the Alpha and the Omega, the One who has no beginning and no end. And yet, He chooses to call His created beings—us—into a familial relationship with Him.

## A BETTER ELIJAH AND ELISHA

There is only one way for us to find forgiveness and freedom from our idolatry. We no longer have Elijah or Elisha to lead us back from our modern idols. But we do have someone better—Jesus Christ, the Son of God. In Him, God took on human form to come down in flesh to our level so that we might be persuaded to return to the one true God, that we might trust in Him and find

salvation and hope. Like Elijah and Elisha, Jesus performed miracles and spoke truth and called people to repentance. Yet unlike Elijah and Elisha, He was both man and God. He died for us, was resurrected for us, and is coming back again for us. He is prophet, priest, and king, and through Him we can have direct access to God. No other person could have done that for us.

God did this because of His love. Because He is slow to anger and abounding in love. Because He is a God who pursues sinful people. Because He desires that no one be lost in eternity. Jesus's work fulfills God's covenant to His people to multiply them, to redeem them, to save a remnant, and to call all nations to Himself. And as we know, God always keeps His promises.





# JEROBOAM'S COMPROMISE



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## **SESSION IN A SENTENCE:**

Left unchecked, doubt and fear can be the first steps toward sin and judgment.

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## **BACKGROUND PASSAGE:**

1 Kings 12–14

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## **SETTING:**

At some point in Solomon's wise reign over Israel, he succumbed to foolishness and worshiped idols. God had declared that He would humble David's descendants when they did not do what was right in His eyes. For Solomon, this took the form of war, but succeeding generations would suffer a divided kingdom. After Solomon's death, his son, Rehoboam, was made king over all Israel, but he did not listen to wisdom and was harsh with the people. Because of this, the kingdom was divided and Rehoboam ruled over Judah while the people established Jeroboam as king over the rest of Israel. Jeroboam now had the responsibility to lead the people to obey God and enjoy His favor.

# DAY 1

## READ:

**1 Kings 12**

## FOCAL PASSAGE:

**1 Kings 12:25-27**

## NOTES

Death can be an incredible motivator. We spend most of our lives avoiding death. We eat, drink water, sleep, exercise, and avoid pain as best we can to prevent death from getting a hold of us sooner than we like. Have you ever had a near-death experience?

We may avoid certain foods or make certain decisions all in the name of avoiding death. There is a healthy way to pursue safety and longevity in life, but there are also extreme responses. It would be unwise and unfulfilling to stay locked up in a bunker our entire lives for fear of death. In fact, we could do every single thing known to humankind to prevent death, and God still could stop our hearts and remove our breath in an instant.

It was the possibility of death that motivated new King Jeroboam to set up an altar to false gods. To avoid death, Jeroboam was willing to set up idols. Fear of death should never encourage sin. In fact, we have many examples in Scripture of the opposite taking place. Daniel looked death in the face in the lions' den, yet he did not waver in his obedience to God. John the Baptist proclaimed the Messiah was near and denounced sin and was beheaded for it. Countless Christians in other parts of the world are told to denounce their faith every day, and they have given their lives for remaining steadfast to the Lord.

Disobedience to God is not worth your life. It is better to be killed for obedience than to live longer while denying the gospel. Nothing in this world is able to satisfy your deepest desires. Compromising to gain a little admiration, pleasure, wealth, or anything else is more damaging to your soul than to walk away and pursue obedience over everything. You may not be facing death as a martyr at this moment, but you are constantly facing decisions to honor God or not. If you deny Him in the small things, what is to stop you from denying Him in moments of life or death?

**In what ways do you find yourself compromising and disobeying God instead of walking in obedience?**

# DAY 2

## READ:

**Matthew 5**

## FOCAL PASSAGE:

**Matthew 5:27-30**

## NOTES



## ESSENTIAL DOCTRINE #44: TEMPTATION AND SIN

Temptation is not the equivalent of sin. Temptation can refer to natural and good desires that are twisted and directed toward pleasing of self rather than giving glory to God. Jesus was tempted like we are (Matt. 4), and yet, He never sinned but faithfully resisted temptation and followed the will of His Father. Knowing our weakness, we are to be on guard against temptation that may lead us to sin (Matt. 26:41), and we pray for God to deliver us from evil (Matt. 6:13).

Sin is quite sneaky. It is easy to make several seemingly small decisions of disobedience that can lead us to a place where we turn around and have no idea how we got there. We may be tempted to think that the sin we are committing is not a big deal, it isn't affecting anyone, or we have it under control. Yet allowing small threads of sin to pull at our heart and mind could slowly lead to a full unraveling later.

The thread that Jeroboam pulled was doubting whether or not the people of his kingdom would stay under his reign. This led him to create a secondary place of worship, create idols, lead the people into sin, and try to arrest a man of God. It would have been easy for Jeroboam to justify his sinful actions or say he had good intentions. But the reality was his sin led him to idolatry.

The Bible is clear about the seriousness of sin. Even our momentary thoughts are a representation of what we really feel and think. In Matthew 5:28, Jesus states that if someone even looks with lust, they have committed adultery. And the solution is not to shrug our shoulders and hope we do better next time. Instead, it is to cut off the very source of sin and flee far from it.

Ultimately, sin is a heart issue, a faith issue, not believing and trusting that God is who He says He is and will do what He says He will. In our lack of trust, we want to do things our own way. But we must stop, evaluate every little action we do, and ask ourselves, "Is this glorifying God?" or "Could this lead me to sin?"

God is holy and just and will not stand even an iota of sin. But praise God for His mercy and grace in sending Jesus to die for our sins and to draw us back to Him when we fail His standards!

**In what areas of your life are you not taking your sin seriously and thus giving it a foothold in your heart and mind?**

# DAY 3

## READ:

**1 Kings 12:25-33**

## FOCAL PASSAGE:

**1 Kings 12:28-30**

## NOTES

## VOICES from THE CHURCH

"[Jeroboam's] intention seems to be, like Solomon, to dedicate a temple to the Lord. But he celebrates at the wrong time, in the wrong place, on the wrong altar, and in honour of the wrong gods. Just as there are two nations, two capitals and two kings, now there are also two religions. For the rest of Kings, Jeroboam will be spoken of as the one who led Israel astray."<sup>1</sup>

-Havilah Dharamraj

Fear of God can be a difficult thing to understand, yet it is essential in keeping us from sin. Jeroboam feared men and death more than he feared God. This led him to idolatry. And idolatry is still alive and well today in many of our modern-day pursuits.

If you have ever been more concerned about what a person thinks of you than what God thinks of you, you have feared man more than God. Maybe it's desiring wealth or status, fame or popularity, or just the good life, the comfortable and peaceful life—these too can be symptoms of fearing man more than God and can result in idolatry. It would be easy to raise our eyebrow at Jeroboam and think about how evil he was, but it would do us good to remember that we may only be two or three steps away from being just like him.

You may think to yourself, "I need to stop fearing man" or "I need to fear God more." These are true and right thoughts. However, it can sometimes be difficult to see results just by thinking you should change.

Your fear of man must be completely replaced by fear of God, and fear of God comes from knowing that God is all-powerful, all-knowing, all-sufficient, and perfectly holy, just, and loving. He cannot ignore sin, and we know that sin will not go unpunished. If we let sin rule in our hearts, if we let our fears of man and what they might do control us, then we have no room to let God rule in our hearts.

The worst that a person can do to you is destroy the body, and that is not insignificant. But for those who know Jesus, death does not have the final word. Even if the world hates us and kills us, we have the promise of life in eternity with Jesus. But if we do not repent of our sins, we will spend an eternity in hell apart from God. We must fear the God who punishes sin yet offers life in abundance for us as well (Matt. 10:28).

**What can you do to grow in the fear of the Lord instead of the fear of man?**

# DAY 4

## READ:

**1 Kings 13**

## FOCAL PASSAGE:

**1 Kings 13:8-10**

NOTES

There is a common message today that encourages us to be ourselves, to not let anyone tell us what to do, to pursue individuality, and to avoid being controlled by anyone else. This can sometimes lead us to reject authority in our lives or become skeptical of those who tell us how things are to be done. Whether this is a parent, pastor, boss, spouse, or any other person who is requesting a specific kind of behavior or action, we may allow our doubt of their trustworthiness to push us to reject their request.

We may even be tempted to interact with God this way. We may doubt His trustworthiness or think that we know a better way. Or put simply, we just do not want to be “controlled.” We want to protect ourselves, and we do not want anyone else telling us how to live our lives. God’s Word requires uncomfortable things of us. It requires us to deny ourselves to follow Jesus (Matt. 16:24).

Jeroboam is an example of someone who did not trust God as Ruler and Lord of his life. He rejected God’s authority and chose his own path instead. In contrast, there was a man of God. This man was obedient to God’s word (until he was deceived). He was completely submissive to God in every way, even with the possible threat that the king could punish or kill him.

In the story, one is king and one is a nameless voice for God. Who is the hero? Would you rather be a king that’s faithless or be someone who is nameless and devoted? Many of us are nameless heroes in God’s book as we choose to trust and be faithful to God alone. No one will write about us; we may never have a title. But in God’s book, our names will be written.

Choose to be nameless over being a king when faithfulness is asked of you. Choose obedience over self-indulgence. Choose total submission over getting your own way.

**What are some things keeping you from obeying God or from acknowledging His authority in your life?**

# DAY 5

## READ:

Exodus 20

## FOCAL PASSAGE:

Exodus 20:3-6

NOTES

As human beings with a sinful nature, it's natural for us to create idols. It could almost be considered impulsive. We may recognize an idol that we've created and then do the work to remove the idol and love God more. But before we know it, there is another idol forming in our hearts and demanding our love, affection, and admiration.

How do we overcome this? It feels daunting and hopeless. If we create idols by nature, then when will our struggle with idolatry end?

If you've been a Christian for very long, you've probably had moments in your life when you have been frustrated by your sin. You can't seem to stop a certain sin, or you do for a while and then it rears its ugly head all over again. How do we deal with this? Is there hope for us?

We must recognize that we live in the "already/not yet." What this means is that Jesus has already paid for our sin and has counted us righteous before God, but we are not yet perfect. God's kingdom has already come, but it is not yet complete. Day by day, we are being transformed into the image of God (2 Cor. 3:18), but daily we are reminded that we have not yet arrived.

In the meantime, we continue to trust in Christ as our Savior, whose death has given us righteousness before God. Though we still sin and break God's commands even when we don't want to, we do not live with the burden of hopelessness or the consequences of death.

Our hope for salvation and for sanctification is in Christ. We still strive for holiness in the power of the Holy Spirit, but we do not despair in our sin. We know that when we reach eternity, we will be made perfect and our hearts will no longer create idols.

**What idols or sins do you find yourself returning to?  
How will you live today in light of your hope in Christ for future freedom from sin?**

# GROUP

NOTES

## VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

"Jeroboam's first impiety was that he cast aside the promise of God . . . He trusted in his own providence and counsel, imagining that he defended himself and had gained the kingdom by himself. In a second clear impiety, he then cast aside those things of God that God had commanded in Deuteronomy. He raised up golden calves as gods, along with ways of worshiping that differed from the law. Third, he thrust this seemingly holy pretext onto future generations."<sup>2</sup>

-Johannes Bugenhagen  
(1485-1558)

**POINT 1: Doubting God's promises leads to fear** (1 Kings 12:25-27).

Jeroboam \_\_\_\_\_ God's \_\_\_\_\_ to give him a secure kingship through his obedience, and this would result in disobedience to God.



**Why is doubt a dangerous way to view and relate to God?**

Jeroboam's doubt led to fear. He misjudged his circumstances, which led to a fear of \_\_\_\_\_ over the fear of \_\_\_\_\_ .



**What reasons do we have to fear God over man?**

**POINT 2: Fear leads to idolatry**  
(1 Kings 12:28-33).

## ESSENTIAL DOCTRINE #44: TEMPTATION AND SIN

Temptation is not the equivalent of sin. Temptation can refer to natural and \_\_\_\_\_ desires that are twisted and directed toward pleasing of \_\_\_\_\_ rather than giving glory to God. Jesus was tempted like we are (Matt. 4), and yet, He never sinned but faithfully \_\_\_\_\_ temptation and followed the will of His Father. Knowing our \_\_\_\_\_ , we are to be on guard against temptation that may lead us to sin (Matt. 26:41), and we pray for God to \_\_\_\_\_ us from evil (Matt. 6:13).



**What are some ways we can resist temptation to sin?**



Jeroboam's self-reliance and desire to take matters into his \_\_\_\_\_ hands led to sin of the deepest kind— \_\_\_\_\_ and usurping \_\_\_\_\_ throne.



**What reasons do we have to trust God's wisdom over our own?**

NOTES

### **POINT 3: Idolatry leads to judgment**

(1 Kings 13:1-10).

An \_\_\_\_\_ man of God spoke God's judgment against Jeroboam and his idolatry. The Lord will \_\_\_\_\_ ignore distractions from His glory.



**Why should we listen to those who speak God's truth to us?**

Though Jeroboam \_\_\_\_\_ the Lord, God graciously healed his hand, yet there remained \_\_\_\_\_ fellowship between them.

## **MY RESPONSE**

Because God has proven Himself to be faithful to all of His promises, we live not in doubt and fear but with boldness and confidence, declaring Christ to the nations no matter the cost.

- **HEAD:** What are some areas in your life where you are doubting God, trusting your own wisdom?
- **HEART:** How has God been faithful to you, and how will you remember those things so you don't let doubt grow into fear?
- **HANDS:** How will you help others to trust Jesus by your life, words, and actions? How will you address your doubt and disobedience?

### **VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY**

"Miracles performed by good people on account of evil may themselves produce nothing but testimony for condemnation where there is no faith or conversion, having been found frightening more than inspiring. Ungodly people hear the man of God but do not heed him."<sup>3</sup>

—Konrad Pellikan (1478-1556)

# AHAB'S IDOLATRY



**+** **SESSION IN A SENTENCE:**

God will not fail to confront evil, but neither will He fail to offer mercy to those who repent.

**+** **BACKGROUND PASSAGE:**

1 Kings 15–18

**+** **SETTING:**

Because of Jeroboam's idolatry, his whole house was wiped out in judgment (1 Kings 14:10). The kings of Israel that followed failed to restore the kingdom to a healthy place. Over and over again, they walked in the ways of Jeroboam, in the ways of idolatry and sinfulness. With each passing king, it seemed to be getting worse. Then King Ahab came to power, and he was more evil than all the others. And of course, the people followed. But in God's mercy and grace, He sent messengers and prophets to speak truth and to call for a return to the Lord. Some would listen, and some would not.

# DAY 1

## READ:

**1 Kings 15:25–16:34**

## FOCAL PASSAGE:

**1 Kings 16:33**

## NOTES



## ESSENTIAL DOCTRINE #32: THE PROBLEM OF EVIL

Many atheists have argued that if God is all-powerful, all-loving, and knows everything, then evil would not exist in the world as humans know it today. But because evil exists in the world, God must not exist (or if He does exist, then He is not good or all-powerful). Despite its powerful rhetoric, appealing to evil as an argument against God fails: first, because outrage over bad things in this world presupposes a “good” moral standard that does not exist apart from God, and second, because God could have a good reason (though unknown to us) for allowing evil and suffering to continue for a season. Given what we know about God’s character and purposes, Christians can rest assured that even in the midst of evil, God is working all things for our good (Rom. 8:28).

God’s anger can sometimes be difficult to understand. We know God is loving and kind. The first verse many of us memorized was John 3:16, about God loving the world so much that He sent His Son to give us life. But God can still express anger.

Anger is not an emotion we regularly view in a positive light. We see anger as something to avoid and something that is inherently wrong. Yet anger is just a neutral emotion that can cause us to sin or lead us to righteousness. Even Scripture says we can be angry and not sin (Eph. 4:26).

So God can be angry and not sin because He is angered by sin. God is perfect, holy, and just, so when He is angry, He is always angry about the right things and He always acts in accordance to His righteous character. We, on the other hand, many times react in sin when we are angry, thus portraying anger in more of a negative light.

God’s anger is righteous. This means that He has every right to be angry. Because God is perfect and holy, He hates sin. Watching His people disobey and rebel angers Him. Here, Ahab’s idolatry and sinfulness provoked God to anger, not because God hated Ahab but because God hates sin.

Understanding that God hates our sin and our sin angers Him should encourage us to avoid sin and seek to walk in obedience to God. This should also encourage us to know that God cares about justice in the world, and as we see evil, we know God will one day make all things right again. He has a perfect plan that we can’t always see, but we can trust in His righteousness, goodness, and justice.

Fortunately for us as believers, by God’s grace, even when He is angered by our sin, the blood of Jesus covers our sin and God looks on us with love.

**How should understanding God’s anger change how you think about your sin?**

# DAY 2

## READ:

**1 Kings 17:1–18:21**

## FOCAL PASSAGE:

**1 Kings 18:21**

## NOTES

“How long?” Elijah asks. How long will the Israelites go back and forth between two choices: obey the one true God or obey other gods?

Let 1 Kings 18:21 sit with you for a few minutes. Think about your life, your choices, your beliefs, and your actions. None of us are spiritually balanced. We do not follow God perfectly, and we let other loves get in the way of our loving God. It may not be obvious to us that we are wavering between two opinions. This is why we need discerning questions that help us evaluate if we are drifting from our devotion to the Lord.

Sometimes we can ask ourselves these questions, but often we need the church, someone outside of ourselves to look in and ask us what we believe and where we might be coming up short.

When we analyze our hearts, when we see the places we are wavering, we may be tempted to remain seated on the fence. It is easy to convince ourselves that our sin is not too big of a deal. It is easy to believe that we’ll stop sinning tomorrow, but right now it is okay. Elijah made it clear to the people of Israel—you either follow God or you do not. There is no in-between option.

If you have shared the gospel with someone who grew up Hindu, you know that when they hear about Jesus, they often want to add Him to their list of hundreds of gods they might worship. They like what Jesus says and does, so they’re just going to add Him to a group of idols to worship.

Jesus cannot sit on the shelf with other gods. He is either Lord of the universe who conquered death or He is not. But you must be the one to choose, and there is a right and wrong answer to this test.

**In what areas of your life are you wavering between two opinions, struggling to let Jesus be Lord?**

# DAY 3

## READ:

**1 Kings 18:22-46**

## FOCAL PASSAGE:

**1 Kings 18:36-39**

## NOTES

## VOICES from THE CHURCH

"Elijah didn't pray so that people would think he was a great prophet or talk about his power. He didn't pray in order for his church to grow. He asked God to answer him so the people would know that the Lord was Yahweh, the Lord God."<sup>1</sup>

—Michael Catt

All-consuming fire.

Nothing in the path of the Lord's fire existed once the flames touched the ground. What marvelous and overwhelming power! We don't see acts of God like this today, but we do see the power of the Lord at work in changing lives and capturing hearts.

This evidence that Elijah prayed for was not so he would be proven right but so the people would return to the Lord. This example can shape the way we share the gospel. Think of a time you have shared the gospel with a friend, coworker, family member, or stranger. What was your motivation? Was it out of a desire to see the person consumed with the Holy Spirit and made obedient to Jesus, or was it for selfish reasons?

Elijah's prayer can be ours as well. We need to pray that others may know God and turn their hearts back to Him.

We have a God who answers prayers. Sharing the gospel can be scary and even frustrating at times. Yet if we truly love our neighbors—any other fellow human (Luke 10:29-37)—then praying that they would come to know the Lord is the most loving thing you could ever do for them. We are a cynical and doubting people. We sometimes struggle to believe that God really will answer our prayers. But He does! He answers our prayers and He saves sinners from the clutches of death.

Not only can God rain down all-consuming fire, He is consuming fire (Heb. 12:29). Because of Jesus Christ, we have new hope and new life and our lives become a living sacrifice to Him, our spiritual act of worship (Rom. 12:1). He desires that all would come to Him offering their lives in worship and sacrifice to the one true God.

**How might the way you share the gospel change if your prayers were similar to Elijah's?**

# DAY 4

## READ:

John 15

## FOCAL PASSAGE:

John 15:18-21

NOTES

Persecution is difficult for most Americans to understand. Most of us do not face beatings, public humiliation, or death for our obedience to Jesus. However, we can at least understand that the world hates us. If we believe that marriage is a God-ordained covenant between one man and one woman, then there are people who hate us for that belief. If we believe that abortion is the destruction of human life and not a removal of a clump of cells, then there are people who will hate us. In a conversation with just about any non-Christian, you will find some belief that you hold that they hate.

Yet we are often surprised by this as if Jesus did not tell us to expect it and that it was promised. We cannot expect America as a whole to hold the same values and beliefs that we do. America, just like many other parts of the world, is made up of some who follow Jesus and some who do not.

Personal offense at the world hating you is a misunderstanding of the path of the Christian. The world hates us as the world hated Jesus. His followers should not be surprised that they experience similar things to what He experienced on earth.

Previously, we read that Ahab hated Elijah because he brought a message from God that was negative. But Elijah continued to be faithful and bring the word of the Lord. We can remember to be like Elijah.

It is an honor to walk in the path of the Messiah. We can walk forward with confidence knowing that if we experience hatred from the world for our obedience to Scripture, we are walking directly behind Jesus, following in His footsteps, and that is exactly where we should be.

**How should expecting the world to hate you for your obedience to Scripture change the way you view and interact with the world?**

# DAY 5

## READ:

**Romans 12**

## FOCAL PASSAGE:

**Romans 12:17-21**

## NOTES

Responding to evil with good may be one of the most countercultural reactions one could give.

In a viral video, Shelby Houston spoke about her father, who was killed in the line of duty as a police officer. Her stunning eulogy demonstrates some of the most shocking grace you could expect.

Shelby forgave the man who killed her father and stated that she prayed that he would know Jesus. This response demonstrated Shelby's complete trust that it is God's responsibility to avenge her father's death. She did not desire to kill this man or see him suffer. Rather, she longed to see him repent and know the Lord.

When someone does something evil against us, it is natural to want to respond equally and give payback for what has been done. But we can trust the Lord to repay evil in a perfect and holy way. Only God is God; we are not. Vengeance belongs to God alone (Rom. 12:19).

Knowing that God has forgiven us over and over again should motivate us to learn to forgive others who have wronged us. It's easy to sin and ask God for forgiveness. It's not so easy when sinned against to forgive. But with God's help and strength through prayer, we can know we can overcome evil with good.

Our calling as believers is to love our enemies and care for them. When believers are able to forgive those who sin against them, and leave vengeance to the Lord, we might just find more people being drawn to the Lord and His love and mercy.

**When in your life have you chosen to love your enemies and treat them with kindness instead of repaying their evil? How did you see God at work in that instance?**



# GROUP

NOTES

## VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

"Elijah, the great prophet of God, taught that God rejects being worshiped alongside another god . . . For the Lord our God requires our entire heart, mind and soul. As such, he leaves nothing for us to give to another."<sup>2</sup>

-Heinrich Bullinger (1504-1575)

**POINT 1: Ahab leads the people further into idolatry** (1 Kings 16:29-34).

Ahab shows how sin leads to \_\_\_\_\_ sin when we \_\_\_\_\_ God.

### ESSENTIAL DOCTRINE #32: THE PROBLEM OF EVIL

Many atheists have argued that if God is all-powerful, all-loving, and knows everything, then evil would not exist in the world as humans know it today. But because evil exists in the world, God must not exist (or if He does exist, then He is not good or all-powerful). Despite its powerful rhetoric, appealing to evil as an argument against God fails: first, because outrage over bad things in this world presupposes a " \_\_\_\_\_ " moral standard that does not exist apart from God, and second, because God could have a good reason (though unknown to us) for allowing evil and suffering to continue for a \_\_\_\_\_. Given what we know about God's \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_, Christians can rest assured that even in the midst of evil, God is working all things for our good (Rom. 8:28).



**Why should we maintain hope when we see evil?**

**POINT 2: Elijah leads the people toward repentance** (1 Kings 18:15-21).

In spite of the potential \_\_\_\_\_, Elijah \_\_\_\_\_ God to appear before King Ahab and confront him for his sin and idolatry.



**What are some potential dangers believers in Christ might face for obeying the Lord?**

Elijah challenged the people of Israel for their \_\_\_\_\_ worship in hope of bringing them to \_\_\_\_\_ and back to worship of the Lord.



**Why should believers be able to speak the truth with boldness even in the face of opposition?**

NOTES

### **POINT 3: God's power leads the people toward worship** (1 Kings 18:36-39).

Elijah's \_\_\_\_\_ revealed his heart for God and the \_\_\_\_\_ people of Israel, desiring them to turn to God in \_\_\_\_\_ and repentance.

God's people saw the Lord demonstrate His \_\_\_\_\_ as the one true God, so they acknowledged and \_\_\_\_\_ the Lord \_\_\_\_\_.



**What are some ways we can see the power of God on display today?**

## **MY RESPONSE**

Because Christ suffered and died on our behalf, we rely on God for the strength we need to deliver His message no matter the hardships we may face.

- **HEAD:** What consistent sinful thoughts are you struggling with, and how will you take those thoughts captive, replacing them with truth?
- **HEART:** How will you pray for yourself so that your affections for the Lord may grow?
- **HANDS:** How will you pray today for people who do not know the Lord as the one true God?

### **VOICES from THE CHURCH**

"False gods push us to mutilate ourselves because we desperately want to win their approval. But only one God was ever mutilated for us—Jesus Christ."<sup>3</sup>

—J. D. Greear

# ELIJAH'S SUCCESSOR



## + SESSION IN A SENTENCE:

Those who seek to be faithful to God's call do so empowered and equipped by His Spirit.

## + BACKGROUND PASSAGES:

1 Kings 19; 2 Kings 2

## + SETTING:

Elijah had been a faithful prophet, obedient to God and consistent in calling Israel to repentance and their own obedience to God. He spoke directly about the sins of the people and performed miracles that demonstrated the Spirit of God was with him. Now the end of Elijah's time on earth was near. He was still following the Lord faithfully, and his protégé, Elisha, was right by his side. The nation of Israel still needed a prophet, still needed someone to declare God's truth to them. God had said it would be Elisha, but how would Elisha fill Elijah's rather large shoes?

# DAY 1

## READ:

**2 Kings 2:1-6**

## FOCAL PASSAGE:

**2 Kings 2:6**

## NOTES

Being faithful can be difficult for many of us. With divorce rates at an all-time high, people leaving employers, people leaving churches—faithfulness seemingly is not a natural trait for us.

But sometimes God does call us to move on to different things, in which case a lack of faithfulness can be assumed incorrectly. Perhaps someone is being faithful to God by leaving a job or neighborhood to become a missionary. There are plenty of scenarios of following God and needing to leave something.

Though lack of faithfulness can sometimes be difficult to label, faithfulness isn't. Being a good friend, good spouse, and faithful disciple is someone who stays the course no matter the circumstances. This is one of the greatest challenges in the Christian life.

We face so many things that tempt us to look away from the Lord. The road is indeed narrow in following Christ. It can be tempting to wonder if following Jesus is really worth it sometimes. Our hearts can grow faint and weary when the trials of life come our way, such as poverty, illness, slander, loneliness, abuse, or any other pain in this life.

When the world feels like it is caving in and you are uncertain whether or not you can handle all that is being thrown your way, you have a choice: You can walk away and declare that you do not trust God, or you can lean on Him and believe that He will carry you to the end.

Elisha knew that Elijah was going to be taken away from him and that the road of a prophet was dangerous at worst and tumultuous at best. Yet he stayed on the road with Elijah and with God until the very end. This is a great example to us that even when it is difficult, faithfulness to God is always the right and most rewarding path.

**What are some ways you need to demonstrate your faithfulness in the coming days, months, and years?**

# DAY 2

## READ:

**2 Kings 2:7-8**

## FOCAL PASSAGE:

**2 Kings 2:7-8**

## NOTES



### ESSENTIAL DOCTRINE #85: MISSION OF THE CHURCH

The church is a sign and instrument of the kingdom of God, a people united by faith in the gospel announcement of the crucified and risen King Jesus. The mission of the church is to go into the world in the power of the Spirit and make disciples by proclaiming this gospel, calling people to respond in ongoing repentance and faith, and demonstrating the truth and power of the gospel by living under the lordship of Christ for the glory of God and the good of the world.

The devil is a powerful being. Sin is a mighty force against humanity. Idolatry is destroying the world. When you stop to think about these realities, you might shudder at how powerful and mighty is the darkness in the world.

In Elijah and Elisha's day, idolatry and sin were beating down the doors of Israel, and Elijah was ready to leave the world. The people still had a long way to go to show their obedience and faithfulness to God. The powerful schemes of the devil and the Israelites' own sin seemed to be ravaging them. Thus, a display of power was necessary to demonstrate who was really in charge—namely, the One who created the heavens and the earth and who holds all things together with His word.

Thus, we arrive at the river. There God displayed His power. Sometimes God displays His power to convince the nations and the people to return to Him in urgency. Sometimes He displays His power to encourage and comfort His people with His presence.

When God divided the waters of the Jordan River and Elijah and Elisha crossed on dry land, God encouraged both of them to continue walking, even knowing Elijah's time had come to an end. Both needed that encouragement: Elijah needed to be assured that God was present in his last days; Elisha needed to be assured that God was present as he replaced the great prophet Elijah.

The God who brought His people out of slavery in Egypt and who brought Israel to their promised land by crossing this same river on dry land—this was the same God present with Elijah and Elisha in His power. Nothing can come against this God; all other powers cower in the light of His glory. And that in itself brings comfort to all who believe.

**What are some ways you can regularly remind yourself of God's demonstrations of His power? How should that affect your daily life?**

# DAY 3

## READ:

**2 Kings 2:9-15**

## FOCAL PASSAGE:

**2 Kings 2:14**

## NOTES

“Where is the LORD?” asked Elisha. What are we to think of this question?

There are two ways we can interpret this question from Elisha. Either he was saddened by the loss of Elijah and questioning if the Lord was even present with him in his mourning or he realized he had taken the baton of being prophet and needed assurance that this was from the Lord, asking, “Lord, are You with me on this?” Maybe it was a little of both, with Elijah needing God to display His power through him to assure him of God’s presence.

Have you asked God something similar? In desperation during struggles: “Where are You, God? Are You listening? Do You care about me?” During times of needing direction: “Lord, is this the right path? Did I make the correct choice? Are You equipping me for this next role?”

In the face of uncertainty, it is common for us to wonder where God is, if He is present, and if He will direct and equip us.

It is easy to wonder if God even hears our prayers when we do not hear Him speak audibly back to us or see Him act by parting a river. But God doesn’t take our prayers or questions lightly. Rather, He is longing for us to seek Him in prayer and through His Word to help us find the answers to our questions.

When we ask, “Where is the Lord?” we can look to the Bible and see stories like this one, where God answers very clearly that He is near and present. Be assured that God will always answer us when we are looking for His presence or His empowerment in ministry. It might not be through parting the Jordan River, but it will be clear if we truly seek Him.

**If you are wondering where the Lord is, how does the story of Elijah and Elisha help answer that question?**

# DAY 4

## READ:

**Romans 8**

## FOCAL PASSAGE:

**Romans 8:12-17**

## NOTES

## VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

"Come, Holy Comforter,  
Thy sacred witness bear  
In this glad hour! Thou, who  
almighty art, Now rule in  
ev'ry heart And ne'er from us  
depart, Spirit of power."<sup>1</sup>

—Anonymous Hymn,  
"Come, Thou Almighty King"

The Spirit of God—when you think about Him, what comes to mind?

We can be tempted to minimize the Holy Spirit. We forget that this is the Spirit who brought Jesus back to life and that the Spirit is actually living in us and is just as powerful today as in the days of Jesus and the disciples and throughout time. Sometimes we don't actually believe that the Spirit is alive and powerful.

We can also be tempted to overemphasize the Spirit and believe that if we just have enough faith or pray hard enough or conjure up enough "Spirit gifts," we can have the power to do whatever we want by the Spirit. We treat the Spirit as a magical talisman to give us power and not as God who is all-powerful.

The Spirit of God is an equal Person of the Trinity, just as important as God the Father and Jesus the Son. The Spirit is who we have right now. The Spirit is alive and active in us! And this is what gives us life and allows us the ability to call out to God as Father, being adopted into His family.

Our adoption as sons and daughters is sealed by the work of the Spirit, and thus, we are heirs and co-heirs with Christ. Therefore, we serve and minister for the kingdom in glory and in suffering.

As we choose to follow Christ and bring peoples and nations into God's kingdom, we are empowered by and equipped by the Holy Spirit to accomplish the will and purposes of God. We need not fear. We need not doubt. But giving God all the glory, we continue in the work set before us until the end of our lives or until Jesus returns to restore all things and make things new.

**Do you tend to overemphasize or underemphasize the power of the Spirit? How will you seek to understand the Spirit more fully today?**



# DAY 5

## READ:

**Luke 9**

## FOCAL PASSAGE:

**Luke 9:23-24**

## NOTES

In 2 Kings 2:12-14, we find Elijah had been taken away. Immediately after, Elisha tore his own clothes, picked up Elijah's cloak, and struck the water with it as Elijah did.

In Luke 9:23, Jesus says if we want to come after Him, we must deny ourselves, pick up our cross, and follow Him. Do you see the similarity there? What an example Elisha is for us!

Elisha left his old self behind, his old clothes behind. He took up Elijah's mantle, his cloak, a symbol of his prophetic responsibility, and followed in Elijah's steps and actions, performing miracles to display God's presence and power for the purposes of God.

In the same way, as disciples of Christ, we are called to do the same—to put our old self behind, pick up our cross, and follow Jesus. In picking up our cross, we know that this will not be an easy path void of trouble or turmoil. Jesus asks that every day, we ought to walk behind Him with a cross, with a burden in the sense of a heavy responsibility, to follow in Jesus's steps. When Jesus walked with His cross, He was beaten and bruised and bloodied. He took up His cross because He loved us and wanted to save us from our sins.

Following Jesus requires losing our life for His sake. It is the upside-down world. You die to live and you gain by losing. Not many believe this kind of life is worth living. We want comfort and ease, not pain and suffering. But the path Jesus walked was not too low for Him, so it ought not be too much for us.

Ultimately, we can follow Jesus because He is walking with us, being the One who really is carrying the load. He has already done the most difficult part by dying, so now we can live in obedience to Him. Jesus strengthens our steps and, in our weakness, helps us carry our cross.

**How will you die to yourself today and follow Jesus?**

# GROUP

NOTES

## VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

"Except the Lord endow us with power from on high, our labour must be in vain, and our hopes must end in disappointment."<sup>2</sup>

—Charles Spurgeon (1834-1892)

### POINT 1: Faithful to the Call (2 Kings 2:1-6)

Faithfulness involves remaining \_\_\_\_\_ to your calling. Elisha was called to be a \_\_\_\_\_ of Elijah and eventually to take his place, so he refused to leave his mentor's side.



**What are some ways disciples of Jesus should demonstrate their faithfulness to Him?**

The mark of faithfulness is not a one-time event but a \_\_\_\_\_ of \_\_\_\_\_ over time.

### POINT 2: Power for the Call (2 Kings 2:7-8)

Elijah and Elisha's journey brought them to the edge of the Jordan River, a place remembered for a display of \_\_\_\_\_ power to provide for His people and to affirm \_\_\_\_\_ as His chosen leader after Moses.



**What are some physical places that hold spiritual meaning for you?**

Elijah, in the pattern of Joshua and Moses, struck the water so that it parted for Elisha and him to pass through, but the power for the miracle came not from Elijah but from God, the \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ of the world.

### POINT 3: Equipped for the Call (2 Kings 2:9-15)

If Elisha was to succeed Elijah as the Lord's prophet, he knew he would \_\_\_\_\_ what Elijah had with \_\_\_\_\_, perhaps more, so he asked for a double portion as an inheritance.

## ESSENTIAL DOCTRINE #85: MISSION OF THE CHURCH

The church is a sign and \_\_\_\_\_ of the kingdom of God, a people united by faith in the gospel announcement of the \_\_\_\_\_ and risen King Jesus. The mission of the church is to go into the world in the power of the \_\_\_\_\_ and make disciples by proclaiming this gospel, calling people to respond in ongoing repentance and faith, and demonstrating the truth and power of the gospel by living under the lordship of Christ for the \_\_\_\_\_ of God and the \_\_\_\_\_ of the world.



**Why do we need the Holy Spirit to fulfill our gospel mission in the world?**

## MY RESPONSE

Because we have been given the Holy Spirit, we fulfill the mission Christ has given to us and share the gospel with the world, knowing that our strength comes from God's Spirit.

- **HEAD:** In the areas of life where you are struggling to believe God has a plan, what is the next faithful step you should take?
- **HEART:** How should knowing God is just as powerful today as He was in Elijah's day change the way you pray, speak, and act?
- **HANDS:** Who will you share the gospel with this week, knowing you have the power and comfort of the Holy Spirit?

NOTES

## VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

"As Elisha had his request granted on condition that he see Elijah at his ascension, so the faithful who see, that is, believe not only the incarnation and passion but also the resurrection and ascension of Christ into heaven, obtain their request to do greater things in the Spirit than Christ did, as he promised they would."<sup>3</sup>

—John Mayer (1583–1664)

# ELISHA'S POWER

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## SESSION IN A SENTENCE:

God works through His people to do great things for His glory.

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## BACKGROUND PASSAGE:

2 Kings 4–6

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## SETTING:

Elijah left the earth by God's appointment, and by God's will, he passed on his title and his spirit to the new prophet, Elisha. This prophet is now filled with the same power as his predecessor and is present in Israel. The majority of kings that follow in Israel are still wicked in the eyes of the Lord, and the people follow them. So Israel still needs a prophet to call them to repentance and obedience to Yahweh. Through Elisha, God continues to demonstrate His power so the kings, people, and nations will know Yahweh is the Lord God. And Elisha remains faithful in obedience to God, following the footsteps of his mentor.

# DAY 1

## READ:

**2 Kings 4:1-37**

## FOCAL PASSAGE:

**2 Kings 4:27-28**

NOTES

Our faith finds its greatest challenge in the face of death. Life comes with many struggles and trials, to be sure, but no difficulty compares to death. The grief that comes when someone we love dies is unlike any other pain in this life. Our only hope in the face of death for ourselves or someone near to us is eternal life with Christ for those who follow Him.

Death without the hope of resurrection is completely hopeless. Once you die, there is no way to undo it. And even more desperate is the thought of eternal death, eternal separation from God.

No one wants to dwell on death, yet we cannot have a serious appreciation of eternal life offered to us without an understanding of what we are being saved from. And through that understanding, we see the greatness of God in all His glory, love, mercy, grace, justice, and holiness, all in one.

In Christ, then, death does not have the final say. In Christ, we are saved from an eternal death that keeps us far from the love of God and we are brought near to God, into His loving arms, into the home He has prepared for us.

But first, we must assess: Are we true followers of Christ? Do our actions show faith in the Creator God and trust in Jesus's sacrifice on the cross for us? Or have we simply been going through the motions because going to church seems comfortable as part of our routine?

**Assess your walk with the Lord. Have you been living in a way that shows you have complete trust and faith in Jesus Christ? If not, how will you further surrender to the Lord in every aspect of your life?**

# DAY 2

## READ:

**2 Kings 4:38-44**

## FOCAL PASSAGE:

**2 Kings 4:42-44**

NOTES

Doubt is a tricky thing. In one sense, because we are human, we are always going to struggle with doubt. In another sense, doubt left unchecked can keep us from a life of obedience and can eventually taint our trust in God.

Elisha's attendant was doubtful that God could perform a miracle. Famine was in the land, but a man came with an offering of bread to give to Elisha as an offering to God.

Not only did God prove that He is a God who listens to and provides for those who trust Him, through this story, we're reminded that God can do much with very little. But we do need to offer what we have to Him. The man who offered his bread could have kept it for himself or doubted that it could be of use at all since it wasn't much when so many people were hungry. But he trusted God and knew it was God who gave in the first place. God can do much with our offerings, especially when it comes to the offering of our very lives.

So when we experience doubt, we can let that doubt consume our thoughts, direct our hearts, and leave us uncertain. Or we can bring our doubts to God and ask Him to remind us that He is trustworthy and that He always cares for us and is able to do so much more than we can imagine (Eph. 3:20-21).

The Lord does not abandon us. And even when we struggle to see or understand what He is doing around, in, and through us, we can trust He is at work.

**Where are you struggling with doubting God right now?  
What examples can you remember of times when God has been faithful in your life even when you couldn't see it or understand?**

# DAY 3

## READ:

**2 Kings 5**

## FOCAL PASSAGE:

**2 Kings 5:10-14**

## NOTES

## VOICES from THE CHURCH

"All Naaman needed was nothing. It was the one thing Naaman didn't have."<sup>1</sup>

-Sally Lloyd-Jones

Have you ever heard the phrase, "Delayed obedience is still disobedience"? This is true, but thankfully, it need not be the end of the story.

The Gentile Naaman did not like what Elisha commanded him to do to be healed of his skin disease, so he walked away. Only after his servants coaxed him did he go to the river and obey Elisha's instructions.

In our lives, we know what God has said. We understand the commands He gives us, but we don't like them. There may be several reasons why we delay our obedience. Maybe God's command is inconvenient. Maybe it would require that we give up something we don't want to. Maybe it seems like it is just too difficult. Or maybe it seems like it is just too easy and beneath us.

Usually our disobedience is because of pride. Ultimately, we want to do what we want to do and we don't like to do what others tell us. We think we can do things on our own. Our pride and selfishness and ego take over and we pause, take our time, or completely disobey.

No matter our reason for delaying obedience to God, we are still disobedient if we withhold obedience for a time. But thankfully, God is gracious to us and He delights in our obedience even if we reject His Word and commands for us for a time. In Naaman's case, though he scoffed at Elisha's command at first, he eventually obeyed and God still healed him in His grace and mercy. And then Naaman turned around, humbled himself, and responded in worship to the one true God.

God desires that all would turn back to Him, so He gives us all opportunities upon opportunities to do so.

**What might be causing you to delay obedience to God today? What actions do you need to take right now in faithful obedience to the Lord?**

# DAY 4

## READ:

Mark 6

## FOCAL PASSAGE:

Mark 6:41-44

NOTES

In Mark 6, we can immediately sense the similarities between Jesus's feeding the five thousand and Elisha's feeding the crowd of prophets. In both stories, there is a need for food and the people are hungry. One in a famine, one through a long day. In both stories, the prophet/leader tells the servant/disciples to give the people something to eat, and in both stories, the servant/disciples are doubtful and hesitant. Instead of simply obeying, they question how to do so and if it were even possible. In both stories, God provides food from very little. In both stories, all the people present are able to eat. In both stories, God does even more and provides leftovers.

Jesus and Elijah in these stories step forward and demonstrate the power of God. They instruct for the people to eat. And one of the most powerful portions of this passage in which Jesus performs this miracle is in the result that everyone ate and had their fill. Not only was there enough food for all of them, but they were satisfied, and there was even food left over.

Can God not do above and beyond what we ask and what is possible? Of course, He can—He is God! And He does much with very little. He can do much with our very little lives.

This is a picture of what coming to Jesus is like. Not only does He feed us with food and bread and the provisions of life, but He satisfies us—with Himself! With Christ, we no longer hunger and thirst; we need not long for anything because He is sufficient for us. He truly is the Bread of Life and Living Water.

**What are some ways you can grow in your faith that Jesus is sufficient for all of your needs?**



# DAY 5

## READ:

**Philippians 2:1-18**

## FOCAL PASSAGE:

**Philippians 2:9-11**

## NOTES



### ESSENTIAL DOCTRINE #27: GOD'S GLORY

The glory of God is His manifest work, the way He represents His perfect character through His activity. It also refers to His excellent reputation and is given as one of the reasons we are to praise His name. Another sense of the word is the inherent beauty of God, the unbearable brightness and beauty of His being as He radiates His own attributes and characteristics for all to witness. The Scriptures speak of humanity as having "fallen short" of God's glory (Rom. 3:23) because we have rejected the purpose for which God created us—to glorify Him.

Noah, Abraham, Moses, Joshua, David, Elijah, Elisha—all of these men were incredible and powerful. They performed miracles, listened to God's word, and exuded wisdom unlike anyone else in their day. Yet they are not considered the greatest in history.

These great men did great things with the power of God. They healed, they won battles, they brought God's people back to Him, and they were faithful to God (most of the time). But ultimately, they were not perfect because they were fully human and only human.

Jesus, however, is different. Similar but greater. He lived a perfect life, being truly human and also truly God. He resurrected life and also resurrected Himself. He died that sinners might live. Being God, only He could satisfy our punishment, only He could be a final sacrifice for our sins, only He could forgive us completely and do the impossible in reconciling us to a holy God.

Because of Jesus's death, burial, and resurrection, He is exalted above all others. His name is above all others. And every person, no matter how powerful and renowned they were on earth, will fall at Jesus's feet when they meet Him face to face. He is worthy of all admiration and honor. All of the Bible's historical figures point to Jesus, as He is the plan all along to restore and redeem humankind. In His humbling, in His servanthood, in His obedience, we are made new. And He asks us to follow Him, trust Him, and be like Him. Through the power of the Holy Spirit, we can do so, with His strength overcoming our weakness.

Praise be to God for how He loves us enough to send His Son to die for our sins!

**Like Jesus, how can you humble yourself and live in obedience this week to be a servant to others and point them to Jesus, our Savior and Lord?**

# GROUP

NOTES

## VOICES from THE CHURCH

"Humans have been unable to open their own eyes, spiritually, since Adam hid behind the tree in hopes that his hiding from God could save him from God. We've all become very creative at trying to make ourselves see, but we will never succeed . . . [God] will always be doing what no one can: be God. The God who does the miraculous. And we can be sure that the salvation of a sinner is the greatest miracle the world could ever see."<sup>2</sup>

-Jackie Hill Perry

## POINT 1: The man of God brings life from death (2 Kings 4:18-21,32-35).

\_\_\_\_\_ drove the Shunammite woman to the man of God. Though her son had died, she kept her \_\_\_\_\_.

Elisha was a \_\_\_\_\_ of God's power, and through him, the dead son was raised to life. Jesus is \_\_\_\_\_ Man of God with the \_\_\_\_\_ to raise the dead, both physically and spiritually.



**How should the reality of God's resurrection power affect the lives and actions of people today?**

## POINT 2: The man of God multiplies bread for the people (2 Kings 4:42-44).

Elisha's faith led to \_\_\_\_\_ that the Lord would \_\_\_\_\_ for the needs of the people.



**What are some ways you have seen the Lord provide for your needs?**

## ESSENTIAL DOCTRINE #27: GOD'S GLORY

The glory of God is His manifest work, the way He represents His perfect \_\_\_\_\_ through His \_\_\_\_\_. It also refers to His excellent reputation and is given as one of the reasons we are to praise His name. Another sense of the word is the inherent beauty of God, the unbearable brightness and beauty of His being as He radiates His own attributes and characteristics for \_\_\_\_\_ to witness. The Scriptures speak of humanity as having "fallen short" of God's glory (Rom. 3:23) because we have rejected the purpose for which God created us—to \_\_\_\_\_ Him.



What are some ways we can serve the Lord for His glory?

**POINT 3: The man of God heals a skin disease** (2 Kings 5:1-3,10-16).

NOTES

The young slave girl demonstrated \_\_\_\_\_ by \_\_\_\_\_ with her captors about God and His work through His prophet, Elisha.



What are some ways we can show kindness in the world and point people to Jesus?

God desires that all people in every nation would come to \_\_\_\_\_ in and glorify Him. He healed Naaman for this and sent \_\_\_\_\_ for us.

## MY RESPONSE

Because we have come to know Jesus as the Word of God and have been forgiven and transformed by Him, we declare God's Word to those around us with faith and boldness so that God may move others from death to life.

- **HEAD:** How should faith in Jesus, the powerful Son of God, affect the way you think, speak, and act this week?
- **HEART:** How have you experienced the comfort of God's power in hard times? Praise Him for His love and care for you.
- **HANDS:** What are some ways you will care for people's physical needs this week? For their spiritual needs, namely, to know Jesus and believe in Him?

## VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

"Every effort to change must involve at its core a shift in direction away from dependence on one's own resources for life to dependence on God."<sup>3</sup>

-Larry Crabb (1944-2021)

# THE FUTILITY OF IDOLATRY

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## SESSION IN A SENTENCE:

Idolatry is rebellion against God, born in the hearts of people when they worship parts of creation rather than the Creator.

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## BACKGROUND PASSAGE:

Isaiah 44–46

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## SETTING:

Isaiah prophesied during a relatively good time for the Southern Kingdom of Judah, but the Northern Kingdom of Israel was in its death spiral leading to their eventual fall to Assyria. Still, idolatry remained a struggle for both kingdoms in varying degrees until both met their demise in exile as God's punishment. One place Isaiah addressed this issue was in a portion of his prophetic book aimed ahead to a time after the people had been deported to pagan lands. Through Isaiah, the Lord made the case that idols, whether local or abroad, were nothing but a dead distraction from the one true God.

# DAY 1

## READ:

Isaiah 44:1-5

## FOCAL PASSAGE:

Isaiah 44:1-5

## NOTES

When we stop and really think about the fullness of what God has done, does, and will continue to do for us, it can stop us in our tracks.

God made us. He thought our life was worth living and gave us breath. He formed us in our mother's womb before anyone else had seen our face. And He knows us completely, our past, present, and future, and He loves us still.

God provides His Spirit for us. God Himself is dwelling inside of us as believers, giving us the hope and courage that we need to carry on. This Spirit gives us comfort and peace in a world that is in constant turmoil. The support of the Spirit is unmatched. He guides us and gives us counsel, convicts us, and seals us as His own.

God also blesses us with offspring. Even if you have never had children of your own, you are able to carry on in the Spirit and multiply children in the faith by sharing the love of Christ and the gospel message with others. God allows us to partner with Him in growing His kingdom, in creating a multitude of worshipers for His glory.

God has also written His name on us. This means that no threat can truly harm us. We are sealed with the promise of eternity with God forever. God has sealed us with His name because we are His children by faith in Jesus and He is our God. He is the same God who has always existed and who is the only true God to be worshiped forevermore.

**What are some blessings in your life that have come from God? What praise will you give Him today for the love He has lavished on you?**

# DAY 2

## READ:

Isaiah 44:6-11

## FOCAL PASSAGE:

Isaiah 44:6

## NOTES

We cannot mess up God's plan. This may be a profound and uncomfortable thought, but it is absolutely true. Even our best efforts to ruin things are thwarted by a God who is not surprised by anything. What a strange truth that should bring us incredible comfort.

As we are daily following Christ, when we are left to make a difficult decision, maybe one where both options seem good, we can step out in faith and choose without fearing that we will be outside of God's will. As our desire is to do what God desires, that is a very good thing. However, we can sometimes become paralyzed because we have put so much emphasis on figuring out God's plan, not wanting to make a mistake. We then live a life of inaction and complacency.

But God says many times in the Bible not to fear, not to worry. Seek God and His kingdom first and everything will turn out as God wills it. For He is the first and He is the last. Everything is in His hands.

God's sovereignty and His omniscience actually free us to live our lives with great comfort and peace. We are not so significant that one decision will disrupt the cosmos and cause the world to implode. As we daily walk with Him, He gives us much freedom and wants to guide us and give us good gifts. The key, though, is that daily walk.

If instead we are following the idols of our modern world, the straight and narrow path starts to get foggy and we might end up lost. But God is gracious with us still, knowing that we are sinners in need of the Savior, and desiring that we find the right path home.

In both cases, we rest in the comfort of His knowledge and hold on to the knowledge that all things are in His hands.

**Are you holding back on making a decision because of fear of what might happen? How can trusting in God's knowledge of all things bring you comfort and confidence to do the next right thing?**

# DAY 3

## READ:

Isaiah 44:12-23

## FOCAL PASSAGE:

Isaiah 44:12-17

## NOTES



## ESSENTIAL DOCTRINE #40: SIN AS IDOLATRY

Sin is not only a physical act of rebellion against God, such as lying or stealing, but it is also a matter of the heart. The physical displays of sin are the fruit of what has been birthed in the heart of a person (Matt. 15:10-20). In Scripture, idolatry usually refers to bowing down to a statue made of wood or gold, worshiping created things instead of the Creator. But idolatry can take on more subtle forms: a seeking of approval, security, power, pleasure, etc. We can diagnose the idolatry of our heart by examining the areas where the desires of our heart have turned into idolatrous demands (Jas. 4:1-2).

Giving up something we cherish has always been difficult. When we were children, giving up a pacifier or beloved toy was about the most devastating thing that could occur. As older children and teenagers, giving up time with friends or playing games could disrupt our entire week.

Adults are above that, right? What about the relationship you know needs to end? What about the money you know you should start saving? What about that job promotion that would cause you to be away from your family more often? The list is endless.

As adults, we are still scared to lose something we want. It can be even more difficult if we have invested time, energy, and money into something that God is asking us to give up. We like comfort and security, we like what is familiar, but sometimes these are not the best things for us. These may be good things in a general sense, but if they have become an idol in our lives, something we treasure above God Himself, then we have fallen into idolatry! Idolatry in our modern world is a sin that creeps up on us so gradually that sometimes it's difficult to spot it. We might even think something we worship is a blessing given by God, and it actually could be, but we have turned it into a gross idol.

Let's remind ourselves to release our grip on things, to stand before the Lord with open hands. Sometimes God is calling us to be uncomfortable for a season so that we might learn to find our comfort in Him. Whatever it is that may be taken from you at some point, the Christian can have hope because we know God is a good, faithful, and holy God.

**In your life right now, what are some things you believe God might be calling you to let go of but that you are struggling to release? Who are some trusted believers you could discuss this struggle with for wisdom and help?**

# DAY 4

## READ:

1 Corinthians 10

## FOCAL PASSAGE:

1 Corinthians 10:14-17

## NOTES

## VOICES from THE CHURCH

"We must see the arrogance in this; we the created have turned unfulfilled away from our glorious Creator, and we take his place, shaping a god out of our own imaginations. In the end all idolatry is just self-worship."<sup>1</sup>

—Andrew M. Davis

In 1 Corinthians 10, we see that fleeing from idolatry has corporate implications. When we give in to idolatry, we not only harm ourselves but those around us.

Paul speaks about the bread and cup that believers share immediately after he warns against idolatry. This meal done in remembrance of the Lord is a sign of unity and commitment to follow after God. When one member of the body of Christ walks in idolatry, he or she is harming the whole body. Sin never affects just us. When we think about potential or current idols in our life, we should be motivated to remove them for two reasons.

The first is that God is calling us to serve only the one true God, Himself. Only He is all-powerful, all-knowing, and all-present. Only He sought to save and redeem us. Only He created us and loves us and calls us His own. There is only one powerful, supreme being.

The second reason is because we are part of the body of Christ and our decisions affect everyone around us. As followers of Christ, we are not only a group of believers, we are a body. This is a powerful image we sometimes take for granted. When one part of the body is in pain, the whole body hurts. When one part of the body sins, the whole body is affected and sometimes experiences the consequences of it.

Out of love, concern, and compassion for other believers and the church, we should thus remove idols from our own lives because we are a family and we are the body of Christ.

**What idols or potential idols in your life can or are currently harming those in your church? How will you confess these sins and seek repentance for the sake of the whole body?**



# DAY 5

## READ:

**1 Thessalonians 1**

## FOCAL PASSAGE:

**1 Thessalonians 1:8-10**

NOTES

When the Word of God goes forth, people turn from their idols and wait for Jesus's return. In today's passage, when the people of Thessalonica heard the gospel, they realized their idolatry was empty and began to worship the God who is alive. Not only that, but Paul says they were waiting for Jesus.

The church at Thessalonica is a wonderful example for us in our own discipleship journeys. First they "turned to God from idols" (v. 9). This wasn't a half turn. It was a full turn toward God and away from idols. Unlike the Israelite kings who wanted to worship both God and idols, the Thessalonian church knew only one could be worshiped. For it is when we remove idols from our lives that Jesus has all the more room to fill our hearts and lives with Himself. No idol has died for us, and no idol has raised from the dead to restore our relationship with God. Only Jesus, the Son of God, has.

Next, Paul says they turned to God "to serve" Him. Our role is to serve God, yet sometimes we think it's His role to serve us. We pray for this or that and in His goodness, He gives us good gifts. But we must remind ourselves that our worship is in our service. Serving doesn't save us, but we serve because He is an almighty, loving God.

And last, in this passage, Paul says that this early church waited for Jesus, understanding that their lives were in constant preparation and waiting for Christ's return. Are we waiting in the same way? Are we prepared? Do we live with that mind-set?

The power of the gospel is this: Those who repent from their sins, turn from their idols, and follow after God in Christ will receive the gift of eternal life. One day, Jesus will return to earth to rule His kingdom with all the children of God, protecting them from the wrath to come against idolaters. What a Savior!

**When you think about the gospel, what transformation should take place in your life? Where do you need to repent today and turn to God?**

# GROUP

NOTES

## VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

"How could he fail to pity them in this also, seeing that they worship them that cannot see. In hearing, they pray to them that cannot hear. Born with life and reason, people, as they are, call gods things that do not move at all but do not even have life. Strangest of all, do they serve as their masters beings whom they themselves keep under their own power?"<sup>2</sup>

—Athanasius (d. 373)

### POINT 1: Idolatry begins by rejecting God (Isa. 44:1-6).

Despite the Israelites' idolatry and rebellion, they remained God's \_\_\_\_\_ people, and one day, God would bless and \_\_\_\_\_ their numbers through the gift of His \_\_\_\_\_.

Because the Lord is the \_\_\_\_\_ God, our Redeemer, He alone is worthy of worship. Yet our idolatry, the worship of other "gods," rejects His \_\_\_\_\_ status as God.



**Why do people, even believers, succumb to the temptation of idolatry?**

### POINT 2: Idolatry leads to futile religion (Isa. 44:7-11).

The Lord has confidently laid out a challenge to any other gods to contend with Him—none can—and He calls on His people to be \_\_\_\_\_ to the world of God as our \_\_\_\_\_.



**How has the Lord been your Rock?**

### ESSENTIAL DOCTRINE #40: SIN AS IDOLATRY

Sin is not only a physical act of rebellion against God, such as lying or stealing, but it is also a matter of the \_\_\_\_\_. The physical displays of sin are the fruit of what has been birthed in the heart of a person (Matt. 15:10-20). In Scripture, idolatry usually refers to bowing down to a statue made of wood or gold, worshiping \_\_\_\_\_ things instead of the \_\_\_\_\_. But idolatry can take on more subtle forms: a seeking of approval, security, power,

pleasure, etc. We can diagnose the idolatry of our heart by examining the areas where the desires of our heart have turned into idolatrous \_\_\_\_\_ (Jas. 4:1-2).

NOTES



**Why must we remember that every act in service to an idol is ultimately futile?**

### **POINT 3: Idolatry results in foolishness**

(Isa. 44:12-20).

Idols are crafted from metal, wood, or other resources God has created, but these are \_\_\_\_\_ more than a reflection of \_\_\_\_\_ and a \_\_\_\_\_ from the only God who saves.



**What are some of the empty promises of idols that only God can fulfill?**

We have all been \_\_\_\_\_ by idolatry and are rightly counted as fools. But God still calls idolaters to find salvation through \_\_\_\_\_ in Jesus Christ.

## **MY RESPONSE**

Because we have come to know and taste the goodness of God through Christ, we proclaim the freedom that can be found in Him to all those enslaved by idols.

- **HEAD:** What does an examination of your thoughts reveal about your focus and your worship?
- **HEART:** How will you cultivate your love for God today so that you might become more like Him?
- **HANDS:** How will you lovingly show someone that what they idolize is insufficient and cannot satisfy but Jesus can?

### **VOICES from THE CHURCH**

"Our God lives! The idols we have created with our hands and our own desires are worthless and undependable. They are mere objects or ideas. Let us not compare them to God or allow them to take the place of God in our lives."<sup>3</sup>

*—Africa Study Bible*

## UNIT 14

+

**SEEK THE LORD,**  
**ALL YOU HUMBLE**  
**OF THE EARTH**

# “I Turn My Feet Back to Your Decrees”

by Matt Capps

When Martin Luther sparked the Protestant Reformation by nailing his ninety-five theses on the door of the Wittenberg Cathedral in Germany, it was no coincidence that the very first thesis focused on repentance. For Luther, repentance was so central to the Christian life that this famous document began by arguing that “the entire life of believers be a life of repentance.”<sup>1</sup> This may sound odd to our modern sensibilities. In fact, it’s not a stretch to argue that the doctrine of repentance has fallen on hard times in our day because it presupposes there is something wrong with us. In our therapeutic culture, this can come across as demeaning. No one wants to admit something is wrong with them, right? Who has the right to tell me I need to change? Who has the right to tell me I don’t measure up? And repentance is needed for all of life? Come on, Luther. Isn’t that a little excessive?

We all like to justify ourselves, in every part of our being. As the father of three small children, I am reminded of this often. When confronting a child’s

wrongdoing, I always notice how quickly their inner lawyer is revealed in their arguments. One common response is: “It wasn’t my fault! He started it!” We all are excellent at pointing out the faults of others, aren’t we? Another response is: “I didn’t do anything wrong!” We love to redefine right and wrong according to our own benefit. It’s fascinating how the actions of a child reflect how controversial repentance is from an early age. Things don’t change much as we grow older; our self-justification just becomes more advanced. This is common among all humanity. You see, the way the world typically deals with sin is blame-shifting or redefinition. However, God calls His children to deal with sin by repentance.

## DEFINING REPENTANCE

Repentance is more than remorse over being caught. Repentance is deeper than regret for the consequences of sin. Repentance begins with sorrow over breaking God’s heart. But repentance doesn’t end there. Repentance is turning

from sin and returning to God with a desire to follow His commands. Mark Dever put it well when he said:

What is repentance? It is turning from the sins you love to the holy God you're called to love. It is admitting that you're not God. It is beginning to value Jesus more than your immediate pleasure. It is giving up those things the Bible calls sin and leaving them to follow Jesus.<sup>2</sup>

When one examines Scripture, repentance is always the first step to renewal and revival. The good news is God always initiates this renewal with a manifest call for repentance among His people. In this sense, all of God's warnings that precede final judgment are acts of mercy and grace. However, we must not presume upon His grace. Even in His long-suffering, God is also just. The Old Testament makes it clear: When people ignore God's warnings and proceed in their sin despite His summons, it always ends in judgment. Therefore, true repentance is marked by perseverance in obedience. To put it another way, sin forsaken is one of the best pieces of evidence for true repentance.

Sin forsaken is one  
of the best pieces  
of evidence for  
true repentance.

## **REPENTANCE IN SANCTIFICATION**

Now, you may be thinking, But even in my best efforts, I am not able to walk in perfect obedience! This is why Luther declared that all of life should be marked by repentance. Even from the beginning, an infant in the faith must first understand that repentance is required to understand our need for grace. As time goes on and one matures in faith, it becomes clear that the closer you get to our Holy God, the more you realize how much you need to repent. The brighter the light, the more visible the imperfections. In this way, we understand that the fruitful Christian life isn't a sinless life but a repentant life. The Christian who has stopped repenting is a Christian who has stopped growing. After all, Jesus exhorted people to produce fruit that comes from repentance (Matt. 3:8).

The fruitful Christian life isn't a sinless life  
but a repentant life.

Growing in repentance is the fruit of faithfulness.  
And faithfulness is proven through  
persevering in repentance.

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### THE GOSPEL IS FOR SINNERS

The gospel is such good news for sinners like you and me. Jesus came not for the healthy but for those who knew they were sick, to call sinners to repentance (Luke 5:31-32). As Christians, we know that Jesus died as the atoning sacrifice for our sin so that we could be forgiven (Luke 24:46-47). Because Jesus is the only person who has ever lived a perfectly righteous life, He is the only One who can make a satisfactory sacrifice to appease the justice of God. The gospel of Jesus Christ is the grounds of our repentance. And it's God's kindness that leads us to repentance (Rom. 2:4). This is good news for the entirety of our lives! Why? We can be open and honest when we repent of our sin because the Scriptures promise that our sins will be wiped out and remembered by God no more. Moreover, we are promised that when we repent, we will be refreshed by the Lord (Acts 3:19-20).

Now we see that repentance is not just the door of entry into the Christian life. Repentance is the way we go further up and deeper into our walk with God. At the end of his life, the puritan theologian

John Newton was recorded as saying, "My memory is nearly gone, but I remember two things: That I am a great sinner and that Christ is a great Savior."<sup>3</sup> You see, like Newton, we must understand that repentance and faith are two sides of the same coin. Repentance recognizes that we are so sinful that we need God's grace. Faith believes that we are so loved that Christ came to show us grace. And it's because of God's grace in Christ that we can approach the throne of grace with boldness to receive mercy and find grace (Heb. 4:16). Therefore, growing in repentance is the fruit of faithfulness. And faithfulness is proven through persevering in repentance.



# A HUMILIATED KING

**+** **SESSION IN A SENTENCE:**

Faithfulness is proven over the long-term, and later lapses of faithfulness will be judged.

**+** **BACKGROUND PASSAGES:**

2 Kings 11–12; 2 Chronicles 22–24

**+** **SETTING:**

Ahab, king of Israel, and his wife, Jezebel, brought great wickedness and idolatry into the land, leading their people far astray from the one true God. And Ahab's influence spread to Judah when his daughter, Athaliah, married Jehoram, the king of Judah. Through the word of Elisha, a general from Israel named Jehu brought judgment upon all the house of Ahab, killing the wicked kings of both kingdoms who were descended from him. The power vacuum in Judah was quickly and violently filled by Athaliah, the queen mother, but even she did not escape God's judgment and was replaced by the rightful king, Joash.



# DAY 1

## READ:

**2 Chronicles 22:1–24:14**

## FOCAL PASSAGE:

**2 Chronicles 24:4**

## NOTES



## ESSENTIAL DOCTRINE #62: DEITY OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

The Holy Spirit is the Third Person of the Trinity, possessing the fullness of deity like the Father and Son. His deity can be seen in the fact that He is eternal (Heb. 9:14), omnipresent (Ps. 139:7-8), the creator and giver of life (Gen. 1:2; Ps. 104:30; John 3:5-7), and directly identified with the Triune God (Matt. 28:19; 2 Cor. 13:14).

In 2 Chronicles 24:4, Joash decided that he wanted to renovate and restore the Lord's temple. The Hebrew word used for "renovate" or "restore" was not a word used often in the Bible when talking about buildings. It was a word used for personal renewal (Pss. 51:10; 103:5; Lam. 5:21).<sup>1</sup> This tells us something about the kind of work Joash set his heart upon. It wasn't just a fresh coat of paint on the walls. It was a rejuvenation of the temple's heart. It was a reclaiming of the temple's purpose. The temple was the center of worship for God's people. It was the meeting place where grace could be found. It was God's dwelling place on earth where the mercy seat sat in the innermost part of the temple. The temple was a holy place because the Holy One resided within.

But the temple had fallen into disrepair. It was abused during the reign of Athaliah, and it had become a house useful for staying alive rather than a temple that brings life. It was a shell of its former glory, like something you might see along the road and think, "I wonder what happened to that place?"

In 1 Corinthians 6:19, Paul asked if his readers were unaware that their physical bodies were temples of God. Some of them weren't treating them as such. They were abusing themselves by living with abandon in the sinful lifestyles associated with the world. It's not just old buildings that need renovation—we do too. We need to be refreshed by the Lord; we need a restoration to what we were made to be: living houses of worship to the Lord.

How do we reclaim that glory? We can pour more money into it. We can paint the walls of our scarred lives with all the makeup in the world. But it won't do any good if the insides are still cracked and bruised. We need One who can clean what we never could. We need the Spirit of God to dwell within, for we are His temples (1 Cor. 6:19).

**How do you need the Lord to restore you today?**

# DAY 2

## READ:

Psalm 69

## FOCAL PASSAGE:

Psalm 69:9

NOTES

In 2 Chronicles 24:4-14, Joash labored hard, involved many, and raised an abundance of funds to repair the Lord's temple. He had a zeal for the Lord's house, for its restoration and renewal, similar to that of his father David.

In Psalm 69:9, David spoke of a consuming zeal for God's house. Facing persecution and suffering, David could not shake his sense of justice. Things were not all right. Not only was he derided and slandered, but God's very house was disregarded. David's lament was not only for himself, but it also pointed upward to the God who was ignored and forgotten. Zeal for God's house consumed him, and he took up his pen.

Psalm 69:9 is not a one-off verse in the Bible. It appears later in John 2:13-17, when Jesus came to cleanse the temple. Zeal for God's house consumed Jesus as well, and He took up a whip. What happened in the temple mattered to God. The activities, the rituals, the comings and goings, the hearts of those who entered and those who longed to enter mattered to God. His name would not be derided forever. His glory would not be overshadowed by traders and money changers. The temple was the meeting place of God and humanity, and that sacred space was worth fighting for. It was for David and Joash. It was for Jesus too.

But Joash's zeal would wane. We will read of his many sins and his failure of faithfulness. Yet his renovation work still mattered because, despite who he became, the temple revealed that God longs to draw near to His people and to have His people draw near to Him. He desires to call all people to Himself. He made His dwelling with humanity, and He will do so again (Rev. 21:3). Zeal for His house consumed Jesus while on earth, and it consumes Him now in heaven. One day, He'll come again and renew this tired earth. On that day, nothing will stand in the way of us coming to Him.

**How does Jesus's consuming zeal for God's house, especially as it points to an eternal hope of heaven, give you peace and comfort today?**

# DAY 3

## READ:

**2 Chronicles 22:10–24:18**

## FOCAL PASSAGE:

**2 Chronicles 24:17-18**

## NOTES

## VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

“See how much one head may sustain, and what a great judgment to any prince or people the death of godly, zealous, useful men is. See how necessary it is that, as our Saviour speaks, we have salt in ourselves, that we act in religion from an inward principle, which will carry us on through all changes. Then the loss of a parent, a minister, a friend, will not involve the loss of our religion.”<sup>2</sup>

—Matthew Henry (1662-1714)

Growing up in a Christian family should be a massive benefit to a child. A culture of grace inside a family looking to God is the kind of fertile soil perfect for faith to spring up. Jehoiada provided such a family to his nephew Joash. Furthermore, Joash had a long line of family history in which the works of God were evident in each life. He had every advantage to succeed in faith, and while Jehoiada was around, Joash seemed strong in the Lord. But when Jehoiada died, it seemed Joash’s faith died with him. What are we to make of this situation and narrative?

Faith is not an inherited trait. Each generation must discover the beauty of the gospel, and every person must place his or her faith in Christ for themselves. Parents ought to raise their children in the church and teach them the things of God. That’s a biblical command (Deut. 6:6-7). But faith cannot be passed down like a family heirloom. Faith is an individual step each one must take.

The story of Joash at least shows us this: faith cannot be dependent upon another. We must all follow God from personal choice. It is good to be in community with other believers, and their faith can encourage ours (Rom. 1:12), but if all community were stripped away, would we still believe?

The apostle Paul helps us diagnose our hearts with his exhortation in Philippians 2:12: “Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling.” God saves individuals and places them in a community of believers. We may sing along with the church’s worship, but do we believe the truths proclaimed? We may listen to the sermons preached, but do we hear and believe the words of truth? We may pray along with the pastor, but is that as far as we bend our hearts to God? Faith must be a personal reality for each of us.

**Though the Bible gives assurance of salvation, it also calls us to evaluate our relationship with Jesus. How do you need to work out your own salvation with fear and trembling today?**

# DAY 4

## READ:

2 Chronicles 24:15-19

## FOCAL PASSAGE:

2 Chronicles 24:19

## NOTES

There are two types of people in the world: those who stay and those who leave. Jehoiada was one who stayed (2 Chron. 24:15-16). Joash and the rulers of Judah were those who left, abandoning the Lord and His temple (24:17-18). To whom did they go? To the Asherah poles and the idols. They left the God of the universe for a stick in the ground and a bust made from a log. They left the temple filled with glory for an idol filled with nothing.

That's crazy, right? That doesn't make sense, does it? Yet they went. They abandoned the one true God for many false gods, looking for a new life in a bigger world than they previously knew. It's a story of biblical proportions, one that started way back in the opening chapters of the Bible and reaches all the way to the final book. God's people leave Him for idols. Even after God has come in the flesh to live and die and rise again to save His people, the apostle John still felt the need to end one of his letters with an exhortation to the church to guard themselves from idols (1 John 5:21).

We are a leaving people. It's in us to go. We try to pursue more and more worldly things, despising what we already have, looking for the latest and greatest. But despite our habit of leaving, God never leaves or abandons us (Heb. 13:5). He stays faithful, though we are faithless (2 Tim. 2:13). He remains like the father of the prodigal son, waiting for the day we come back home after realizing all we have left behind (Luke 15:11-32). Our God is a staying God, a God who loves those hard to love, who is patient with those who rebel, who is steadfast with those who look in every direction but His. Just as He was with Joash and His people, the Lord is faithful to call His wayward children back to Himself. The question is "Will we listen?"

**Where in your heart do you feel you've left God, even if in the sense of not letting Him control one certain aspect of your life? Will you repent today? Why or why not?**

# DAY 5

## READ:

**2 Chronicles 24:17-27**

## FOCAL PASSAGE:

**2 Chronicles 24:24**

NOTES

The judgment of God is a difficult doctrine. We instinctively know that if God is good, then He must act against all evil and sin in the world, yet His judgment is still a difficult thing to swallow. It has so many implications that we cannot possibly address them all here, so let's consider just one. How will our sins be judged?

This question is vital to our understanding of God and the gospel. Let's assume you agree that you have very real sins that deserve a very real punishment. But you also know that God is gracious and merciful. You also know there is a judgment day coming. What will that day be like?

This question is more than a theologically interesting thought experiment. We need a real answer because we have real sin, and those sins deserve real judgment. So what does the gospel say about our sins?

Here's what we know from the Bible. God cannot overlook sin. He cannot just ignore it and move on. Passages such as Romans 1:18 and 6:23 tell us God's wrath stands against all ungodliness and that the wages of sin is death.

But God in His wisdom created a world in which sin could be forgiven. Instead of humanity bearing the cost themselves, He decided in His grace and mercy that He could bear it Himself. Jesus would come to live and die as our substitute. He would live the perfect life we failed to live and take on the penalty we owed for our sin at the cross. He would remove our unrighteousness and give us His perfect righteousness instead.

The answer to all our sin is Jesus. The judgment we are due has already been paid for. On the cross, Jesus took our punishment, and He paid it in full. Now, before the holy God above, all who believe in Christ's atoning work are proclaimed not guilty in the great courtroom of divine justice. That's the message of the gospel.

**How does the judgment Jesus took on your behalf help you think through the doctrine of the judgment of God?**

# GROUP

NOTES

## VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

"Every man in the state of nature makes an idol of himself; exalts himself when he should advance God; minds himself more than he minds God; aims at himself, when he should aim at God; rests in himself, when he should depend upon God; loves himself more than God; honours himself more than God; seeks himself more than God; would have that ascribed to himself, which is to be ascribed only to God; would have himself eyed, admired, praised more than God. Self-conceit, self-love, self-seeking, they are all secret strains of idolatry, and ourselves are naturally our own idols."<sup>3</sup>

-David Clarkson (1622-1686)

## POINT 1: A faithful king restores the proper worship of God (2 Chron. 24:4-6,13-14).

The temple of the Lord had been \_\_\_\_\_ and ravaged by an ungodly queen, but young King Joash saw to it that the temple would be \_\_\_\_\_ and restored with the help of the Levites and his \_\_\_\_\_.



**What are some excuses people might have for delaying spiritual restoration in their lives and churches?**

Joash and Jehoiada served well in their \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ duties, respectively. They restored and filled the temple and led the people to \_\_\_\_\_ the Lord as He had commanded.

## POINT 2: A forgetful king reverts to the worship of idols (2 Chron. 24:17-22).

Joash's life exemplifies the truths that faithfulness is played out over \_\_\_\_\_ and that \_\_\_\_\_ company corrupts \_\_\_\_\_ morals (see 1 Cor. 15:33).



**What are some things we can do to avoid the wayward path Joash took with his life?**

## ESSENTIAL DOCTRINE #62: DEITY OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

The Holy Spirit is the Third \_\_\_\_\_ of the Trinity, possessing the \_\_\_\_\_ of deity like the Father and Son. His deity can be seen in the fact that He is eternal (Heb. 9:14), \_\_\_\_\_ (Ps. 139:7-8), the creator and giver of life (Gen. 1:2; Ps. 104:30; John 3:5-7), and directly identified with the Triune God (Matt. 28:19; 2 Cor. 13:14).

### POINT 3: A fallen king receives the judgment of God (2 Chron. 24:23-25).

Joash, the leaders, and the people of Judah incurred the wrath and judgment of God for their rebellion.

The \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ Lord used a \_\_\_\_\_ people to judge Joash for his sin.



**What does God's response to Joash's rebellion teach us about God's character?**

Joash began faithfully, then forgot tragically, and therefore was judged justly. He died for his rebellion. But one day, the promised King—Jesus—would come. He is \_\_\_\_\_ faithful and died in our place, taking on the judgment we deserve. \_\_\_\_\_ in Him and be \_\_\_\_\_ !



**What should a life of faithfulness look like for a believer in Jesus Christ?**

## MY RESPONSE

Because Jesus has gone before us in complete faithfulness, we don't rest in momentary acts of obedience but rather seek to live in a way that is fully pleasing to the Father as long as we draw breath.

- **HEAD:** What comes into your mind when you think about God? What thoughts need to be examined more closely, and how will you do that?
- **HEART:** Where does your path of life diverge from the faithful path Jesus has paved? What sinful patterns of idol worship do you need to repent of?
- **HANDS:** For whom is the Holy Spirit leading you to play the part of Zechariah, to warn and call them to repentance that they might be saved through faith in Jesus Christ?

NOTES

### VOICES from THE CHURCH

"Like milk that turns sour, Joash never returns to his former wholesomeness. However, we remember that only with death do we reach the point of no return. While there is life, there is always the hope that by the grace of God, even a curdled life can be reinvested, or turned into *rasgullas*, the Bengali sweet made with sour milk."<sup>4</sup>

—Havilah Dharamraj

# A HUMILIATED NATION

**+** **SESSION IN A SENTENCE:**

The Lord seeks to show mercy and compassion even to His disobedient people.

**+** **BACKGROUND PASSAGE:**

Isaiah 13–31

**+** **SETTING:**

God's people always had a tough time obeying. Faithfulness should have marked their lives, but often rebellion was the major key. How did God respond? Did He throw them out and bind Himself to another group of people? By no means! God remains faithful though His people are faithless. God remains true though His people stray. God is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in faithful love and truth, staying true to a thousand generations of sinful men and women who love Him (Ex. 34:6-7). God is just and true, and He is loving and merciful, but He does correct and judge—all to bring us to repentance.



# DAY 1

## READ:

Isaiah 22:8-14

## FOCAL PASSAGE:

Isaiah 22:11

## NOTES

We give a lot of thought to preparing for the battles of life. Like Judah, we fortify our walls and build up our defenses. We plan and work hard to prevent destruction. But there is one simple point God wants to show us through a passage like Isaiah 22:8-14. We spend so much time and effort on our work that we never stop to consider the One who controls everything in this world.

Here's a great diagnostic question. Do you factor God into everything in your life? Do you consider Him? How real is He to you, really? Maybe you consciously ignore God. You sense He's there and He cares and He could do something about your situation, but you turn the other way, trying to make it on your own. That's the picture of Judah. The people rebelled and sinned, putting their trust in themselves. Maybe you think God couldn't possibly care about your life, and you've thought that for so long that you can't seem to get out of that rut. But the gospel tells us that God does care. He is involved. He stepped into this world to show how much He cares. He got His hands dirty.

Wherever you are on that spectrum, we all fall into the sin of disbelief. We all find ourselves at one time or another failing to factor God into our lives. God is saying to us today that it doesn't have to be that way. We aren't alone. To some that is very good news, like a balm to your soul. To others, that is bad news because you know you've run from Him on purpose. But to all, it is ultimate reality: God is there, and He's not going anywhere.

Wherever you are right now, God is calling you to Himself. He has all you need. You're working yourself to death, and He's offering His peace and His easy yoke and the kind of rest only God can offer (Matt. 11:28). You can go to Him right now and unburden yourself. Why not trust Him?

**What difference would it make for you today to stop and factor God into your life right now?**

# DAY 2

## READ:

Isaiah 25:1-5

## FOCAL PASSAGE:

Isaiah 25:1

## NOTES

## VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

"The love of Christ, being the love of God, is *effectual and fruitful* in producing all the good things which he willeth unto his beloved. He loves life, grace, and holiness into us; he loves us also into covenant, loves us into heaven. Love in him is properly to will good to any one: whatever good Christ by his love wills to any, that willing is *operative* of that good."<sup>2</sup>

—John Owen (c. 1616-1683)

The prophet Isaiah had a big vision of God—a really big vision of who God is. The opening verses of Isaiah 25 are just one sample of that bigness as he exalted God, praising His name and His accomplishments of wonder, realizing it's all part of His plan.

Isaiah knew God is not only the God of the present but the God of the past and the future too. He is over and above all of time and history. God accomplished wonders, and those wonders were planned long ago. He wasn't caught by surprise and then improvised, coming up with a spectacular last-minute shot to put Him in the win column once again. No, everything that happens in this world is by the sovereign plan of God, who knew beforehand what would come to pass. He is perfectly faithful.

Commentator Alec Motyer notes Isaiah's understanding of God's faithfulness is so expansive that it refers to "every imaginable faithfulness or perfect or quintessential faithfulness."<sup>1</sup> Whatever we imagine faithfulness to be, God is that, perfectly, fully, and completely. He is the very definition of faithful. Therefore, He is faithful in bringing about His planned wonders. Everything that happens in this world is in the strong, perfect hand of God. That's hard for us to believe, but it's true.

That means your life is also in His hands. He is proving His perfect faithfulness to you every day. Because God is over all that was, is, and ever will be, we can trust His divine plan will work out for our good and His glory. The Bible promises us that, and if God is perfectly faithful, He can't fail His own words in the Scriptures.

**How should the perfect faithfulness of God impact how you face your circumstances today?**

# DAY 3

## READ:

Isaiah 25:1-5

## FOCAL PASSAGE:

Isaiah 25:3-5

## NOTES

There are two groups of people highlighted in the opening verses of Isaiah 25. There are the strong people (v. 3) and there are the poor people (v. 4). The strong live in well-fortified cities. They instill fear in others around them. They themselves seem to fear nothing. The poor, on the other hand, are weak and needy. They have no stronghold of their own to claim. There is no city wall protecting them, and there is no fortress for their home. The storms hit them hard, and they have no shade from the heat.

But in the logic of the gospel, the strong are actually weak and the poor are actually rich. In the confusion of this world, the oppressor doesn't see his need while the oppressed do. When God speaks, it is hard for the oppressor to hear because he has no evident need, but the oppressed only have need. This, of course, sounds like we're talking about material strength and poverty—those well fed and well secured from the outside world and the natural elements have a disadvantage when it comes to hearing God's voice. That isn't what we're saying. Rather, it's all about the posture of the heart. Spiritually speaking, are you strong and "without need" or are you poor and needy?

Isaiah makes it clear whose side God is on. He is for the poor and against the strong, not because of their status in life but because of their posture of heart. It is the needy to whom God comes. It is the strong and proud against whom God sends judgment. The difference comes down to this very simple but profound question: Do we need God in our lives or do we believe we are doing just fine on our own?

The truth is we sometimes feel like the strong and sometimes we feel like the poor. The key is recognizing that strength comes when we humble ourselves to the poverty of spirit that finds its dependence on God. The reassurance, though, is that the sins of the strong, proud spirit can still be forgiven by God as well.

**How would you describe your heart posture before God today?**

# DAY 4

## READ:

Isaiah 30:18-22

## FOCAL PASSAGE:

Isaiah 30:18

## NOTES



## ESSENTIAL DOCTRINE #17: GOD IS JUST

God establishes standards for His moral creatures that are in accordance with His righteousness, and His moral creatures will be judged according to those righteous standards (Lev. 11:44-45; Rom. 2:5-11; 2 Cor. 5:10). It would be an injustice if God were not to uphold His righteousness, for such a failure would require God to violate His own righteous character. Since humanity has sinned by failing to live up to God's righteous standards, God has taken it upon Himself to make provision by being both just and the justifier of those who place their faith in Christ (Rom. 3:25-26).

Consider the patience of God. What has He endured from you? Have you always loved Him? Always obeyed Him? Always followed Him? Always sought Him first in every decision? Have you not run from Him, hidden from Him, and questioned Him when things didn't go your way? And yet, He loves and cares for you still. He has not revoked the offer—no, the promise—of salvation for all who believe.

God is far more patient than all of us combined. His patience is eternal, if He so desires. He never wavers. He doesn't tap His toes in anxiousness. He doesn't huff and puff in frustration. Through our wandering lives, He waits to show mercy and is rising up to show compassion (Isa. 30:18).

Praise the Lord that He is so! If God were not patient, would anyone be saved? We do not come out of the womb and begin an upward progression of faithfulness and godliness. We are sinful from the beginning, and as we grow, we add sin to sin. The Lord is patient through it all, and sometimes we even look at this wonderful patience and grow impatient. We wonder what's taking Him so long to do something, to answer a prayer, to intervene in the exact way we want. But Peter says in his second letter that the Lord doesn't delay His promise; He's not slow at it—He's fulfilling it in His timing that all may come to repentance (2 Pet. 3:9). The Lord's patience is your salvation.

Isn't it wonderful how patient the Lord is with us? Even when we come to faith, we still falter and fall. We still disobey. We still run from Him. But what does He do in return? He waits for us, working out everything in our lives to bring us safely home.

**How has the patience of God worked wonderfully in your life?**

# DAY 5

## READ:

Isaiah 30:18-22

## FOCAL PASSAGE:

Isaiah 30:20-22

## NOTES

John Calvin once said, paraphrasing, our hearts are like idol factories.<sup>3</sup> We constantly find new things to love, and instead of treating them as the good things they are, we place them on the throne of our hearts and bow down in worship to them. Now maybe we don't physically bow down, and there probably isn't a real throne room in our house with some idol sitting on it. The reality is it may all be internal but still very real.

Humanity has been in the idol business since the fall in the garden of Eden. When we read the Old Testament, we see time and time again the way God's people establish new religions and new gods and new laws and new traditions. It's almost as if the Lord God who created and sustains it all weren't even there.

We also see in the Bible how difficult it is for God's people to get rid of their idols. Just go read through the history of Israel's kings. One sets up an idol, another takes the idol down, then another puts it back up. It's an endless circle of idol worship like a dog returning to its vomit (Prov. 26:11). We are like that too, though it may not be as obvious. When we take a good thing and make it an ultimate thing, when we replace God with something else as the great love of our hearts, we have fashioned an idol.

So how is this cycle broken? Isaiah 30:20-22 helps us see how the presence of the Lord overturns the idols of our hearts. When God breaks in by His wondrous grace, He starts rearranging our internal loves and desires. He clears out the cobwebs so we can see. He instructs us by His Word and shows us the right path. When God lovingly takes over our lives, we gladly throw out the old idols. What was once so precious to us now looks like filth after all.

**What idols of your heart need to be dethroned today by God's wonderful grace? Pray to the Lord accordingly.**

# GROUP

NOTES

## VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

"According to Christian teachers, the essential vice, the utmost evil, is Pride. Unchastity, anger, greed, drunkenness, and all that, are mere fleabites in comparison: it was through Pride that the devil became the devil: Pride leads to every other vice; it is the complete anti-God state of mind."<sup>4</sup>

-C. S. Lewis (1898-1963)

### POINT 1: The Lord will be vindicated in judging iniquity (Isa. 22:8-14).

The people of Judah trusted in themselves and their fortifications rather than the Creator. God does not remain silent in the face of our disobedience. He intervenes to \_\_\_\_\_ us, \_\_\_\_\_ us, and \_\_\_\_\_ us.



**Why might we find it so hard to abandon our self-reliance and trust God alone?**

### ESSENTIAL DOCTRINE #17: GOD IS JUST

God establishes standards for His moral creatures that are in accordance with His righteousness, and His moral creatures will be \_\_\_\_\_ according to those righteous standards (Lev. 11:44-45; Rom. 2:5-11; 2 Cor. 5:10). It would be an injustice if God were not to uphold His righteousness, for such a failure would require God to violate His own righteous character. Since humanity has \_\_\_\_\_ by failing to live up to God's righteous standards, God has taken it upon Himself to make \_\_\_\_\_ by being both just and the justifier of those who place their \_\_\_\_\_ in Christ (Rom. 3:25-26).

### POINT 2: The Lord will be praised for judging iniquity (Isa. 25:1-5).

Isaiah praised the Lord because of his \_\_\_\_\_ knowledge of God, which informed his understanding of God's \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ against the nations.



**Why should the promise and fulfillment of God's judgment cause people to worship the Lord?**

God's justice is \_\_\_\_\_ the oppressor, but it is also \_\_\_\_\_ the poor and oppressed. People who come to the Lord in faith seeking refuge and salvation will find it, just as the Lord has \_\_\_\_\_ and promised.

NOTES

### **POINT 3: The Lord will be merciful after judging iniquity** (Isa. 30:18-22).

Sin deserves eternal punishment, but our just God waits to show \_\_\_\_\_ ! The Lord is not eager to \_\_\_\_\_ but patient to \_\_\_\_\_ .



**What does it mean to wait for the Lord?**

God's mercy is also experienced in the immediacy of God's \_\_\_\_\_ and His \_\_\_\_\_ , which \_\_\_\_\_ the way we live and see the world.



**How has God's mercy changed the way you live and see the world?**

## **MY RESPONSE**

Because Jesus has provided the means of our forgiveness and righteousness, we live in full reliance on Him as we seek to declare God's plan of salvation to the nations.

- **HEAD:** How will the justice and mercy of God change the way you see yourself and others?
- **HEART:** What sins are prohibiting your grateful worship of God? How will you heed God's call to repent?
- **HANDS:** How will you reflect God's mercy today?

### **VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY**

"He has seen us sinning and has borne with it. He who forbade us to sin before we did it does not stop waiting to pardon us even after we have sinned. The one we have rejected is calling us. We have turned away from him, but he has not turned away . . . We turn our backs on his face, so to speak, when we reject his words, when we trample his commandments under foot; but he who sees that we reject him still calls out to us by his commandments and waits for us by his patience, stands behind us, and calls us back when we have turned away."<sup>5</sup>

-Gregory the Great  
(c. 540-604)

# A HUMBLER PEOPLE

**+** **SESSION IN A SENTENCE:**

God saves and restores all those who repent and turn to Him in faith.

**+** **BACKGROUND PASSAGE:**

Zephaniah

**+** **SETTING:**

The prophet Zephaniah brought one major message to God's people: the day of the Lord was coming. That day was a day of judgment, but it was also a day of grace. God's people and the nations were faced with the reality of God's coming judgment, and Zephaniah's message called all people to repentance to find grace in the face of judgment. The Lord is patient, but His judgment does not delay. It comes soon, so the prophet's call was timely and urgent: Humbly come under the refuge of God's grace or be destroyed in your pride.



# DAY 1

## READ:

**Zephaniah 1:1–2:3**

## FOCAL PASSAGE:

**Zephaniah 2:1-3**

## NOTES

## VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

"The beginning of true nobility comes when a man ceases to be interested in the judgment of men, and becomes interested in the judgment of God."<sup>1</sup>

—J. Gresham Machen  
(1881-1937)

The day of the Lord is mentioned over and over by the Old Testament prophets. The phrase refers to a day when God comes down in judgment upon the world. It is a phrase synonymous with the day of the Lord's anger, as referred to in Zephaniah 2:2-3. When God comes down in judgment, He will come with burning, consuming anger, an anger that overtakes. His holiness will burn up all the unholiness in the land and purify the world of all evil.

But this day of the Lord has another side. There is also grace. God will not destroy the humble. He will save them. He will patiently and lovingly and kindly rescue those who look to Him alone for salvation. The day of the Lord is both a day to fear and a day to anticipate, depending on where you stand in your relationship with God.

Whereas we might have a tendency to focus on one aspect or the other—judgment or grace—Zephaniah weds these two messages together in one short book. The consuming fire of the Lord's anger is the springboard to appeal to God's people and the nations to seek His face and find grace.

When God comes, all will be exposed. Every hidden thing will come to light. All sin will be uncovered, and the Lord's burning anger will consume it and destroy it finally and fully. He will judge sin and sinner alike.

There is only one escape from this judgment. It is to humble yourself before God and seek His face. Though sin will be uncovered in that great day, those who humble themselves and ask for God's grace and salvation will find in their greatest time of need a covering that can only come from the Lord. Rather than expose their sin to burn them with His overtaking anger, He will show how those sins were covered by Jesus on the cross, who died as the substitute and now stands as the Savior (Col. 2:13-14).

**How do you need to humble yourself and seek the Lord's grace? It is not too late to do so.**

# DAY 2

## READ:

**Zephaniah 2:4–3:13**

## FOCAL PASSAGE:

**Zephaniah 3:9-10**

## NOTES

Our culture seems enthralled by Armageddon. I don't mean the movie from the 90s, as undeniably good as it was. I'm talking about the end of the world theme that runs through so many books, movies, and TV shows of our day. What will the end be like? We seem to understand, and even wholeheartedly accept, that it will be a time of trouble and to some degree a time of judgment. It always ends in embers, doesn't it? Those who remain struggle to survive.

Does the Bible support such a view of the end? We've seen from our studies that God's judgment is very real and certainly coming to this world. But then what? Embers? Zombies? A long, drawn out, survival-of-the-fittest apocalypse? No. God's judgment will be swift. Then for those who remain with God, the Bible's place of emphasis is restoration.

Those walking the new earth after God's judgment comes are those whom He brings through the cleansing blood of Jesus. He restores His people and places them back in a purified world to live the life they always longed for. Jesus is there in His glory, walking the earth with them. The world is as it was meant to be. No more pain. No more sorrow. No more sadness. All worshipping God.

The biblical theme of restoration runs through the Bible's pages from Genesis to Revelation. It is the constant refrain of God's Word, infusing hope into God's people throughout the ages. Life may look dim right now, and the near future may look darker still. But there is a light shining in the darkness, and the darkness will not overcome it. Jesus is coming with the place He has prepared for His people. Eden—something better than Eden, actually—will come down from heaven, and all God's people will enjoy Him and one another in a renewed and restored world forever (Rev. 21). All who remain will see what a truly wonderful world it is!

**How should the Bible's theme of restoration infuse hope into your daily life?**

# DAY 3

## READ:

**Zephaniah 3:9-13**

## FOCAL PASSAGE:

**Zephaniah 3:11**

NOTES

There are some scary verses in the Bible. Perhaps none is more frightening than Jesus's words in Luke 8:17, stating all things will be revealed. The Old Testament version of this is Numbers 32:23, revealing that our sins will catch up to us and be found out. What is worse than knowing who we really are with all our secret sins being found out? How will we feel when we are so exposed?

The shame associated with this scenario feels unbearable, doesn't it? It's one thing to bring our sins out into the light ourselves, but when others do it for us, the shame increases tenfold. Our shame before others is profound, so imagine the feeling before the holy God. On the great and final judgment day, the day of the Lord, when we stand before God, how will we possibly stand as all our secret sins are shown for the darkness they truly are?

The truth is we can't stand in that day. Not unless we have a covering. For the unrepentant, it will be a day of shame that leads to hell. But what about for the believer? Zephaniah 3:11 tells us something shocking: For those of humble faith in the Lord, though their sins are as great, if not greater, than the unrepentant, on that day, they will not be put to shame. All their evil deeds and all their secret sins will be removed by the atoning blood of Jesus (Eph. 1:7).

So here's the deal God makes with us right now: All our shame for all Christ's grace. We can look to the cross right now and see our shame hanging there. Jesus was totally humiliated for us because of us. And He's offering the fullness of His grace to us today. All we have to do is believe it and accept it.

If we will accept His offer, then on that day of judgment, God will pronounce His righteousness over us because of Jesus. We will not be banished from His presence but welcomed in forever.

**Where in your shame do you need to trust the sufficiency of Christ's sacrifice on the cross today?**

# DAY 4

## READ:

**Zephaniah 3:9-13**

## FOCAL PASSAGE:

**Zephaniah 3:12-13**

## NOTES



## ESSENTIAL DOCTRINE #75: SANCTIFICATION

After we are justified by faith, declared to be in right standing with God through the righteousness of Christ, we undergo a lifetime of sanctification where we are continually made more like Christ through the work of the Holy Spirit (Gal. 5:16-26; 2 Thess. 2:13). Scripture speaks of sanctification as a present position (we have already been sanctified) and as a continuing process. Sanctification affects the whole of a person, transforming one's heart, mind, and character to reflect that of Jesus.

We might wonder sometimes what the secret to the Christian life is. Why does it often feel so hard to grow in godliness? Why does our faith feel so wooden and dry at times? While there can be many different reasons, let's consider just one: pride.

Our pride gets in the way of our growth in Christ more than anything else. It is the sin beneath every other sin. It is the sin that keeps us from laying ourselves before God in total dependence. Even pushed into the darkest corner, our flesh cries out that we still have control and we can still make a strong effort to get ourselves out.

Consider, however, the life of Jesus. He lived a perfectly humble life. I once heard a preacher say Jesus never got up in the morning and thought, "What do I want to do today?" He was always about His Father's business (Luke 2:49). Though Son is divine, He submitted control of His schedule to the Father. He let people interrupt His plan. He stopped to talk and heal and teach on the way to wherever He was going.

Jesus's humility, of course, was best seen at the cross. He humbled Himself to the point of death, Paul says in Philippians 2:8. He laid down His life, though He had done nothing wrong. He was the perfect man with perfect obedience, and He willingly went to the cross to die for sinful people like us. That is the epitome of humility. This is the goal to which all Christians strive: dying to the flesh so that we might live to God (Gal. 5:24-25).

There is good news on this front. Though the fight feels so strong right now, it will not always be so. God will redeem all His people completely one day, and then humility will not be something we strive for—it will be who we are. We will finally be like Jesus as fully as we can possibly be.

**How does the example of Jesus's humility inspire you to humble yourself today?**

# DAY 5

## READ:

**Zephaniah 3:14-20**

## FOCAL PASSAGE:

**Zephaniah 3:17**

## NOTES

Perhaps no verse in the Bible is as shocking to our understanding of an almighty God and our awe of Him as Zephaniah 3:17. God sings? Because He delights in me?

Think of your birthday when everyone gathers to sing in celebration of your new year. What goes through your mind? Perhaps you feel uncomfortable. Maybe you want to join in the singing. It's difficult for many simply to be still and accept the song from others. We sense we don't deserve the attention, or at the very least, we aren't comfortable with it.

Imagine, then, this scene: Jesus Himself steps out of heaven and comes into the room with you right now. With eyes like a flame of fire, He looks at you and smiles. You're already uncomfortable. Maybe you want to run away, but He's standing in the doorway and He's too big to get around.

Then He starts rejoicing. He's clapping and hollering like His team just won the World Series. Then He suddenly stops and looks at you so intently with affection that you wonder if you can endure the next few moments. It feels as if it lasts forever. Then He starts singing. It takes you by surprise, but you soon realize He's singing about you, delighting in you.

Maybe that sounds too far-fetched for you, but the Bible says this is the believer's future. Jesus rejoices in you. Not because of what you've done, or even will do, but because of who He is. He loves you because He is love and you are His creation and child. He loves you and you can't do anything about it but accept it.

Sometimes it's easy to receive love, and sometimes it's difficult. Either way, the truth is that God loves you more than you can ever know. Even knowing everything about you—the good, the bad, and the ugly—He loves you still, delighting in you and singing over you.

**How do you need to receive the love of Jesus today?**

# GROUP

NOTES

## VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

"I tell you again that He cannot reject you—that would be to alter His whole Character and 'un-Christ' Himself! To spurn a coming sinner would un-Jesus Him and make Him to be somebody else, and not Himself any longer. 'He cannot deny Himself.' Go and try Him! Go and try Him."<sup>2</sup>

—Charles Spurgeon (1834-1892)

### POINT 1: The Lord saves the repentant (Zeph. 2:1-3).

The Lord graciously called His sinful people to gather together so they could hear the threat of His \_\_\_\_\_ and respond so as to be \_\_\_\_\_ from it.

The only hope for salvation from God's judgment is to fall on God's \_\_\_\_\_. He calls on His people to seek righteousness and seek humility, and only the \_\_\_\_\_ will repent and obey.



**Why does humility please the Lord?**

### POINT 2: The Lord restores the faithful (Zeph. 3:9-11).

The Lord, in His grace, has promised to bring restoration to \_\_\_\_\_ people, which will include people from every tribe, nation, and \_\_\_\_\_. Then they will \_\_\_\_\_ the one true God together in purity.



**What are some ways our speech is tainted by the effects of sin?**

On the great day of the Lord, God's people will recognize God's \_\_\_\_\_ and forgiveness as He removes all \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ influences that lead to sin and shame.



**Why is pride such a devastating attitude and sin?**

### POINT 3: The Lord purifies the humble (Zeph. 3:12-13).

#### ESSENTIAL DOCTRINE #75: SANCTIFICATION

NOTES

After we are justified by faith, declared to be in right standing with God through the righteousness of Christ, we undergo a \_\_\_\_\_ of sanctification where we are continually made more like \_\_\_\_\_ through the work of the Holy Spirit (Gal. 5:16-26; 2 Thess. 2:13). Scripture speaks of sanctification as a present position (we have already been sanctified) and as a continuing \_\_\_\_\_. Sanctification affects the whole of a person, transforming one's heart, mind, and \_\_\_\_\_ to reflect that of Jesus.



**What should sanctification look like in this world plagued by sin?**

The Lord has promised a day when His people will be marked by perfect \_\_\_\_\_, holiness, and \_\_\_\_\_ because He has made them so.

#### MY RESPONSE

Because we have been purified of our sins in Christ Jesus, we live with expectancy of Jesus's return as we make Him known to others so that they too might turn from sin and fear.

- **HEAD:** What are some ways you might be trying to earn your own salvation?
- **HEART:** What are some ways you will respond to the truth of the gospel?
- **HANDS:** With whom will you share the good news of Jesus Christ this week?

#### VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

"A natural man's confessions run through him as water through a pipe. They do not affect him at all. But true confession leaves heart-wounding impressions on a man. David's soul was burdened in the confession of his sins: 'as a heavy burden they are too heavy for me' (Psalm 38:4). It is one thing to confess sin—and another thing to feel sin's wounds."<sup>3</sup>

—Thomas Watson (c. 1620-1686)

# A HUMBLER HEART

**+** **SESSION IN A SENTENCE:**

Repentance is an act prompted by sorrow in which a person turns from sin to Christ.

**+** **BACKGROUND PASSAGES:**

Psalms 119; Proverbs 28; 2 Corinthians 6–7

**+** **SETTING:**

The past few studies have taken us from the theme of judgment to the theme of grace and back again. From a king to a nation to a people, the need for humility is evident. So where should all of this take us? To a humbled heart. We've seen the kindness of God in the past few studies, though kindness and judgment aren't thought to live in the same house. With God, however, they do. The apostle Paul said God's kindness is intended to lead us to repentance (Rom. 2:4). It is to repentance we now look.



# DAY 1

## READ:

**2 Corinthians 6–7**

## FOCAL PASSAGE:

**2 Corinthians 7:2-10**

## NOTES

The Bible tells us to speak the truth in love (Eph. 4:15). Have you ever wondered what that means? It's hard to discern what is loving and what is something we want to say that we label "love." How can we tell the difference between what is truly loving and what just feels good to get off our chest?

Paul's words in 2 Corinthians 7:9-10 show us the kind of speech that speaks the truth in love. Paul knew he had to confront the Corinthian believers about their current way of living and thinking. They were not who they should have been. They were sinning against God, Paul, and one another.

As Paul dashed off a previous letter and saw it carried away to the church he loved, he let on that he had some regret about how it was received, but only for a little while (2 Cor. 7:8). He regretted he had to write it at all. He did not rejoice in the cause of the letter, but he did rejoice in the change the letter wrought in the hearts of his readers. Paul spoke the truth in love because he said what needed to be said in order to bring the church back to God in repentance. Paul wasn't out to settle the score. He wasn't trying to pick a fight. He wasn't pulling rank as the apostle in the room. He was saying hard things in a loving way in hopes of melting their hearts toward God. And it worked.

Perhaps you have never known the feeling of being on the loving end of truth-telling. Maybe you've too often experienced a kind of false love that attempts to manipulate and coerce. If so, that is not the way God works. God speaks hard things to us. The Bible is full of them. It is truth from page to page. But God is always loving. His goal is not to crush us but to save us. Jesus was already crushed for us. Christ is God's truth in love that leads us back to God's heart, where we find safety and salvation.

**How have you experienced the Bible's truth as God's words of love to you, and how should that change your approach to speaking with others in the future?**

# DAY 2

## READ:

2 Samuel 11–12; Psalm 51

## FOCAL PASSAGE:

Psalm 51

## NOTES



## ESSENTIAL DOCTRINE #67: REPENTANCE

Repentance is a response to God's gracious call to salvation. It includes a genuine sorrow for one's sin (Luke 5:1-11), a turning away from one's sin toward Christ (Acts 26:15-20), and a life that reflects lasting change and transformation (Ps. 119:57-60). It is the human counterpart to God's work of regeneration; in other words, the human side of our conversion.

King David was a mighty man who did great things in Israel. By all accounts, the people loved him, God loved him, and he was the king the world needed. In fact, it was to David that God made the promise of an eternal throne for his family.

But David was a sinner, and a bad one. In 2 Samuel 11, we are told of one especially terrible string of events where David took another man's wife into his bed, impregnated her, brought her husband home to trick him, and when that didn't work, sent him back to the front lines of battle with orders that he be left alone to die at the enemy's hands. For nearly a year, David seemingly had no regret. He kept silent and went about life as normal. But God knew what David had done. In 2 Samuel 12, He sent the prophet Nathan to confront David and call him to a godly grief and repentance.

Perhaps David had both kinds of grief at different points. Surely he regretted that the woman's husband had to die because of his sin. But it was a selfish move, one he considered worth the cost to hide his sin. He didn't seem too caught up on what to do next. He just moved along to the next idea that protected his own skin. This is worldly grief in a nutshell, entirely self-centered. When Nathan came, however, David's heart melted before God in repentance. In Psalm 51:4, David expresses his realization that it was against God that he had sinned. Yes, David sinned against others, but he knew his sin was really against God alone. He had turned away from the Lord, and now it was time to turn back.

David's grief turned to repentance. He pleaded for God's forgiveness and confessed his sinfulness. When our sin is exposed, we may find ourselves humiliated, not knowing if our lives can go on. But David shows us that with repentance and with God, all things are possible as God forgives us and restores us.

**What sins do you need to confess in godly grief right now?**

# DAY 3

## READ:

**Proverbs 28**

## FOCAL PASSAGE:

**Proverbs 28:13**

NOTES

Each one of us faces two options regarding our sin. We can hide it in the shadows of our hearts or we can drag it into the light of Jesus. Any third option we can imagine is only a derivative of those two.

What happens in each scenario? Let's say we made a vow to ourselves that we would never open up. We would never confess. We would hide those dark parts of our hearts away forever. We would take our sins to our death. What will happen when we get to the grave? The Bible says it is appointed once for man to die and then face the judgment (Heb. 9:27). On that day, we will appear before the judgment seat of Christ so that we will receive our due reward (2 Cor. 5:10). God will, at that time, judge the secrets of human beings (Rom. 2:16). In other words, you can hide all you want. But a day is coming when all that is hidden will be revealed. Your sins will be dragged into the light. Even if you never confess your sins, you can be certain that God will reveal it all and there will be no more covering on that day for your soul.

Now let's suppose we take a different path. We choose to open our hearts to Jesus and step into His light. Will He judge us harshly? Will we wilt before Him? Will He cast us out? When we take that step of faith, here's what we find—grace and mercy (Heb. 4:14-16; 1 John 1:7). When we open our hearts to Jesus, He opens His heart to us, and we find the freedom and love we've longed for all our lives. He showed His love at the cross, where He paid the penalty for our sins and offers His cleansing blood for our unrighteousness.

So, we have two options: We can hide our sin in the darkness and God will drag it into the light on His day of judgment, or we can drag our sin into the light and God will cover it by the cross with the blood of Christ (1 John 1:7,9).

**What excuses do you make for keeping your sins to yourself? How does the gospel of Jesus remove those excuses?**

# DAY 4

## READ:

1 John 1:1–2:2

## FOCAL PASSAGE:

1 John 1:5–10

## NOTES

## VOICES from THE CHURCH

"Repentance is not a onetime action. We initially repent as part of our salvation response. However, salvation doesn't make us act perfectly. While we're living we will still commit sin, thus the need to repent. We don't repent in order to restore our salvation, because we never lose that; rather, we repent in order to restore our fellowship with God."<sup>1</sup>

—Mary Wiley

First John 1:7 is the perfect life-verse for a community of Jesus followers. If we walk in the light as God is in the light, then we will have fellowship with one another and find all our sin forgiven in the blood of Jesus. This verse is a way to take Proverbs 28:13 and put it into practice. Jesus is light. He's out there in His light right now, waiting for you to step into it. When you do, it's an exposing light, but it's also a cleansing light. You will see things previously hidden in the darkness, and that can be scary. It will also be freeing. It's a step we all need to take on a continual basis.

But there is another step included in this verse that might surprise us. John wrote this not to individuals but to a community. This isn't an exhortation to private confession but to public confession with one another. Notice the second phrase of the verse: "we have fellowship with one another." Maybe we don't expect that to be true. Some environments are not safe for confession. Your sin can be used against you. Maybe you've experienced that before. But when a community can step together into the light of Jesus and trust Him alone to deal with whatever happens next, something miraculous can occur.

We deeply believe we are alone in our sin. Even if we know others sin too, at the heart level, we believe we're alone. Confession is to community what oxygen is to the body. It opens us up to life-giving power. When we confess our sins to one another, we find fellowship with one another. We find friends on the road to glory, all looking to Jesus alone for our hope and salvation.

When we open our hearts like that, not only do we find fellowship with one another, but we also find the blood of Jesus cleansing us from our sin. We find the grace of Jesus pouring out upon us. When we speak out loud what we really did and what we really thought and then look to Jesus for salvation, we will find Him and His people with arms wide open.

**Will you allow your sins to keep you in darkness, or will you confess them with a trusted believer in the light?**

# DAY 5

## READ:

**Psalm 119:57-64**

## FOCAL PASSAGE:

**Psalm 119:58**

## NOTES

In Psalm 119:58, the psalmist prays that God would be gracious to him according to His promises. This is a thoroughly biblical prayer, and not just because we find it in part of the Bible. Praying God's words back to Him is a model of prayer we see throughout the Scriptures. God gives us the privilege of using His own words in prayer to Him. We can come to Him with His words on our lips and ask Him to make His truth a reality in our lives.

When we think about it, what else is there to pray for? What greater prayer could we utter? God's words are never failing. The full weight of His glory is behind them. If He has said He will be gracious to His people, we can be sure that He will be gracious to us.

Prayer is among the most difficult things for us to do, perhaps more so in our modern day of endless distractions and relative safety compared to other times throughout history. Many today don't have a deep sense of need before God. We feel in control of our lives. Our refrigerators are full. Our beds are warm. Our bank accounts may not be as full as we would wish, but they are among the richest history has ever seen.

So what can we bring to God in prayer when we can't sense our need for Him? We can pick up the Bible and pray His words back to Him. The Bible can coach us in how to pray. It raises our eyes to God in thanksgiving. It pushes us low before the cross in humility. It lifts us up to the heights of glory where we sing with the angels of the holiness of God. And it reminds us of how needy we are of His grace and mercy all our days.

**What portion of Psalm 119 might you use in your prayers today?**

# GROUP

NOTES

## VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

"No man is born with godly sorrow in his heart, as he is born with a tongue in his mouth. Godly sorrow is a plant of God's own planting; it is a seed of his own sowing; it is a flower of his own setting; it is of a heavenly offspring; it is from God, and God alone."<sup>2</sup>

—Thomas Brooks (c. 1608-1680)

## INTRODUCTION

### ESSENTIAL DOCTRINE #67: REPENTANCE

Repentance is a \_\_\_\_\_ to God's gracious call to salvation. It includes a genuine \_\_\_\_\_ for one's sin (Luke 5:1-11), a turning away from one's sin toward \_\_\_\_\_ (Acts 26:15-20), and a life that reflects \_\_\_\_\_ change and transformation (Ps. 119:57-60). It is the human counterpart to God's work of regeneration; in other words, the human side of our conversion.

### POINT 1: Repentance is the result of godly sorrow (2 Cor. 7:9-10).

Good and faithful confrontation regarding sin seeks not humiliation but repentance. And when sinners repent, we should \_\_\_\_\_ over God's \_\_\_\_\_.



**Why should repentance, whether someone else's or our own, result in rejoicing?**

Not all grief over sin is the same. What matters is the \_\_\_\_\_ of our grief: Do we keep our eyes locked on \_\_\_\_\_ in self-pity or do we turn them to \_\_\_\_\_, who forgives and saves?



**What are some ways we can recognize the difference between godly grief and worldly grief?**

### POINT 2: Repentance is the act of turning from sin (Prov. 28:13).

As sinners, our first instinct when we sin is to \_\_\_\_\_ it. But this results in exhaustion and weakness as \_\_\_\_\_ frustrates our way forward.



**What are some ways sinners do not “prosper” when hiding their sins?**

\_\_\_\_\_ who turns from their sin and comes to God in repentance and faith will be saved. The Lord has promised His mercy, and He sent His Son to secure that salvation, so we are to believe in \_\_\_\_\_ as Savior and Lord.

NOTES

### **POINT 3: Repentance is proven by obedience** (Ps. 119:57-60).

Repentance of \_\_\_\_\_ necessarily leads to obedience to \_\_\_\_\_. Because the Lord has graciously given \_\_\_\_\_ to us, we should seek to obey Him wholeheartedly.



**Why does repentance require that obedience follow?**

Our \_\_\_\_\_ ways always come short of our expectations and of God’s glory, but \_\_\_\_\_ ways are worth our consideration and quick obedience.

## **MY RESPONSE**

Because we have come to know the glory and beauty of God, we seek to respond to all sin with humility and genuine sorrow as we are quick to repent and turn back to God.

- **HEAD:** What obstacles keep you from confessing your sin to God? What reasons should you have for confessing your sin?
- **HEART:** What sins will you confess to God and others so that you may be forgiven and free?
- **HANDS:** How will you press the gospel gladly and gently into those around you today?

### **VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY**

“The difference between an unconverted and a converted man is not that the one has sins and the other has none; but that the one takes part with his cherished sins against a dreaded God, and the other takes part with a reconciled God against his hated sins.”<sup>3</sup>

–William Arnot (1808-1875)

## UNIT 15

+

**HE HAS MADE**

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**EVERY**

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**NATIONALITY**

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# “Made in the Likeness of God”

by Daniel Davis

Can you imagine your life without mirrors? You would never know what you look like. You would not be able to see easily if cars were coming up behind you as you took a turn or changed a lane while driving. You would never enjoy the smile of a child grasping the meaning in a reflection. Nor would you be able to laugh at a pet facing off against a fierce but familiar enemy.

Mirrors help us to get a sense of reality for places and things we otherwise could not see. Want to know if your hair is out of place? Use a mirror. The hair on the back of your head? Use two. Large mirrors are used in the Hubble Space Telescope and the new James Webb Space Telescope to help scientists and interested observers see and study stars and galaxies across the universe.

Not every mirror tells the whole truth, however. Perhaps you recall the need for the printed warning “Objects in mirror are closer than they appear,” especially if you are driving a vehicle being chased by a T-Rex. And some mirrors are intentionally altered for a fun house to skew the reflection in humorous ways. But if you want to see what is real, it is best to have a mirror that is flat, clean, smooth, and pure, not to mention aimed in the right direction.

## IMAGE-BEARERS ARE MIRRORS

Mirrors in ancient times were crafted from polished metals. Not the best means for an accurate reflection. But today’s glass mirrors do an amazing job of displaying a truthful image.

Making a mirror involves a process called silvering, applying a metallic material, often aluminum, to the back of a sheet of glass.<sup>1</sup> Once complete, you can no longer look through the glass, but it becomes a

# So often the mirror of our being is aimed not at Christ but at the distractions and deceptions of our gold- and silver-plated idols.

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looking glass. What was once transparent has now become reflective.

When God created human beings on day 6 of creation, He chose to make them in His image. Adam and Eve and all their descendants were to fill the earth, work it, and rule over it as God's representatives (Gen. 1:26-28). All of humanity was designed from the beginning to reflect our Creator throughout His creation, even as that creation testifies to us about who God is (Rom. 1:20). We weren't made to be empty, transparent windows but mirrors radiating the glory of God in the world.

But look around. Look at the people of every tribe, tongue, and nation. Or better yet, look in the mirror, and what do you see reflecting back at you?

## OUR REFLECTIONS ARE SKEWED

Though all human beings were made to reflect God's glory in the world, we do a very poor job of fulfilling our purpose. This is because of sin. Adam and Eve broke God's "law" in the garden of Eden

and thus shattered humanity in their wake. Now we all fall short of God's glory (Rom. 3:23), and our reflections distort the holiness of the holy God we were meant to image.

A mirror may have a solid backing material that reflects well, but if the glass that provides the structure for the reflective surface is dirty, warped, pitted, or cracked, then the image it puts off will be distorted. Similarly, we are made in the image of God, and that hasn't changed, but that image is skewed through our sinful nature and our sinful acts, whether we know it or not.

The Israelites knew of God's creation, they knew of God's law, and they knew their purpose to be a light to the world. But they chose rebellion and eventually would suffer the consequences. The Assyrians, on the other hand, didn't know their right hand from their left, meaning they were ignorant of the truth and reality of the God they were made to reflect (Jonah 4:11). Their sins caught up with them as well because the Creator God, though slow to anger and abounding in love (Ex. 34:6-7), will not be mocked by His image-bearers (Gal. 6:7).

## THE MINISTRY OF IMAGE-BEARING

The image a mirror is meant to reflect also can be skewed if the mirror is pointed in the wrong direction. You've likely been the victim, whether accidentally or on purpose, of a bright, directed flash of light into your eyes via a watch, a CD, a cell phone, or even a mirror. The rays of the sun catch the reflective surface and bounce into your face, temporarily scarring your vision. The purpose of our image-bearing as human beings compares well with this phenomenon.

When we have our spiritual gaze aimed upward at God, more specifically, at Christ our Savior seated at the right hand of God (Col. 3:1-4), then the light of His perfect glory and character will more readily reflect through our words and actions in this dark world.

Yet so often the mirror of our being is aimed not at Christ but at the distractions and deceptions of our gold- and silver-plated idols. This is the default state for all of humanity. Rather than look to our Creator to image Him here, we have lowered our gaze to try to see ourselves

shining back at us in the idolatrous works of our hands. Then, caught in an endless reflection akin to a hall of mirrors, we become stuck, fixated on the seemingly infinite and hollow images of our sinful selves until we reap the judgment we deserve for our narcissistic pride.

But Jesus, the Son of God, came into the world as “the image of God” (2 Cor. 4:4). He came to save us from our sin and to break us free from our self-made traps in this world. He calls us upward and lifts our gaze that we should behold Him in all His glory and rightly reflect the truth and reality of the gospel in a world that cannot distinguish its right hand from its left. As image-bearers of God, as mirrors reflecting “the light of the world” (John 8:12), let us shine forth and show all the world the glory of God in Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord.



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Jesus calls us upward and lifts our gaze that we  
should behold Him in all His glory and rightly  
reflect the truth and reality of the gospel.

# GOD'S HEART FOR THE NATIONS

## + SESSION IN A SENTENCE:

God loves all peoples and sends out His Word so that they might repent of their sin.

## + BACKGROUND PASSAGE:

Jonah

## + SETTING:

Many use the story of Jonah, a picture book favorite, as a cautionary tale of the consequences of disobedience. Yet the book of Jonah is more than a tale of a man on the run who ends up in the belly of a fish. God gave Jonah, a prophet during the rule of Jeroboam II (793-753 BC), the great honor and responsibility of declaring His words to His people. He enjoyed the role of prophet during a time of relative ease and safety. But when God called him to go and speak out against his evil enemies, Jonah bolted in an attempt to shirk the responsibility he had previously embraced.

# DAY 1

## READ:

**Jonah 1:1-10**

## FOCAL PASSAGE:

**Jonah 1:7-10**

## NOTES

Trouble. We try to avoid it as much as possible. No one wants trouble. Yet the Bible gives many examples of the woes of humankind and how God works in the midst of our messes.

When trouble comes, it's easy to start thinking, "Why? Why do I have to deal with this difficulty? Why did this struggle come? Why can't my life be easy?"

Instead, perhaps the question, "How?" is more helpful. "How is God using this for my formation? How is God using this to draw others to Himself? How can I see God in a bigger way, not despite of, but in light of my circumstances?"

While there certainly is a place for learning from our mistakes, not all trouble we encounter is a direct result of something we've done wrong. Here in the book of Jonah, we see that Jonah's rebellion brought correction, and the stress that correction caused extended beyond Jonah. The mariners found themselves in the eye of Jonah's storm. Similarly, the suffering in our lives can be due to someone else's sin, if not our own. Other times, problems come our way as a result of the limitedness and brokenness of this world. A leaky roof. A worn-out immune system. The devastation of a hurricane, earthquake, or fire.

The sailors here experienced great distress due to Jonah's disobedience. Yet God used the dilemma they found themselves in to point them to His character. They emerged from this episode of trouble with greater knowledge of who God is. Hopefully they continued their search for truth upon their return to dry land and found eternal salvation from the One who spared them from the raging sea.

**What troubles are you facing today? Instead of only asking God, "Why?" take some time today to ask Him to show you "how" He is using this problem in your life for your good and the good of those around you.**

# DAY 2

## READ:

**Jonah 1:11-17**

## FOCAL PASSAGE:

**Jonah 1:17**

NOTES

Don't run from God or else He'll send a whale to swallow you up in punishment. This is the application point many have errantly taken from the book of Jonah. On the surface, this seems to some to be the main point of the passage. But taken in context of the big picture of the rest of the book of Jonah (as well as the main message of Scripture), a contrasting teaching emerges: The big fish was a means of deliverance sent from God. Those three nasty days and nights in the fish were a gift of grace.

God used the fish to rescue Jonah from death. God used the storm to stop Jonah in his disobedient tracks. Later in the book of Jonah, we see how God used the good (the vine) and the bad (the worm) to uncover Jonah's entrenched entitlement and lack of compassion. Definitely, there is an element of disciplinary action involved here. But correction from our good, loving Father is a means of grace, not judgment, for we know that the Lord disciplines those He loves just like a father would (Prov. 3:11-12).

Jonah is not a book about divine punishment and weird object lessons. It is a book about God and His gracious pursuit of sinners—a Father who disciplines those in whom He delights. It is a story of God and His relentless compassion for all people. It is a living illustration of the gospel at work in both the lives of Jonah, the mariners, and the Ninevites.

God is pursuing us, and He gives us every opportunity to come back to Him when we stray, rebel, and disobey. Whether we choose to or not is up to us. But in His persistent pursuit, we see a God who loves us even as He disciplines us.

**How do you primarily view the discipline of the Lord: as a despicable act of an angry, distant deity or a gracious act of an affectionate, loving Father? Why?**

# DAY 3

## READ:

**Jonah 2:1–3:5**

## FOCAL PASSAGE:

**Jonah 3:1**

## NOTES



## ESSENTIAL DOCTRINE #47: THE GOSPEL

The Bible teaches that the gospel is both an event and a story. First, it is an event that took place at a specific point in history, the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ for the redemption of sinners (1 Cor. 15; 2 Cor. 5:21). Second, the gospel is also the story of redemption that God has planned since before the foundations of the earth (Eph. 1:4), which runs through Scripture, and which culminates in a restored and redeemed creation—a new heaven and new earth where sin, death, and suffering will never again plague humanity, and God’s people will live with Him forever (Isa. 25:8; 2 Pet. 3:13; Rev. 21). The event and story do not exist apart from or in conflict with one another, but together inspire us to a life of devotion and mission.

Our God is a God of second chances. Here we clearly see God recommissioning Jonah to carry God’s message to the Ninevites. It seems as if Jonah has had a change of heart, and instead of running, he goes willingly to Nineveh, and the Ninevites respond in faith and repentance.

This is good news! Yet we later see that Jonah’s heart was far from repentant. He may have changed his physical direction, but his hatred for Nineveh had not budged. Certainly, God knew the state of Jonah’s heart when He first called the prophet to preach against Nineveh, and He called Jonah anyway. He also knew the state of Jonah’s heart when He came to Jonah a second time, and He called Jonah anyway.

God is not only a God of second chances (and third, and fourth), He is an all-knowing God who chooses to use imperfect people to accomplish His perfect work. There is no such thing as a perfect minister. There are no flawless Christians who are worthy to be used by God. Though God chooses to involve His people in His purposes, God’s work is not dependent on people. The power of the gospel is wholly dependent on God’s perfect character.

He can (and does) use the disobedient runner to accomplish His purposes.

He can (and does) use the reluctant minister to proclaim His precepts.

He can (and does) use the hard-hearted soul to bring the gospel message to the nations.

He can (and does) use you for the work of His kingdom.

**How does seeing the way God used Jonah—in spite of Jonah—free you up to obediently step into God’s work of taking the gospel to all peoples and nations?**

# DAY 4

## READ:

Jonah 4:1-4

## FOCAL PASSAGE:

Jonah 4:4

## NOTES

## VOICES from THE CHURCH

"God's too big for us to control. You can't pick and choose which of God's attributes you want to see displayed and when and where you want to experience them."<sup>1</sup>

—Priscilla Shirer

Angry enough to die? Have you ever found yourself in that place before? Jesus expressed His anger while here on earth, as seen in His famous turning of tables in the temple court (Matt. 21:12-13). Psalm 7:11 and other passages tell us that God has righteous indignation (a fancy term for anger). So, while anger—a normal emotion—is not always a negative thing, what causes us to become angry very well might be.

In Jonah's case, his anger stemmed from a sinful place. In this first display of anger, Jonah was furious over the fact that God dared to show compassion to the Ninevites. Undoubtedly, Jonah's rage boiled up because he held on to hatred for his enemies. He did not believe they were worthy of God's mercy. He would rather have died than see these people receive forgiveness.

Most would say they do not hold on to hatred for a people group. Yet whether it be people of a particular ethnicity, those with a different political position, or individuals from a certain social class—the presence of anger toward others may reveal otherwise.

Whether big or small, many people hold on to prejudices that prove to affect our actions and attitudes. It may be hidden and unrealized, but they are there. And when God chooses to bless others and our anger rears its ugly head, that may be a signal that something within our hearts is not quite right.

Let's not be like Jonah in his anger and lack mercy. Let's strive to have a heart like God's, who desires all to have the opportunity to come to Him in repentance (2 Pet. 3:9).

**Whether you've been angry to the same degree as Jonah or not, it can be helpful to evaluate the root of your anger. Is it from a normal and right place, as in the case of a gross injustice? Or is it out of jealousy, pride, or prejudice?**



# DAY 5

## READ:

**Jonah 4:5-11**

## FOCAL PASSAGE:

**Jonah 4:8**

NOTES

In a society centered on pursuing comfort at all costs, it is often difficult to recognize how much outside influences shape our lives. Commercials constantly push the “fact” that we deserve various products. Companies build multi-million dollar marketing campaigns geared toward the felt needs of making life easier and more enjoyable. For example, while there is nothing wrong with choosing a comfortable pillow or cozy pajamas to give us better sleep, the pursuit of the “best” night’s sleep can sometimes become a non-negotiable in our lives. Whether it be a satisfying slumber, our favorite foods, or a haven at home, sometimes these good gifts from God become things we pursue more than God Himself.

When we examine our lives, we can see there are many practices in our day-to-day living that boil down to the pursuit of comfort, and these aren’t necessarily bad. But when those who claim to follow Christ sacrifice obedience to Him on the altar of leisure and convenience, we have a problem.

Jonah relished the comfort the vine provided. It brought him great pleasure, while he seethed over the mercy shown to his enemies. He would rather have died than be uncomfortable. He would rather have died than see his enemies receive spiritual comfort. These two realities are not unconnected. Creature comforts often distract us and distance us from the urgency of the Great Commission. Though we don’t have to forsake every convenience and pleasure to be obedient, we must be watchful for how these things can rob us of our focus. Instead of making the gifts of God our ultimate pursuit, we can use these comforts to provide rest and sustenance for a life of obedient service to God’s eternal purposes.

**What are some creature comforts in your life that have become earthly distractions from God’s mission instead of provisions for our God-given eternal pursuits?**

# GROUP

NOTES

## VOICES from THE CHURCH

"Behind all our mission stands the unshakeable determination of God to be known throughout His whole creation as the living God."<sup>2</sup>

—Christopher Wright

### POINT 1: A wayward prophet leads others to worship the Lord (Jonah 1:10-16).

Instead of pointing others to the goodness of God through his \_\_\_\_\_, Jonah's selfish actions brought \_\_\_\_\_ to the pagan sailors.



**How have you seen the decisions of Christ-followers positively or negatively affect unbelievers around them?**

Despite Jonah's hard-heartedness, God still used him to reveal His \_\_\_\_\_ to the pagan sailors that they might \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ Him.

### POINT 2: A stubborn prophet draws others to repent to the Lord (Jonah 3:1-5).

God pursues sinners for their \_\_\_\_\_ and their \_\_\_\_\_. He desires His people to obey and for \_\_\_\_\_ to come to repentance.

### ESSENTIAL DOCTRINE #47: THE GOSPEL

The Bible teaches that the gospel is both an event and a story. First, it is an event that took place at a specific point in \_\_\_\_\_, the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ for the redemption of sinners (1 Cor. 15; 2 Cor. 5:21). Second, the gospel is also the story of redemption that God has \_\_\_\_\_ since before the foundations of the earth (Eph. 1:4), which runs through Scripture, and which culminates in a restored and redeemed creation—a new heaven and new earth where sin, death, and suffering will never again plague humanity, and God's people will live with Him forever (Isa. 25:8; 2 Pet. 3:13; Rev. 21). The event and story do not exist apart from or in conflict

with one another, but together inspire us to a life of \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ .



**Why might we give into the thought that some people are too far gone for God to redeem?**

NOTES

### **POINT 3: A hard-hearted prophet receives compassion from the Lord** (Jonah 4:5-11).

The Lord had already used \_\_\_\_\_ to show Jonah compassion and to \_\_\_\_\_ his heart, and He did so again with a plant as an object \_\_\_\_\_ .



**What are some difficult lessons you have had to learn from the Lord?**

As much as we might care about \_\_\_\_\_ , God cares even more about \_\_\_\_\_ made in His \_\_\_\_\_ that they repent and believe in Him.



**How might we grow in our desire to see all people repent and believe in Jesus?**

## **MY RESPONSE**

Because we were enemies who received God's grace and mercy, we break down walls and put to death our prejudices as we share the news with everyone that forgiveness is available through repentance and faith in Christ.

- **HEAD:** Who are some groups of people you need to see differently because God is a God of compassion?
- **HEART:** How will you seek to develop a compassionate heart for unbelievers in the world?
- **HANDS:** What is one way you will show the compassion of Jesus this week?

### **VOICES from THE CHURCH**

"God breaks down walls and leads His people out into the world with good news: forgiveness is possible through repentance and faith. Tribal attitudes melt away when constantly exposed to the warm embrace of our missionary God."<sup>3</sup>

-Trevin Wax

# GOD'S JUDGMENT OF THE NATIONS

**+** **SESSION IN A SENTENCE:**

God will punish all sin so that none may accuse Him of unrighteousness.

**+** **BACKGROUND PASSAGE:**

Nahum

**+** **SETTING:**

Over a century after Nineveh's repentant response to God's warning through Jonah, God gave Nahum a final word for the Assyrian capital. We don't know how long the city's contrition lasted, but it eventually faded. In 612 BC, the Babylonians decimated Nineveh and—thanks to Nahum—God's people saw it coming. This book of prophecy is a record of God's message to His people suffering under the oppression of Assyria. To Nineveh, this was a severe indictment. But these words pointed the hearts of God's people to the holiness, justice, and faithfulness of the Lord, who would certainly, decidedly, and finally avenge the many wicked wrongs wrought by the Assyrians.

# DAY 1

## READ:

**Nahum 1–3**

## FOCAL PASSAGE:

**Nahum 1:1-8**

NOTES

What is your favorite movie? What is it that you love about the movie? Is it merely the message of the movie, or is there more to it than the script?

Captivating movies enamor us through more than the words spoken. An exceptional director communicates mood and movement through the angle from which they shoot a scene, the lighting they select, and the cinematic filters they use on the camera. A good movie transports us to worlds we've never known or specific situations we've never been in. It is through the journey we take with the characters that we catch the message the screenwriter wants us to receive.

The writers of the Old Testament and the details they provided can seem so far removed from our current reality. Indeed, there are many differences between our world and theirs. But there are always important principles for us to “get” from every book, passage, and verse in the Bible. The best way to do this is to take the time to learn more about the situation so that we can try to put ourselves in their shoes. Because, like in a good movie, when we imagine what these words would have meant to them, they can mean so much more to us today.

Here in Nahum, the director of the message started off with a hymn of praise to God. Most of the book is in poetic form, and the first section of the poem means to bring us on a journey that leads us to worship God.

It's easy to get lost in the harsh language and bloody details of this prophecy and miss the message of the book. Nahum carefully crafted this book to point God's people toward praise of the good and powerful character of God even as they suffered at the hands of the Assyrians. For us as readers, we too can see God's goodness and power in how He chooses to display His mercy and judgment.

**What characteristics of God in Nahum 1 stir you to worship? Which characteristics challenge your understanding of who God is?**

# DAY 2

## READ:

**Psalm 94**

## FOCAL PASSAGE:

**Psalm 94:1-15**

## NOTES

Have you ever encountered a lost child? Perhaps it was at the park, a department store, or maybe a theme park. Often the panicked, helpless child is on the verge of tears, if not already there. Safety was felt in the care and company of his or her parents. Separation from them, however, pulls that security out from under the child's feet. Instantly his or her world goes from one free of cares to one full of fear and anxiety.

When we are in the midst of difficulty, panicked and feeling helpless, it is easy to feel that God has forgotten us, especially during seasons of prolonged troubles. The evil one wants us to give in to the thought that the Lord does not see our dire situation or that He simply does not care. When we are waiting on God for deliverance that seems unlikely or far away, it is tempting to believe that He is unable or unwilling to save us.

Psalm 94 communicates encouragement for the soul who feels lost and forgotten. It, like the book of Nahum, points our hearts to who God is: a God of vengeance (Ps. 94:1), the Judge of the earth (Ps. 94:2), the Lord who will not forsake His people or abandon His heritage (Ps. 94:14). Regardless of what we see or feel, God is always working. Despite our seemingly hopeless situation, there is always hope for the one who follows Yahweh.

Even in the darkest of days, when we feel lost and forgotten, there is much to which we can hold fast:

- God will never forsake us.
- God will bring justice to His people.
- God will never abandon us.
- God will bring rest from the days of trouble.

**Have you bought into the lie that God has forgotten you? Consider sharing this with a trusted friend who can pray for you and remind you of God's love and care for you.**

# DAY 3

## READ:

**Nahum 1:7**

## FOCAL PASSAGE:

**Nahum 1:7**

NOTES



## ESSENTIAL DOCTRINE #42: SIN'S EFFECTS IN THE WORLD

Sin does not only impact our relationship with God; it is also the root of our broken relationships with the people around us. Human sinfulness is the reason the creation groans in anticipation for redemption and deliverance from its bondage to evil powers (Rom. 8:20-22). Sin has infected and redirected the social structures of society, leading to injustice and oppression. The distorting effects of sin are visible all around us, but the good news of the gospel is that the battle against these powers will be won through the work of Christ.

“The LORD is good.” Four simple words we struggle to grasp. From the dawn of time, the evil one has been attacking the truth that God is good. Satan’s primary strategy is to get us to question the goodness of God. The enemy could have attacked the truth of any one of God’s attributes. He chose the one aspect that would do the most damage. Once he got Eve to buy into the lie that God didn’t really have Eve’s best interest at heart, Satan had succeeded in bringing sin into the world. Humankind has been doubting God’s goodness ever since.

If we doubt that God is good, then we cannot trust any other aspect of who He is. If God is all-powerful but not good, then He cannot be safe. If God is all-knowing but not good, then He cannot be trusted. God’s goodness is foundational to who He is. It is essential to every action He takes.

Oftentimes, when we look at the poor choices we’ve made—the ones in which we should have known better—these choices stem from a lack of trust in God’s goodness. When we fail to follow God in the way we treat people, we declare that His way is not good. When we withhold our time, talents, and tithes from our local church, we state that His plan for the body of Christ is bogus. When we willingly ignore God’s plan for sexuality and instead follow the desires of the flesh, we show that we don’t believe God’s way is the best plan for our lives.

Ultimately, every choice to sin is a proclamation that we know better than God, thinking our way is good and His way is not, or even that His way may be good but our way is better. We must remind ourselves that God is always good, and we are not. His plans are always for the ultimate good, and ours are not. We are limited, but He is limitless in goodness. Let us never forget!

**What are some areas of your life where you struggle to believe that God’s way is good? What steps will you take to trust Him more?**

# DAY 4

## READ:

Nahum 1

## FOCAL PASSAGE:

Nahum 1:12-13

## NOTES

Yesterday we looked at the goodness of God. Nahum made a direct connection with God as good and God as a stronghold, a refuge where He cares for His people. Several passages in the Old Testament provide a picture of God as our refuge. Ruth sought God's caring wings of safety as her refuge (Ruth 2:12). David declared a song of praise to God as his fortress, deliverer, rock, stronghold, and shield in whom he took refuge (2 Sam. 22). Dozens of psalms affirm God as our refuge.

To take refuge in God is to rest in His provision.

To take refuge is to place all our trust in Him.

Trusting God can be a scary prospect. We are taught to trust in our strength and abilities. Our culture highly esteems self-confidence. People are even taught to trust no one but themselves. However, seeking refuge in God requires neediness. The prerequisite for needing a stronghold is the recognition that we are weak. This is antithetical to the messages we've heard all our lives, making the act of trusting God a difficult one.

Taking refuge in God is not just about recognizing our weakness and neediness, it is also about our view of God. If we settle our hearts on the fact that God is good, this confidence in God's character will be like a magnet that naturally gravitates toward metal, an automatic drawing.

Our journey of taking refuge in God starts with our need for a Savior. Not one of us can save ourselves. Our sin has brought on the storm of God's wrath. Through taking refuge in Christ, we are delivered from the punishment due to us. We are given a safe and secure way out through the cross, where Jesus provided forgiveness of sins and power over death.

**What need do you have today that draws you to take refuge in Christ? Pray about that now.**



# DAY 5

## READ:

**2 Peter 3**

## FOCAL PASSAGE:

**2 Peter 3:8-9**

## NOTES

## VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

"Let us mourn with Nahum and let us say with him, 'Woe to him that builds up this house [by injustice]' . . . Let us not, I beseech you, cease mourning in this way, and if it is not unbecoming, let us also bewail the apathy of our brothers. Let us not weep loudly for him who is already dead, but let us weep for the robber, the grasping, miserly, greedy man."<sup>1</sup>

—Chrysostom (d. 407)

The seasons of waiting in life are some of the hardest. Times of loss can be dark, but the times when we're suspended in between the here-and-now and the what-might-be tries our patience. With loss, there is much grieving, but with the tragic and irreversible comes a sense of finality. With waiting, there is a sense of unruliness. When you're waiting on a decision, an opportunity, or a big change, it is hard to make plans. Life seems on hold. Days feel like weeks. Weeks feel like months. Months feel like years.

This is especially true if in the waiting there is also suffering. In Nahum, we encounter God's people in a season of waiting as well as great suffering. Their days must have been more than hard. Those years must have been agonizing as they waited on God's deliverance. Yet the hastening of God's deliverance meant a hastening of His judgment.

In 2 Peter, we get a glimpse of God's character that is important to hold on to in our seasons of waiting. It is easy to get caught up in what's right in front of us and forget that God sees all, knows all, and holds all in the palm of His hand. Those long, long years are but a moment to God. Therefore, we can rest in Him as we wait on His perfect timing, not only for our well-being but also for the well-being of those who have yet to trust in Him.

Perhaps the very season we are praying for God to remove is part of God's patient plan to give a lost soul additional time to reach repentance. That in itself should give us hope and purpose in our waiting.

**What can you be praying for and asking God to give you a glimpse into His perspective while you endure a season of waiting?**

# GROUP

NOTES

## VOICES from THE CHURCH

"God's covenant was true every time I looked elsewhere for love and acceptance. His covenant has been true every time you've acted out of fear and doubt. It is still true, no matter the circumstances we face or the hurt we hold in our hearts. Even when the temporary feels painfully permanent, His covenant is true. Remember whose you are."<sup>2</sup>

-Amanda Bible Williams

### **POINT 1: The Lord will not leave the guilty unpunished** (Nah. 1:1-6).

The Lord, the good God of Israel, is a jealous God. He will avenge His \_\_\_\_\_ that is withheld by others through a display of His wrath. Certain judgment awaits the \_\_\_\_\_ before God.



**Why is it good that God is a jealous God?**

Nahum's prophecy of judgment against Nineveh was intended to \_\_\_\_\_ God's people who suffered under the Assyrians. Yet the Lord is also \_\_\_\_\_ that sinners might repent and be saved.



**What emotions might rise to the surface knowing God will punish all wrongdoing one day?**

### **POINT 2: The Lord will be a stronghold for those who take refuge in Him** (Nah. 1:7-8).

When the whirlwind of God's wrath comes, all who continue to \_\_\_\_\_ in the Lord need not fear because God will never cease to \_\_\_\_\_ for them.



**What are some ways we should expect to experience God's care for us?**

Utter \_\_\_\_\_ was coming for the unrepentant Ninevites. Whatever the \_\_\_\_\_ had started, God would put to a full and complete stop.

### **POINT 3: The Lord will be vindicated before the nations** (Nah. 3:1-7).

The \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ of Assyria would not last. The Lord condemned them

to a bloody end, the kind they perpetrated on other nations.

## ESSENTIAL DOCTRINE #42: SIN'S EFFECTS IN THE WORLD

NOTES

Sin does not only impact our relationship with God; it is also the root of our broken relationships with the people around us. Human sinfulness is the reason the creation groans in anticipation for redemption and deliverance from its \_\_\_\_\_ to evil powers (Rom. 8:20-22). Sin has infected and redirected the social structures of society, leading to \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_. The distorting effects of sin are visible all around us, but the good news of the \_\_\_\_\_ is that the battle against these powers will be won through the work of Christ.



**How should believers in Jesus respond to the promise of destruction for God's enemies?**

## MY RESPONSE

Because God will not leave the guilty unpunished, we rest in His righteousness, refusing to take vengeance into our own hands when we are wronged.

- **HEAD:** What are some ways God's jealousy and vengeance should affect the way we think, feel, and act?
- **HEART:** How do you need to pray today in light of the jealousy and justice of God?
- **HANDS:** What steps will you take to grow in your knowledge of God and your faith in Him, namely, in Jesus, the Son of God?

## VOICES from THE CHURCH

"God will hold the guilty accountable. No one will get away with sin and injustice—neither individuals nor nations. Now is always the appropriate time to respond to God's gracious patience with repentance and faith. Those who delay turning to the Lord in repentance and faith are only storing up divine judgment for themselves. Don't be like Nineveh, for whom it was already too late."<sup>3</sup>

—Ken Fentress

# GOD'S JUDGMENT THROUGH THE NATIONS

**+** **SESSION IN A SENTENCE:**

God sends judgment upon all who are obstinate against Him.

**+** **BACKGROUND PASSAGE:**

2 Chronicles 36

**+** **SETTING:**

In 586 BC, Nineveh and Assyria have been destroyed and the nation of Judah has fallen under Babylonian control for about two decades. The northern kingdom of Israel is long gone, and the kings of southern Judah have been a mixed bag. Some have followed God, but most have not. God has given Judah a very long leash with ample opportunities to repent of their unfaithfulness. Yet they have broken their covenant with Yahweh, and God's wrath has been stirred—this time against His own rebellious, obstinate people. In His righteousness, God removes His protective hand. Judah's time is up, and destruction comes swiftly through the hands of the Babylonians.

# DAY 1

## READ:

**2 Chronicles 36:1-14**

## FOCAL PASSAGE:

**2 Chronicles 36:13**

## NOTES

## VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

"The thing that ruined Zedekiah, was, not only that he *turned not to the Lord God of Israel*, but that he *stiffened his neck, and hardened his heart from turning to him*, that is, he was obstinately resolved not to return to him, would not lay his neck under God's yoke, nor his heart under the impressions of his word, and so, in effect, he *would not be healed, he would not live.*"<sup>1</sup>

—Matthew Henry (1662-1714)

Heart disease is the leading cause of death for both men and women in the United States. Though there are many procedures that can help, such as bypasses and valve replacements, hope for those with a failing, diseased heart is solely in a heart transplant.

The heart of King Zedekiah was evil, rebellious, full of pride, and obstinate. So were the hearts of the people of Judah. The message of God through the prophets came with a dire warning against their hard-heartedness. Their obstinacy would only lead to ruin. It needed to be taken seriously.

Graciously, God not only spoke of the coming judgment, He also made promises for a new covenant because God knew the efforts of humankind can only come up short. We cannot overcome our obstinacy. There is no human remedy for hardness of heart. The diagnosis is in and it's not good—we need a heart transplant.

A new heart is precisely what God guaranteed. Both Jeremiah and Ezekiel proclaimed this promise. A pledge to give us a new heart and put a new spirit within us. A vow to remove our heart of stone and give us a heart of flesh (Ezek. 36:26), and a vow to write His teaching on our hearts (Jer. 31:31,33).

Obstinacy is the mortal disease that no soul can cure on its own. Only a new heart, a soft one, filled with the very words of God can enable us to follow God. Through faith in Christ, we undergo this life-saving heart transplant and receive a new heart of flesh that is able to love and worship God in a way no heart of stone could ever do.

**What evidence of a spiritual heart transplant have you experienced? Spend some time praising God for this life-saving gift.**

# DAY 2

## READ:

Hebrews 3

## FOCAL PASSAGE:

Hebrews 3:12-15

NOTES

It can be difficult to read the Old Testament accounts of the past and find immediate application to our modern lives. Of course, there is always the character of God to observe to help rightly shape our view of God. But talk of kings, far-off countries, city walls, and fighting with swords might lose our attention when it comes to application.

The people of the Old Testament frequently exemplified obstinacy. Though we may be far removed from the specifics of their situations, hard-heartedness is not primarily a problem of the past.

The writer of Hebrews makes this clear. Using the example of those who wandered in the wilderness after witnessing the incredible deliverance of God from Egypt, he warns us against obstinacy, going astray, and forgetting the Lord's faithfulness, all of which stem from unbelief.

Beyond the heart transplant, we are given another remedy to fight off spiritual heart disease: the encouragement of our spiritual family. Our brothers and sisters in Christ have a role to play in our pursuit of tender-heartedness. The deceit of sin wreaks havoc on our new hearts. We need continual reminders to depend on the Donor to keep our hearts going. That Donor is the living God, who gives hope and peace in a world full of wickedness that threatens to dampen our spiritual vigor and steal our hope.

Hebrews exhorts us to keep a firm hold on the gospel. In this, we all need continual reminders, which is why the local body of Christ is a need for every believer. Through regular fellowship with our spiritual family, we can point each other to the good news so that we can each keep our eyes on Jesus, the perfecter of our faith (Heb. 12:2).

**How can you encourage another believer this week to keep his or her heart tender toward the Lord?**

# DAY 3

## READ:

**Proverbs 4**

## FOCAL PASSAGE:

**Proverbs 4:23**

NOTES

In Proverb 4:23, we are encouraged to protect and guard our hearts. Many use this as a charge for teens and young adults to pay attention to their affections when it comes to romantic relationships and not let their emotions rule the roost. But a deeper dive into this passage provides additional details.

King Solomon wrote Proverbs to administer direction and protection to God's people through collected teachings of wisdom. Throughout, there is a connection with attention to that wisdom and the heart. In the Old Testament, one's heart represents the inner self, who we are at the core of our being. It is where our thought processes and conscience reside, where we make judgments, think critically, and hold beliefs.<sup>2</sup> So, while emotions may certainly become involved, to guard one's heart is a much deeper idea than simply avoiding the pain of a bad break-up.

As we consider the danger of obstinacy, this passage provides vital instruction for cultivating softness of heart. First up is a call to embrace wisdom, which will lead to flourishing for the one who does so (Prov. 4:20-22). A subsequent command to guard the heart then echoes this idea (4:23). To pay attention to God's words, to listen closely to them, is to guard the heart. Not losing sight of His sayings, keeping a tight grip on them, is to guard the heart. In doing so, wholeness, life, and health will abound.

It is from this place, with God's Word held dear, that we move forward in obedience (4:24-27), which flows naturally out of the guarded heart because the guarded heart is soft to God's words. It is actively listening, closely attentive, and intentionally guided by the life-giving sayings of the Source of all life.

**How will you better embrace God's Word this week that you may guard your heart?**

# DAY 4

## READ:

**2 Chronicles 36:11-23**

## FOCAL PASSAGE:

**2 Chronicles 36:11-17**

## NOTES



## ESSENTIAL DOCTRINE #46:

### THE WORLD

### OPPOSED TO GOD

There are times in Scripture where the term “world” refers to more than the physical planet Earth or the collective human population. In many instances, the term refers to an active and evil spiritual force that is in direct conflict with God and His kingdom. This evil world force operates under Satan’s control (Eph. 2:2; John 14:30), displaying the same self-centeredness and deceit that is found within his character. Christians are called to overcome this world of spiritual evil by faith in the Son of God (1 John 5:4-5).

The focal point of 1 and 2 Chronicles is on the monarchy, recording the deeds of each king. These records are not comprehensive but do provide a fly-over of the history of the kingdoms of Israel and Judah with a view toward calling God’s exiled people—His remnant—to return and rebuild what was lost.

Beyond the day-to-day running of the nation, the king’s role was to provide spiritual guidance to the people. Each monarch was responsible for the rise or fall of his nation. As for those who did evil, whether they intended to or not, they led their people to do evil. For those who did what was right in the sight of the Lord, repentance and revival followed. Leaders always influence people—either toward health or decay.

Unfortunately, so many of these kings failed to point their people to God and His ways. However, though many of these kings missed an incredible opportunity to use their power and influence for the good of the people, God still held individuals responsible for their actions. Here we see the last of the monarchs, Zedekiah, judged for his rebellion. But we also see that the people piled on their unfaithful deeds (2 Chron. 36:14), and thus, they too encountered the punishment of God.

Regardless of the leadership we find ourselves under—whether it is godly and good or blasphemous and base—every person will receive judgment for their actions and inactions. We may find ourselves in an unhealthy workplace environment, a tense political situation, or under a disobedient pastor, but we are still to pursue individual integrity and intimacy with God even when our leaders fail us. Whether it is an uphill battle or a synergistic movement toward righteousness and gospel work, we must each make the personal choice to live our lives in obedient worship.

**When it comes to your behavior, have you been making excuses because of bad leaders? What can you change to make a shift toward personal responsibility for your actions?**



# DAY 5

## READ:

Isaiah 11

## FOCAL PASSAGE:

Isaiah 11:10-12

## NOTES

Second Chronicles largely ends on a dark note and is not far removed from the start of a four-hundred-year period of silence from God. Though some of God's people returned to Jerusalem after the exile to rebuild the temple and restore the walls, it would never be restored to its former glory. Only a small Jewish remnant with a tiny bit of fractured hope remained in Jerusalem. Where there once was plenty and splendor, there was now destruction and despair.

Though they could not see it, this was not the end of the story. God promised to raise up a shoot from this stump (Isa. 11:1). When all seemed lost, there was hope to be found. In the fullness of time, God would send His Son to rule in faithful righteousness and perfect justice. He will bring a peace and safety never seen. He will rule over all, collect the scattered of God's people, and recover the remnant (11:10-12).

Yet this spark of hope—the shoot of Jesse—would return as King and restore the monarchy in an unexpected way. Instead of coming in majesty, He would come in humility. Rather than installing a new physical province, He would inaugurate a new spiritual kingdom. For a time, He would relinquish His power so that He could pour out His life for all humankind. This King Jesus will rule completely and eternally. Every knee will bow and every tongue will confess Him as Lord (Phil. 2:10-11).

When all around us seems lost and we are tempted to despair, we must remember that King Jesus is our victor. He is always faithfully working His plan that was set forth before the foundations of this earth (Eph. 1:4-6). He knows all, sees all, and controls all. Jesus is King of kings and Lord of lords (1 Tim. 6:15; Rev. 17:14; 19:16), regardless of what our situations seem to scream.

**How does knowing that God did not leave His people hopeless and instead fulfilled His promise of a Savior give you hope for the future?**

# GROUP

NOTES

## VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

"The prophets had to speak against the spirit of their times, against popular opinion, against all the political powers—and to bear the consequences. [They] were able to interpret the disasters which befall God's people not as a defeat for God but as the manifestation of God's righteous judgment."<sup>3</sup>

—Lesslie Newbigin (1909-1998)

**POINT 1: Obstinate people refuse God's ways** (2 Chron. 36:11-14).

Zedekiah's \_\_\_\_\_ led him to doing \_\_\_\_\_ in God's sight. His lack of \_\_\_\_\_ kept him from returning to God and finding forgiveness.

### ESSENTIAL DOCTRINE #46: THE WORLD OPPOSED TO GOD

There are times in Scripture where the term "world" refers to more than the physical planet Earth or the collective human population. In many instances, the term refers to an active and evil spiritual force that is in direct conflict with God and His kingdom. This evil world force operates under \_\_\_\_\_ control (Eph. 2:2; John 14:30), displaying the same \_\_\_\_\_-centeredness and \_\_\_\_\_ that is found within his character. Christians are called to overcome this world of spiritual evil by \_\_\_\_\_ in the Son of God (1 John 5:4-5).



**What are some detestable practices of the nations that tempt believers today?**

**POINT 2: Obstinate people reject God's word** (2 Chron. 36:15-16).

For the Israelites, disobedience reigned for \_\_\_\_\_ generations, but time and time again, God showed \_\_\_\_\_ and gave His people opportunities to \_\_\_\_\_ through the message of His \_\_\_\_\_.



**What are some means God uses to speak to us and direct us back to Him?**

God's \_\_\_\_\_ cannot be exhausted. But when people choose to be obstinate in their sin, God will bring \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_.

NOTES

### **POINT 3: Obstinate people experience God's judgment** (2 Chron. 36:17-21).

The destruction the Lord brought upon Judah and Jerusalem was \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_, leaving no king, no people, no city, and no temple.



**How might the destruction of the temple have been interpreted by the remaining people of Judah?**

Even after God's promised discipline and judgment, there was hope. \_\_\_\_\_ had come, but God promised that one day there would be a \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ for the remnant of His people.



**How should God's promise of a remnant for Judah bring hope to us in our darkest days?**

## **MY RESPONSE**

Because the punishment of our sin has been taken from us and paid by Christ, we listen to God's Word with softened hearts as we proclaim God's patience and righteousness to others while there is still time for them to repent.

- **HEAD:** What place does the warning of judgment need to have in our sharing of the gospel of Jesus with others?
- **HEART:** What are some ways you need to address the obstinacy and sin in your own heart?
- **HANDS:** What will you do this week to show the kindness of Christ to the hard-hearted?

## **VOICES from THE CHURCH**

"Pride can sometimes be seen in a hidden desire for the praise and admiration of men, an insistence on being 'right,' the desire to be noticed and appreciated, fear of rejection, or just preoccupation with myself—my feelings, my needs, my circumstances, my burdens, my desires, my successes, my failures. These are all fruits of that deadly root of pride. A heart filled with itself will be unable to behold the loveliness of Jesus and will cease to reflect His light."<sup>4</sup>

—Nancy DeMoss Wolgemuth

# GOD'S IMAGE IN THE NATIONS

**+** **SESSION IN A SENTENCE:**

All people possess value, having been made in the image of God.

**+** **BACKGROUND PASSAGES:**

Genesis 5; Psalm 139; Luke 10:25-37; 2 Corinthians 3

**+** **SETTING:**

One key to fully comprehending the wrath and judgment of God is to grasp the nature of humanity. The Bible begins with the story of creation. Filled with many astounding details of how God formed this world and all He filled it with, it is easy to miss one colossal truth embedded within the creation narrative. When God made humankind, He did something different. Every other action was performed without one critical factor found only in the creative act of Adam and Eve, namely, God fashioned humans in His image. Both male and female were constructed to reflect who God is, providing humankind with a unique and special status within all of God's work.

# DAY 1

## READ:

**Psalm 139**

## FOCAL PASSAGE:

**Psalm 139:13-14**

NOTES

## VOICES from THE CHURCH

"People were created in the image of God, to reflect the glory of God. 'The heavens declare the glory of God' and so also 'the earth is full of his glory' (Psalm 19:1; Isaiah 6:3), but in the beginning it was the man and the woman, the ones created in God's image, who most clearly and brightly and purely shone with the glory of God. As they stood upon the earth, bearing God's image, they bore a true witness to the existence and the excellence of God. What a great tragedy it was when the man and woman lost the clearness and brightness and pureness of that image by their sin."<sup>1</sup>

-Nancy E. Ganz

Back in 2005, a new online e-commerce site emerged. Created by a group of amateur artisans, Etsy® provided a dedicated marketplace for handmade, hand-crafted, and vintage items. Before Etsy arrived, quality crafted items had to compete within the online spaces that included brand-new items produced in bulk. Alongside one another, the price disparity can be shocking, not to mention that merchants flood the markets with cheap imitations and quickly built knock-offs that won't stand the test of time.

Etsy took off quickly. Not only did it provide a space for artisans to more easily highlight and sell their work, it also gave consumers a honed-in arena to find the unique and quality pieces they may be looking for. When the consumer heads to Amazon®, he is looking for a steal-of-a-deal. When a shopper buys from Etsy, she is making an investment in a distinctive product to enjoy for years to come.

Psalm 139 is a captivating account of the meticulous efforts God took to create David. Indeed, this is a testimony to God's careful creation of each of us. There is no flippancy or cutting of corners involved. The bottom line is not about dollars and cents but about establishing worth and wonder. The Lord exhibits great care and intentionality to create every person as a unique and valuable masterpiece: "for we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works" (Eph. 2:10).

God is the master craftsman, the divine Creator, and He chose to create us, beautifully and intricately. He is worthy of our praise for how He created us.

**What aspects of yourself might you struggle to recognize as God's care in His creation of you? For what aspects of your creation will you praise the Lord today?**

# DAY 2

## READ:

Genesis 1

## FOCAL PASSAGE:

Genesis 1:26-27

## NOTES



### ESSENTIAL DOCTRINE #28: IMAGE OF GOD IN HUMANITY

The image of God in humanity is understood as mirroring God's attributes in our nature, actions, and relational capacities. In Jesus, we see the true image of God. He perfectly mirrors God's attributes, fulfills God's will, and enjoys a perfect relationship with the Father. The Bible continues to speak of the image of God in humanity even after our fall into sin, even though our ability to rightly reflect God has been marred.

We're all on a journey to figure out who we are. This is seen acutely in the teenage years. Self-expression becomes an important part of life as teenagers experiment with hair color, clothing, music, even style of speech. It's like putting on a costume to see if it fits. Some kids end their freshman year with the cowboy look, only to return as a goth sophomore. It is innate within us to figure out who we are. And with the culture screaming at us, "You do you!" the pressure is real.

It is critical for each of us to figure out who we are. It can be okay to establish different "flavors" of personality and to express those variations through what we wear, how we spend our time, and how we set up our environments. However, we must recognize that ultimately God has already given us our identity. From the foundation of the world, we were all given the status of an image-bearer of God. Our existence is already wrapped up in who He is.

Therefore, when we don't know who God is, or we have His character mixed up, we become mixed up ourselves. If we see God as distant and weak, we will compensate by making much of our strengths and abilities. When our mind's eye views God as subject to the whims of the world instead of being the One who holds the universe together, it will lead us to think we can create our own rules.

Until we see ourselves for who we truly are—created, treasured, purpose-filled individuals who bear the very mark of God—we will wander and waste much energy trying to solve a puzzle we already have the answer to.

**What will you do today to establish reminders in your life of who you already are as an image-bearer and child of God?**

# DAY 3

## READ:

**Luke 10:25-37**

## FOCAL PASSAGE:

**Luke 10:36-37**

NOTES

The definition of “neighborly” is dependent on the culture where you grew up. Be it in the southeastern United States, being kind to your neighbor might include sweet tea and casseroles delivered to your doorstep. In the western US, it probably involves minding your own business and keeping your mind open. In other countries, there is great honor in going to great lengths to show hospitality to those you encounter. Trying to pin down a definition for being “neighborly” is difficult.

Then there is the question the expert in the law asked Jesus, “And who is my neighbor?” (Luke 10:29). Is a “neighbor” restricted to living within a certain number of blocks? Does it include people outside my normal sphere of life? Are there further restrictions within that circle of proximity?

Through this parable, Jesus gives us a glimpse into the biblical perspective of who a neighbor is and what a neighbor does. He does not define a neighbor by ethnicity or proximity. The good neighbor highlighted in this story was a perfect stranger from a hated culture. To be a good neighbor has more to do with what you do than where you are (or are not) from.

So, then, what does a neighbor do? According to Jesus, a neighbor of merit is one who shows mercy. Compassion drove the neighbor in the parable to care for the hurting person. The Samaritan went to great lengths to rescue and bring restoration to the beaten traveler. If we want to follow in the footsteps of the figure Jesus provided, we too must have compassion for all we encounter.

Regardless of their address or background, we get to deliver the mercy of God to the proverbial doorstep of our neighbors’ hearts.

**How would you define being neighborly to people you encounter throughout your life? How will you show the mercy of God to one image-bearer today?**

# DAY 4

## READ:

**Colossians 3**

## FOCAL PASSAGE:

**Colossians 3:9-11**

## NOTES

Perhaps all this talk of image-bearing can seem a bit ethereal and unreachable. Thankfully, we have the example of Christ to guide our efforts toward becoming better image-bearers.

Hebrews 1:3 tells us that Jesus is the radiance of God's glory and the exact expression of His nature. The Messiah came to earth—fully God and fully man—and lived a perfect human life. His perfect life was vital as it qualified Him to become the unblemished sacrifice for our sins. Only a perfect sacrifice was acceptable, which is why we needed the Lamb of God to die in our place. Not one of us could pay the penalty of our sins through our very blemished efforts.

But the perfect life of Christ has also provided an example for us to follow. So, as we follow in the footsteps of Jesus, we are walking out our identity as an image-bearer of God. Jesus, the exact expression of God's image, got it right every time. Everything He did and said pointed to the holy character of the Father. This too is our job as Christ-followers.

The role of an image-bearer is to reflect the character of the original image. We set our minds on things above, choose to put to death the deeds of the flesh, and intentionally put on the new self we've been given in Christ. This is the work of the image-bearer. We do everything in the name of the Lord as an act of worship for all He has done for us, all He is currently doing, and all He will continue to do.

**As you look at the list of actions in Colossians 3, what do you need to adjust today so that you can walk in the footsteps of Jesus and become a better image-bearer?**



# DAY 5

## READ:

**2 Corinthians 3–4**

## FOCAL PASSAGE:

**2 Corinthians 4:1-4**

## NOTES

As believers in Christ, we live a “therefore” life. The Bible is filled with incredible truths of who God is and all He has done. This is primarily what the Scripture is all about. Every reader, then, gets to choose how to respond to these truths about God. Christians wholeheartedly embrace these truths, and with this embrace, we are given a new purpose—all of life becomes worship to the one true and living God.

Worship at its essence is simply a response to something or someone. Choosing to worship God is a determination to live a life that responds to who He is and what He’s done. Being a recipient of mercy brings with it a responsibility to respond to that mercy. The Bible provides the answer for what this looks like, namely, obedience. The commands we tend to turn into checklists of achievement are actually invitations to worship God for who He is and what He’s done.

- Christ has saved me from my sin; therefore . . .
- I have been given glorious gifts of grace; therefore . . .
- The Spirit has brought me freedom; therefore . . .
- I am made in the image of the glorious God of the universe; therefore . . .
- My eternal destiny is secure; therefore . . .
- I am being transformed into Christ’s perfect likeness; therefore . . .

As redeemed Christians, we are given incredible purpose for our lives. If the end goal of our salvation is simply our salvation, there would be no need for us to remain on this earth. Yet here we are. We are still here because we have work to do for the sake of God’s glory among the lost.

We live a “therefore” life—a life that honors God—in order that those who are perishing would see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ within us.

**What are some ways you will show the light of Christ to others this week?**

# GROUP

NOTES

## VOICES from THE CHURCH

"Every human being resembles his or her Creator in some way. Consequently, every human being is special and important. We should be able to recognize the Creator in the men and women we see around us."<sup>2</sup>

-Barnabe Assohoto  
and Samuel Ngewa

**POINT 1: All people are made in the image of God** (Gen. 5:1-2; Ps. 139:13-16).

### ESSENTIAL DOCTRINE #28: IMAGE OF GOD IN HUMANITY

The image of God in humanity is understood as \_\_\_\_\_ God's attributes in our nature, \_\_\_\_\_, and relational capacities. In Jesus, we see the true image of God. He perfectly mirrors God's attributes, fulfills God's will, and enjoys a perfect relationship with the Father. The Bible continues to speak of the image of God in \_\_\_\_\_ even after our fall into sin, even though our ability to rightly reflect God has been \_\_\_\_\_.



**What are some implications of knowing God made every human being in His image?**

God alone \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ life. With intricate care, He fashions people in His image so that we would \_\_\_\_\_ Him alone all our days.

**POINT 2: All people are valued because they are made in the image of God** (Luke 10:25-37).

Image-bearers are called to love \_\_\_\_\_ and love \_\_\_\_\_ as themselves. We should not put \_\_\_\_\_ on who is our neighbor and pass them by.

Since \_\_\_\_\_ people are made in God's image, they have inherent value, no matter their history or heritage. Therefore, like the good Samaritan, we should show \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ to everyone.



**What are some ways we can prove ourselves to be good neighbors?**

**POINT 3: All believers are being transformed into the image of Christ**  
(2 Cor. 3:17-18).

\_\_\_\_\_ human being is made in the image of God, though this has been marred by sin. But believers in Jesus are being \_\_\_\_\_ to that image through the freeing work of the Holy Spirit.



**How does sin keep people from experiencing freedom?**

Through the gift of the Holy Spirit to believers, we are directed to continually behold the \_\_\_\_\_ of God in \_\_\_\_\_. In this way, the Spirit transforms us to resemble more closely the perfect image of our \_\_\_\_\_.



**What are some ways we need to work on beholding the glory of God in Christ?**

## MY RESPONSE

Because every person is an image-bearer of God, we seek to love and value all others and stand against all sin that fails to honor another person's inherent dignity.

- **HEAD:** What are some ways the image of God in humanity should change the way we interact with the people we encounter each day?
- **HEART:** Who are some image-bearers about whom you will pray for the Lord to soften your heart that you might show them compassion and share the gospel of Jesus?
- **HANDS:** What are some ways you will stand up for the inherent dignity of others this week because they are made in the image of God?

NOTES

## VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

"That good Samaritan represents your Christ and mine. He came into the world to seek and to save that which was lost . . . Oh, come tonight to the Son of God, and He will have compassion on you, and take you off from the dunghill, and transform you, and lift you up into His kingdom, into the heights of His glory, if you will only let Him!"<sup>3</sup>

—D. L. Moody (1837-1899)

# GROUP LIFE ACCELERATES DISCIPLESHIP

A recent survey by Southwestern Seminary revealed a disturbing trend among churchgoers. The results released prior to the COVID-19 pandemic revealed a fierce independence among God's people. Sixty-five percent (65%) of 2,500 churchgoers surveyed agreed with the statement "I can walk with God without other believers."<sup>1</sup> Perhaps one could go it alone in his or her growth as a disciple, but it would not be wise to do so.

## GROUPS HELP US GROW

We can see the benefits of group life in the book of Acts. The earliest Christians met in two kinds of groups: large-group gatherings in the temple courts for worship and smaller groups in homes for prayer, fellowship, teaching, and ministry. Today, we continue this tradition of large and small-group gatherings that provide a place for continued spiritual growth.

Another set of research conducted by Lifeway for the Transformational Groups project revealed that people who are in groups grow in their discipleship at a greater rate than people not in groups. The research proved that people in groups serve more, give more, confess sin more, are more open to outsiders, and pray more than people who choose not to belong to a small group. To say it another way, group life accelerates your growth as a disciple.

## HOW SHOULD WE GROW IN GROUPS?

The Transformational Groups research discovered that disciples grow in eight significant areas, spiritual disciplines important in the life of believers who want to become more Christlike:

### 1. **Disciples engage with Scripture.**

Believers engage in the study of the Scriptures because it's God's word given to us. Transformation can be recognized in a person when their mind is sharpened by the Bible, their perspective is shaped by the Bible, and their actions are directed by the Bible.

### 2. **Disciples obey God and deny self.**

Discipleship is the process of obedience to One who is in authority over you. In the research study, faithful believers prioritized God's desires over self-will. Transformation can be seen in them because they progressively set aside earthly delights for kingdom priorities.

### 3. **Disciples serve God and others.**

Jesus said that He came to serve and not be served—so must believers. The choice to serve others highlights a maturity of soul in that we allow the needs of others to trump our own needs. Transformation is evident when personal needs, and even dreams, are set aside for the needs we see in others.

4. **Disciples share Christ.** Inherent to being a disciple of Christ is the making of other disciple-makers for Christ. Even with the need to live out the effects of the gospel, maturing believers know that proclaiming and sharing the message is a necessity. Transformation is evident when we talk about the source of it in our lives.

5. **Disciples exercise faith.** Can you measure a person's faith? Probably not. But you can see it when it is put into action. Believers participating in the research noted that they knew the importance of living by faith as opposed to by personal strength. Transformation is seen in believers when risk-aversion is set aside and our lives are characterized by faithful obedience to God's will.

6. **Disciples seek God.** A person becomes a disciple of Christ because they intend to follow Him and become like Him. A continuous hunger should arise from this life. Christ should always be our "first love." Transformation is seen when our desire is to know God more deeply and experience His work more fully.

7. **Disciples build relationships.** Our faith is personal but not private. Jesus established the church for our collective good and our collective growth. Humans are relational by design. As believers, our horizontal relationships should develop along with our vertical relationship with God. Transformation occurs when relational maturity is evident in our lives.

Transformation is  
evident when personal  
needs, and even  
dreams, are set aside  
for the needs  
we see in others.

8. **Disciples live unashamed.** A person following Christ should be willing to publicize such a matter. The research noted that believers felt it appropriate, and even necessary, for others to know them as Christians and so be held accountable for a life exemplary of that name. Transformation is evident when a believer is unashamed in presenting their own life as being aligned with Christ.

The Christian life cannot be isolated. Regular group involvement introduces us to spiritual disciplines necessary for growth. As one pastor has said, "Preaching to make disciples is like going to the nursery and spraying crying babies with milk and saying you just fed the kids . . . Discipleship involves more than preaching and listening."<sup>2</sup> Spiritual transformation occurs when, in large group worship and in smaller groups, we relate to one another in love, accountability, and mutual encouragement centered on the Word of God.

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