



FUEL

**MY IDENTITY
IN CHRIST**

7TH GRADE



IDENTITY

LIFE AS I KNOW IT

Written and Edited by Ryan Jackson, Josh Fairbaugh, Kristen Fairbaugh, and Andy Ferguson

Graphic Design by Ryan Jackson

Produced for Carmel Baptist Church.

Commentary is from the ESV Study Bible

ABIDE IN ME

LIFE IN CHRIST ESSENTIALS

Written and Edited by Ryan Jackson, Josh Fairbaugh, Kristen Fairbaugh, Rachel Jackson, Marny Rey Ketcham, and Lindsey Roberts

Graphic Design by Ryan Jackson

Produced for Carmel Baptist Church.

Commentary is from the ESV Study Bible

PSALMS

SONGS OF PRAISE

Rootworks: Psalms by Doug Fields

Written and Edited by Ryan Jackson, Josh Fairbaugh, Kristen Fairbaugh, Rachel Jackson

Graphic Design by Ryan Jackson

Produced for Carmel Baptist Church.

Commentary is from the ESV Study Bible

CRITICAL ISSUES

RELATIONSHIPS

Originally written by the InQuest Team

Originally edited by i.e. Excellence

1-800-776-1893 • info@inquest.org • <http://www.inquest.org>

Copyright © 2006 by InQuest Ministries

Converted to PDF 2015

Edited by Ryan Jackson, Kristen Fairbaugh, Josh Fairbaugh, Rachel Jackson

Graphic Design by Ryan Jackson

Produced for Carmel Baptist Church.

Commentary is from the ESV Study Bible

Getting Started

We are so excited that you have chosen to be a part of Discipleship Community! It is our prayer that God will use this study to deepen your relationship with Him. The contents of this material include core truths that we want you to learn so that you will have a firm foundation in your faith. This book will lead you to take time each day to read God's Word and to pray.

Plan on spending 15 — 30 minutes each day of the week with God. This spiritual discipline will help you to grow to be more and more like Jesus Christ. In this book, we have used the English Standard Version of the Bible (ESV). Please keep this version of the Bible nearby while doing this study, or refer to an online Bible, such as the one at www.biblegateway.com.

This material is written based upon our Life in Christ Essentials and Milestone Strategy here at Carmel. The Essentials are the core principles and truths that we want every follower to live out in Christ. The Milestones and Essentials are as follows which help believers live an abundant Life in Christ:

Milestone 4: Purity for Life

ESSENTIALS:

Biblical Purity, Healthy Relationships, Identity in Christ, Biblical Sex

Milestone 5: Rite of Passage

ESSENTIALS:

Roles of Men and Women, Spiritual Gifts and Service, Catechism

Milestone 6: High School Graduation

ESSENTIALS:

Apologetics, Dating/Marriage, God's Plan for Me, Person of Influence, Life Skills

Life in Christ

ESSENTIALS:

Scripture, Prayer, Authentic Faith, Obedient Follower, Disciple-Maker, Generous Living, Biblical Community

We are confident that God will amaze you as you get to know Him through these studies. It has been a great joy to write these books, knowing that you will get to know the one true God in a deeper way!

IDENTITY

LIFE AS I KNOW IT

Identity Crisis: I AM
Week 1

The Identity of Christ

008

I am: THE IMAGE OF GOD
Week 2

In The Beginning

014

I am: A SINNER
Week 3

Did God Really Say?

020

I am: REDEEMED
Week 4

Is There Hope?

026

I am: NO LONGER CONDEMNED
Week 5

Live In Freedom

032

I am: AN HEIR OF CHRIST
Week 6

The Heavenly Homeland

039

I am: THE TEMPLE OF GOD
Week 7

God Dwells With Man

045

I am: AN IMAGE BEARER
Week 8

Good Deeds

051

I am: A DISCIPLE
Week 9

The Power of Your Story

057

REASON AND HOPE
Week 10

My Story

064

LOOKING BACK

065

ABIDE IN ME

LIFE IN CHRIST ESSENTIALS

THE LIFE IN CHRIST ESSENTIALS

Week 1	Abide in Me	067
Essential #1: PRAYER Week 2	Our Response to God	073
Essential #2: SCRIPTURE Week 3	The Solid Food of God's Word	079
Essential #3: AUTHENTIC FAITH Week 4	Faith that is Seen	085
Essential #4: OBEDIENT FOLLOWER Week 5	How You Ought to Walk	091
Essential #5: DISCIPLE MAKER Week 6	Disciples Making Disciples	097
Essential #6: GENEROUS LIVING Week 7	Excelling in Generosity	103
Essential #7: TRANSFORMATIONAL COMMUNITY Week 8	Life in Christ, Together	109
LOOKING BACK		115

PSALMS

SONGS OF PRAISE

PSALMS FORWARD	How to Read the Book of Psalms	117
TORAH PSALMS Week 1	Psalm 1	120
TORAH PSALMS Week 2	Psalm 119	126
WISDOM PSALMS Week 3	Psalm 73	134
PRAISE PSALMS Week 4	Psalm 95	141
LAMENT PSALMS Week 5	Psalm 74	147
ZION PSALMS Week 6	Psalm 84	155
THANKSGIVING PSALMS Week 7	Psalm 32	163
THANKSGIVING PSALMS Week 8	Psalm 116	170
ROYAL PSALMS Week 9	Psalm 2	177
LITURGICAL PSALMS Week 10	Psalm 24	184
LOOKING BACK		190

CRITICAL ISSUES

RELATIONSHIPS

SOLID RELATIONAL FOUNDATION

Week 1	Your Relationship with the Lord	192
--------	---------------------------------	-----

LAY DOWN YOUR LIFE

Week 2	Your Relationship with Others	198
--------	-------------------------------	-----

MENTORSHIP

Week 3	Your Learning and Teaching Relationships	204
--------	--	-----

GUIDING YOUR FRIENDS

Week 4	Your Relationship with Your Friends	210
--------	-------------------------------------	-----

THE REALITY OF CONFLICT

Week 5	Dealing with a Difficult Relationship	216
--------	---------------------------------------	-----

TRUSTING GOD'S DESIGN

Week 6	Your Relationship with Authority	223
--------	----------------------------------	-----

LOOKING BACK

229

IDENTITY

LIFE AS I KNOW IT

Our mindset, the things we hold valuable, and our character are all significant parts of our identity. Of course there are other things that shape our identity such as how we were made, relationships that we have, things that happen to us and around us, and the things we think, say and do.

In this study we will learn about Jesus' identity before we understand how his identity influences ours. Our answer to Jesus' question of "who do you say I am" does not change his identity, however, it does change ours and it influences everything about our lives.

Identity Crisis

I AM

MATTHEW 5:14-16

WEEK

1

Key Questions and Concepts

Jesus' identity is supreme. We must understand his identity before we understand how his identity influences ours.

Our answer to the question of "who do you say I am" does not change his identity, however, it does change ours.

Jesus revealed his identity to us so we would face the dark days ahead to carry out the mission of declaring the gospel to the world.

IDENTITY—CHARACTERISTICS THAT DETERMINE AN INDIVIDUAL

Identity is a vital and unavoidable part of all our lives. Our identity shapes our actions. The culture around us would like for us to believe that you should shape your own identity to be what you want to be for yourself. How does that perspective line up with Scripture?

This passage speaks to your identity. We are creatures of God with a nature designed by God to be conscious displays of God's greatness and his beauty and his worth. That's fundamentally who we are. In other words, our basic identity is that we are designed by God to display God's identity to bring him glory.

By allowing others to see whose you are (your identity) it causes them to praise your identifier. As you allow God to shape your identity to become more like his, the world gets to see his identity. Being secure in who you are and whose you are is essential so that you can effectively be the light he has called you to be.

A HUMAN BEING IS A CREATURE OF GOD WITH A NATURE DESIGNED BY GOD TO CONSCIOUSLY DISPLAY GOD'S GREATNESS AND HIS BEAUTY AND HIS WORTH. —JOHN PIPER

How can someone else's identity shape your own?

What are the differences in what the world says about your identity versus what God says?

Understanding the core of our identity should change everything that we consciously do so that we can reflect God's glory. Before we learn more about our own identity we must have a firm grasp on the identity of Jesus. How can the identity of Jesus actually impact us? How does his identity influence ours? After all, we are suppose to illuminate the world so they may see Jesus and give him glory.

5-Minute Commentary

Matt. 16:13-16 Caesarea Philippi is some 25 miles (40 km) north of the Sea of Galilee. It had been a center of the worship of (1) Baal, then (2) the Greek god Pan, and then (3) Caesar. At this time it was an important Greco-Roman city. It had a primarily pagan Syrian and Greek population. John the Baptist . . . Elijah . . . Jeremiah . . . one of the prophets. The responses are in line with the popular messianic expectations (see Deut. 18:15–18; Mal. 4:5). Simon Peter replied. Peter acts as spokesman for the Twelve. Christ means "Messiah" or "Anointed One." Son of the living God. Jesus is the Son of the God who is alive, unlike the pagan gods of Caesarea Philippi. Jesus is the fulfillment of the OT promise of a divine son as anointed king (2 Sam. 7:14; Ps. 2:7).

THE IDENTITY OF CHRIST

The one identity that matters more than any identity is the identity of Jesus Christ. The truth about His identity as Christ the Lord changes everything about the identity of mankind. As Christians our identity is to be transformed to that of Jesus Christ. Therefore, his identity is supreme.

Read Matthew 16:13-17.

When Jesus asked this question, he was not looking for someone else to make up his identity for him. He knew his identity. The book of John records a number of Jesus' statements regarding his identity.

Read John 6:22-59.

What did Jesus accuse the people of for following him?

Jesus takes this moment to teach them a lesson. They were so enthralled with the food, they were missing out on the fact that their Messiah had come. They tell Jesus that God gave them manna during the desert wandering. Jesus responds by telling them that they need to ask for the true bread from heaven that gives life.

By equating Himself with bread, Jesus is saying he is essential for life. Jesus is trying to get his hearers thinking beyond physical life to spiritual life. He is contrasting what He brings as their Messiah with the bread He miraculously created the day before. That was physical bread that perishes. He is spiritual bread that brings eternal life.

He is proclaiming He will satisfy our hunger and thirst to be made righteous in the sight of God. When Christ died on the cross, He took the sins of mankind upon Himself and made atonement for them. When we place our faith in Him, our sins are charged to Jesus, and His righteousness is accredited to us. Therefore, Jesus satisfies our hunger and thirst for righteousness. He is our Bread of Life.

Read John 8:12 and 9:5.

JESUS' CLAIM AS THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD COMMUNICATES THREE THINGS:

- 1) He is true _____.
- 2) He is the portrait of _____.
- 3) He is the very _____ of God.

Read John 8:58.

What was the claim Jesus was making?

Reference

Jesus alone can fulfill the desire in our hearts for righteousness through the exchange of our sin for his righteousness. See 2 Corinthians 5:21.

Fill in the Blank

- 1) knowledge
- 2) moral purity
- 3) presence

Point to Make

Jesus is claiming that He is eternal. The Greek words translated "was," in the case of Abraham, and "am," in the case of Jesus, are quite different. The words chosen by the Spirit make it clear that Abraham was "brought into being," but Jesus existed eternally.

John 6:35 Jesus' claim, "I am the bread of life," is the first of seven "I am" sayings in John. Compare the references to God as "I am" in Ex. 3:14 and in Isaiah (e.g., Isa. 41:4; 43:10, 25).

John 8:12 Jesus is the light of the world (see 1:4-5; 3:19-21; 12:35-36, 46). Jesus fulfills OT promises of the "light" of salvation (e.g., Isa. 9:2; 42:6; 49:6; John 9:5; Acts 26:18, 23; Eph. 5:8-14; 1 John 1:5-7).

John 8:58 Jesus claims to have been alive before Abraham was. Thus he claims an existence apart from time that is true only of God.

Jesus does not simply say, "Before Abraham was, I was," which would simply mean that he is more than 2,000 years old. Rather, he uses the present tense "I am" in speaking of existence more than 2,000 years earlier, thus claiming a kind of transcendence over time that could only be true of God.

JESUS ISN'T OLD, HE IS ETERNAL. —ALEX KENNEDY

Read John 10:7-15.

Shepherds often kept their flocks in the countryside at night in a pen made up of a rocks piled into a rough circle with a small open space to enter. Since there was no gate to close—just an opening—the shepherd would keep the sheep in and wild animals out by lying across the opening. He would sleep there, in this case literally becoming the door to the sheep. When Jesus says, "I am the door," He is reiterating the fact that only through Him is salvation possible.

What is Jesus calling false teachers and other religious leaders that offer salvation other than the teachings found in the Bible?

Describe the difference between a hired hand and the good shepherd?

It is helpful to realize that sheep are utterly defenseless and totally dependent upon the shepherd. Sheep are always subject to danger and must always be under the watchful eye of the shepherd as they graze. Likewise, Jesus gave His life on the cross as "the Good Shepherd" for his own. He chose to save others, though He had the power, did not choose to save Himself.

Read John 11:17-27.

What are the two things Jesus is claiming in this passage of Scripture?

HE USED HIS ENCOUNTER WITH MARTHA TO MAKE A STATEMENT ABOUT HIS DIVINE NATURE:

- 1) Martha believed that the resurrection is an event; Jesus showed that the resurrection is a Person.
- 2) Martha's knowledge of eternal life was an abstract idea; Jesus proved that knowledge of eternal life is a personal relationship.
- 3) Martha thought victory over death was a future expectation; Jesus showed that victory is a present reality.

Read John 14:6.

In these words, Jesus was declaring Himself the great "I AM," the only path to heaven, the only true measure of righteousness, and the source of both physical and spiritual life. He was staking His claim as the very God of Creation, the Lord who blessed Abraham, and the Holy One who inhabits eternity.

Point to Make

Jesus makes it clear that any religious leader who offers salvation other than the teachings of Christ is a "thief" and a "robber." This is far from the universal teachings popular in today's culture.

Point to Make

A hired hand works for wages, which are his main consideration. His concern is not for the sheep but for himself. A faithful shepherd would willingly give up his life for the sheep.

Point to Make

There is no resurrection apart from Christ. Believers in Jesus Christ will experience resurrection because, having the life Jesus gives, it is impossible for death to defeat them. See 1 Corinthians 15:53-57.

Reference

Salvation is found in no one else. See Acts 4:12.

John 10:7 I am the door of the sheep. Jesus is the only way by which one can become part of the people of God (that is, Jesus' flock). Compare Ps. 118:20.

John 10:8 All who came before me may refer to messianic pretenders (e.g., Acts 5:36-37; 21:38). thieves and robbers. Compare Ezek. 34:2-4.

John 10:9 door. The NT elsewhere speaks of "entering" God's kingdom as through a door (e.g., Matt. 7:7, 13; 18:8-9; 25:10 and parallels; Acts 14:22). Will go in and out echoes OT passages about the covenant (see Num. 27:16-17; Ps. 121:8).

Read John 15:1-5.

At this point Jesus is making it clear that he is going to be leaving the disciples soon. Even though they would no longer enjoy His physical presence, he would continue to nourish and sustain them just as the roots and trunk of a grape vine produce the energy that nourishes and sustains its branches while they develop their fruit.

Why would Jesus declare the need for his disciples to depend upon him?

SO, WE DEPEND ON JESUS FOR EVERYTHING, STARTING WITH OUR VERY IDENTITY, "FOR IN HIM WE LIVE AND MOVE AND HAVE OUR BEING" —ACTS 17:28

Take a moment to review each of the meanings of the passages that Jesus described himself as I AM and what that means for his identity.

<u>Scripture</u>	<u>Statement</u>	<u>Meaning</u>
John 6:35, 48	I am the bread of life	Righteousness
John 8:12, 9:5	I am the light of the world	True Knowledge, Moral Purity, & Presence of God
John 8:58	Before Abraham was, I AM	Eternal
John 10:9	I am the door	Protector & Only Way In
John 10:11	I am the good shepherd	Sacrificial Love & Caretaker
John 11:25	I am the resurrection and the life	Death Has No Power Over Him
John 14:6	I am the way, the truth, and the life	Only Option for Eternal Life
John 15:1	I am the true vine	Sustainer, Life-Giver, Source of Fruit, Nourisher

Which part of Jesus' identity do you need the most in your life right now?

Over and over, he defines himself. Jesus knew who he was and, as a result, he was not under pressure needing others to define who he was for him.

This is the principle of identity. As long as you are unsure of your identity, you're going to be pressured to fit into the world's molds. The world will manipulate you. People will try to make you into what they think you ought to be rather than what God made you to be.

The only way you can counterbalance outside external pressures is to have an internal sense of satisfaction about who you are and who God made you to be. You discover who you are by knowing whose you are.

That is what this study is really all about it. The Bible says that God created you. You are deeply loved by him. You are accepted as you are. You can be forgiven. He has a plan for your life. In the coming weeks we are going to look at how the identity of Jesus shapes the identity of each of us. Our answer to the question of "who do you say I am" does not change his identity, however, it does change ours.

Reference

To understand more about what it means that Jesus is the "true vine" see Psalm 80:8-19.

Point to Make

He said that no branch could even live, let alone produce leaves and fruit, by itself. Cut off from the trunk, a branch is dead. Just as a vine's branches rely on being connected to the trunk from which they receive their energy to bear fruit, Jesus' disciples depend on being connected to Him for their spiritual life and the ability to serve Him effectively.

Discuss

Jesus revealed his identity to us so we would face the dark days ahead to carry out the mission of declaring the gospel to the world.

John 10:11 I am the good shepherd. Another "I am" saying; see note on 6:35. In the OT, God is seen as the true shepherd (Psalm 23; Isa. 40:11; Jer. 23:1-4; Ezekiel 34; Zech. 11:4-17), and David (or the Davidic Messiah) is depicted as a good shepherd (2 Sam. 5:2; Ps. 78:70-72; Ezek. 37:24; Mic. 5:4), as is Moses (Ps. 77:20; Isa. 63:11). Jesus, as both God and man, fulfills both of these themes. David literally risked his life for his sheep (1 Sam. 17:34-37), but Jesus surpassed David in that he gave his life on the cross for his sheep.

John 11:25 Jesus does not merely say that he will bring about the resurrection or that he will be the cause of the resurrection (both of which are true), but something much stronger: I am the resurrec-

NOW WHAT?

Which part of Jesus' identity is the Holy Spirit calling you to share with a friend this week?

How can you rely on Jesus' identity to shape yours?

Think through each of the "I AM" statements and their meanings from today's lesson. Pick a couple of them and write a prayer of praise in the space below.

GOING DEEPER

As a Christian, how does knowing Jesus' identity increase your faith?

From your knowledge of Scripture, how did Jesus' identity shape his actions?

MEMORY VERSE FOR THE WEEK

John 14:6

tion and the life. Resurrection from the dead and genuine eternal life in fellowship with God are so closely tied to Jesus that they are embodied in him and can be found only in relationship to him. Therefore believes in me implies personal trust in Christ. The preposition translated "in" (Gk. eis) is striking, for eis ordinarily means "into," giving the sense that genuine faith in Christ in a sense brings people "into" Christ, so that they rest in and become united with Christ. (This same expression is found in 3:16, 18, 36; 6:35; 7:38; 12:44, 46; 14:12; 1 John 5:10.) The "I am" statement here represents a claim to deity.

WEEK 1 DEVOTIONS

Spending time in God's Word is essential to growing in your faith in Jesus. The REAP Bible study method is a simple tool that you can use during your quiet times.

READ - Take the time to carefully read the Bible passage with an open heart, asking the Holy Spirit to give you words of encouragement, direction and correction.

EXAMINE - Grab your journal and write out your answers to the questions. Make note of what stands out to you.

APPLY - A great question to ask is "How will I live differently and be different today because of what I just read?"

PRAY - Then, talk with God about the passage and your application. Ask Him to change your heart and life based on the time you've spent in His Word.

DAY 1 — JOHN 6:35

What phrase does Christ use in reference to himself?

What attribute does Christ reveal about himself through use of this phrase?

DAY 2 — JOHN 8:58-59

What does Christ mean when he says he was alive before Abraham?

Think of what God the Father said to Moses at the burning bush in Exodus 3:14. What is Jesus saying of himself in respect to his deity?

DAY 3 — JOHN 10:7-10

What phrase does Christ use in reference to himself?

Entering life by way through Christ, what does the passage say we are protected from?

DAY 4 — JOHN 10:11-18

What term does Christ use in reference to himself?

In what ways does Christ exhibit being a shepherd? According to the text, how is he our shepherd?

DAY 5 — JOHN 11:25-26

Explain the significance of Christ being the resurrection *and* the life.

Believers die all the time. What kind of freedom from death is Christ speaking of then?

DAY 6 — MATTHEW 15:1-8

What phrase does Christ use in reference to himself? To his followers? What does this visual mean?

What attributes of God are revealed through this metaphor that Christ shares?

DAY 7 — ISAIAH 54:1-12

How does this passage of Scripture speak of the identity of Christ?

How does this passage help us identify Jesus with the New Testament?

In The Beginning

I am: The Image Of God

GENESIS 1:24-2:25

WEEK

2

Key Questions and Concepts

Why did God create humans with special qualities, instead of being like the rest of creation?

The purpose of being a human is to represent God in the world.

Suppose you have been elected as a Representative for the State of North Carolina. Does everyone know what a Representative does? A Representative is part of the House of Representatives in Washington DC. There are several representatives from every state, and the House of Representative's job is to work with the Senate to make laws for the United States. So suppose you are now one of the Representatives for North Carolina. Discuss around your table what you might need to know before you leave to go live to Washington DC. [Bring them back after 2-3 minutes, collect answers from around the room.]

Probably the most important thing you can know is what the people of North Carolina want you to do. Why is this important? It's important because you were elected to represent every person in North Carolina. When you show up at the Capital building in Washington DC to vote yes or now on a law, you are not voting for you, you are voting for the entire state of North Carolina. What would happen if you decided to just vote how you wanted to vote?

What is the difference between "reflect" and "represent"?
Describe some reasons that people send others to be their representatives.

Today we're going to see from Genesis chapter 1 that God has chosen us to be his representatives. In many ancient nations, the kings would create little statues of himself and put them all over the country. They called these statues "images" of their King, and they were suppose to represent and remind people of the king's power. They would speak to and worship to theses images as if they were the King himself.

However, our God did something much better than this. Instead of being represented by a lifeless statue, God is represented by us – living, breathing, humans beings who are *like* him. Each human being is made in the image of God and called to represent God. We'll see just how important this is as we study Genesis 1 this morning.

5-Minute Commentary

Gen. 1:1–2:3 The book of Genesis opens with a majestic description of how God first created the heavens and earth and then how he ordered the earth so that it may become his dwelling place. Structured into seven sections, each marked by the use of set phrases, the entire episode conveys the picture of the all-powerful, transcendent God who sets everything in place with consummate skill in conformity to his grand design. The emphasis is mainly on how God orders or structures everything. Each of the six workdays follows the same pattern: it begins with "and God said," and closes with "and there was evening and there was morning, the nth day." After declaring that God is the Creator of all things (1:1), the focus of the rest of Genesis 1 (beginning at 1:3) is mainly on God

MADE TO REPRESENT

Read Genesis 1:26-31.

This account tells how and why God created human beings. This is the beginning of the human story. The best way for us to understand our own individual purpose is to understand God's purpose for human beings in general. Today we will focus especially on verse 26. Let's spend a few minutes looking at this verse in its context and trying to discover what it means.

When you type on a computer or your phone, how do you show emphasis? What options do you have to show someone who is reading your message what the important parts are?

The authors of the Bible didn't have most of these available to them! Instead, they used a more old fashioned way of telling us what is important: REPETITION. Whenever we read the Bible, one of the most helpful things we can do is look for repeated words and phrases.

Look at Genesis 1:1-23. Write down the repeated words and phrases that the Bible uses to describe God's creation of the world in these verses.

Now look at verses 26-31. How do these verses compare to verses 1-23? What words are missing? What words are the same? Are there any new words?

Although many of the words are the same, there are some striking differences. For example, "according to their kinds" means that animals were based on a pattern God had designed. "Let us make man in our image" means that humans are based on the pattern of God himself.

The author (Moses) is trying to tell us that this section is especially important. In other words, the creation of human beings is the most important part of this chapter. Human are *not like* the rest of the creation. Read the first sentence of verse 26-27 out loud. The word "image" should stand out; it is repeated three times!

What is an image? How does it relate to the thing that it is an image of?

Why do people make images of things? Why do people make images of themselves?

Example

Students should make suggestions like *italics*, bold, CAPS, highlighting, or emoticons.

Reference

Help students find phrases like "Let there be..." / "Let the earth..." / "Let the waters..." / "according to their kind..."

Point to Make

The goal of this discussion time is to get students thinking about the concept of *representation*, which will be the basis of the teaching point in the subsequent section. Try to take each question one at a time, then build into the next question, leading students to realize that images are designed to accurately represent something greater than the image.

bringing things into existence by his word and ordering the created things ("let the waters ... be gathered together," 1:9), rather than on how the earth was initially created (1:1). Different features indicate this. For example, vegetation is mentioned on day 3, prior to the apparent creation of the sun on day 4. Viewed in its ancient Near Eastern context, Genesis 1 says that God created everything, but it is also an account of how God has structured creation in its ordered complexity. Readers are introduced in the first three days to Day, Night, the Heavens, Earth, Seas—all these items, and only these, being specifically named by God. In days 4–6 the three distinctive regions are populated: the Heavens with lights and birds; the Seas with fish and swarming creatures; and the Earth with livestock and creeping things. God finally gives authority to human beings, as his vice-regents, to govern all

Why do you post (or not post) “images” of yourself on the Internet? Has anyone ever posted an image or video of you that you did not like? Why didn’t you like it?

An Image Has Two Purposes:

- 1) To be like the original thing or person.
- 2) To represent the original thing or person.

So Genesis 1:26 tells us that humans are different than the rest of creation in two ways. First, they are *like God* in ways the rest of creation is not. Secondly, they represent God in a way the rest of creation does not. One theologian translates verse 26 like this: “Let us make man like us, and let him represent us.”

In what ways are humans like God that the rest of creation is not?

Why might God have wanted to create humans with these special qualities, instead of being like the rest of creation?

ESTABLISHING SUPERIORITY

There is a clue to this question in the second half of verse 26. Read it out loud again at your table.

What does it mean for humans to “have dominion”?

How does “have dominion” relate to being the image of God?

When we put all of these things together, we find out that God created us for a very specific purpose: to be his representatives! The reason we exist on earth is to carry out God’s will on the earth. God is invisible, so he has sent us to do his will. This means that every human is extremely valuable because they are designed to be God’s representative. It also means that we have a huge responsibility. It is our job to live our lives to carry out the will of God on earth, just as an ambassador carries out the wishes of a country in a foreign land.

Read verses 28-31.

What else does God command Adam and Eve to do in these verses?

Point to Make

There are many answers. 1) Spiritual capabilities 2) Intellectual capabilities 3) Moral capabilities 4) Personhood 5) Will and Desire

Point to Make

Spend time helping students think critically about why God would have done this. Refer back to the previous discussion about why people create images of themselves in general. How we answer this question determines the purpose of being a human being, which is the core concept we want students to draw from this lesson: The purpose of being a human is to represent God in the world.

Reference

Prompt students to think through the two purposes of “image” listed at the top of this page as it relates to dominion.

these living creatures. Genesis 1 establishes a hierarchy of authority. Humanity is divinely commissioned to govern other creatures on God’s behalf, the ultimate purpose being that the whole earth should become the temple of God, the place of his presence, and should display his glory.

Gen. 1:24–31 This is by far the longest section given over to a particular day, indicating that day 6 is the peak of interest for this passage. Here a significant distinction is drawn between all the living creatures that are created to live on the dry land, and human beings. Whereas vv. 24–25 deal with the “living creatures” that the earth is to bring forth, vv. 26–30 concentrate on the special status assigned to humans.

These verses are often called the “Cultural Mandate.” They teach us that God wanted to create humans beings so that he would have a representative in the world. Men and women, guys and gals, moms and dads and kids, were all created *like God* so that we would be able to *represent* God in the world and to rule the world for him.

There Are Three Main Ways That We Represent God.

- 1) Ordering
- 2) Filling
- 3) Restoring.

THE VALUE OF REPRESENTATION

As a student, how can you be “ordering” and “filling” and “restoring”?

How might understanding that you have this job impact how you live each day?

Each day we have a choice to embrace or reject the calling to represent God to the world. Talk about some ways that you reject or embrace it.

Discuss this statement: I was created to be God’s ambassador in the world. This means my life is incredibly important.

Sometimes we get discouraged about our place in the world. Discuss with your table ways that you could encourage one another in remember your calling to represent God in the world.

Discuss

Help students think through the implications of representing God in their own lives. The goal is that they see both the great responsibility that they have, as well as the incredible value it brings to their life. They exist for a great and honorable purpose – to represent their creator in the created world.

Point to Make

Looking back at Genesis 1, we see God making order out of chaos. As people, we do this all the time. This is part of our God-given role of being His image.

Reflect

Encourage students to think about the little things. How can you represent God to your little sister? How can you represent God to your friends? How does being the image of God affect how you do school work?

Gen. 1:26 The text does not specify the identity of the “us” mentioned here. Some have suggested that God may be addressing the members of his court, whom the OT elsewhere calls “sons of God” (e.g., Job 1:6) and the NT calls “angels,” but a significant objection is that man is not made in the image of angels, nor is there any indication that angels participated in the creation of human beings. Many Christians and some Jews have taken “us” to be God speaking to himself, since God alone does the making in Gen. 1:27 (cf. 5:1); this would be the first hint of the Trinity in the Bible (cf. 1:2).

Gen. 1:27 Since v. 26 links the image of God with the exercise of dominion over all the other creatures of the seas, heavens, and earth, one can see that humanity is endowed here with authority to

NOW WHAT?

Think about your story up to this point. If you asked those who know you, who would they say you represent most?

What has God specifically gifted you to do? What do you like to do?

Do you use that skill to further your own interests, or to further God's interests?

Create a specific goal of one area where you can improve how you are using your gifts and talents to "order" or "fill" or "restore" the world for God.

GOING DEEPER

Think about the Bible stories that you know. How did the characters in those stories represent God (or *misrepresent* Him)?

Why did God make people to represent him, instead of having animals or rocks or statues do the job?

MEMORY VERSE FOR THE WEEK

Genesis 1:26

rule the earth as God's representatives or vice-regents. Other scholars, seeing the pattern of male and female, have concluded that humanity expresses God's image in relationship, particularly in well-functioning human community, both in marriage and in wider society. Traditionally, the image has been seen as the capacities that set man apart from the other animals—ways in which humans resemble God, such as in the characteristics of reason, morality, language, a capacity for relationships governed by love and commitment, and creativity in all forms of art. All these insights can be put together by observing that the resemblances (man is like God in a series of ways) allow mankind to represent God in ruling, and to establish worthy relationships with God, with one another, and with the rest of the creation.

WEEK 2 DEVOTIONS

Spending time in God's Word is essential to growing in your faith in Jesus. The REAP Bible study method is a simple tool that you can use during your quiet times.

READ - Take the time to carefully read the Bible passage with an open heart, asking the Holy Spirit to give you words of encouragement, direction and correction.

EXAMINE - Grab your journal and write out your answers to the questions. Make note of what stands out to you.

APPLY - A great question to ask is "How will I live differently and be different today because of what I just read?"

PRAY - Then, talk with God about the passage and your application. Ask Him to change your heart and life based on the time you've spent in His Word.

DAY 1 — PSALM 8

What responsibility does God give to mankind?

How does this passage reflect mankind being made in the image of God?

DAY 2 — GENESIS 2:15-25

How do the responsibilities of mankind God places on Adam reflect God's will and character?

Explain how the relational nature of man, as seen in Adam and Eve's necessary relationship, is an image-bearing aspect of God.

DAY 3 — GENESIS 9:1-7

Any overlap in God-given responsibilities expected of Noah that were also expected of Adam? (Genesis 2:15-25)

What implications flow from verse 6?

DAY 4 — EXODUS 20:4-6

Other than restating the First Commandment, why would God not want us to form an 'image' to worship?

In his righteous jealousy, how does God say he will reward or punish individuals that obey or disobey the Second Commandment?

DAY 5 — COLOSSIANS 1

Why are all things created?

In what ways does Christ go before us, based on the passage?

DAY 6 — HEBREWS 1:3

We may be made in the image of God, but who is made in the exact representation of God's being?

What does it mean that to be the exact representation of God?

DAY 7 — 2 CORINTHIANS 3:18

As image bearers of God according to this verse, what does mankind do?

How does the passage reflect mankind being made in the image of God and who we are?

Did God Really Say?

I am: A Sinner

GENESIS 3:1-13

WEEK

3

Key Questions and Concepts

Every person has sin and death because of Adam's sin.

Being a sinner is part of our identity.

Until we understand and admit that sin is a very big part of our story, we'll never understand the importance of what Christ has done for us.

If you've ever had a dog, you know that there are certain things that dogs do. Dogs bark, they slobber, they dig up your flowers, and they refuse to listen when you call them. Some dogs can be well trained to speak, lay, shake, roll over, or play dead. Yet, no matter how many tricks you teach them, and no matter how much you help them act like a human being, they will always still be a dog, and they will always do "dog" things. You can dress them up in sweaters, let them sleep in your bed with you, and talk to them like your best friend. However, in the end, a dog is a dog it will do dog things.

Now consider if I got down on my hands and knees and started to bark, slobber, dig, and refuse to listen when you called me. What would that make me? Crazy, right?!? I can't be a dog by doing dog things any more than a dog can be a human by doing human things. That's not the way the world works. Each "thing" that God has made does what it does because it is what it is. Dogs are dogs and so they do dog things. Humans are humans and so they do humans things. When dogs acts like humans or humans act like dogs it doesn't change what they are.

***Why do people act the way they do?
Which is more basic: being or doing?***

The world teaches us the exact opposite of this truth. There's a recurring line in the recent Batman movies that goes something like this: "It's not who I am underneath, but what I do, that defines me." The world teaches us that we can be whatever we want simply by acting differently. The Bible teaches us that we are defined not by what we do, but by who we are. The way we act—what we do—flows out of who we are underneath.

Today, we're going to study one of the most fundamental truths about *what we are*: Sinners. Sometimes we think that if we could just stop sinning, then we would not be a sinner anymore. But the truth is deeper than that, and crucial for understanding our identity.

5-Minute Commentary

Gen. 3:1–24 The Couple Rebels against God. The sudden and unexplained arrival of a cunning serpent presents a challenge of immense importance to the human couple. Their choice is to disregard God's instructions, an act of willful rebellion that has terrible consequences for the whole of creation. As a result, God's creation is thrown into disorder, with chaotic effects that result from the disruption of all the harmonious relationships that God had previously established. God's punishment of the man involves his relationship with the very ground from which he was formed (see note on 2:5–7). Because he has eaten that which was prohibited to him, he will have to struggle to eat in the future. Given the abundance of food that God provided in the garden, this judgment reflects God's disfavor.

THE FALL

Last week we saw that God created humans to represent Him to the world. This is what it means to be created in the "Image of God." God has put us in the world, made in and as His Image to take dominion, to fill the earth, and to subdue it for Him. This forms the basis of our relationship with God.

In Genesis chapter 3 something goes seriously wrong. This week we're going to find out what went wrong and how that affects us.

Read Genesis 3:1-6.

Look carefully at the conversation between Satan and Eve in verses 1-3. Compare what they say with God's actual command in Genesis 2:15. What is different? What is the same?

Do these changes make a difference? Why might Eve and Satan have made changes?

Last week we learned about the beginning of the human story. God created human beings to represent him. Now, Satan is telling a Eve a totally different story. Read verses 4-5.

What story is Satan trying to get Eve to believe and why would he want her to believe it?

If Satan's story is true, what does that mean about God? What does it mean about Eve?

All of this sets the stage for what happens in verses 6-7. Now that Eve has questioned the word of God, accepted Satan's lies about God's motives, and begun to believe that God isn't good or right, she actively rejects his commands, choosing instead to serve herself.

Read verse 6. Eve "saw" three things about the fruit. Write down what they are.

Eve chose to reject God's story and believed Satan's story instead. Instead of representing God like she was designed to, Eve chose to represent her own interests. She "saw" the fruit, and began dreaming of all the great things that would happen for her if she ate it. Eating the fruit was the last step in a process of rejecting God's plan and embracing her own selfish desires.

Point to Make

Satan questions God and implies a complete prohibition against all trees. Eve exaggerates God's command by adding "touch" to the prohibition. She also understates the punishment by leaving out "surely." She also identifies the tree according to its location instead of its name.

Point to Make

Instead of God creating humans perfectly to represent Him, Satan rewrites the story so that God actually is a liar who doesn't care about Adam and Eve. Satan wants Eve to believe she's better off looking out for her own interests, instead of being the image of God. In essence, Satan claims that God is holding Eve back. Sin originates here: Lack of faith in the goodness and plan of God.

Adam will no longer enjoy the garden's abundance but will have to work the ground from which he was taken. The punishment is not work itself, but rather the hardship and frustration that will accompany the man's labor. To say that the ground is cursed (Hb. 'arar, v. 17) and will bring forth thorns and thistles (v. 18) indicates that the abundant productivity that was seen in Eden will no longer be the case. Underlying this judgment is a disruption of the harmonious relationship that originally existed between humans and nature.

Gen. 3:19 Further, the man's body will return to the ground (v. 19), i.e., it will die (which was not true of the original created order; cf. Rom. 5:12). For this reason, the Bible looks forward to a time when

Read verses 7-24. Write down some of the consequences that Adam and Eve experienced because they turned away from God.

A SINNER IS A PERSON WHOSE RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD IS BROKEN

Based on this story of Adam and Eve, how would you define "sin"?

What does this have to do with us? One of the clearest explanations can be found in Romans 5:12. Turn to Romans 5:12 and discuss the following questions.

Who is the one man? Who did this one man's sin affect? How did it affect them?

The following phrases come from the rest of Romans 5. Read them one after another.

- **Romans 5:12** — "Sin came into the world by one man..."
- **Romans 5:15** — "Many died through one man's trespass..."
- **Romans 5:16** — "For the judgment following one trespass brought condemnation..."
- **Romans 5:17** — "Because of one man's trespass, death reigned through that one man..."
- **Romans 5:18** — "As one trespass led to condemnation for all men..."
- **Romans 5:19** — "For as by the one man's disobedience the man were made sinners..."

What do these verses teach us about the effect of Adam's sin?

EVERY PERSON HAS SIN AND DEATH BECAUSE OF ADAM'S SIN

Not only is every person a sinner because of Adam, but all sadness, sorrow, brokenness, sickness, and pain in the world comes from sin. Sin comes from rejecting God as Lord and desiring to represent ourselves instead. When Adam and Eve chose to seek their own desires and reject God's plan, the entire world was brought under the power of sin. This is a critical part of your story.

THE IMPACT OF SIN IN MY LIFE

We have seen that at its core, sin is about refusing to represent God and choosing to represent ourselves instead. From the minute we are born, we would rather represent ourselves than God. Just like with Adam and Eve, when we seek to represent ourselves instead of God, there are negative consequences.

Point to Make

Compare verse 7 with Genesis 2:25. It represents spiritual death, shame, and guilt. They didn't physically die right away, but their spiritual death was instant. It will also be helpful here to focus on their removal from Eden. This is not just symbolic: It is separation from the presence of God and relationship with God.

Point to Make

Sin is fundamentally about our broken relationship with God. Out of this brokenness flows sinful thoughts, words, actions, and desires which reject God's plan and design for us. Breaking God's command not to eat of the tree was a sin, but it was the result of Eve's rejection of God as her Lord. Individual sins flow out of a prior broken relationship with God.

nature will be set free from the consequences of human sin; i.e., nature will no longer be the arena of punishment, and it will finally have glorified human beings to manage it and bring out its full potential (Rom. 8:19-22).

Gen. 3:22-24 The couple is expelled from the garden. God begins a sentence in v. 22 and breaks off without finishing it—for the man to live forever (in his sinful condition) is an unbearable thought, and God must waste no time in preventing it ("therefore the Lord God sent him out from the garden").

Gen. 2:15-16 The overall picture of Eden presented in the preceding verses suggests that the park-

Discuss this statement: "The fall did not begin when Eve ate the fruit, it began with her inner intention to eat the fruit." Is this true? Why or why not?

Why is it important to understand that sin is more than just "doing bad things?" Why do we sin?

What evidence do you see in the world that every person naturally seeks to represent themselves instead of God?

What are some ways that you seek to represent yourself instead of God?

Have you experienced the negative consequences of these decisions?

What does it mean that being a "sinner" is part of our identity?

What difference does it make whether you believe that being a sinner is part of your identity?

We've talked a lot about sin today. This is because until we understand and admit that sin is a very big part of our story, we'll never understand the importance of what Christ has done for us. We can't hide from death, and we can't hide from sin. We need to admit this part of our story and understand where it comes from. Next week will talk about the good news of Christ's payment for our sin.

Discuss

Talk about some of the difficulties you've experienced in your life. Can you trace these difficulties back to sin, either yours or others?

like garden is part of a divine sanctuary. The man is put in the garden to work it and keep it. The term "work" (Hb. 'abad; cf. v. 5; 3:23; 4:2, 12; Prov. 12:11; 28:19) denotes preparing and tending, and "keep" (Hb. shamar) adds to that idea. Since this command comes before Adam sinned, work did not come as a result of sin, nor is it something to be avoided. Productive work is part of God's good purpose for man in creation. Later, the same two verbs are used together of the work undertaken by the priests and Levites in the tabernacle ("minister" or "serve" [Hb. 'abad] and "guard" [Hb. shamar]; e.g., Num. 3:7–8; 18:7). The man's role is to be not only a gardener but also a guardian. As a priest, he is to maintain the sanctity of the garden as part of a temple complex. And the Lord God commanded the man. The fact that the command was given to Adam implies that God

NOW WHAT?

Think through your story up to this point. How has it been marred by sin? (This may be your own sin or the sins of others).

Are there people you need to ask to forgive you for sin or hurt that you've caused?

PRAYER: Take some time and ask God to reveal to you how you have sinned. Confess that sin and turn away from it.

Sin will always be a part of your story. Spend some time confessing this to God and asking for His Holy Spirit to give you grace as you grow.

GOING DEEPER

Sin is a part of every person's story. Think about people you know who may be hurting. How can you show them love and grace in the midst of their pain and suffering?

What can we learn about God from Genesis 3?

PRAYER: Ask God to restore those you know (including yourself) who have been hurt by the results of sin.

MEMORY VERSE FOR THE WEEK

Romans 5:12

gave "the man" a leadership role, including the responsibility to guard and care for ("keep") all of creation (Gen. 2:15)—a role that is also related to the leadership responsibility of Adam for Eve as his wife (cf. v. 18, "a helper fit for him"). (On the NT understanding of the relationship between husband and wife, see Eph. 5:22–33.)

Rom. 5:12–21 Hope in Christ's Triumph over Adam's Sin. The main theme of this section continues to be the future hope of those who have trusted in Christ. Adam brought sin and death into the world, but those who have believed in Christ are full of hope, for Christ has reversed the consequences of Adam's sin and has given his own life and righteousness to secure their eternal glory.

WEEK 3 DEVOTIONS

Spending time in God's Word is essential to growing in your faith in Jesus. The REAP Bible study method is a simple tool that you can use during your quiet times.

READ - Take the time to carefully read the Bible passage with an open heart, asking the Holy Spirit to give you words of encouragement, direction and correction.

EXAMINE - Grab your journal and write out your answers to the questions. Make note of what stands out to you.

APPLY - A great question to ask is "How will I live differently and be different today because of what I just read?"

PRAY - Then, talk with God about the passage and your application. Ask Him to change your heart and life based on the time you've spent in His Word.

DAY 1 — GENESIS 3

What does it mean after mankind sins when this passage says "and to dust you will return"?

What are some of the deeper reasons that Adam and Eve ate from the tree? As sinners, how do we exhibit those same reasons for sinning?

DAY 2 — ROMANS 1:29-32

Was there anything on this list that surprises you?

In what ways does society approve of those who practice some of these things? In what ways do I sin by approving of those who practices some of these things?

DAY 3 — 2 SAMUEL 11:1-12:13

List the ways that David sinned in this situation.

Look at the relationship of Nathan and David, and the role Nathan plays in his life. Do you have a friend in your life that will tell you difficult things you need to hear, even if you don't want to hear them? If not, how will you find one?

DAY 4 — MATTHEW 23:27-28

The legalistic, self-righteous mindset of the Pharisees is seen in every generation. What does Christ want these people to know?

How are we like the Pharisees?

DAY 5 — NUMBERS 20:2-13

Why was Moses punished for such a seemingly small thing as striking the rock twice?

What does it say about mankind's sinful nature that Moses too receives judgment from God?

DAY 6 — LUKE 22:54-62

Explain the interactions that happened in this passage.

What did Peter realize after the rooster crowed and Christ looked at him?

DAY 7 — JOHN 8:1-11

Because everyone had to walk away, what does this say about mankind?

What responsibility does Jesus charge to the woman at the end?

Is There Hope?

I am: Redeemed

EPHESIANS 1:7-8

WEEK

4

Key Questions and Concepts

We were slaves to sin, and Christ bought us with His blood.

Jesus alone provides redemption.

God has done everything necessary to eternally redeem us for himself. So we could be his and our identity would be in him.

Everyone is in need of redemption. Our natural condition is characterized by sin. Many of the difficulties in our lives are a direct result of sin, often including our own. Quite simply, our depravity is not something that we can overcome on our own. Sin has a price to pay and we can't pay it. So, where do we turn? Is there any hope? The answer is Jesus. Nothing apart from him can fix our wickedness. No measure of good deeds is sufficient to satisfy the wrath of God other than the blood of Jesus.

What is it that Jesus provides that can give us hope? Is this hope something that is only for the future or is it for right now as well? To understand hope we have to understand redemption. It's too bad that some words in the Bible have become "church words"—words that really don't mean much in our day-to-day lives. Here's an example that might make sense to you. Do you have a parent who travels frequently by plane? If so, they probably collect points or miles in a frequent flier program. After they have saved up a certain amount of points, they can redeem them for a free airline flight. Yet, it wasn't really free, was it? It took a lot of paid flights to get that free trip.

Another example of redemption in biblical times was if a woman accepted a marriage proposal, the groom would pay a price for his bride-to-be, then leave to prepare a place for his bride. She did not see him again until he came back for her. It could be weeks, months, or years. The word engaged was not used. They used a word that meant, "bought with a price." Everyone in her town would know her as the girl who was "bought with a price."

*Can you imagine being engaged and not knowing when you would get married?
Does Jesus only provide hope for those that choose to follow him?*

Get the connection? God redeemed us with a huge payment. We were slaves to sin, and Christ bought us with His blood. Jesus tells us we are not our own; we are bought with a price. We are "engaged" to Christ because He paid a price for us. Only through the payment of the blood Jesus shed on the cross can we be redeemed. Now when God looks at believers, he sees us clothed with the righteousness of Christ. He accepts and loves us just as he does Jesus. We are redeemed. Redemption means we have hope. Hope for a different life now and the future.

5-Minute Commentary

Eph. 1:7 Redemption denotes ransoming someone from captivity or from slavery. The supreme OT example was the exodus, where God redeemed Israel from slavery in Egypt (see Ex. 15:13; Deut. 7:8; 2 Sam. 7:23; Mic. 6:4). Forgiveness of our trespasses explains the nature of redemption: Christians are freed from slavery to sin and guilt. This was effected by Christ's blood, which means his death as an atoning sacrifice (see also Rom. 3:24; Eph. 1:14; 2:13; 4:30; Heb. 9:15).

Rom. 3:23 No one can stake a claim to this righteousness based on his or her own obedience, for all people have sinned and fall short of what God demands (see 1:21).

A CHURCH WORD WITH A PUNCH

REDEMPTION — IS OBTAINING SOMETHING OR SOMEONE'S RELEASE BY MEANS OF PAYMENT.

When God looks at believers, He sees His beloved Son, Jesus. Jesus sees you and me, and the whole church as His bride—not the sin or the mess we are now, but the perfected bride He is making us to be. This is all due to redemption.

This truth is so important for us to understand. God even started teaching about redemption way back when He was leading the Jews out of Egypt. This passage teaches us that redemption always comes at some cost.

Read Exodus 13:11-16.

What were the Israelites told to redeem?

What was the purpose of this redemption command?

God obviously takes redemption seriously, so much so that He issued commandments to His people that would remind them about redemption every time a firstborn was born. Redemption in the sacrificial system foreshadowed what was to come through Jesus for the payment of our sins.

ONCE AND FOR ALL

The reconciliation that needs to happen between man and God goes both ways. God's first act in reconciling us to himself was to remove the obstacle that separated him from us—the guilt of our sin. He took the steps we could not to remove his own judgment by sending Jesus to suffer in our place.

Read Romans 3:23, 5:10, and 6:23.

Why did mankind have to be redeemed in the first place?

There was no escape from the curse of God's law. It is just. We are guilty. There was only one way to be free: someone must pay the penalty. Jesus alone met the demands of the Law.

Read Galatians 2:16.

The law's demands have been fulfilled by Christ's perfect law-keeping, its penalty fully paid by his death. Christ redeemed us through His own death on the cross. This is why the Bible teaches that

Reference

Verse 13 states that every first born was to be redeemed. A price had to be paid for that firstborn life.

Discuss

What about a first-born child? Certainly God did not require the death of a first-born child, but a price still had to be paid. What was the redemption price for a firstborn son? See Numbers 18:16.

Point to Make

Reminder of the 10th plague and how God brought them out of Egypt. Also, to remember their dependency on the Lord.

Point to Make

He did what the law could not do permanently. See Romans 8:3-4.

Rom. 5:10 As in v. 9, Paul argues from the greater to the lesser, though here he speaks in terms of reconciliation (the language of friendship) rather than justification (a legal term). Since Christians are now reconciled to God through Christ's death, they can be assured that they will be saved on the day to come (here "saved," Gk. *sōzō*, includes not only justification at the start of the Christian life but also completed sanctification, glorification, freedom from final condemnation, and future rewards). But here the salvation is based on his life. The reference is to Christ's resurrection, showing that both the death and resurrection of Christ are necessary for salvation (see 4:25).

Rom. 6:23 Those who give themselves to sin will die both physically and eternally, whereas Christians

getting right with God is not based on law-keeping: Our only hope is having the blood and righteousness of Christ credited to our account.

Jesus made it plain that rejecting the eternal life he offered would result in the misery of eternity in hell. However, for those who trust Christ, the best is yet to come. We will see the all-satisfying glory of God.

Read John 3:18, 36, 14:2-4, and 17:3.

What hope does redemption provide now?

Where does a redeemed person spend eternity?

Reconciliation from our side is simply to receive what God has already done, the way we receive an infinitely valuable gift.

For all these reasons and more, Christ suffered and died. Why would you not embrace him as your Savior from sin and judgment, and live with God eternally?

THE KINSMAN REDEEMER: A PORTRAIT OF GOD

Sometimes the best way to explain a concept is revealing it through a story. There are beautiful stories of redemption throughout the Bible, such as, the story of Ruth and Boaz. A young Jewish man had traveled with his family to Ruth's home country of Moab (now known as Jordan). He married Ruth but died just ten years later. Ruth went with her mother-in-law, Naomi, back to the family's hometown of Bethlehem, even though she was not Jewish herself. To appreciate the rest of the story, you need to understand the history between Israel and Moab.

Read Deuteronomy 23:3 to see how the Law regarded Moabites in the holy places of the Lord.

Based on the law, what response would Ruth have received if she tried to enter the temple?

☐ Accepted ☐ Denied

Read Judges 3:28-30.

Describe the relationship between Israel and Moab.

With a history like this, you can imagine that anyone from Moab did not receive a warm welcome in the land of Israel. Yet, Ruth insisted on returning with Naomi to her homeland.

Discuss

What does the verse mean when it talks about a tree?

are assured of eternal life. Wages implies that the punishment for sin is what one has earned and what one deserves. Free gift is the opposite of something one deserves, which fits Paul's earlier emphasis on justification by grace alone (God's unmerited favor; see note on 4:16), through faith alone (trusting in Christ for justification; see 1:17; 3:21–4:25).

Gal. 2:16 "Justified" means "counted righteous" or "declared righteous" by God. If people were sinless and perfectly obeyed all of God's perfect moral standards, they could be justified or "declared righteous" on the basis of their own merits. But Paul says that this is impossible for any Gentile or even for any Jew to do (cf. Romans 1–2). We also have believed in Christ Jesus, in order to be

What words would you use to describe Ruth's character as it was revealed in this action?

As a young widow in a foreign land, Ruth was at risk of falling between the cracks of society with no one to provide for her future well-being. She basically could have been cast out like a dog. Naomi, however, opened new doors for Ruth and God moved through different events to take care of Ruth.

Read Ruth 2:1-12 and keep in mind how important first impressions are.

Ruth found favor with Boaz. He could become her kinsman-redeemer. While that may seem a little odd to you, this was a very normal way of life for the Jews. What is a kinsman-redeemer, you might ask? The Jews had a belief that if a husband died without a son, his closest male relative had to marry his widow. This was to make sure that the dead husband's family line would continue. If that relative declined, the next-closest male relative could become the kinsman-redeemer.

As you read Ruth 3:7-13 and 4:13-14, consider how the entire story of Ruth is an illustration of God's redemptive love for you and me.

Who do the main characters in the story, Ruth and Boaz, represent as you read this book of the Bible today?

REDEMPTION IS HERE

Can you make the connection? Just like Ruth, you didn't deserve to come into God's presence. You were lost and unclaimed. God provided a Kinsman-Redeemer to pay the price for you. Now you are the bride of Christ and have been claimed for eternity.

Hopefully, this gives you a new appreciation for what has been done for you. Based on your learning from these verses, here's a question that might take a little more thought.

Can you redeem yourself? Why or why not?

Read Galatians 3:10-14.

Who has been redeemed?

Read 1 Peter 3:18.

The gospel is the good news that at the cost of Jesus' life, God has done everything necessary to eternally redeem us for himself. So we could be his and our identity would be in him.

Discuss

Do Ruth's actions and words sound like a woman trying to capture a husband?

Discuss

Considering Ruth's social status as a foreign widow in Israel, she ended up pretty well, don't you think? If that wasn't enough, God blessed her even further. Ruth's family tree might come as a surprise to you. Read Ruth 4:13-22. What was the name of the last descendant of Ruth who is mentioned?

justified by faith in Christ implies that justification is the result of saving faith. The contrast and not by works of the law shows clearly that no human effort or merit can be added to faith as a basis for justification. Paul concludes decisively: by works of the law no one will be justified (cf. 3:10-14; Acts 13:39; Heb. 10:1-14). On justification, see also notes on Rom. 4:25; Phil. 3:9; James 2:21.

John 3:18 Those who do not believe and trust in Christ have neither a positive nor a neutral standing before God. They stand condemned already before God for their sins because they have not trusted God's solution for guilt, the only Son of God. This verse also refutes the assertion that a sincere person following any religion can have eternal life with God (cf. 14:6; Acts 4:12; Rom. 10:13-17)

NOW WHAT?

In your own words, define redemption.

Ask someone this week the following question: "Who/what gives you hope?"

If you are moved to embrace God's Son for redemption, tell God in words like these:

God, I'm convinced that Jesus suffered and died for my sins. I gratefully trust in him now as my Lord and my precious Treasure and the only way I'll ever receive your forgiveness and your promise of eternal life. Amen.

PRAYER: Thank God for paying a huge bride price for you. He gave His life for you. Thank God for redeeming you. Ask Him to help you to realize that you are valuable to Him. Ask God to open your eyes this week to His redeeming love. Ask Him to put this idea front and center in your faith and to open your eyes to what it cost for Him to redeem you. Thank Jesus that He is your Kinsman-Redeemer.

GOING DEEPER

Read Matthew 27:50-51 and Romans 10:9.

When is a person redeemed?

How do the truths we discussed today change your worship of Jesus?

PRAYER: This might take a little courage; are you up for it? Confess "that" to God. Thank Him that Christ has already redeemed you from "that" by dying on the cross. Ask His Holy Spirit to give you strength to fight "that" by His power rather than yours.

MEMORY VERSE FOR THE WEEK

Galatians 3:13

John 3:36 Has eternal life indicates that eternal life is not merely a future expectation but already a present experience.

John 17:2-3 Eternal life comes from knowing God and Jesus the sent Son (cf. 1:4; 5:26; 20:31). Knowing God is not confined to intellectual knowledge but entails living in fellowship with him. That they know you implies an intimate relationship that involves actually knowing God as a person.

1 Pet. 3:18 A key statement on the substitutionary atonement of Christ. He suffered and died as the righteous one in place of the unrighteous, in order to bring us to God.

WEEK 4 DEVOTIONS

Spending time in God's Word is essential to growing in your faith in Jesus. The REAP Bible study method is a simple tool that you can use during your quiet times.

READ - Take the time to carefully read the Bible passage with an open heart, asking the Holy Spirit to give you words of encouragement, direction and correction.

EXAMINE - Grab your journal and write out your answers to the questions. Make note of what stands out to you.

APPLY - A great question to ask is "How will I live differently and be different today because of what I just read?"

PRAY - Then, talk with God about the passage and your application. Ask Him to change your heart and life based on the time you've spent in His Word.

DAY 1 — JOHN 4:1-14

What does Christ claim to give those that ask him for?

What does Jesus say about the well water? What does this mean for the things of this world?

DAY 2 — 1 PETER 1:3-5

What hope is available from having a new birth?

What does Peter mean by "inheritance"? What are we waiting for?

DAY 3 — ROMANS 5:1-5

Why do you have hope from God? How is peace connected to hope?

How can we rejoice in our sufferings because of all this?

DAY 4 — GALATIANS 5:1

What does this passage say Christ gives us in Him?

How is Christ's freedom better and different than the American definition of freedom?

DAY 5 — REVELATION 19:7-10

What does it mean to be invited to the "marriage supper of the Lamb?"

In the metaphor for the Bride of Christ being the church, what significance is the "fine linen" and its cleanliness?

According to the passage, what are we to do up unto and after the point of Christ and the church being joined together?

DAY 6 — ROMANS 1:16

According to this verse, through the Gospel Christ gives us salvation and access to...?

Describe the attitude Paul exhibits here. How can you reflect that attitude?

DAY 7 — 1 CORINTHIANS 10:13

The first phrase gives us the feeling that we are not alone in our struggles. What does the first sentence of this verse mean?

Why will God not allow us to be "tempted beyond what we can bear"?

Live In Freedom

I am: No Longer Condemned

ROMANS 7:21-8:4

WEEK

5

Key Questions and Concepts

Christ has truly taken our sins, clenching on to them is not pleasing to God.

When we feel we need to punish ourselves, we are actually devaluing Jesus' sacrifice.

God is willing to embrace us no matter the severity of the sin, don't choose to recoil in shame, but come to him in comfort.

Redeemed...paid in full...justified...pure...holy. As you learned last week, the Bible even describes you as the bride of Christ. What about when you look in the mirror every day? Do you see a pure bride, especially when you compare your behavior to God's perfect standard of righteousness? Sometimes it's hard to believe these statements are true of us once we've received Christ as our Savior. After all, we're talking about the God who sees everything.

He even sees you when you're doing..."that". What's "that"? you ask. Well, "that" is whatever keeps you from feeling pure and righteous. Whatever "that" is for you may not even be a big deal for somebody else. Whatever "that" is for them may not be a stumbling block for you. "That" may be something that you did a long time ago, you repented, and God has forgiven you, yet, you still feel ashamed. "That" is what the enemy (Satan) uses over and over again to try to defeat you and make you feel condemned, unworthy, and...unredeemed.

***What is something that you regret doing this past week?
How have you seen shame cripple someone from living as new creation in Christ?***

It is true that sin separates you from God. However, God's hatred of sin is only part of the picture. The other part, of course, is His incomparable love for us—one that is so zealous and all-encompassing. He couldn't help but make a way for us to escape sin's bondage. Enter Jesus Christ. While we think we know the meaning behind Jesus' death, and most of us have "accepted" it for our personal lives, the real litmus test comes with our response to sin. If we become preoccupied with its ugliness, hanging our heads in anxiety and shame, we're likely not absorbing the truth that we are more than our faults.

If Christ has truly taken our sins, then clenching on to them is not pleasing to God. When we feel we need to punish ourselves, we are actually devaluing Jesus' sacrifice—even exalting our perceived ability to redeem ourselves or finish His atonement. Rather than using our faults as a chance to punish ourselves, perhaps we can consider them the invitation to not only practice our faith, but also to grasp the intense love of God.

When we repent of our sin, we are claiming the promise of God's eternal love is strong enough to save. Therefore, walk in the freedom of no longer being condemned.

5-Minute Commentary

Rom. 5:1–8:39 Hope as a Result of Righteousness by Faith. The central theme of chs. 5–8 is that believers in Christ, who are righteous in God's sight, have a certain hope of future glory and life eternal.

Rom. 8:1 Therefore indicates that Paul is stating an important summary and conclusion related to his preceding argument. The "therefore" is based first on the exclamation of victory that comes "through Jesus Christ our Lord" (7:23–25), which in turn is linked back to 7:6, where the idea of the "new life of the Spirit" is first mentioned. But more broadly Paul seems to be recalling his whole argument about salvation in Christ from 3:21–5:21. The now in 8:1 matches the "now" in 7:6, showing

RESPONDING TO SHAME

Everyone experiences a certain amount of shame and regret over sins committed in the past. The Bible has much to say about shame and regret, and there are numerous examples of people in the Bible who experienced these negative feelings.

Read Genesis 2:25.

Adam and Eve were innocent in this moment. They had done nothing wrong, there was nothing to hide, and they were without shame.

Read Genesis 3:1-13.

Eating the fruit transformed Adam and Eve, but not for the better. Now ashamed of their nakedness, they attempt to clothe themselves. Conscious of the Lord God's presence, they hide. When confronted by God regarding the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, the man blames the woman, who in turn blames the serpent.

Describe the shame and regret Adam and Eve must have felt after they sinned?

Immediately God judges the serpent, woman and man. They spoiled the perfect creation God had made. Adam and Eve were in a perfect world, had perfect minds and bodies, and had perfectly close fellowship with God. When they chose to sin against God, all of God's creation was made subject to sin's effects, including disease, decay, death, and separation from God for eternity. Every human being afterward was born with a sin nature—the natural inclination to sin.

However, his punishment for their sin is only part of the picture. The other part is his great mercy that was displayed to cover their shame by making garments of clothing. Thankfully, God is sovereign, and He had a plan even then to redeem His world through His Son, Jesus Christ, and give mankind a choice for salvation and eternal life with Him. He did this so that all of our sin and shame would be completely taken away.

God covered their shame, yet they still had to live with the consequences of their sin. How are consequences different than shame?

God does not identify believers by their sins. It's almost as if He sees things the other way around—while we might magnify our mistakes, He is not intimidated by our weaknesses, like we so often are. He sees their power as already dissolved by the cross.

Read John 13:37-38.

Point to Make

Adam and Eve must have lived out their lives on earth with much regret over their loss of innocence and its associated blessings—after all, they remembered paradise.

that the new era of redemptive history has “now” been inaugurated by Christ Jesus for those who are “now” in right standing before God because they are united with Christ. But the summary relates further to the whole argument presented in chs. 3, 4, and 5. No condemnation echoes the conclusion stated in 5:1 (“Therefore ... we have peace with God”) and underscores the stunning implications of the gospel first introduced in 1:16–17. As Paul immediately goes on to explain, there is “no condemnation” for the Christian because God has condemned sin in the flesh by sending his own Son (8:3) to pay the penalty for sin through his death on the cross. The following verses then show that indwelling sin is overcome through the power of the indwelling Spirit, with ten references to the Spirit in vv. 4–11.

Right after the Passover meal, Peter tells Jesus that he would lay down his life for his Lord. Jesus responds by telling him that on that very night Peter would deny three times even knowing the Lord.

Read John 18:15-27 & Matthew 26:31-35, 69-75.

What happened?

Read Luke 22:61-62.

What was Peter's response?

It is clear that Peter was upset about what he had just done. He was so bold in his statement to fight for Jesus and then allowed fear to overtake him. Shame certainly has a place in our lives. It helps us recognize that we have sinned. It allows us to feel the weight of the sin. However, its purpose is to lead us to repentance when we have done something wrong.

Read John 21:15-19.

Later, Peter was restored and grew in his faith, becoming one of the founding fathers of the early church. Peter did indeed "strengthen his brothers" after being forgiven, just as Jesus had foretold.

While Peter must have lived with much shame and regret over his public denial of Christ, his deepened understanding of the person and work of Christ overcame his feelings of failure. He realized that he was forgiven by the grace of God, and he moved past his personal regret to feed Jesus' sheep.

LIVE IN THE FREEDOM OF CHRIST IN THE FUTURE

Our souls are wearied by the weights we put on ourselves. We are often dried up by self-criticisms and judgment. We try to motivate ourselves with fear and shame—the idea that we are bad people until we change. However, that tactic simply isn't effective.

Staying in that place keeps us stuck and God knows this. He chooses to motivate us by giving us knowledge of who we really are, and awareness of His unconditional kindness. He knows that only gracious love brings us healing and the ability to love ourselves. It then gives us the strength to let go, and move forward in hope.

As we grow spiritually by spending time with God daily in prayer and reading His Word, we find ourselves loving and trusting Him more. Yes, we regret our past mistakes, but that is not our focus.

JESUS SUFFERED SHAME THAT OUR SHAME MIGHT BE TAKEN AWAY
AND THAT HIS GLORY MIGHT BE RESTORED UNTO US.

Point to Make

Later that night, out of fear of losing his own life, Peter did just exactly what Jesus said he would do.

Discuss

Describe moments when you have made bold statements about your desire to follow Christ and then did not follow-through. What caused the lack of follow-through?

Reference

"Strengthen his brothers" See Luke 22:32 and Acts 2.

John 21:15–17 Peter has denied Jesus three times (18:15–18, 25–27); now Jesus asks him three times to reaffirm his love for him and recommissions him. Jesus' question, "do you love me more than these?" probably means, "Do you love me more than these other disciples do?" rather than, "Do you love me more than these fish [i.e., his profession]?" or "Do you love me more than you love these men?"—though all three senses are, of course, important. In these three questions and answers, Peter uses the same verb for "love" all three times (Gk.phileō), but Jesus uses a different verb for "love" in the first two questions (Gk.agapaō) and then switches to Peter's word phileō in the third question. There may be a slight difference in nuance between the verbs (Peter seems to see a difference in the related nouns in 2 Pet. 1:7), and many older commentators have argued for a difference,

Take some time to look through the following passages of Scripture. Put a star next to the three that stand out the most to you.

- **1 Peter 5:7** — Acknowledge to God that you are wrestling with shame.
- **1 John 1:9 & Psalm 32:5** — Acknowledge any sin on your part that has brought shame into your life and ask for God's forgiveness.
- **Ephesians 6:10-18** — Armor up and fight against guilt and shame.
- **John 8:36** — Trust the freedom that Jesus provides.
- **Matthew 18:21-22 & Colossians 3:13** — By the grace of God forgive anyone who has offended you and brought you shame.
 - **Romans 12:19-21** — Put the judgment of any now living offender in God's hands.
 - **Ephesians 4:31-32** — Acknowledge any unforgiveness, anger, bitterness, and resentment that you have held toward the offender and ask God to forgive and cleanse you from your shame.
- **Psalm 139:23-24** — Ask the Holy Spirit if you are free from the bondage of shame. If you are not free the Holy Spirit will reveal why you are not.
- **Joshua 1:8** — Meditate on God's Word.
- **James 5:16** — Don't go it alone.
- **Hebrews 3:1** — Fix your eyes on Jesus.
- **John 1:12** — You are a child of God.
- **Colossians 1:15-22** — You are cleansed from all our unrighteousness.
- **John 10:27-30 & Hebrews 7:24-25** — Your salvation is eternally secured.
- **Psalm 103:2** — Trust that God has cast our sins from us as far as the east is from the west.
- **Philippians 3:13-14** — Shame and regret are part of what is behind us. We must learn to forget.
- **Titus 3:3-7 & Romans 6:4** — Change your path and walk in newness of life.
- **Romans 8:1** — You are a sinner, but you are justified.
- **Galatians 2:20** — God has forgiven us, therefore, we can move on.

Why did you choose those three Scriptures?

When we feel guilty and perceive God as sternly pointing out our faults, perhaps we can recognize it is really just our own voices or the enemy's. We can choose instead, to listen to His quieter voice that tenderly repeats, "There is no condemnation for those who are in Christ." (Romans 8:1). We can recognize that God is a God of deep compassion.

WE'VE GOT IT MADE RIGHT

If it wasn't enough to be redeemed from our past sins, Jesus' death on the cross even redeemed us from our future sins. This opens the door to another idea. Since you're already forgiven for the sins you haven't yet committed, why fight it? If Christ is your Savior, you're going to heaven anyway, so why bother trying to be obedient? That very same question was asked by one of the New Testament writers. Look at what Paul the Apostle said in his letter to the Romans:

Encourage

We all have trouble when dealing with regrets because sometimes it may not have been the best decision for our future. However, if we don't learn and move on from the past we cannot move forward. Shame also comes when others have hurt us. That shame does not require repentance but makes us feel as though we no longer have value. Jesus became the object of our shame. Jesus has come to heal our hurts and take away our shame. He was rejected and despised. God wants to restore what guilt and shame has taken away. He died for that. Don't try to carry it.

Point to Make

Walking in the freedom of being no longer condemned allows us to walk in faith and not in regret.

often seeing agapaō as representing a higher and purer form of love. While there may be no difference in the meanings of the two verbs, Peter is nonetheless grieved because Jesus kept asking him if he loved him. You know everything, taken in its full sense, is an affirmation of Christ's omniscience, consistent with his deity. If he knows everything, then of course he knows Peter's heart. Feed my lambs. Jesus as the true shepherd (John 10:11, 14) appoints Peter and other apostles to be subordinate shepherds (see 1 Pet. 5:1-4). Peter will demonstrate his love for Jesus by loving God's people and feeding them with his Word.

Rom. 6:1 Paul is likely responding to a question posed regularly by his Jewish opponents. They did

Read Romans 6:1-2.

If you and I are dead to sin through Christ's death, what are we saying to God when we willingly continue to sin?

Read 1 John 1:9.

When we see issues in our lives, we are asked to take them seriously, to present them and ourselves to the only One who is able to help us, teach us and grow us into His likeness.

GOD IS WILLING TO EMBRACE US NO MATTER THE SEVERITY OF THE SIN, DON'T CHOOSE TO RECOIL IN SHAME, BUT COME TO HIM IN COMFORT.

not raise this question so that they would have an excuse to sin, though in every age some have wrongly interpreted and applied Paul's gospel of grace to rationalize sin. Instead, Paul's opponents argued that his gospel must be mistaken since, in their view, it led people to continue in sin. Paul will now show why their interpretation of his gospel is mistaken.

Rom. 6:2 Paul's gospel does not lead to more sin, since those who belong to Christ have died to sin (as explained in the following verses).

1 John 1:9 Christians must confess (their) sins, initially to receive salvation and then to maintain fel-

NOW WHAT?

If all this talk about “that” is causing your ears to burn or your heart to beat faster, then God has already convicted you about “that” and even though Christ redeemed you from it, He wants to empower you to overcome it. So, what is “that” for you? If it’s not obvious, take a moment to ask God to make it clear to you. You can even follow a similar prayer that David once used:

Read Psalm 139:23-24.

Write your thoughts and responses here:

When do you struggle the most with feeling shame for your past?

Write down the name of someone that you know is enslaved to shame and regret. Pray for them on your own. Take time this week to share the passages of Scripture that are listed in this lesson.

GOING DEEPER

What does it mean to live in such a way that you know that you are not condemned?

Read Ephesians 4:22-24.

These verses talk about our identity in Christ and how we are newly created for “holiness and righteousness”. What’s the difference in the two?

MEMORY VERSE FOR THE WEEK

Romans 8:1

lowship with God and with one another (v. 3). faithful and just to forgive. God is “slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, forgiving iniquity and transgression” (Num. 14:18). Yet John also makes it clear (1 John 3:6, 9) that persistent unrepented sin is not the mark of a Christian—God “will by no means clear the guilty” (Num. 14:18).

WEEK 5 DEVOTIONS

Spending time in God's Word is essential to growing in your faith in Jesus. The REAP Bible study method is a simple tool that you can use during your quiet times.

READ - Take the time to carefully read the Bible passage with an open heart, asking the Holy Spirit to give you words of encouragement, direction and correction.

EXAMINE - Grab your journal and write out your answers to the questions. Make note of what stands out to you.

APPLY - A great question to ask is "How will I live differently and be different today because of what I just read?"

PRAY - Then, talk with God about the passage and your application. Ask Him to change your heart and life based on the time you've spent in His Word.

DAY 1 — JOHN 1:29

In this verse what does Christ save us from? What does he take away?

What does John mean when he calls Christ the Lamb of God? How is Christ the Lamb of God for us?

Read Exodus 12:1-13. Describe the parallels between Christ and the Passover lamb.

DAY 2 — ROMANS 8:1-3

According to this verse, what are we free from as a result of being in Christ?

Look up the definition of condemnation and meditate on how Christ took your place.

DAY 3 — MICAH 7:18-19

What is the significance that God hurls all our iniquities into the depths of the sea?

What does verse 19 mean for any shame we might feel for our forgiven sins?

DAY 4 — ROMANS 6:16-17

What does sin lead to? What does obedience to God lead to?

How might you live differently knowing that you are free from the slavery of sin?

DAY 5 — 1 THESSALONIANS 1:6-9

Write down the first phrase of verse 6. This is a characteristic of God.

Why couldn't God have just wiped our sin clean without Christ dying in our place?

DAY 6 — PSALM 51:5 & 1 CORINTHIANS 15:22

Explain your understanding of the "sin nature of Adam" that we all have on us.

How long has God had a plan set in motion so that we may be saved from our inherited sinful nature?

DAY 7 — REVELATION 21:3-4

What words would you use to describe the final state of living with God after all these things have passed away?

What words would you use describe God's character and give Him the glory for protecting you from all this?

The Heavenly Homeland

I am: An Heir Of Heaven

HEBREWS 11:8-16

WEEK

6

Key Questions and Concepts

True inheritance was not the land of Canaan, but heaven.

How does your future control the present?

What God promises his people is not earthly blessings, but heavenly ones.

Imagine you've decided to take a trip around the world with a few of your best friends. Your trip will last multiple months and take you to countries on all seven continents. You'll climb the Eiffel Tower, hike along the Great Wall of China, and raft down the Amazon River. The trip will cost money, need lots of planning, and require a high level of physical fitness. You've decided your departure date will be one year from today. What will you need to do before you leave? What will you need to purchase? Spend 2 minutes making a quick list with your group of what you'll need to do to prepare.

THE FUTURE CONTROLS THE PRESENT

As you draw closer to your trip, the anticipation and the preparations will continue to become more and more intense. The closer you get, the more you think about the trip. In fact, the truth is that everything we do in the present is controlled by things we'll do in the future.

Think about it. We think about what we're going to do. We think about where we're going to go. We think about who we are going to meet. What we know will happen in the future defines what we do today. The more important the future thing, the more influence it exercises over you.

***What's the most important event in your future?
What are you looking forward to in the future?***

Today we're going to find out what the Bible says about the future. We spend a lot of time trying to accomplish our goals. We want to have the right car, get into the right college, have a great job, get married to an awesome person, and retire to Florida. The things that we believe will happen in the future determine what we do today. The Bible has very important things to say about your future and how it should influence you today.

5-Minute Commentary

Heb. 11:8–10 God called Abraham to leave Haran and go to Canaan (Gen. 12:1–4). obeyed. Faith leads to obedience to God's promise and calling. inheritance. Also used of Christian salvation (Heb. 9:15). not knowing where he was going. See 11:1. land of promise. See Gen. 15:18–21. On God's promises, see Heb. 6:12–15. foreign land. See 11:13–16. Abraham is portrayed as yearning for the heavenly city (developed further in vv. 13–16; 12:22–24; 13:13–14).

Heb. 11:11–12 Sarah. See Gen. 21:1–7. That Sarah laughed, apparently in unbelief (Gen. 18:9–15), is potentially problematic for her role as an example of faith; however: (1) the author is happy to speak

GO FROM YOUR COUNTRY

Read Genesis 12:1-7.

Circle or underline the phrase "Go from your country" in your Bible. In Hebrew, this command sounds like this: "Get up NOW and leave! Hurry!" Abram didn't have time to think about whether to obey, he had to make a decision right away.

Write down and talk about the things that Abram had to leave behind when God called him to "Go from your country."

Write down the things that God promised to do for Abram. Would it have been difficult for Abram to believe God about these things? Why?

Read verse 6. What is important about the "Canaanites being in the land?"

God called Abram to leave everything that he had and everything he had known to go to different land. God made great promises to Abram, but these promises seemed hard to believe. After Abram obeyed and went to Canaan, his situation got worse instead of better! Instead of being a great nation and being famous, Abram had to live among the wicked Canaanites as a traveling shepherd. His obedience didn't seem to improve his situation.

Read Hebrews 11:8-16. This passage provides insight and helps us understand the story we just read in Genesis.

How do these verses describe Abraham's living situation? Why is this important?

What reasons are given (in verses 8-10) for why Abram obeyed the call of God to leave his land?

Look through these verses and circle or underline every word that has to do with a place.

Why are there so many words about places?

Point to Make

These promises would have been very difficult to accept. Leaving the known for the unknown is very difficult. Abram was 75, so becoming a "great nation" would have been in doubt. Abram is giving up most of what he knew, this doesn't seem like blessing!

Discuss

Ask what the students know about the Canaanites.

Reference

Place, where, land, land, live, city, afar, exiles, earth, homeland, land, country, city. Land is one of the primary promises of God throughout the OT. Having a place to dwell, and safety and blessing and wealth was what all OT people longed for.

of the true faith of Sarah despite her failings, and (2) Sarah apparently later had a change of heart, as her laughter became a genuine expression of joy at the birth of Isaac (Gen. 21:6), whose name means "laughter." received power to conceive (lit., "power for the foundation of seed"). Although some translations give Abraham as the subject, it is best to take "Sarah" as the subject here, because (1) both Sarah's name and "herself" (Gk. autē) are in the nominative case (indicating the subject of the sentence), and because (2) making Abraham the subject requires either an unusual grammatical understanding of the words for "Sarah herself" or an assumption that an early copyist made an error in transcribing those two words. considered him faithful. See Heb. 10:23. stars ... sand. An allusion to Gen. 22:17.

What is an "inheritance" (verse 8)? What "inheritance" was Abraham hoping to get?

What does it mean to be an "heir" of a promise (verse 9)? What promise was Abraham an "heir" of?

What is faith? (Hint: Hebrews 11:1) What did Abraham "not see" and still believe?

INHERITANCE BEYOND MEASURE

Verse 13 says something very interesting. It says, "These all died, not having received the things promised." What does this mean? What did they "not receive"?

Did this mean that God had failed to deliver on his promises? Why did they still believe God even though they didn't get what was promised?

According to this passage, what is heaven? How did these men and women of faith think and feel about heaven?

Do you see the progression? Faith that God would give them a homeland in heaven produced obedience on earth. Abraham believed that God would fulfill his promise of "land" in heaven. Abraham didn't need to see God fulfill the promise on earth, because by faith he believed that heaven was a better place. Christians believe that heaven is better than earth, and this promise is their hope.

CHRISTIANS BELIEVE THAT HEAVEN IS THEIR HOMELAND

ETERNAL FOCUS

When was the last time you thought about heaven? Do you look forward to heaven?

What do you think about heaven? What do you suppose it will be like?

Reference

Provide examples of inheritance from modern life. Help students grasp the concept of a future benefit.

Point to Make

Help students realize that the true inheritance was not the land of Canaan, but heaven. What God promises his people is not earthly blessings, but heavenly ones.

Point to Make

Heaven is an inheritance, it's a land of promise, it's a country, it's a heavenly city, it is a homeland. It is clear from this text that they looked forward to heaven, they believe in heaven, and it made them willing to give up things on earth.

Heb. 11:13 died in faith. They were faithful even unto death. not having received. Abraham and Sarah especially exemplify this: called to a Promised Land and promised innumerable offspring, they merely embraced these promises while living nomadically in a land not wholly theirs, where they had just one son together. strangers and exiles on the earth. See especially Gen. 23:4; also Ex. 2:22; Lev. 25:23. This physical reality for the descendants of Abraham was applied spiritually in the Psalms; see Ps. 39:12; 119:19 (also 1 Chron. 29:15; cf. 1 Pet. 1:1; 2:11).

Heb. 11:14–16 The author says that the people he has mentioned in vv. 1–13 were seeking a better (heavenly) country, which would be their true homeland. First, if Abraham (for example) were

Is there anything that makes you NOT look forward to heaven? Are there earthly things you don't want to give up?

Why might it be hard to believe that we have an inheritance in heaven?

Why is it important to think about heaven regularly? Why is it so easy to forget about the future promises?

Can you have "faith in Jesus" and not think about heaven?

How does the promise of heaven impact the way we live now? How did it impact Abraham's life?

What might you need to change about how you live this week if you really have faith in God's promise of heaven?

In what ways can you demonstrate that you have faith that heaven is a "better country" (verse 16)?

Everything about Abraham's life and story points towards the "better country." Does yours? Is your life defined by the hope of receiving a heavenly country? Or are you focused on getting and keeping earthly things? One of the most important things a Christian can do with his or her mind is think about heaven.

Point to Make

Abraham was praised for his obedience – which comes from faith, faith in the promise of heaven. Abraham was driven by his belief that God would bring him to heaven.

looking for an earthly "homeland" (Gk. *patris* refers to a place of one's fathers), he could have returned to Haran; but he persisted in following God's leading and focusing on his promise (v. 15). Second, the Psalms' spiritual application of exile terminology to this whole mortal life indicates the expectation of a life to come (Ps. 39:12; 119:19; cf. Heb. 11:13–14). prepared for them a city. See v. 10; 12:22–24; 13:13–14.

Gen. 12:1–9 Abram's Migration to Canaan. After the essential background information in 11:27–32, this section moves swiftly to highlight God's invitation to Abram to become a source of blessing for the rest of humanity. (The name "Abram" appears in a text from Dilbat, and "Abraham" in the Egypt-

NOW WHAT?

Write down a few steps you could take to remind yourself about heaven each day.

Think about your “bucket list.” Should Christians have a “bucket list”? Why or why not?

What might you do (or NOT do) because you believe that God has promised to give you all the benefits of heaven?

PRAYER: Spend a few minutes praying about how you could use your life to seek God’s kingdom.

GOING DEEPER

Read the rest of Hebrews 11. How did faith affect the lives of the people who are described in this chapter?

If your name was listed in Hebrews 11, what would it say about you? Is your story focused on heaven or earth?

What can we learn about God from reading Hebrews 11?

MEMORY VERSE FOR THE WEEK

Hebrews 11:16

tian Execration Texts [20th–19th centuries b.c.]. Other names from the patriarchal period, such as “Terah,” “Nahor,” and “Benjamin,” are also known from the Mari texts [18th century b.c.].)

Gen. 12:1-2 God’s invitation to Abram challenges him to abandon the normal sources of personal identity and security: his family and country. To obey, Abram must trust God implicitly; all human support is largely removed. The promised outcomes are conditional on Abram’s obedience. God’s purpose for Abram, that he become a great nation, stands in obvious tension with Sarai’s barrenness and the summons to leave his homeland. Abram is challenged by God to establish a new humanity. make your name great. This was the failed aspiration of the tower builders (11:4).

WEEK 6 DEVOTIONS

Spending time in God's Word is essential to growing in your faith in Jesus. The REAP Bible study method is a simple tool that you can use during your quiet times.

READ - Take the time to carefully read the Bible passage with an open heart, asking the Holy Spirit to give you words of encouragement, direction and correction.

EXAMINE - Grab your journal and write out your answers to the questions. Make note of what stands out to you.

APPLY - A great question to ask is "How will I live differently and be different today because of what I just read?"

PRAY - Then, talk with God about the passage and your application. Ask Him to change your heart and life based on the time you've spent in His Word.

DAY 1 — ROMANS 8:17

What does this verse promise us if we are in Christ Jesus?

If we are to share with Christ in his glory, what are we to share with Christ?

What does it mean to be an heir of God and a co-heir with Christ?

DAY 2 — EPHESIANS 1:13-14 & HEBREWS 9:15

According to the passage in Ephesians, who is with you until you finally acquire your inheritance?

What purpose does our inheritance serve in the long run?

DAY 3 — 2 CORINTHIANS 6:18

Consider what it means that, regardless of our familial circumstance, we have a perfectly loving Father in Heaven that loves you.

How does this translate to our lives? How does the fact stated above affect our thinking?

DAY 4 — EPHESIANS 1:4-6

How long has God known us? What does the passage say we are in Christ?

Think about the idea of adoption. At what point in your life did the Lord adopt you?

DAY 5 — MATTHEW 18:1-5

Who does Christ say is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?

What does it mean to change and approach God like a child? What attributes of a child is God looking for in us?

DAY 6 — 1 CORINTHIANS 15:12-19, 35-58

What does this passage share that is in store for those in Christ?

What is Paul trying to say in verses 12-19? How do we have victory in Christ?

DAY 7 — PHILIPPIANS 3:18-21

If we are not of this world, where does our citizenship lie?

Explain how it is encouraging knowing that your citizenship is not of this world.

God Dwells With Man

I am: The Temple Of God

HEBREWS 9:1-10, 10:19-23

WEEK

7

Key Questions and Concepts

Temple is the place that God dwells.

Who is the most important person you can think of? Why are they important? What sets them apart from other people? A good example of a “VIP” is the President of the United States. For you and I, it is very difficult to spend time with the President.

The President lives in a huge guarded house with fences, cameras, and the best security systems in the world. He flies on his own personal plane with only those he invites along. When going by car, he travels with a huge motorcade and all the streets are shut down. A great deal of effort is made to ensure that no one comes close to the President. He is separated from all of us.

Now pretend that one day the President decides to come and live in your house with you. He shows up at your front door, and says that he’s chosen you, out of all the people in the world to stay with. He wants to change his address from Pennsylvania avenue in Washington DC to your street. He has heard of you and wanted to make his home with you.

How would you feel? What would you think? Would it change the way you lived? Would you talk with him often? What would you tell your friends?

***What is something you are separated from that you want to be closer to?
How do the people you live with affect your life?***

Today, we’re going to study a similar change, but one that’s even more astounding than the President moving in with you. Throughout the Bible, God relates to his people in different ways. One of the most important differences we see in the Bible relates to where God lives.

As we’ll see, in the Old Testament, God lived in one very specific place. This place had huge walls, lots of rules about how to get in, and the best security system in the world. However, in the New Testament, God changed where he lived in a very surprising way.

Only because the work of Jesus on the cross may God dwell within us.

The Holy God who created the universe wants to dwell with us.

What should we believe and know about ourselves, if God lives in us?

5-Minute Commentary

Heb. 9:1-6 The Mosaic covenant came with legislation governing how to worship God and where to approach God in holiness. The tabernacle (an elaborate “tent” for worship, see 8:2, 5; 13:10; also Ex. 25:9; 26:1–37; see The Tabernacle Tent) is divided into two portions—the Holy Place and the Most Holy Place, literally the “Holy of Holies” (indicating “most holy”). The items within each of these sections are mentioned in accordance with the OT (e.g., Exodus 25; 30; 37). Having described the tabernacle (These preparations having thus been made), the writer describes the worship that took place therein. priests go regularly into the first section. Only the Levitical priests were permitted access. They went into the Holy Place (i.e., the “first section” or first “tent”; see note on vv. 2–5) to

A PLACE TO CALL HOME

Read Hebrews 9:1-10.

These verses describe how things were under the “first covenant.” “First” is another word for “old” and “covenant” is another word for “testament.” So we can reword verse 1 to say: “Even in the Old Testament...” Therefore, these verses compare the Old Testament and the New Testament.

Verse 1 talks about “an earthly place of holiness” in the Old Testament. What is this referring to? (Hint: Read Exodus 25:1-9. What words are used to describe the “place of holiness”?)

Describe the value of the things that you wrote down from Exodus 25.

Why does Hebrews make such a big deal about the “Holy Place” and the “Most Holy Place?” Write down some of the differences between them.

What makes the Most Holy Place so special? What was the purpose of the Most Holy Place?

Read Hebrews 9:8. What is “By this” referring to? What does the Holy Spirit indicate “by this”?

Only one Israelite per year (the High Priest) was able to walk into the place where God lived. Regular Israelites—people who would have been just like you and me—were NEVER able to be in the Presence of God. God’s Presence was in the Most Holy Place, but no one was allowed to go there. All throughout the Old Testament the Bible teaches us that God is so holy that man cannot be in his presence. The Tabernacle—and eventually the Temple—reminded everyone about the separation between men and God.

ALTHOUGH GOD LIVED IN THE TABERNACLE
MEN COULD NOT APPROACH HIM

Read Hebrews 10:19-23.

Look carefully at verses 19-20. What words do you see repeated from 9:8?

Point to Make

Although lots of expensive materials were used, verse 8 tells us why the tabernacle mattered: “That I may dwell in your midst.” God himself wanted to make a way to live with man.

Reference

This is a good moment for teaching about how to read the bible. Anytime we see a purpose statement (therefore, for, in order that, so that, by this) we should look back to make the logical connection. Here, the author is referring to difference between the first and second “sections” (The Holy and Most Holy Places). The Temple was a physical demonstration of the separation between man and God.

Point to Make

Specifically point out “way” “opened” and “holy places.”

perform their regular duties (changing the lamp oil, the bread of the presence, and the incense fire; see Ex. 25:30; 30:7–8; Lev. 24:4) and to offer daily offerings (e.g., Num. 28:7).

Heb. 9:7-8 Once a year, on the Day of Atonement, the high priest entered into the second section, that is, the Most Holy Place (Lev. 16:2–3, 11–17); after the incense cloud had shielded him from the mercy seat, he sprinkled it with the blood of a bull and a goat as sin offerings (Lev. 16:6, 9, 11, 15). By this. That is, by the system that restricted to the Levitical priests the right of access into the presence of God in the Holy Place and especially the Most Holy Place. the Holy Spirit indicates. The Mosaic covenant was the command of God, through the Holy Spirit, and by the Mosaic law God

How are these words used differently in this passage? What is “new” in these verses?

MOVING IN

One of the main differences between the Old Testament and the New Testament—according to these passages—is that in the OT, the way into the holy place was closed. However, Hebrews 10:20 says that a new way has been opened into the holy place, and that we have confidence to enter it!

Read 1 Corinthians 3:16, 6:19-20 and John 14:17.

In the Old Testament, the “holy place” was in the Tabernacle, closed off from the people. Where is the “holy place” now?

These verses talk about Christians being the “temple” of God. What does that mean?

A TEMPLE IS A PLACE WHERE GOD DWELLS

What can we learn from the Old Testament temple and tabernacle about the importance of God’s dwelling place?

Write down all the things that verses Hebrews 10:19-25 say that we have because of Christ.

DWELL WITHIN YOU

We have explored the difference between the Old Testament Temple and the New Testament Temple. The Holy God who created the universe wants to dwell with you! Because of Christ, this is not only possible, it is reality. If this is true, it affects our lives in a huge way!

Think about the people you live with. What is unique about living with someone else?

How is your relationship different from those you see occasionally?

Point to Make

Students have probably been taught before that they are the “temple of the Holy Spirit,” but its important to help them think through the implications of this. Compare the New Testament “temple to Old Testament “temple.” Challenge them to draw conclusions regarding the effect of Christ’s death on God’s dwelling place?

Discuss

Ask students to hypothesize about why God wouldn’t have just sent Jesus in the first place. Why did He put the Temple and Tabernacle into use, only to abolish them later?

Point to Make

All the parts of the temple were expensive and important parts of creation. Ultimately he chose to dwell in his most prized part of Creation. Us.

revealed both the spiritual separation of man from God due to sin and the pattern for Jesus’ high priestly ministry. way into the holy places. Only the priests can enter the Holy Place, and only the high priest goes behind the veil, into the Most Holy Place; thus, while the veil and the Holy Place were still standing, the rest of God’s people could not directly draw near to God’s throne of mercy (the Most Holy Place), since the way was not yet opened.

Heb. 9:9–10 Two ages (both Gk. *kairos*, “time”) are here contrasted: the present age (either the old covenant era or simply the “present circumstances of the church”), and the time of reformation. The latter age has been inaugurated by Christ (vv. 11–12, 26). The “present age” is described as a time

Do you really believe that God lives in you? How does that look in your life?

How should it make you feel? How should it make you think? How should it make you act?

Why is it difficult to believe that the Holy Spirit (God!) lives in you? What are some reasons that you doubt this is true?

Hebrews talks about "assurance" and "confidence" and a "clean conscience" and "holding fast to our hope." Do you feel these types of things in your life? Why or why not?

What is your conscience? How does it work?

Why does Hebrews say we have been cleansed from an "evil conscience"? What does this have to do with God living in us?

How should these truths affect our identity? In other words, what should we believe and know about ourselves, if God lives in us?

Point to Make

The indwelling of the Holy Spirit indicates his closeness to our very being. He influences and affects our thoughts and emotions. Help students draw a connection between the Holy Spirit living in us, and our consciences being cleaned. We should think, feel, and act differently if the Holy Spirit does indeed dwell in us.

Listen

If students don't believe or know or experience the work of the Holy Spirit in their lives, it is possible or probable that they don't have the Holy Spirit! Look for students who answer these questions negatively and use this as an opportunity to restate the gospel for them.

of impure consciences and of separation from access to God. Through Christ's work, this present age is passing away and the new time of reformation, which has already been inaugurated, will later be fully consummated (see note on vv. 25–26, where Christ has appeared at "the end of the ages").

Heb. 10:19–25 Exhortation to Draw Near. Since the priestly work of Christ has established the privilege of access to God, the author exhorts his readers to approach God faithfully, to firmly maintain their confession, and to find ways to encourage others.

1 Cor. 3:16 A sanctuary is a "holy place," which, like the ground at the burning bush, is made holy

NOW WHAT?

What are the implications of God living in you for your daily life?

How can you remind yourself that God is living in you? What are the consequences if you forget this truth?

Have you ever felt the Holy Spirit's impact on your thoughts or emotions or conscience? How do you know?

GOING DEEPER

Read Hebrews 9:11-14.

These verses talk more about Christ's work for us. Think through how they fit with the other passages we studied in this lesson. It will help to know that the word "tent" is the same as the word "tabernacle" in Hebrew.

What is the "greater and more perfect tent" (vs. 11)? Why did Christ need blood to enter into the "holy place"?

Why do you suppose God wants to dwell with men? Why did he go to such great lengths to live first in a tent, then a house, and now in us?

MEMORY VERSE FOR THE WEEK

Hebrews 10:19-22

by the Lord's presence (3:5). The presence of the Lord in Israel's midst will be borne out in the arrangement of the camp around the tabernacle (see Num. 2:1-34).

1 Cor. 6:19-20 temple of the Holy Spirit within you. The Spirit of the Lord lives within individual Christians (v. 17), making each Christian's body a temple just as the church, corporately conceived, is also a temple where God's Spirit dwells (3:16). You are not your own. As with other gifts from God (4:2, 7), Christians are to exercise responsible stewardship over their bodies. bought with a price. The image is borrowed from the slave market (7:23; see also Rom. 6:17-18), Christ's blood being the purchase price (Eph. 1:7; see also 1 Pet. 1:19; Rev. 5:9).

WEEK 7 DEVOTIONS

Spending time in God's Word is essential to growing in your faith in Jesus. The REAP Bible study method is a simple tool that you can use during your quiet times.

READ - Take the time to carefully read the Bible passage with an open heart, asking the Holy Spirit to give you words of encouragement, direction and correction.

EXAMINE - Grab your journal and write out your answers to the questions. Make note of what stands out to you.

APPLY - A great question to ask is "How will I live differently and be different today because of what I just read?"

PRAY - Then, talk with God about the passage and your application. Ask Him to change your heart and life based on the time you've spent in His Word.

DAY 1 — 1 CORINTHIANS 6:19-20

Now, under the New Covenant, the Lord dwells within us. Prior, where did the Lord dwell? If those areas were held so sacred, shouldn't we hold our bodies as sacred as well?

How may I live differently by actively remembering my body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, God dwelling in me?

DAY 2 — LEVITICUS 20:26 & 1 PETER 1:13-16

Keeping in mind that we are temples of the Holy Spirit, how might pursuing holiness take on more importance in your life?

According to the passage in 1 Peter, what were we like before we were in Christ—prior to becoming a temple of the Holy Spirit?

DAY 3 — ROMANS 8:6-9

What does the mind of the sinful man bring? What does the mind controlled by the Spirit bring?

How are the mind of sinful man and the mind controlled by the Spirit in conflict?

DAY 4 — EPHESIANS 1:13

What brings about the Holy Spirit to dwell in us?

How does being sealed in the Holy Spirit change the way I live?

DAY 5 — TITUS 3:3-7

Using the terminology from this passage, why are we saved?

The generous outpouring of the Holy Spirit on us who believe in Christ brings about what in our lives?

What change?

DAY 6 — ROMANS 14:17

What does this verse say comes about by life for the kingdom of heaven?

What do you think it means to live with joy in the Holy Spirit? What does that look like?

DAY 7 — 1 CORINTHIANS 3:16-17 & 1 TIMOTHY 4:8

What does 1 Timothy say is of "some value"? What does 1 Timothy say is more important?

Why is godliness more important according to 1 Timothy?

Good Deeds

I am: An Image Bearer

EPHESIANS 2:8-10

WEEK

8

Key Questions and Concepts

God's plan and purpose is for us to reflect Him.

Live differently because of who we are.

While works and deeds do not save us, they do have a very important place in our lives.

People's eternity is at stake. Your role as an image-bearer of God can have a huge impact on those around you. Will you be found faithful? Will you be found in his image?

Imagine this...you eat five meals a day for one year and never leave your house. You never exercise, never play outside; you just sit on the couch, watch TV, and eat. What is likely to happen to you? Such a way of life is crazy, right? The purpose of eating food is so that your body can gain the energy it needs to accomplish tasks in life.

Sometimes we fall into the same trap in our Christian lives. We eat and drink of the Spirit of God by going to church, having quiet times, and doing Bible studies; but we never accomplish anything in our faith. Through the life-giving Son, we are fashioned to walk a path of righteous action to bring glory to the Father.

*Does God just redeem us, love us, seal us, and free us just so we can be happy Christians?
What place do good works have in the Christian life?*

God's plan and purpose is for you to reflect Him. To reflect him you have to know what he looks like. Hebrews 1:3 tells us what God is like? Look at the life, character, and heart of His Son—"the exact representation of His being." Christ is no longer here among us in a physical sense, but our purpose remains the same—to bring glory to God by living a life that reflects Him. We must study the Word to know Christ and apply His characteristics to our hearts and lives.

Yet, you don't have the strength to do it on your own. If you want to live a life that bears the image of Christ, you must live your life in the power of the Holy Spirit. Let God rule your body, your mind, and your heart, and you will be a wonderful image-bearer for the Lord.

We have spent time over the past few weeks focused on understanding who we are, however, today's lesson challenges us to live differently because of who we are! This week we will learn what it means to bear God's image in our lives.

5-Minute Commentary

Eph. 2:8 By grace refers to God's favor upon those who have transgressed his law and sinned against him. But grace may also be understood as a "power" in these verses. God's grace not only offers salvation but also secures it. Saved refers to deliverance from God's wrath at the final judgment (Rom. 5:9); "by grace you have been saved" is repeated from Eph. 2:5 for emphasis. The verb form for "have been saved" (Gk. *sesōsmenoi*, perfect tense) communicates that the Christian's salvation is fully secured. through faith. Faith is a confident trust and reliance upon Christ Jesus and is the only means by which one can obtain salvation. this. The Greek pronoun is neuter, while "grace" and "faith" are feminine. Accordingly, "this" points to the whole process of "salvation by grace through

TALK THE TALK AND WALK THE WALK

Before you jump in, how do you think an image-bearer of Christ should look? Describe their life.

Do you look like either of your parents or maybe even both of your parents? Has someone ever met you and told you that you look exactly like your mom or your dad? Or maybe you've stood by your sibling and had someone say, "You two must be brothers!" Did you know that God wants us to look like Him, too? No, it's not your physical appearance that should look like God. Deeper than the physical outward appearance, God wants our lives and our hearts to look like Him.

Read Romans 8:29.

What do you think it means to "be conformed to the likeness of His Son?"

Read James 2:14-26.

What did this person do wrong verses 15-17? What could have been a better response?

Why do you think God wants His followers to do good works?

Unscramble the words below to discover the relationship with faith and works.

iafht tuwihto eesdd si adde

What do you think the above statement means?

Scripture teaches in Ephesians 2:8-9 that we are saved by grace through faith, not by works or deeds. Yet, when you read that faith without deeds is dead, you might get a little confused. The word "justify" that James uses emphasizes the way in which works demonstrate someone has been declared righteous by God through faith. True faith always produces salvation and works.

Look at the equation below, and circle the correct "formula".

Faith + Works = Salvation

Faith = Salvation + Works

While works and deeds do not save us, they do have a very important place in our lives. After becoming a Christian, our faith will lead us to do good works.

Discuss

Have you ever known someone who claimed to be a Christian, but their actions didn't show it? Explain (please don't use names). We all could probably describe ourselves as one whose walk doesn't always match our talk.

Point to Make

To conform means to take the same shape of something. It's like when you played with Playdoh as a kid and shaped it into something. God wants to conform us and shape us so that our lives look like His!

Point to Make

It is extremely important to remember that good works do not save us. Good works should consistently overflow because of our changes heart and life.

Reference

Faith without deeds is dead.

faith" as being the gift of God and not something that we can accomplish ourselves. This use of the neuter pronoun to take in the whole of a complex idea is quite common in Greek (e.g., 6:1); its use here makes it clear that faith, no less than grace, is a gift of God. Salvation, therefore, in every respect, is not your own doing.

Eph. 2:9–10 Salvation is not by works. If it were, then those who are saved would get the glory created ... for good works. Salvation is not based on works, but the good works Christians do are the result and consequence of God's new creation work.

ONLY GOD DESERVES THE PRAISE

If good works in our lives do not save us but are a result of our faith, why do we do them? Is it so we can feel good about ourselves? So that other people can look at us and applaud us? If we are not careful, we can all fall into this trap.

Read Matthew 5:16.

How will people respond when they see your good deeds?

How can you give God the credit when you perform a good deed?

What are some results that could come from your giving credit to God in these situations?

A CASE FOR FAITH

Read Acts 26:20.

This is Paul defending himself from the accusations against him. What did Paul say would prove their repentance?

How do you think good deeds prove repentance?

When we claim to be a Christian, our life should be led by the Holy Spirit. Before we became a Christian, we were ruled by our sinful nature—we could not help but sin. Thankfully, when the Holy Spirit filled our lives, we can become different.

REFLECTING GOD'S IMAGE IN DIFFICULT TIMES

Read John 16:33.

Think about the last hard time you faced. It may have been within your family or your group of friends, or maybe even with a teacher. Write about it briefly here.

Discuss

Read Acts 12:21-23. What happened? Why did Herod die? We need to be careful to give credit where credit is due. Only God is worthy of praise. When we do good works in our lives, let's always remember to give praise to God.

Definition

Repentance means to turn away from sin.

Point to Make

You are never promised an easy life. In fact, the Bible says that you will have trials and hard times.

James 2:14–26 Faith without Works Is Dead. James continues the theme that hearing/faith must lead to doing/works. Although it may seem as if James is contradicting Paul's "by grace you have been saved through faith ... not a result of works" (Eph. 2:8–9), in reality there is no dichotomy between faith and works, for Paul and James would agree that the basis of salvation is grace alone through faith, with works not the basis but the necessary result thereof (Eph. 2:10). Faith that is not accompanied by action is useless and dead, unable to save.

James 2:15–16 An illustration of what faith without works looks like in everyday life. In itself the phrase Go in peace, be warmed and filled is a pious wish and prayer for the welfare of the poor, but

The way Christians handle problems tells the watching world a lot about God. When you are in a difficult situation, you have the greatest opportunity to show Christ to others. People are always watching—they want to know if God is real in hard times. Can God still be trusted and loved when times get tough?

Being an image-bearer of Christ does not mean that you have to put on a fake smile and pretend things are great. You can be honest about your struggle and still have faith in God.

Read 2 Corinthians 1:3-4.

What do you think this Scripture means?

It may not be right away, but God never wastes anything in your life. He won't waste your difficulties, so please don't waste them either. He wants to comfort you so that you can be an ambassador for his comfort to others.

ETERNAL IMPACT

Read Matthew 28:18-20.

What is the command for every image-bearer of Christ?

Hopefully, you have been challenged this week to examine your life to see if you are bearing the image of God to the world around you.

Read Colossians 3:9-10.

Your new self is your new life in Christ. When you decided to receive Jesus as your personal Lord and Savior, you became a new creation. Each day you have a decision about which way you will live. Will you live like your old self, or will you live like your new self? Only one of these reflects the image of God!

Once again, why do you think it is important for you to bear the image of God to the world?

People's eternity is at stake. Your role as an image-bearer of God can have a huge impact on those around you. Will you be found faithful? Will you be found in his image?

Discuss

Have you ever been amazed by someone who seemed to handle a really difficult situation in a positive way?

Point to Make

When we turn to God with our hard times and learn to trust and depend on Him, He will comfort us. Then, whatever difficulty you may be facing—whether it is your parents' divorce, a friend or family member's illness, or another big disappointment—that difficulty becomes an opportunity for you to help someone else going through the same thing.

Encourage

Ask God to help you learn to trust Him and be willing to help other people around you. People will always listen to someone who has been through the same thing themselves.

in reality it is a cop-out, masking a refusal to help the person in need. There is no good (Gk. *ophelos*, "profit, honor") in such a prayer. "What good is it?" frames vv. 14–16.

James 2:17 dead. Useless, without any life at all. It brings no results, and cannot lead to salvation (v. 14). There can be no true faith that fails to produce works (here seen as care for the poor, but including good works of all kinds).

James 2:21–26 Examples of Abraham and Rahab. James continues his rebuttal by citing the examples of Abraham and Rahab, who were both shown by their deeds to be righteous.

NOW WHAT?

After learning about a Christ follower's role in reflecting God's image to the world how has the Lord challenged you this week?

What area or areas of your life need to look more like God?

What difficulties have you faced that could be used to reflect His glory?

PRAYER: Take time today to confess your sins to God. Tell Him that you are sorry for the times you have stolen His glory by accepting praise from others. Ask Him to help you give Him the credit and praise in all situations in your life. Even though it may be hard to be an image-bearer for God, it is not impossible. Thank God that He helps you to do this. Ask Him to help you remember to depend on Him in your everyday life. Ask God to help you put off the old self with its sinful desires each day and put on the new self, which allows you to be an image-bearer for God!

GOING DEEPER

PRAYER: Ask God to show you ways that you are like or have been like the person in James 2 who did not help the brother or sister in need. Ask God to convict you and help you live out your faith by doing good deeds for people in need.

Respond to the following statement: "You are the only Bible some people will ever read."

What good works is God showing you that you were created specifically for?

MEMORY VERSE FOR THE WEEK

Matthew 5:16

James 2:22 faith was completed by his works. James does not disagree that faith alone saves (Rom. 3:28). "Completed" (Gk. *eteleiōthē*) often means "bring to maturity." Full-grown and genuine faith is seen in the good deeds it produces.

James 2:24 not by faith alone. James again seems at first to contradict Paul's teaching that one is justified by faith alone (Rom. 3:28), but the two are compatible. For James, "faith alone" means a bogus kind of faith, mere intellectual agreement without a genuine personal trust in Christ that bears fruit in one's life. On justified, see note on James 2:21. James, in agreement with Paul, argues that true faith is never alone, that it always produces works (cf. Eph. 2:10).

WEEK 8 DEVOTIONS

Spending time in God's Word is essential to growing in your faith in Jesus. The REAP Bible study method is a simple tool that you can use during your quiet times.

READ - Take the time to carefully read the Bible passage with an open heart, asking the Holy Spirit to give you words of encouragement, direction and correction.

EXAMINE - Grab your journal and write out your answers to the questions. Make note of what stands out to you.

APPLY - A great question to ask is "How will I live differently and be different today because of what I just read?"

PRAY - Then, talk with God about the passage and your application. Ask Him to change your heart and life based on the time you've spent in His Word.

DAY 1 — EPHESIANS 2:10

What word does Paul use to describe ourselves?

How do you feel about that? How does being the handiwork of the Almighty God affect our mindset and actions?

DAY 2 — MATTHEW 5:16

Bottom line—what are our good deeds meant to do?

If we bear Christ's name, a name greater than any other, how should that affect the way we live every day?

DAY 3 — EPHESIANS 5:10 & LUKE 4:1

In living a life of love, what does the verse from Ephesians tell us to do?

If Christ obediently followed the Holy Spirit, and we are told to be imitators of God, then how will we imitate Christ in this circumstance?

DAY 4 — MATTHEW 28:16-20

Now that we have a choice to bear the image of Christ, Jesus calls us to go do what?

Aside from our brothers and sisters in Christ, are we alone in our mission?

DAY 5 — 1 PETER 4:12-19

What do we receive if we endure sufferings for bearing the name of Christ? Why?

According to this passage, what are we to do when we face suffering?

DAY 6 — JOHN 4:23-24

What does this passage describe as "true worship"?

Explain the significance of worshipping in spirit and truth if "God is spirit."

DAY 7 — ROMANS 6:13

Based on verse 19, to what does righteousness lead?

According to verse 22, to what does sanctification lead?

The Power of Your Story

I am: A Disciple

ACTS 22:1-21

WEEK

9

Key Questions and Concepts

Develop a personal testimony.

What is your responsibility as an individual who has received grace and mercy from Jesus?

Sharing your personal story of faith is a really exciting opportunity that you have each day. There are people all around you that are more willing to listen to your story than what you probably expect. Today we are going to spend some time crafting our stories so we can feel confident to share with others the difference Jesus has made in our lives.

***What excites you about sharing your story with others?
Have you ever written out your testimony?***

Paul gives us a glimpse in the book of Acts how he shared his testimony. Before you have an opportunity to write your own story take a moment to look at Paul's testimony as you consider how to tell your story.

His Life Before (Acts 22:1-5)

- Paul describes where he came from and his personal history.
- He spoke in a language and in a way that his listeners could understand.
- Paul describes what he thought and did before he became a believer.
- He gave specific, yet appropriate, examples of what your life was like (attitudes, needs, problems) before Christ.
- He established himself as a credible witness in the minds of those listening.
- He identified himself with those that were listening.

How He Met Jesus (Acts 22:6-13)

- He shared his encounter with Jesus.
- Paul explained how he became a believer.
- He understood he could trust Christ as the payment for his sins.
- His listeners clearly understood how he became a follower of Jesus.
- He shared how someone helped him understand.

How His Life Changed After (Acts 22:14-21)

- Paul explained how becoming a believer changed his life.
- He explained his calling on his future to make disciples. It is the same for you and me.
- He showed repentance by following through with baptism.
- He began to be disciplined.

This week you are going to write out your testimony or story. After we finish today, go home and type up your full testimony and be ready to share it next week in Discipleship Community.

5-Minute Commentary

Acts 21:40–22:21 Paul Addresses the Jewish Crowd. Paul's address to the Jewish crowd sought to establish what he had come to the temple to prove in the first place—his faithfulness to his Jewish heritage. He gave his personal testimony: his former zeal for Judaism (22:3–5), his encounter with the risen Lord (22:6–11), his commission (22:12–16), and his vision in the temple (22:17–21).

Acts 22:2 Just as Paul got the tribune's attention with his Greek (21:37), he quieted the Jewish crowd by speaking Aramaic, the most common language spoken by ordinary Jews in Jerusalem.

THE POWER OF YOUR STORY

We all love stories, especially the stories that give us an inside look at someone else's life. As a child of God, you have a powerful story to tell. Sharing how you came to know Jesus and the difference Christ has made in your life can help others discover how they, too, can know God personally. A carefully prepared testimony, empowered by the Holy Spirit, is your best tool you can use anywhere to effectively share the message of God's love. Do not dismiss how your story has tremendous influence through the Holy Spirit.

The challenge every Christian faces is how to share a lifetime of experiences in just a few minutes, and communicate the significance of dependent faith in a way others can understand. That is reason this lesson includes template and some tips to help you draft your personal testimony. This purpose is to help guide you to create a synopsis of your story that you can share with individuals or groups.

Helpful Hints

- 1) Write the way you speak. You want to be able to share without reading from a piece of paper.
- 2) Practice sharing your story so it becomes natural for you.
- 3) Smile often and show enthusiasm.
- 4) Be careful not to glamorize how "bad" you used to be.
- 5) Don't harshly criticize the church, organizations, or other people.
- 6) Be realistic. Do not imply that Christ removes all of life's problems, but, rather, that He walks with you through them.
- 7) Avoid a focus on religious activities. You want to make it about Jesus and your need for Him.
- 8) Your goal is to explain specific ways Christ has changed your life and show that having Jesus in your life really does make a difference!

Read 1 Peter 3:15.

The questions below will provide a solid frame to build your story on. Try to think of specific examples, details, and Scriptures that relate to each question. In order to give well-thought-out answers, please take your time answering the questions. Remember, you are preparing to give a reason for the hope that you have in Jesus. After praying, answer the following questions in complete sentences.

BEFORE I RECEIVED JESUS CHRIST AS LORD AND SAVIOR

Describe your family. How many brothers/sisters do you have? Describe some details about your parents.

How often do you attend church as a family? How involved is your family at church?

Leader Note

The most difficult part of this lesson will be the student at your table who may not have received Jesus as their personal Lord and Savior. Be observant for the student(s) who may struggle in answering some of the questions. Help clarify the gospel for them.

Encourage

As you build trust with others in friendship, they are more willing to listen to what you value the most. Leverage that trust when sharing your testimony.

Prayer

Before you move forward in writing out your answers, ask the Holy Spirit to give you wisdom as you write. Ask God to guide your thoughts and to help you have the wisdom and courage to prepare and share your testimony.

Acts 22:3 Brought up in this city most likely means that Paul's parents moved to Jerusalem when he was very young and he was reared in the city (cf. 23:16), but some take it to mean only that Paul came to Jerusalem as a young man for his rabbinic training under Gamaliel.

Acts 22:4 On Paul's persecution of the Christians, see 8:3 and 9:1.

Acts 22:6 The light from heaven is the brightness of God's glory (cf. 26:13), as in Ezek. 1:26–28 and Rev. 1:16.

What was your life like before you trusted Jesus Christ as your Savior and Lord? What did your life revolve around? What was most important to you?

Where did you look for security, peace of mind, and happiness? How did those areas begin to let you down?

What were your attitudes, needs and problems before Jesus?

Who/what introduced you to Jesus?

What were your initial reactions to Jesus Christ?

WHEN I RECEIVED JESUS CHRIST AS LORD AND SAVIOR

When and why did you begin to feel positively about Christianity?

Why do you need Jesus Christ in your life? Explain the problem of sin.

Make it Personal

Take time to write out your own answers to the questions as a model for the students.

Encourage

Ask students to do the best they can to answer each question. Remind students their objective at this point is to write freely without editing to just get all their ideas on paper.

Acts 22:12–14 For his Jewish hearers, Paul stressed the piety of Ananias: he kept the law strictly and was respected by all the Jews.

Acts 22:16 Be baptized and wash away your sins does not imply that the physical act of baptism itself cleanses people spiritually from sin, for Ananias gives Paul two distinct commands. Thus baptism should be viewed as an outward symbol of the cleansing from sin that occurs when someone trusts in Jesus (cf. 1 Pet. 3:21). Belief leads to cleansing, but baptism pictures this. Because baptism pictures the reality, the two are often discussed as if they belong to the same act. As Heb. 10:19–22 shows, the believer's sins are "washed away" through faith in "the blood of Jesus," with the result

When/where did you trust Jesus as your Savior? How did you come to accept Christ and give Him complete control of your life?

What does it require for you to trust Jesus as your personal Savior?

What feelings did you struggle with right before you accepted Christ?

Why did you go ahead and choose to follow Christ?

AFTER I RECEIVED JESUS CHRIST AS LORD AND SAVIOR

How is your life different since you became a Christ-follower?

What changes have you see in your life as a result of your relationship with Jesus? In your attitudes? In your actions?

How long did it take before you noticed any changes?

What does knowing Jesus Christ mean in your life now?

Discuss

Explain what it means to be a Christian. Encourage students to use Scripture to answer this question.

that the believer is "sprinkled clean" and "washed with pure water."

Acts 22:17 in the temple, I fell into a trance. This must have taken place upon Paul's visit to Jerusalem after his conversion (9:26). For the Jewish audience, it placed Paul's experience "on holy ground," in the temple, much like Isaiah's call (Isa. 6:1–13).

Acts 22:18 him. That is, the Lord Jesus (see v. 19).

1 Pet. 3:15–17 Believers should always be ready to provide a rationale for their faith, but they should

Describe specific changes and illustrations about the changes Christ has made in your life.

How are you motivated differently?

What is God doing in your life right now?

Why would you encourage someone else to become a follower of Jesus?

You did it! You have answered some key questions to help you put your testimony together. Now all you have to do is get on the computer, look back over your answers and type your testimony in paragraph form. As you look back over what you wrote today consider if your answers will be easy for a non-Christian to understand. Did you use too many “churchy” words that will not make sense to someone that was not raised in church? Go back and make changes if needed.

Just like Paul shared his testimony with the crowds in Acts 22, next week you are going to share your story with your DC group. Before doing that, practice sharing your testimony with your parents this week.

Be creative in sharing your life! Enjoy sharing with others the incredible story of what Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, is doing in you!

do so winsomely and righteously. And if they keep a good conscience, any accusations against them will prove groundless, and their accusers will be put to shame. It is sometimes God’s will that Christians suffer for doing good.

NOW WHAT?

What is your responsibility as an individual who has received grace and mercy from Jesus?

With whom do you plan to share your testimony within the next two weeks?

When and where do you plan share you story with the individual(s) listed above?

PRAYER: Ask God to help you share your testimony with boldness. Pray for the individuals you listed above to listen to your testimony with an open heart and mind. Thank God that you have a testimony to share! Ask for help to clearly communicate the truth to other people through sharing your testimony.

GOING DEEPER

What is the difference between being a fully devoted follower of Jesus and being religious?

How can you continue keep your testimony fresh as you grow older?

When is your story complete?

MEMORY VERSE FOR THE WEEK

1 Peter 3:15

WEEK 9 DEVOTIONS

Spending time in God's Word is essential to growing in your faith in Jesus. The REAP Bible study method is a simple tool that you can use during your quiet times.

READ - Take the time to carefully read the Bible passage with an open heart, asking the Holy Spirit to give you words of encouragement, direction and correction.

EXAMINE - Grab your journal and write out your answers to the questions. Make note of what stands out to you.

APPLY - A great question to ask is "How will I live differently and be different today because of what I just read?"

PRAY - Then, talk with God about the passage and your application. Ask Him to change your heart and life based on the time you've spent in His Word.

DAY 1 — JOHN 3:25-31

How does John speak of God in his testimony?

Where does John place himself in respect to God? What is the focus of John's testimony?

DAY 2 — LUKE 2:8-9, 15-20

Does the overlap of the shepherd's testimonies make their testimonies more powerful? What might this say about the collective testimony of the church?

We know what the shepherds had heard and seen. What have you heard and seen God do in your life?

DAY 3 — LUKE 17:11-19

How does the fact that the one leper, that continued praising God even after he fulfilled his obligation to Christ's command, strengthen his testimony as a faithful believer in Christ?

How does the urgency exhibited by the lepers in sharing their testimonies translate to the urgent need for my testimony to be shared?

DAY 4 — LUKE 18:35-43

How did the beggar live as a witness to those around him in reference to what God had done for him?

Explain how this is a testimony and more than just a miracle story.

DAY 5 — LAMENTATIONS 3:12-24

How is Jeremiah's testimony more powerful in light of his voiced struggles in the previous chapters?

How does Jeremiah's attitude on the enduring characteristics of God show the hope that he has in his testimony?

DAY 6 — PSALM 138

What does David do first in his testimony? How is this necessary for our own testimony?

Explain how David portrays his need for God within this testimony.

DAY 7 — LUKE 26:32-33, 39-43

What does the second criminal recognize about himself and the other criminal?

How does the second criminal react to the first criminal's statement to Jesus? What words would you use to describe the second criminal's attitude in doing so?

My Story for Reason and Hope

1 PETER 3:15

WEEK

10

Key Questions and Concepts

Practice sharing their personal testimony.

Leader Note

The most difficult part of this lesson will be the student at your table who may not have received Jesus as their personal Lord and Savior. A student may not have an “after Jesus” part of their story yet. This is an opportunity for the student to hear others and how Christ has impacted their life. It will be very important to create a safe place for students to be honest about where they are at in their journey of faith.

Encourage

Help students to be kind and listen well to each other.

Clarify

Delineate between being a Christian and growing up in a Christ-centered home.

Last week we spent our time crafting our stories after spending a significant amount of time over the recent weeks learning how the identity of Christ influences our identity. Today is when all of that comes together when we get to share about our identity with each other.

Sharing your personal story of faith is a really exciting opportunity that you have each day. There are people all around you that are more willing to listen to your story than what you probably expect. The purpose of sharing our stories is so we can feel confident to share with others the difference Jesus has made in our lives.

*What has this experience taught you?
How did this challenge you really know what you believe?*

As we sit back and listen intently to each other's testimonies we have an opportunity to hear about God at work in each other's lives. You may find that you will learn something new about the character of God by how he has impacted one of your friends.

If you have not placed your faith and trust in Christ, repented of your sin, and have been baptized to show your faith may today be the day that you make that decision.

As we share today we have to be aware of the number of people in our group because we want everyone to be able to share their story. It may be the first time that you have shared your story with someone other than your family. Let's be kind, considerate, and honoring to one another and not gossip about others or their past when we leave this group today.

We will use the questions we talked about last week along with this basic outline as we describe our own personal life:

- 1) Before I received Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior.
- 2) When I received Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior.
- 3) After I received Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior.
- 4) Where am I at in my thoughts about God?

Today should be a joyful experience because you get to share with others the incredible story of what Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, is doing in you!

5-Minute Commentary

1 Pet. 3:15–17 Believers should always be ready to provide a rationale for their faith, but they should do so winsomely and righteously. And if they keep a good conscience, any accusations against them will prove groundless, and their accusers will be put to shame. It is sometimes God's will that Christians suffer for doing good.

LOOKING BACK

You have done a great job this semester as you have learned more about your identity in Christ. It is such a privilege and joy to study Scripture. Take some time to reflect on all that you have learned during this study.

How do you feel now that you have completed this study?

Describe how your future will be impacted because of this study.

So now you are thinking, okay, now that I've completed this study, I know everything I need to know now, right?

Psalms 119:55 says, "In the night I remember your name, O LORD, and I will keep your law." Discipleship isn't about completing a study. It is about a lifestyle of learning and living as you follow Jesus throughout your lifetime. What you have learned throughout this study will become more important to your Christian life in the months, even years, to come. Think about some of the major concepts that you have learned and can live out.

- Jesus' identity is supreme.
- We must understand Jesus' identity before we understand how his identity influences ours.
- Our answer to the question of "who do you say I am" does not change his identity, however, it does change ours.
- Humans are created with special qualities unlike anything else in all of creation.
- The purpose of being a human is to represent God in the world.
- Every person has sin and death because of Adam's sin.
- Until we understand and admit that sin is a very big part of our identity, we'll never understand the importance of what Christ has done for us.
- We were slaves to sin, and Christ bought us with His blood.
- Jesus alone provides redemption.
- Christ has truly taken our sins, clenching on to them is not pleasing to God.
- When we feel we need to punish ourselves, we are actually devaluing Jesus' sacrifice.
- God is willing to embrace us no matter the severity of the sin, don't choose to recoil in shame, but come to him in comfort.
- What God promises his people is not earthly blessings, but heavenly ones.
- Only because the work of Jesus on the cross may God dwell within us.
- The Holy God who created the universe wants to dwell with us.
- God's plan and purpose is for us to reflect Him.
- While works and deeds do not save us, they do have a very important place in our lives.
- Developed a personal testimony.

Wow! That's a lot! Now it's time to continue to live out what you have learned in this study.

ABIDE IN ME

LIFE IN CHRIST ESSENTIALS

In John 15 “abide in me” means to continue in a daily, personal relationship with Christ, characterized by trust, prayer, obedience, and joy.

The goal of this study is to learn the core principles for every follower to live out in Christ. The content will challenge students to take their next step in their faith journey and encourage them to live an abundant life in Christ.

The Life in Christ Essentials

Abide in Me

JOHN 15:1-11

WEEK

1

Key Questions and Concepts

A Christian is an individual that abides in Christ by faith and produces fruit.

Apart from Christ we can do nothing.

Imagine for a moment what it would be like to have a large garden in your back yard. Think about the tomatoes, potatoes, carrots, peppers, squash, pumpkins, apples, lots of other vegetables and tons of different kinds of berries. Imagine how having a garden like that would impact your family life from April to October.

Feel free to insert your own personal story about gardening.

There would be planting, watering, weeding, fertilizing, harvesting, and eating that would have to be done, and everyone in your home most likely would participate in it. You would probably spend many hours on your knees in the garden, pulling weeds, planting seeds, and watering little seedlings. If any of you or your families have done this, you know how much work it takes for a garden to grow well.

Imagine going out to your garden, cutting off a branch from an apple tree and bringing it into your house. Would that branch grow any apples? What if you planted it in a pot of soil, put it next to the window, watered it every day, and gave it fertilizer. Would it grow any apples? What if you went to the store and bought a bag of apples, and brought them home and tied them to the branch in your living room. Would they grow? Of course this is a silly thing to do. We all know that branches need to stay connected to the trunk of a tree in order to grow. If a branch is cut off, then it won't grow.

***What does an apple tree need to produce good apples?
Why does a branch need to stay connected to the tree in order to produce fruit?***

Jesus uses this same metaphor to describe how Christians must stay connected to him in order to "bear fruit" in their lives. This morning, we start a new study on the Essentials of Life in Christ. They are Prayer, Scripture, Authentic Faith, Obedient Follower, Disciple Maker, Generous Living, and Transformational Community. These essentials describe what it means to be connected to Christ, and to bear fruit. We'll study one each Sunday, starting next week.

This morning, we're going to study John 15 and learn about what it means to have "Life in Christ." Just as a tree branch must stay connected to the trunk in order to grow, so Christians must stay connected to Christ in order to grow.

5-Minute Commentary

John 15:1-17 Jesus' allegory of the vine and the branches is at the very heart of the Farewell Discourse (13:31-16:33). The OT frequently uses the vineyard or vine as a symbol for Israel, God's covenant people, especially in two "vineyard songs" in Isaiah (Isa. 5:1-7; 27:2-6). However, Israel's failure to produce fruit resulted in divine judgment. Jesus, by contrast, is "the true vine," and his followers abide in him and produce fruit.

John 15:2 The divine vinedresser does two things to ensure maximum fruit production: (1) he removes unfruitful branches, and (2) he prunes all the others (cf. Heb. 6:7-8). Does not bear fruit seems

ESSENTIALS OF LIFE IN CHRIST

For the next eight weeks we're going to study what we call the "Essentials of Life in Christ." The seven essentials are: Prayer, Scripture, Authentic Faith, Obedient Follower, Disciple Maker, Generous Living, and Transformational Community. These are things that we believe are "essential" in the life of every Christian. Theologians often call this area of theology the study of "the Christian life." At Carmel, we call it "Life in Christ."

Today we're going to answer two important questions: "What is a Christian?" and "What is the Christian Life?" Once we answer these questions, we can learn how each Essential fits into the picture.

WHAT IS A CHRISTIAN?

You probably hear and use the word "Christian" all the time. There is Christian music, Christian churches, Christian books, and Christians. What exactly does it mean to be a Christian? How do you know if you are really a Christian? What makes someone a Christian?

What is a Christian?

You might be surprised to know that the Bible only uses the word Christian three times. Instead, it refers to people being "in Christ" or "with Christ." These phrases occur more than 200 times in the New Testament! Theologians call this idea the doctrine of "union with Christ."

UNION WITH CHRIST IS THE CENTRAL TRUTH OF THE WHOLE DOCTRINE OF SALVATION.
—JOHN MURRAY

In other words, a Christian is someone who is "in Christ." If you are in Christ, then you are a Christian. If you are not in Christ, then you are not a Christian.

Make a list of the different ways that we use the word "in."

Which of these ways might apply to "in Christ?"

At different times, the Bible uses "in Christ" to mean "by Christ," "with Christ," "through Christ," or "on behalf of Christ." Whenever you see the phrase "in Christ," stop and think about what it means in the passage that you are reading.

One of the clearest teachings about being "in Christ" is found in John 15. Jesus uses a plant metaphor, just like the one we talked about in our introduction today. This passage will help us understand what it means for us to be in Christ.

to indicate that the person symbolized by such a branch is not a true believer (see John 15:6, 8). In that case, in me is just a loose connection needed to make the metaphor of a vine work, reflecting a claim to be Christ's that is not genuine and not implying actual regeneration or true belief. This then would be one of several verses in John showing that not all who follow Jesus for a time and hear his teaching are genuine believers (cf. 6:66; also 13:10–11 on Judas).

John 15:4 Abide in me means to continue in a daily, personal relationship with Jesus, characterized by trust, prayer, obedience (see v. 10), and joy. And I in you is a phrase without an explicit verb, but it probably is an abbreviated way of saying, "See that I abide in you"; that is, "Safeguard your relation-

Point to Make

A Christian is someone who "abides in Christ."

Reference

Christian is found in Acts 11:26; 26:28 and 1 Peter 4:16.

Reference

"In" can sometimes be used with the meaning of 'on', 'through', 'by', or 'with.'

IN CHRIST, IS LIFE

Read John 15:1-11.

Circle every place in this passage that Jesus uses the words "in me" or "in you."

What does it mean to say that a branch is "in" the vine?

What happens if a branch is separated from the vine? What does a branch receive from the vine?

How does this relate to being a Christian?

For you and me, to be "in Christ" is to be connected to Jesus Christ the same way that branch is connected to the vine.

How do we get connected to Christ?

ABIDE IN ME

Throughout these verses Jesus uses the word "abide" (some versions translate this as "remain") combined with "in me." So in verse 4 he says, "Abide in me, and I in you." Underline "abide" or "remain" every time you see it in these verses.

Look through these verses and write down the results of "abiding" in Christ.

What is "pruning" and how does it relate to abiding in Christ?

Write down the consequences for those who do not "abide" in Christ.

What can we learn from these verses about how to abide (remain, stay) in Christ?

Point to Make

Talk about the relationship between a vine and its branches.

Point to Make

Conceptually, the big idea here is that spiritual life comes from Christ. To be "in Christ" is to have spiritual life.

Reference

See John 14:6. Ultimately we get "in Christ" by faith.

Discuss

Talk about the importance of John 15:6.

ship with me so that I continue to abide fully in you." The "in" terminology in the present passage refers back to OT covenant theology, including prophetic texts regarding a future new covenant (see Ex. 25:8; 29:45; Lev. 26:11-12; Ezek. 37:27-28; 43:9). The repeated references to fruit bearing (also John 15:5, 8) underscore that this is God's primary purpose in creation (Gen. 1:11-12, 22, 28) and in redemption (cf. John 15:8, 16). The OT prophets envisioned a time when God's people would "blossom and put forth shoots and fill the whole world with fruit" (Isa. 27:6; cf. Hos. 14:4-8).

John 15:5-6 Apart from me you can do nothing does not mean "nothing at all," for unbelievers of course carry on their ordinary activities of life apart from Christ. Rather, it means "nothing of eternal

THAT YOU BEAR MUCH FRUIT

Jesus commands Christians to “abide” in him and He also gives a reason in verse 8. If you planted an apple tree, you would hope to eat apples from it. If the tree never produced any apples, what would you do? You might cut it down, or you might wonder if it is really an apple tree?

What does it mean for a Christian to “bear much fruit?”

Why does Jesus use the metaphor of a fruit tree? Does it help you understand what he is saying? Why or why not?

ABIDE IN CHRIST → BEAR MUCH FRUIT

WHAT IS THE CHRISTIAN LIFE?

Based on what we’ve seen in John 15, work with your small group to write a one sentence description of the Christian life.

Does this sentence describe your life? How do you abide in Christ? What fruit do you see in your life? Give personal examples.

What is the difference between a Christian and a “good person?” Can you be one and not the other? Why or why not? Which one are you?

The “Life in Christ Essentials” that we will study for the next seven weeks are the way that Carmel Baptist Church has chosen to summarize what the Christian life looks like. Prayer, Scripture, Authentic Faith, Obedient Follower, Disciple Maker, Generous Living, and Transformational Community are specific ways that we “abide in Christ” and “bear much fruit.” Learning about these essentials will equip you to live an abundant life in Christ, abiding in Him and bearing much fruit.

Discuss

How does James 2:14-26 relate to John 15:8?

Point to Make

Focus on using biblical words here: Example: “The Christian life is a life in Christ which bears much fruit and glorifies God.” We want to help students learn to summarize the passage they just read.

value,” or an inability to produce spiritual fruit. The person who does not abide in me is an unbeliever who does not have a personal faith in Christ.

John 15:7 Two conditions are given for answered prayer: abiding in Jesus, and his words abiding in believers (thus transforming their thinking). Elsewhere Jesus says that believers must ask in his name (i.e., in accord with his character and for his glory; see 14:13–14; 16:23–24). If God’s people truly abide in Jesus, they will desire what he desires and will pray according to his words, and those prayers will be pleasing to him.

NOW WHAT?

Think about what it means to “abide in Christ.” Does this describe your life? Why or why not?

Write down a few areas of fruit in your life. Use Galatians 5, Ephesians 4, and Colossians 3 to help you.

Write down a few areas in your life that are not bearing fruit. Why do you think you aren’t bearing fruit in these areas? What might need to be pruned from your life?

Spend some time asking God to help you abide in Him, and so bear much fruit.

GOING DEEPER

Read John 15:5. Think about some areas where you may be trying to live without “abiding” in Christ.

Read Ephesians 4. How does this passage relate to John 15 and what can we learn from it?

Can a person bear fruit without abiding in Christ? Why or why not?

MEMORY VERSE FOR THE WEEK

“Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.” —John 15:5

John 15:8-9 God is glorified not by praise and worship alone but by his followers also bearing much fruit for the advancement of his kingdom on earth. Here again, fruit bearing is evidence of being true believers, or being Jesus’ disciples. Abide in my love. Mutual love between believers and Christ is another element of this “abiding” relationship.

John 15:10-11 Obedience is not to be equated with drudgery; it is all about joy. that my joy may be in you. Just as Jesus had great joy in obeying his Father even in the midst of opposition, so Christians will have joy in obedience.

WEEK 1 DEVOTIONS

Spending time in God's Word is essential to growing in your faith in Jesus. The REAP Bible study method is a simple tool that you can use during your quiet times.

READ - Take the time to carefully read the Bible passage with an open heart, asking the Holy Spirit to give you words of encouragement, direction and correction.

EXAMINE - Grab your journal and write out your answers to the questions. Make note of what stands out to you.

APPLY - A great question to ask is "How will I live differently and be different today because of what I just read?"

PRAY - Then, talk with God about the passage and your application. Ask Him to change your heart and life based on the time you've spent in His Word.

DAY 1 — JOHN 15:1-3

What is the goal of the vinedresser pruning the vine?

How does your perspective of pruning change when you see it as discipline for your good rather than punishment?

DAY 2 — JOHN 15:4

How does the branch bear fruit? To you, what does it mean to abide?

How can you strive to have moment-by-moment communion (abiding) with God in your own life?

DAY 3 — JOHN 15:5

What is your role as the branch?

If "apart from me [Christ] you can do nothing," how heavily should we rely on our Life in Christ Essential of Prayer?

DAY 4 — JOHN 15:6-7

We are not living out our purpose as the branch if we are not abiding in Christ. Are you truly living out your purpose?

What does it mean for God's words to abide in you?

DAY 5 — JOHN 15:8-9

How is the Father glorified?

What would change in your life if you truly believed that God loves you the way he says he does?

DAY 6 — JOHN 15:10

How does your ability to abide in Christ impact your ability to obey His commandments?

How does it comfort you to know that Jesus is your perfect example for living this out?

DAY 7 — JOHN 15:11

God desires that you would abide in him for your good and his glory. How does this make you joyful?

In what ways are you settling for anything less than the abundant life Christ has called you to through abiding in him?

Essential #1: Prayer

Our Response to God

LUKE 11:1

WEEK

2

Key Questions and Concepts

Our prayers are our personal response to who God is.

God wants us to pray because he wants us to have a relationship with him.

We pray because God invites us to be part of His story through prayer.

What was the first word you learned to speak? Maybe “Dada.” Or “Mama.” For many of you it was “NO!” Maybe you were more advanced and said something like “I want pizza.” Most of you probably don’t remember your first words, and you probably haven’t thought much about how you learned to speak. You might be taking French or German or Spanish in school right now, and you’ve found that learning a language is actually pretty hard. You didn’t learn English in one semester; it took years to learn to say the most basic words, and even now you’re still learning words you have never heard before, and wrapping your mind around the grammar.

If someone asked you what the key to learning a language was, what would you say? Is it memorization? Or repetition? Or translation? Actually, the key to learning a language is simple:

Listen.

This how we all learned to speak our first language. Your mom and dad would make sounds to you, and as you listened, you began to understand that these sounds carried meaning. Sounds make words. Words make sentences. Sentences have meaning. Over time, you began to speak those words back to them. At first just one at a time. Then slowly, bit by bit, you learned to speak in whole sentences that had meaning, and your parents responded.

***Have you ever tried to learn a new language? Was it difficult?
Why would it be difficult to be friends with someone without talking to them?***

The first Essential of a Life in Christ is Prayer. Our connection to Christ will never be any deeper than our ability to speak with him. If you grew up and never learned to converse with your parents, your relationship with them would be incredibly difficult to maintain. Learning to pray is very much like learning to speak a language. The first step is to listen to what God says. As we hear what God says, we slowly learn to speak back to him what we have heard from him. Today’s lesson will help us see what happens when we learn to speak to God in response to what He has spoken to us.

5-Minute Commentary

Luke 11:1 Lord, teach us to pray. The request of the disciples is for a distinctive prayer that they can pray as his disciples. Usually referred to as “The Lord’s Prayer,” it would be better to understand this as “The Disciples’ Prayer”—i.e., as the prayer that uniquely binds them together in a community of worship and intercession—and as such it is therefore a distinctively Christian prayer. The prayer underscores the unique relationship of Christian believers to God as their “Father” (cf. Rom. 8:14–17; Gal. 4:4–7).

Ex. 32:1 make us gods who shall go before us. In the NT, Stephen’s response before the high priest

CONVERSATION WITH GOD

The first Life in Christ Essential is Prayer. Many times we say that prayer is simply “talking to God.” In one sense this is true. When we pray, we do talk to God. In another sense, “talking to God” doesn’t quite capture the importance of what happens when we pray. Think about the difference between “talking” to a customer service agent, talking to your best friend, or talking to your mom when you’ve done something wrong. Who we are talking to, and what we are talking about makes a big difference in the purpose of talking.

It may be tempting to examine the definition of prayer right away. First, let’s take a brief look at what prayer is not (this is by no means an exhaustive list):

- **Prayer is not magic.** We cannot summon God as though He were a genie, waiting to grant our wishes without regard for our circumstances or the consequences.
- **Prayer does not make demands.** While we can make requests of God in prayer, we dare not make demands. God is the Creator of the universe and does not take orders from us.
- **Prayer is for our benefit, not God’s.** We need a relationship with God, available to us through Jesus Christ and engaged primarily through prayer.
- **Prayer is not a guarantee against suffering.** Trials will come (John 16:33, 1 Peter 4:12-13).
- **Prayer is not an opportunity for us to show off.** (Matthew 6:5).

In order to develop a clear idea of prayer, we must first have a clear idea of God. This is known as the “knowledge of God.” While we cannot explore all of God’s attributes, here is a basic list:

1. **God is a personal being.** God is a person we can interact with, He has a will, and we are able to relate to Him on a meaningful level. If He were impersonal, then prayer wouldn’t be meaningful. If He were personal, but uncaring and distant, prayer wouldn’t serve a purpose.
2. **God is all-loving** (omnibenevolent). If God were personal, but uncaring or unkind, then prayer might do us more harm than good! In relation to prayer, this means that God always desires the best for us because He loves us (1 John 4:8, 16; John 3:16).
3. **God is all-powerful** (omnipotent). No prayer is beyond His ability to answer. If God were less than all-powerful, then we would have no assurance that He could answer or even hear our prayers (Luke 1:37).
4. **God is all-knowing** (omniscient). If God were limited, then He would not know all that is happening in His creation. If this were the case, He might overlook our prayers because they might be beyond His knowledge. Fortunately, the Bible is clear that God knows everything (Psalm 139:2-4; 147: 4-5; Isaiah 46:10, Matthew 6:8).
5. **God is wise and holy.** He knows what is best for us, as well as what will lead us to holiness rather than sin.
6. **He is also immanent.** God is active in His creation in a personal way, not only directing greater matters of history, but also involved in the life of everyone. This means that no prayer is too great for Him, but also that no prayer is too small for Him.
7. **God is sovereign.** God is supremely in charge of everything that happens in His universe. Nothing takes Him by surprise and nothing happens in our lives without the knowledge of God, even though we may not always understand His actions (Isaiah 55:8-9).

Discuss

Before reading today’s passage, talk with your group about the following question. It’s a tough question, and we’ll come back to it at the end of the lesson. For now, see what you can come up with.

Why do we pray?
What is the purpose (or goal) of prayer?

Discuss

Have you ever had any of these perceptions? Which one do you have a tendency to believe?

recounts aspects of Israel’s history and says of this event that Israel “thrust [Moses] aside, and in their hearts they turned to Egypt” (Acts 7:39).

Ex. 32:4 These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt. The plurals “these” and “gods” may indicate that Israel considered the calf to be another god alongside the Lord (see Aaron’s proclamation of a “feast to the Lord” in v. 5). Whatever the people may have thought, their words and their actions are clearly out of accord with both the first (20:3) and second commandments (20:4–6). This incident also prefigures one of the most disastrous acts in Israel’s later history, when Jeroboam I speaks the same words before two golden calves, which he sets up for the

In hearing and responding to our prayers, then, we are assured that God will do so on the basis of His many attributes. His personal nature, love, power, knowledge, wisdom, holiness, immanence and sovereignty all play a role in how we relate to God in prayer and how He relates to us.

PRAYER IS LIKE THIS: A PERSONAL, COMMUNICATIVE RESPONSE TO THE KNOWLEDGE OF GOD.
—TIM KELLER

So what is prayer? Prayer is a wherein we humbly communicate, worship, and sincerely seek God's face, knowing that He hears us, loves us and will respond, though not always in a manner we may expect or desire within the context of a relationship.

MOSES AND THE GOLDEN CALF

Let's look at one Old Testament example of a man whose prayer is in response to his knowledge of God. For the last 12 chapters, Moses has been up on top of a mountain, where God has been telling him what the laws will be for the people of Israel. We pick up the story as the people have begun to get bored and angry in waiting for Moses.

Read Exodus 32:1-14.

Who are the four main characters in this story? (Hint: one is a group of people)

- 1)

2)

3)

4)

What did Aaron and the people do in verses 1-6? Why did they do this?

In verses 7-10, God tells Moses what has happened and declares that he is going to destroy the people of Israel for worshipping another god. Then in verse 11-14, Moses prays as a response to God.

Read Exodus 32:11-14 again.

What reasons does Moses argue that God should not destroy the people?

- 1)
- 2)
- 3)

How did Moses' knowledge of God impact his prayer? What can we learn about Moses' relationship with God?

How does God respond to Moses prayer? Did Moses prayer change God?

Point to Make

Our prayers are our personal response to who God is.

Explain

You may need to provide even more background for students who are completely unfamiliar with the Israelites and their relationship with God leading up to this point in Scripture.

Discuss

What does Moses ask God to do? What does it mean to "re-lent"?

Point to Make

- 1) You faithfully and lovingly brought your people out of Egypt.
- 2) The Egyptians will think you didn't know the people would turn from you and you didn't love enough to overcome their sin.
- 3) Remember the covenant with Abraham.

specific purpose of creating an alternative to worshipping the Lord in Jerusalem (see 1 Kings 12:26–28).

Ex. 32:6 The people offered burnt offerings and peace offerings to the calf, which are the same offerings they had made to the Lord at the base of Mount Sinai just before they confirmed their commitment to keeping his covenant (see 24:5). the people sat down to eat and drink and rose up to play. In 1 Cor. 10:7 Paul cites this to show that simply being a part of God's people is not enough; God's own people must show faithful loyalty to him, and avoid thinking that mixing pagan practices into their lives is harmless.

This is a very strange story. God first declares He's going to destroy the Israelites, then Moses prays, and he appears to change God's mind. It is important to realize that Moses' prayer did not change God. The Bible is clear that God is unchanging, and his purposes and promises are unchanging. So what happened when Moses prayed?

GOD, WHO NEVER CHANGES, ALLOWED MOSES TO BE PART OF GOD'S PLAN TO SAVE AND PROTECT THE ISRAELITES. PRAYER IS GOD'S WAY OF INVITING US INTO HIS STORY.

What does this story teach us about God? What does this story teach us about prayer?

THE POWER OF PRAYER

Based on attributes of God we learned about today, did God know what Moses would pray before he prayed? Does God know what we will pray before we pray it?

If God knows what we are going to pray, describe two reasons why we should pray?

1) 2)

What do you pray for most often? When do you pray?

Do you trust that God hears you when you pray? Do you believe he responds? Why or why not?

Discuss these statements: Whether we pray or not makes a difference to God. Your relationship with God is only as deep as your prayer.

Do you struggle to pray? Why do you think many people have trouble with consistent prayer?

Keys to Proper Attitude in Prayer:

- We must not be haughty, but humble (Ephesians 4:2; James 4:10; 1 Peter 5:6).
- Always strive to have a prayerful attitude (1 Thessalonians 5:17).
- Our prayers must come often and regularly, not from legalistic duty, but from a humble heart, realizing our dependence on God in every aspect of our lives.

Reference

God is unchanging and his desires will be accomplished. Numbers 23:19

Point to Make

We pray because prayer is how we develop a relationship with God, our Father. We pray because God invites us to be part of His story through prayer.

Example

There are many prayers in the Bible, and the entire book of Psalms is made up of prayers. If you don't know where to start, or how to pray, start with Psalms. Pick a Psalm with your small group and close by using God's Word to pray.

Ex. 32:10–14 Moses responds to the Lord's statement about destroying the people and making a nation out of him (v. 10), appealing to God's own reputation among the Gentiles (whom God intends to bless through Israel, cf. 19:6; Gen. 12:2–3) and his promises to Abraham (Ex. 32:11–13). Moses' intercession on behalf of the people results in the Lord's relenting from consuming them entirely (v. 14; see also Num. 14:12–21). However, Moses himself will be a means of judgment on some of the people (Ex. 32:26–29), and the Lord will judge them further through a plague (v. 35).

NOW WHAT?

What are some practical obstacles that stop you from praying?

What choices do you need to make in your life to open up time for prayer?

Do you know someone who is consistent in their prayer life? Would you consider asking them to help you learn to pray?

Pick a Psalm and pray each verse back to God using your own words. Write it out in the space below.

GOING DEEPER

Paul says in 1 Thessalonians 5:17 that we ought to “pray continually.” How is that possible?

Is it easier for you to pray when things are going well or when things are going poorly? Why?

Read Romans 8:26-28.

What can you learn about prayer from these verses?

MEMORY VERSE FOR THE WEEK

“I cried aloud to the LORD, and he answered me from his holy hill.” —Psalm 3:4

WEEK 2 DEVOTIONS

Spending time in God's Word is essential to growing in your faith in Jesus. The REAP Bible study method is a simple tool that you can use during your quiet times.

READ - Take the time to carefully read the Bible passage with an open heart, asking the Holy Spirit to give you words of encouragement, direction and correction.

EXAMINE - Grab your journal and write out your answers to the questions. Make note of what stands out to you.

APPLY - A great question to ask is "How will I live differently and be different today because of what I just read?"

PRAY - Then, talk with God about the passage and your application. Ask Him to change your heart and life based on the time you've spent in His Word.

DAY 1 — EXODUS 15:1-18

What event is Moses responding to? Find and list some of the attributes of God that Moses talks about. What strikes you most about this prayer? Does it resemble your prayer? Why or why not?

DAY 2 — GENESIS 18:22-33

What are the circumstances of this conversation between God and Abraham? What is Abraham asking God to do? Why is he asking for that?

How would you describe the way that Abraham approaches (and thinks about) God's position in his prayer?

DAY 3 — NEHEMIAH 1:1-11

Nehemiah's prayer has several parts. How would you divide it up?

Are there any similarities between this prayer and Moses prayer for the Israelites in Exodus 32 (the passage for last Sunday's lesson)? What are the differences?

DAY 4 — PSALM 6

How would you describe David's mood during this prayer? Is this appropriate for prayer?

Compare verses 1-7 and 8-10. How does David end his prayer? Are you this "real" with God?

DAY 5 — PSALM 146

How would you describe the purpose of this prayer? What reasons does the Psalmist give for trusting God as opposed to man? What kind of people does the Psalmist talk about?

Why are these people important God, and why might the Psalmist bring them up?

DAY 6 — EPHESIANS 3:14-19

What five specific things does Paul pray for the Ephesians? How do these relate to each other?

Can you figure out what reason Paul is talking about in verse 14 based on the previous verses?

DAY 7 — HEBREWS 4:14-16

What claim does this passage make about Jesus (v 14-15)? What does the author say is the result of this claim? (v. 16)

Why is it significant that Jesus can sympathize with us? How should that affect our prayer?

Essential #2: Scripture

The Solid Food of God's Word

HEBREWS 5:12-14

WEEK

3

Key Questions and Concepts

Scripture is essential to our growth in Christ.

Psalms 119:105

Imagine that you had a little brother who is about to be born this afternoon. He comes home from the hospital on Tuesday weighing 8 pounds and wearing a shirt that would barely fit around your hand. Let's call your imaginary little brother Norman. On Norman's first day home from the hospital, your mom doesn't want to make dinner, so she asks you to order your favorite pizza. You call the pizza place and a few minutes later (this is a really fast pizza place) two boxes of pizza arrive at your front door. Norman is fast asleep in his little cradle, but when the pizza delivery guy rings the doorbell, Norman wakes up and starts crying. Assuming he is hungry, you reach into the fresh box of pizza, grab a slice of pizza and begin to feed it to Norman.

Why is this a ridiculous situation? Babies don't (can't!) eat pizza! Babies drink milk—only milk. Why do they drink only milk? A baby's digestive system is undeveloped and can't handle the ingredients of pizza, or any other solid food. For the first 6 months of a baby's life, he will eat only milk. However, imagine that Norman is now 1 year old, but still only drinks milk. Is that a problem? What about at two years old? Twelve years old? What if you, a teenager, only drank milk? This would be a huge problem. As you grow older, you need more nutrients to stay healthy.

*How long have ever gone without food? What did it feel like?
How do you think your body would react if you drank only milk for a week?*

Today we're going to study the second Essential of "Life in Christ:" Scripture. In today's passage, the Bible compares itself to food, and says that as baby Christians become grown up Christians, they stop drinking milk and start eating solid food. True Christians are not satisfied with drinking milk; in other words, they aren't content to learn only the basics of the Bible. True Christians desire to grow in their knowledge and understanding of God's Word, because they realize that they need the nutrients that are found in it.

5-Minute Commentary

Heb. 5:12–14 Hebrews rebukes the readers, since by now they should have matured enough in the faith to instruct others. basic principles of the oracles of God. The most fundamental truths of God (see partial list in 6:1–2; on "oracles" [Gk. *logia*], cf. Acts 7:38 and Rom. 3:2, with reference to the law). Milk versus solid food shows the readers' immaturity in the faith; they are like infants, whereas they should be mature adults, well-learned (Heb. 5:12, 14) and well-practiced (v. 14) in the faith.

1 Tim. 4:6 The referent of these things, here and in v. 11, is debated. It refers each time at least to the preceding paragraph, and it may refer more broadly to the entire letter. See also 3:14; 4:15; 5:7;

TWO KINDS OF FOOD

The second Essential of Life of Christ is Scripture. The word "Scripture" is the translation of a Greek word, which the bible uses often: γραφή (graphē). This word simply means "writings." When we use it, it refers to the 66 books that are found in the Bible. The Bible is not a magical book; it is a book of writings by men who God used to write down His own words. The Bible (Scripture) is essential because it is God's Word spoken to us. Today, we are going to think about how the Bible is part of the Christian Life.

Read Hebrews 5:12-14.

Look carefully at these verses. Does it sound like the author happy with the people he is writing to? Why or why not?

How do we know that this passage is talking about the Bible? What words does the author use to refer to the Bible?

Apparently the Hebrew people were doing something wrong with God's word. To help them understand what was wrong, the author uses a metaphor about food. Read the passage again and look at all the food references.

What two food "groups" does the author talk about? What does each one represent? Why did the author choose to use these two specific kind of foods?

These two different kinds of "food" go with two very different groups of people. The author praises one group and corrects the other group.

How does the author describe those that drink "milk"? Write down these descriptions. Why does he criticize them?

How does the author describe those that eat "solid food"? Write down these descriptions. Why does he praise them?

How does a person move from the first group (child) to the second group (mature)?

CHILDREN DRINK MILK—MATURE PEOPLE EAT SOLID FOOD.

Reference

Remind students how we defined "The Christian Life" in Week 1: abiding in Christ and bearing fruit. Help them connect the dots by referring back to this throughout the lesson.

Reference

"Oracles" and "word of righteousness"

Reference

Paul uses the same metaphor in 1 Corinthians 3:1-3. Looking there may help fill out the understanding of "milk."

1 Tim. 4:9 The saying probably refers specifically to the "value" of "godliness" (v. 8).

1 Tim. 4:10 to this end. The goal of Paul's labors is that people attain "godliness" (v. 8) and its eternal "value." Toil and strive is typical of Paul's description of gospel ministry (cf. 5:17; Rom. 16:6, 12; 1 Cor. 15:10; 16:16; Gal. 4:11; Eph. 4:28). The statement that God is the Savior of all people, especially of those who believe could seem to teach universalism, that every person will eventually go to heaven. However, the rest of Scripture clearly denies this idea. There are several other possible explanations for this phrase: (1) It means that Christ died for all people, but only those who believe in him are saved. (2) It means he is offered to all people, though not all receive him. (3) It means

GROWING INTO MATURITY

Look carefully at verse 14 and let's draw some conclusions from this passage. The verse describes how people become mature in God's word: they "have their powers of discernment trained by constant practice to distinguish good and evil."

What is discernment? What does it mean in this context? What is the opposite of discernment? (Hint: look in verse 13).

Share something you have become skilled at. How did you become skilled at it? Do you know how to do it well enough to teach someone else?

In verse 14, the author says that mature Christians have their powers of discernment "trained by constant practice." Circle the word "trained" in your bible. The Greek word that is used for "trained" is rare in the bible, only occurring four times. One of those times is in 1 Timothy 4:7.

Read 1 Timothy 4:6-10.

The word for "train" is the same, and the word in the Apostle Paul's day it was often used to refer to Olympic training.

How does 1 Timothy 4:7 relate to Hebrews 5:14? They use the same word, but are they talking about the same thing? Why or why not?

Why would Hebrews use the word for Olympic training to talk about reading the Bible? What does it look like to approach the Bible with this mindset?

What can we conclude about the goal of reading the Bible?

What can we conclude about the consequences of neglecting the "oracles of God" and the "word of righteousness"?

How does this relate to our discussion of the Christian Life?

Point to Make

Encourage students to think about something they have spent time practicing. Sports, music, school-work, even video games. As they come up with examples of constant practice, it will be easier to help them see the relevance and application of Hebrews 5:14.

Reference

See 1 Corinthians 9:24-27.

"the Savior of all people, namely, those who believe" (a different translation of Gk. *malista*, based on extra-biblical examples). (4) It means "the helper of all people," taking Greek *Sōtēr*, "Savior," to refer not to forgiveness of sins but to God's common grace by which God helps and protects people in need. (5) It means "the Savior of all kinds of people, not Jews only but both Jews and Greeks." In any case, the emphasis is on God's care for the unsaved world, and in the flow of the letter Paul is stressing once more (cf. 2:3-5) that God's will that people would be saved is the basis of the universal mission (cf. Matt. 28:19-20).

EVALUATING OUR BIBLICAL MATURITY

The author of Hebrews makes it clear that training ourselves to understand and apply God's word is a huge part of what it means to live the Christian Life. In other words, you can't "abide in Christ" without reading and learning his word.

This passage points out that being a mature Christian doesn't happen by accident. We don't grow in maturity unless we train ourselves by constant practice in reading God's Word. Are you training your powers of discernment by constant practice, or are you unskilled in the word of righteousness?

What might it look like for someone to train themselves by constant practice in God's Word? Give examples of when you have done it well.

Take a minute to think about your personal interaction with God's Word in your life right now. How would you describe it? Are you stuck on basic principles or are you going deeper by constant practice?

What would happen to your physical body if you only drank milk, instead of eating solid food? Why would this happen?

What happens to your spiritual life if you neglect the "solid food" of God's word? Why would this happen?

How do you know if this is happening to you?

Do you feel guilty when you don't read your Bible? Why or why not? What is the difference between "feeling guilty" and "repentant?"

We all experience emotional, spiritual, and practical roadblocks to "constant practice." Identify some of these things that keep you from pursuing God's word.

What practical steps are you taking in your life right now to train yourself in God's Word?

Discuss

Spend time with your small group talking honestly about how you approach the Bible in your own life.

Discuss

It is critical that students understand the difference between the two spiritual feelings of guilt and repentance.

NOW WHAT?

Think back to Week 1 when we talked about abiding in Christ. What is the relationship between abiding in Christ and training yourself in God's Word?

Is it possible to read God's Word and yet NOT abide in Christ? Why or why not?

Is it true to say that abiding in Christ depends upon training yourself in God's Word? Why or why not?

No one learns God's Word overnight. Write down one single step you want to take this week to train yourself in God's Word.

GOING DEEPER

One sign of maturity is the ability to teach others what we have learned. Write down at least one area of God's word that you could help someone younger than you understand.

Do you have any opportunities to teach others what you have learned about God's Word?

What are some reasons that you might be worried about teaching others?

MEMORY VERSE FOR THE WEEK

"But solid food is for the mature, for those who have their powers of discernment trained by constant practice to distinguish good from evil." —Hebrews 5:14

WEEK 3 DEVOTIONS

Spending time in God's Word is essential to growing in your faith in Jesus. The REAP Bible study method is a simple tool that you can use during your quiet times.

READ - Take the time to carefully read the Bible passage with an open heart, asking the Holy Spirit to give you words of encouragement, direction and correction.

EXAMINE - Grab your journal and write out your answers to the questions. Make note of what stands out to you.

APPLY - A great question to ask is "How will I live differently and be different today because of what I just read?"

PRAY - Then, talk with God about the passage and your application. Ask Him to change your heart and life based on the time you've spent in His Word.

DAY 1 — JOSHUA 1:7-9

What is the "Book of the Law?" What three things does this passage say we should do with the Book of the Law?

Why is it so important that you "do not let this Book of the Law depart from your mouth"?

DAY 2 — PSALM 19

This Psalm can be broken into three main sections. Can you find them? What is the theme of each of each one?

Write down all the adjectives used to describe God's Word.

DAY 3 — PSALM 119:1-16

Write down all the words that these verses use to refer to God's Word.

Do you feel the same way that the Psalmist does about God's Word? How can you grow in your love for the Bible as the very Word of God?

DAY 4 — ISAIAH 5:24-25

Isaiah is pronouncing a curse against Israel—God's people! What have they done wrong? Why is this a wrong thing to do?

What are the consequences for Israel ignoring God's Word?

DAY 5 — GENESIS 3:1-7

What strategy (relating to God's word) does the serpent take to convince Eve to eat the fruit?

How did Adam and Eve display doubt about God's Word?

DAY 6 — JOHN 1:1-18

What conclusion can you draw about how important words are to God?

God's Word points to the Word who is God (Jesus). Spend some time meditating on this truth.

DAY 7 — 2 TIMOTHY 3:14-16

Write down the four things that Bible is profitable for. Why is it profitable for these things?

What is the purpose of reading the Bible? (Hint: Verse 17)

Essential #3: Authentic Faith

Faith that is Seen

1 THESSALONIANS 1:1-10

WEEK

4

Key Questions and Concepts

God alone determines authentic faith.

An individual with Authentic Faith will display the fruit of the Spirit.

Is it possible to have a fake faith?

How many of you have some type of special collection? Maybe you hope your collection will someday be worth a lot of money. Remember the Hot Wheel and Beanie Babies collection days? If you are collector of anything you probably care if something is real or fake. Some of you may care about clothes, shoes, or even purses. There is usually always a way to spot a fake. Our U.S. BUREAU OF ENGRAVING AND PRINTING spends a lot of time designing money so that it cannot be reproduced and takes measures to easily determine authenticity. Usually, the more expensive an item the more important it is to determine if it is real or fake. For instance, there are several ways to authentic a real diamond. Here are just a few:

- 1) **Use the fog test.** Put the stone in front of your mouth and fog it like you would a mirror. If it stays fogged for a couple seconds, it's probably a fake — a real diamond disperses the heat from your breath instantaneously and won't fog up easily.
- 2) **Use a jeweler's loupe to inspect the diamond.** Mined diamonds usually have small naturally occurring imperfections. A gem that is too perfect is more often than not a fake.
- 3) **Heat up the stone and see if it shatters.** Heat up a suspect stone with a lighter for 30 seconds, then drop it straight into a glass of cold water. The rapid expansion and contraction will overwhelm the tensile strength of weaker materials like glass or quartz, causing the stone to shatter from the inside. A real diamond is strong enough that nothing will happen.

Bring in something that you know for certain that is authentic. Potentially you have something that has a certificate of authenticity or a specific way that you can spot a fake.

***Do you have any type of special collection?
When it comes to your collection does it matter if it is real or fake?***

In today's lesson, Paul thanks God that the Thessalonians are evidencing the essential marks of the Christian life—work of faith, labor of love, and steadfastness of hope. These are the practical outworking of the Thessalonians' conversion. The "work" the Thessalonians do is a result or consequence of their "faith." So, too, their "labor" flows from "love," and their endurance or "steadfastness" comes from "hope." The Greeks from other areas were the ones reporting that the Thessalonians had repented of their idolatrous past, had committed themselves to serve God, and were waiting for Jesus' second coming—the key traits of genuine Christian conversion. So here is the point, others notice an authentic faith. If they notice, how much easier is it for God?

5-Minute Commentary

1 Thess. 1:2–3 Thanksgiving for the Thessalonians' Faith, Love, and Hope. Paul thanks God that the Thessalonians are evidencing the essential marks of the Christian life—faith, love, and hope.

1 Thess. 1:3 remembering. Paul may be recalling the events of his mission to Thessalonica, or this may just be standard prayer language. faith ... love ... hope. The prominent final position here belongs to hope, which seems fitting in a letter so concerned with the end times. work ... labor ... steadfastness. These are the practical outworking of the Thessalonians' conversion. The "work" the Thessalonians do is a result or consequence of their "faith." So, too, their "labor" flows from "love,"

AUTHENTIC OR NOT?

Our first two essentials that we have talked about are Prayer and Scripture. These first two Essentials go together because they focus on the conversation that we have with God. God speaks to us in his Word, and we respond in Prayer. These are the most basic actions of being a Christian – hearing and responding to God.

The third Essential of Life in Christ is Authentic Faith. Let's start by defining what we mean when we use the word authentic.

What do you think of when you hear the word "authentic"? What are some examples of things that are authentic?

What is the opposite of authentic? Write down some examples of things that are not authentic.

How do you know if something is authentic?

Is it possible to have faith that is not authentic? Why or why not?

This essential is called Authentic Faith for a purpose. The Bible makes it clear that it is possible to have "fake" faith. Some people claim that they believe in Jesus, when in reality they do not. In order to understand the difference between authentic faith and fake faith we must look in God's Word for the answer rather than our own opinions.

NOT IN WORD ONLY

One of the clearest answers to this question is found in 1 Thessalonians. Paul is very specific in the beginning of this letter to the Christians in the city of Thessalonica about their faith.

Read 1 Thessalonians 1:1-10.

What three things does Paul list in verse 3 that he thanks God for about the Thessalonians?

1)

2)

3)

Leader's Note

Even though this particular lesson speaks about how other people may or may not notice an authentic faith does not determine real faith. That determination belongs to God alone. It is merely an indicator just like the fruit of the Spirit.

Definition

Authentic – genuine, real, not copied or false

Point to Make

Make sure the students conclude that the answer is yes, it is possible to have a fake faith!

Reference

See James 2:14-26.

Point to Make

- 1) Work of faith
- 2) Labor of love
- 3) Steadfastness of hope

and their endurance or "steadfastness" comes from "hope."

1 Thess. 1:4 The ultimate reason for Paul's certainty regarding the Thessalonians' election is that they are brothers loved by God. God's love undergirds election (Eph. 1:4–5; cf. Rom. 1:7; 9:13) and is demonstrated by it (Rom. 8:35–39; 11:28). Chosen (lit., "elected," using Gk. *eklogē*, "choice, selection, election") refers to God's antecedent sovereign act of appointing people for eternal life. Paul infers from the events of the mission that the Thessalonians were elect and therefore he can reassure them that they are forever secure.

Look carefully at verses 4-10. Write down as many ways as you can find how Paul describes the Thessalonian Christians.

In verse 4, Paul says, "we know that [God] has chosen you, because..." In other words, he's about to give the reasons that he knows that their faith is real!

What are the reasons that Paul gives for knowing that God had chosen the Thessalonians, specifically in verse 5?

What does it mean that the gospel came in "word? What does it mean that the gospel came "also in power"?

How did Paul know that the gospel came in power and full conviction? What did he see in them? (Hint: Look at verses 6-10)

WITH FULL CONVICTION

Paul preached the good news of Jesus to the Thessalonians, and not only did they believe that it was true, they embraced it in their hearts with full conviction. Their faith was so authentic that everyone around them knew that they were Christians. They became an example to all the believers all over the world! It is an example even for us to consider today. Their faith was real, and everyone could see it.

AUTHENTIC FAITH IS FAITH THAT CAN BE SEEN

In this case, the word "conviction" is another form of "convinced." In other places in the Bible this word is translated as "assurance."

What does it mean to be "fully convinced" of something?

How does being fully convinced about something change the way that you act? Give some examples?

What does the Holy Spirit have to do with being fully convinced (verse 5)?

Point to Make

The gospel came not only in word, but in power and in the Holy Spirit, and with full conviction.

Point to Make

There is something of a head/heart distinction here. The gospel coming in word means that they heard and understood in the minds. That it came in power and conviction means that they embraced it with their heart as well.

Prayer

Take a moment to pray that the Gospel would move from your students head and hearts to their hands and feet.

Discuss

What's an example of something you are fully convinced of, that no one could persuade you to change your mind?

1 Thess. 1:5-10 because. Paul grounds his confidence that the Thessalonians are elect in two things: the undeniable authenticity and authority of those preaching the gospel to them (v. 5) and the exemplary nature of the Thessalonians' response to the gospel (vv. 6-10). First, he appeals to the fact that the missionaries' preaching (our gospel) was characterized by power (miraculous power, or power in preaching, or both), the Holy Spirit (manifestations of the Spirit's approving presence), and full conviction (transparent sincerity and integrity, bringing certainty to the hearers' minds). You know what kind of men we proved to be among you for your sake. The genuineness of the gospel was reinforced, as it always should be, by the evident integrity of its preachers.

IS YOUR FAITH AUTHENTIC?

Think about your own life for a moment. If someone looked at your life, would they be able to write the same paragraph about you that Paul wrote about the Thessalonians? Has the gospel come to you in power, or in word only? Are you so fully convinced that Jesus Christ is God that everyone around you knows it? It is impossible to abide in Christ and bear much fruit without having Authentic Faith.

How has your Authentic Faith changed your own life? Give some examples.

You are not alone if you have doubts about God and about the gospel. Which parts of the message about Jesus are sometimes hard for you to be fully convinced about? Why are they hard?

We talked about “fake faith” at the beginning of this lesson. How do you know if someone’s faith is fake? How do you know if your own faith is fake?

Think of someone who you could write these verses about. Who do you know that demonstrates Authentic Faith? How can you see it in their life?

Discuss some of the ways that you can follow their example of authentic faith.

Knowing about Jesus and going to church does not mean that a person has Authentic Faith. Authentic Faith is a faith with also has power and the Holy Spirit and full conviction. This kind of faith can be seen in the way that people live their lives.

Discuss

What is wrong with trying to compartmentalize our faith?

Discuss

A student’s choice to follow Christ should impact their decisions, how they respond to authority, what they listen to and watch, their choice of friends, how they spend their money, and the list could go on and on.

Encourage

Paul encouraged the Thessalonians by telling them that he could see their faith. Consider having students write a note of encouragement to the person that they describe as having an authentic faith.

1 Thess. 1:6 imitators of us. The Thessalonians followed Paul’s example even as Paul followed Christ’s example. for you received the word in much affliction. See Acts 17:5–9; 1 Thess. 2:14. Suffering affliction is normal for those destined to be saved at the end (see Rom. 8:17–18; 1 Pet. 4:12–14). with the joy of the Holy Spirit. The remarkable joy in suffering that characterized the Thessalonian Christians was patterned after the joy of Jesus and Paul.

1 Thess. 1:7 Macedonia and Achaia were the two Greek provinces of the Roman Empire.

1 Thess. 1:8 not only has the word of the Lord sounded forth. This may refer to evangelistic activities

NOW WHAT?

Think about your personal faith. Has your faith become more authentic over time? How?

What are some things that might prevent someone from having Authentic Faith?

What is the relationship between “abiding in Christ” and Authentic Faith?

What is the relationship between “bearing much fruit” and Authentic Faith?

GOING DEEPER

Read James 2:14-17.

What does James mean when he says that faith without deeds is dead?

According to James, is it possible to have works without faith? What about faith without works?

Authentic Faith is faith that can be seen. If you were put on trial for your faith, what would evidence in your life would demonstrate your faith is real?

MEMORY VERSE FOR THE WEEK

“So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.” —James 2:17

or, more likely, news of the Thessalonians’ newfound faith. Either way, what transpired in Thessalonica resulted in the gospel being proclaimed far and wide, no doubt aided by the fact that Thessalonica was strategically located.

1 Thess. 1:9–10 The Greeks from other areas report that the Thessalonians had repented of their idolatrous past, had committed themselves to serve God, and were waiting for Jesus’ second coming—the key traits of genuine Christian conversion.

WEEK 4 DEVOTIONS

Spending time in God's Word is essential to growing in your faith in Jesus. The REAP Bible study method is a simple tool that you can use during your quiet times.

READ - Take the time to carefully read the Bible passage with an open heart, asking the Holy Spirit to give you words of encouragement, direction and correction.

EXAMINE - Grab your journal and write out your answers to the questions. Make note of what stands out to you.

APPLY - A great question to ask is "How will I live differently and be different today because of what I just read?"

PRAY - Then, talk with God about the passage and your application. Ask Him to change your heart and life based on the time you've spent in His Word.

DAY 1 — JAMES 2:14-17

What example does James use to make his point?

What is the answer to James' question in verse 14?

DAY 2 — JAMES 2:18-26

What do the demons believe? Why is this important?

What two biblical examples does James bring up to demonstrate his point? Is it possible to have "faith" and not be saved? What always comes along with saving faith?

DAY 3 — MATTHEW 5:14-16

What does Jesus command us to do in this passage? How do we do that?

What does this passage teach us about our faith? Is it ok if no one can see that we are Christians?

DAY 4 — 1 CORINTHIANS 1:4-9

What does Paul thank God for about the Corinthians?

How was the "testimony about Christ confirmed" by the Corinthians? How was the testimony about Christ been confirmed in your life?

DAY 5 — MATTHEW 3:1-10

What does John criticize the Pharisees and Sadducees for doing?

What did the Pharisees and Sadducees place their hope in? Did they think that they had faith?

DAY 6 — LUKE 18:9-14

What two men does Jesus describe? What were they doing?

What is the difference between the two men? Why was one man "justified" and the other man not justified?

DAY 7 — HEBREWS 11:13-16

What characteristics does Paul list of these great men and women of faith in these verses?

How do we know that their faith was authentic?

Essential #4: Obedient Follower

How You Ought to Walk

JOHN 10:27, 14:15

WEEK

5

Key Questions and Concepts

The result of obedience to God's commands is personal holiness/sanctification.

What is your motivation to obey and follow Christ?

One of the most amazing ways that the Bible talks about being saved is through the metaphor of Adoption. God has adopted us as his children, the Bible says. To be a Christian is to be a member of God's family, and to get all the privileges of being part of the family. Some of you in this room today have been adopted and know what it's like to go from "outsider" to "insider," from orphan into a forever family.

I want us to think about adoption for a few minutes. Consider why parents decide to adopt a little baby. Is it because of anything the little baby did to deserve being adopted? Of course not. Parents adopt a baby not because of what the baby has done for them, but simply because they love him (or her). They go through the adoption process and the baby becomes a part of their family forever.

As the adopted child grows up, the child begins to learn what it means to be part of that family. There are certain family chores they must do, certain traditions that they practice, and unwritten family rules. When the child breaks these rules, does it make them un-adopted? If they follow the rules, does it make them more adopted? No! So why do they follow the rules? They follow the rules because they know their Dad and Mom love them and they want to please their parents. When they break the rules, they receive punishment, not to kick them out of the family, but to help them learn how they can thrive in the family.

*What do you think it feels like to be adopted by human parents?
What are some wrong reasons to obey your Mom and Dad?*

Today's lesson is about the Essential we call Obedient Follower. As Christians, we've been adopted into God's family. Sometimes people say that because we've already been adopted, there's no need to obey. However, just like a child that's been adopted, Christians obey their heavenly Father because they love Him and want to make their Dad happy.

5-Minute Commentary

John 14:15 Jesus' words echo the demands of the Deuteronomic covenant (cf. Deut. 5:10; 6:5-6; 7:9; 10:12-13; 11:13, 22) and reflect his unique authority. True love manifests itself in willing obedience.

1 Thess. 4:1 To walk and to please God is to live a life that is pleasing to God. do so more and more. Their process of growth in sanctification and in their ability to "please God" has not yet been completed.

THE GOAL OF THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

In weeks 2 and 3, we talked about the two basic ingredients of the Christian Life: Prayer and Scripture. Last week we saw that a Christian is fully convinced about Christ, and their Authentic Faith can be seen by those around them. Paul praised the Thessalonians for their Authentic Faith. They knew Christ with both their head and their heart.

Today, we're going to look at Essential #4: Obedient Follower. We'll look back in the letter to the Thessalonians and see how Paul talks to the Thessalonians about what it means to be an Obedient Follower of Jesus.

Read 1 Thessalonians 4:1-8.

What does Paul "ask and urge" the Thessalonians to do in verse 1?

Why would Paul tell them that? What exactly does he want them to do more of?

Discuss what Paul means by "walk to please God." What "instructions" did he give them?

The first half of verse 3 says: "For this is the will of God: your sanctification." If "sanctification" is God's will for us, it is important for us to know what it is! The rest of the verses in this passage should help us understand what sanctification is.

Compare and contrast verse 3 and verse 7:

Verse 3a: "For this is the will of God for you, your sanctification."

Verse 7: "For God has not called us for impurity, but in holiness."

What do you notice about these verses? What is the same? What is different?

These verses are saying the same thing, but in two different ways. In fact, the word "sanctification" and the word "holiness" are really the same word in Greek!

What does it mean to be holy? What is the opposite of being holy? Give examples of things that are pure and things that are not.

HOLINESS IS THE GOAL OF THE CHRISTIAN LIFE. —ANDREW MURRAY

Point to Make

His desire is for the people to continue to walk in obedience. In doing so it will please God.

Reference

Although Colossians 3 and Ephesians 4 weren't written to the Thessalonians, Paul probably gave similar instructions to the Thessalonian church when he visited there.

Reference

If you have different Bible translations in your small group, have each person read their translation for verse 3 and 7.

1 Thess. 4:2 instructions (Gk. parangelia). Originally a military word, it usually denotes authoritative commands.

1 Thess. 4:3–8 Paul commands the Thessalonians to live in sexual holiness. Some converts may have found it a struggle to adjust to Christianity's demanding ethical code.

1 Thess. 4:7 called. When the Thessalonians embraced Paul's gospel, they were responding to God's effectual call. That call did not have as its goal impurity but rather a life of holiness.

Rewrite verses 3a and 7 in your own words.

Verse 3)

Verse 7)

We could summarize this passage by saying that being holy (or pure) is the purpose and goal of the Christian Life. God did not call you to be a Christian so that you could be messy, dirty and sinful. He called you so that you could be holy and pure.

GOD LOVES HOLINESS, AND SO SHOULD WE

It is important to realize that our work to be holy cannot, and does not, save us. You cannot earn God's acceptance by trying to be more holy. As we saw in week 1, we can get connected to Jesus only by believing in him—by faith. However, if we aren't saved by what we do, then why does Paul make such a big deal of being holy to the Thessalonians?

If being holy doesn't save us, why should we be holy?

Read 1 Peter 1:13-16.

What reason does this passage give for why we should be holy?

This is one of the most important truths about God. God is perfect, holy, and pure; everything he does is right. He loves goodness and truth and beauty and perfection. God has called you to be a Christian so that he can make you beautiful and pure! Holiness matters to God because He himself is holy.

Think about the things that you like to do. They matter to you because they define who you are. If you are a baseball player, you care about baseball. If you are a musician, you care about music. If you are a reader, you care about books. God is the same way; what he IS determines what he loves. He is holy, and therefore he loves holiness, and he wants his people to be holy too.

OBEDIENT FOLLOWERS

What does holiness have to do with obedience? What does disobedience do to holiness?

Read John 15:10.

In other words, to abide in Christ, we must obey his commandments. Following God's commandments leads to holiness. Being an Obedient Follower of God is definitely an Essential of Life in Christ.

Reference

See Ephesians 2:8-10. This is an important opportunity to reinforce the gospel message.

Point to Make

God is holy.

Reference

See 1 Thessalonians 4:2 and 1 Peter 1:13-16.

Point to Make

Help draw the connection between God's commandments leading to holiness. The result of obedience to God's commands is personal holiness.

1 Thess. 4:8 Therefore. In view of v. 7, to reject Paul's teaching on sex is to reject not merely Paul but God, who is the source of Paul's sexual ethic. who gives his Holy Spirit to you. In the OT (e.g., Ezek. 36:26-27) God promised that he would establish a new covenant in which the Holy Spirit would write the law on people's hearts and cause them to obey. This new covenant reality, which has been inaugurated by Christ, makes sexual sin inexcusable. To reject the giver of the Holy Spirit is to cut oneself off from the sanctifying power that enables the Christian to be "blameless in holiness" at the second coming (1 Thess. 3:13).

1 Pet. 1:13-21 The Future Inheritance as an Incentive to Holiness. The inheritance promised to fol-

Read 1 Thessalonians 4:8.

Using your own words, restate the warning described in this verse.

What does an "Obedient Follower" look like? What does he/she do? What does he/she not do?

DISCUSS AND APPLY

What is your response to this statement? God's goal for me is to be holy.

Think about your own life. What motivates you to obey God? Is that a good motivation? Why or why not?

List some "fruit" in your life that has come from being an Obedient Follower of God's commandments.

What are some of God's commands that are hard to obey? Why are they hard to obey?

Do you believe that obeying God's commands is good for you? Why or why not?

What are some practical ways you that you can seek to obey God this week?

Reference

Challenge students to describe examples in their own life that reflect Philippians 4:8.

Point to Make

Direct students to John 10:10 and God's desire to bring life verses Satan's desire to bring death and destruction.

lowers of Christ should motivate them to set their hope entirely on their future reward (vv. 13–16) and to live in fear of the God who redeemed them at the cost of his own Son (vv. 17–21).

1 Pet. 1:13 set your hope fully. The fullness of grace and its complete work will come only when Jesus returns, and believers are to long for that day. They do so by thinking rightly about reality and by living sober-minded and sensible lives in this present evil age.

1 Pet. 1:14–15 While living on this earth, Christians have to fight the desires of sin, so they are called to be obedient children, separated from evil in all that they do. They are to be holy (cf. Lev. 18:2–4),

NOW WHAT?

What sort of “fruit” do you see in your life that shows you are an Obedient Follower of God’s commands?

Does God require perfection from us? Why or why not?

We know that we don’t obey God’s law perfectly. What should we do when we realize that we’ve disobeyed God’s laws?

Spend a few minutes writing out a prayer that God would forgive your disobedience and give you the desire to be holy, as He is holy.

GOING DEEPER

Write down some things that encourage you to obey God’s commandments.

Write down a few things that hold you back from obeying God’s commandments.

What is the relationship between obeying God, abiding in Christ, and bearing fruit?

MEMORY VERSE FOR THE WEEK

“For this is the will of God, your sanctification.” —1 Thessalonians 4:3

for that accords with the character of God who is holy and has called believers to himself.

John 15:10–11 Obedience is not to be equated with drudgery; it is all about joy. that my joy may be in you. Just as Jesus had great joy in obeying his Father even in the midst of opposition, so Christians will have joy in obedience.

WEEK 5 DEVOTIONS

Spending time in God's Word is essential to growing in your faith in Jesus. The REAP Bible study method is a simple tool that you can use during your quiet times.

READ - Take the time to carefully read the Bible passage with an open heart, asking the Holy Spirit to give you words of encouragement, direction and correction.

EXAMINE - Grab your journal and write out your answers to the questions. Make note of what stands out to you.

APPLY - A great question to ask is "How will I live differently and be different today because of what I just read?"

PRAY - Then, talk with God about the passage and your application. Ask Him to change your heart and life based on the time you've spent in His Word.

DAY 1 — MATTHEW 23:25-26

How is this relatable to our lives today? What is the "cup"?

Where does holiness begin?

DAY 2 — 1 JOHN 2:1-3

Can we be 100% pure while living on this earth before Jesus comes back?

Why is it necessary to work towards purity and holiness before Jesus comes back?

DAY 3 — 2 SAMUEL 22:21-25

Reflect for a minute, how do you think David kept himself living so clean in God's eyes?

What is one thing in your life you are feeling guilty about today? What is the opposite of that thing and how can you practice walking it out in your day today?

DAY 4 — GALATIANS 5:16-24

Out of the list of the desires of the flesh, which sticks out to you the most?

Which fruit of the spirit do you think combats that specific sin most effectively?

DAY 5 — 1 PETER 2:1-3

What makes the Bible pure?

What do you think it looks like to "grow in respect to salvation"?

DAY 6 — PSALM 17:15

Where does the psalmist find his satisfaction?

What is God's "likeness"? Do you feel this is a reflection of how you feel about God? Why?

DAY 7 — COLOSSIANS 1:21-23

How does God view those who do not believe in Jesus?

What did Jesus' sacrifice do for us and how are we viewed in Him?

Essential #5: Disciple Maker

Disciples Making Disciples

2 TIMOTHY 2:1-2, 4:1-5

WEEK

6

Key Questions and Concepts

Help students see that just “telling people about Jesus” is not what it means to make disciples. The goal of discipleship is helping people grow in following Jesus’ commands. This is a lifelong process.

We are all called to make disciples.

Suppose you have a friend who has told you that he is a huge Carolina Panthers fan. Do we have any Panther fans in here? If you’re not a Panther fan, pretend I’m talking about your favorite sports team. Every time you see this friend, he’s talking about how much he loves the Panthers. He wears blue and black every day, has “I love the Panthers” tattooed on his forehead, and you’ve even heard that he has a giant stuffed panther that he keeps in his bedroom.

Now imagine that Cam Newton has decided to come to your school to visit, and he’s invited every student in your school to a flag football game after classes. As soon as you find this out, you run up to your friend and say, “Hey! Are you going to play flag football with Cam Newton after school on Thursday?” To your astonishment, he says, “Who’s Cam Newton?”

So you begin asking him more questions, and it goes something like this:

“When is the last time you’ve been to a Panthers game?” — “Never been to a single one.”

“When is the last time you’ve watched a Panther’s game?” — “I think I watched part of one last year.”

“Who plays linebacker for the Panthers?” — “What’s a linebacker?”

“Who is the coach of the Panthers?” — “Mike Ditka?”

“Did the Panther’s win last week?” — “I don’t know.”

*How do you follow your favorite sports team?
What does it require to be a true fan?*

What do you think about your friend’s claim to be a “huge Panther fan?” It’s ridiculous! He’s not a real Panther’s fan, he’s a fake! A real fan actually follows the team. He watches the games, he learns the stats, he knows the players, and he cares if they win. You can’t claim to be a fan or a follower if you don’t actually follow the team. This a small picture of what it means to follow Christ. Following Christ is hard. We follow Christ by learning about him and living as he would have us live.

Today, we’re going to see that “following” is an important part of the Christian Life. Not just following, but helping others to follow as well.

5-Minute Commentary

2 Tim. 2:2 As Paul faces death, he encourages Timothy to pass the gospel on to faithful men who will in turn teach others, so that the gospel is preserved for coming generations.

2 Tim. 4:1–8 The Ultimate Charge. Having just reminded Timothy of his early training in Scripture and of the power and divine origin of Scripture (3:15–17), Paul exhorts him to preach this word (4:2ff.). Chapter 3 ends with a reference to being competent and equipped, and 4:1–8 then describes the specific “good work” of leadership that Timothy is now to show himself competent to do: vv. 1–2 present the charge, followed by the reason why this is necessary (vv. 3–4); v. 5 returns to

WHAT IS A "DISCIPLE"?

Over the past 5 weeks we have focused on our personal relationship with God. The first two Essentials (Prayer and Scripture) describe the conversation that we have with God. The next two Essentials (Authentic Faith and Obedient Follower) describe what that conversation produces in our lives.

The final three Essentials are: Disciple Maker, Generous Living, and Transformational Community. These three Essentials shift from focusing on our personal relationship with God to our relationship with other Christians. It is important to realize that unless you are growing in Prayer, Scripture, Faith, and Obedience, it will be impossible to do these last three.

Today we're going to focus on #5: Disciple Maker. Before going any further today, we are going to try an activity. Pick one of your favorite things (could be a place, sports team, video game, movie, song, person, etc.). Explain to your group why you love it, and try to convince them that they should love it too.

What was difficult about this activity? Why was it difficult?

Why do we want others to love what we love? Can you think of other examples in your life where you try to convince your friends about something?

In the most basic sense, the word disciple means: learner or follower. So you are a "disciple" of the things you love. If you know the lyrics to every Taylor Swift song, you are a disciple (follower) of Taylor Swift. If you watch every play and know every player of the Clemson football team, you are a disciple (follower) of Clemson football.

Why do people become followers of something?

How do you know if someone is a "follower" of something or not?

DISCIPLE — A FOLLOWER OF CHRIST IN LEARNING AND LIVING

What does it mean to be a "follower in learning?" What does it mean to be a "follower in living?"

What parts of your life does being a disciple of Christ affect?

Leader's Note

The long-term discipleship goal of student ministry when students graduate is for a student to be a disciple that is making disciples.

Activity

Everyone should take a turn.

the charge in contrast to the evil of the current situation.

2 Tim. 4:2 The charge itself is spelled out in five imperative verbs (with four more in v. 5). Preach the word refers back to "Scripture" (see 3:16) and thus includes proclaiming the "good news" of the gospel in a broad, biblically anchored sense. "Gospel" for Paul is not only an evangelistic presentation; the gospel is the core message (found in the whole of Scripture; cf. 3:16) which can be applied to unbelievers (a call to faith) or to believers (a call to continue to believe in and live out the implications of this message). Thus, the way to preach the gospel is by expounding the Scriptures. be ready in season and out of season. When it is convenient and when it is inconvenient. Reprove, rebuke,

THERE IS NOT A SQUARE INCH WITHIN THE DOMAIN OF OUR HUMAN LIFE OF WHICH CHRIST, WHO IS THE SOVEREIGN OVER ALL, DOES NOT SAY, 'MINE.' —ABRAHAM KUYPER

MAKING DISCIPLES

Part of being a follower of Christ is helping others be followers of Christ as well. The clearest statement of this in the entire Bible is what we call the "Great Commission."

Read Matthew 28:16-20.

Who was Jesus talking to in this situation? When did this happen?

The command in this verse is "make disciples." This is a very clear mission for the disciples. They weren't supposed to just BE disciples, they were supposed to MAKE disciples.

Does the command to "make disciples" apply to us today? Why or why not?

What three things does Jesus say are part of making disciples of all nations?

What does it mean for those first disciples to "Go"? How does it relate for us today? Should we all become missionaries somewhere in Africa?

Baptism is the second part of making disciples that we find in the Great Commission. Although we're not going to talk much about it today, if you are a follower of Christ and you haven't been baptized, you need to be! Baptism is a visible sign that a person is connected with Christ and the Bible commands it for all disciples.

Let's focus on the third part of making disciples that Jesus mentions in our passage is: "teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you."

Look carefully at verse 20. Re-write it in your own words.

What are some of the things that Jesus commanded us? Find the Scripture references and write them down as well.

Point to Make

They are: "Go" "Baptizing" and "Teaching." All three words have the same form in the Greek and are used to modify the command: "Make Disciples."

Review

Carmel is committed to making disciples of those nearest, our neighbors, and the nations.

Discuss

Be intentional about talking about baptism and why it matters with your group.

and exhort means the communicating of all that Scripture includes—doctrine, instruction, correction, and encouragement. Patience in such teaching is again encouraged (see 2:24–26).

2 Tim. 4:3-4 Itching ears indicates a yearning for novelty that results in a pursuit of teachers who will tell people what they want to hear (to suit their own passions) instead of orthodox teachers like Timothy. Driven by their own desires, people will readily accept fanciful myths rather than the truth.

2 Tim. 4:5 the work of an evangelist. The full scope of "evangelist" is not made explicit here or elsewhere in Scripture. Paul instructs Timothy in terms of the "gospel" (cf. 1 Tim. 1:11; 2 Tim. 1:8, 10;

If following Jesus' commands is part of being a disciple, what does this mean for making disciples?

Disciple making is not something that you do only on Sunday, or Wednesday, or during Bible Study. If being a disciple has to do with every part of life, then making disciples has to do with every part of life.

YOU ARE A DISCIPLE MAKER

Jesus didn't just command us to be a disciple; he commanded us to make disciples. This includes more than just sharing the good news of Jesus with non-Christians. It includes helping each other follow Christ in learning and living each and every day. This process of following Christ is called "discipleship." You already know this word because you're in "Discipleship Community" right now!

DISCIPLESHIP — THE PROCESS OF LEARNING TO FOLLOW CHRIST

What is the difference between friendship and discipleship?

How can you help your friends become better followers of Christ?

Think about someone who has helped you follow Christ better. How did they help you follow Christ better? Do you realize that this is discipleship?

Think about your friends. Do they follow Christ better because they are friends with you? Do you encourage them in their walk with Christ? If not, why not?

Disciple Making does not happen by accident. What steps can you take right now to actively seek to make disciples of your friends, relatives, neighbors, and anyone else you know?

Point to Make

The goal is to help students see that "telling people about Jesus" is not what it means to make disciples. The goal of discipleship is helping people grow in following Jesus' commands. This is a lifelong process.

Point to Make

Help students to think about the word "intentionality" as it relates to discipleship.

2:8), which certainly includes proclamation to the unconverted, i.e., the continuation of Paul's mission to the Gentiles. However, Paul does not typically distinguish between "evangelism" and "discipleship".

Matt. 28:16–20 The Risen Jesus' Great Commission. As the resurrected Lord, Jesus calls upon his followers to make disciples of all people groups through the preaching of the gospel of the kingdom.

Matt. 28:19 The imperative (make disciples, that is, call individuals to commit to Jesus as Master and Lord) explains the central focus of the Great Commission, while the Greek participle (translat-

NOW WHAT?

Everyone needs someone to help them become a better disciple. Who is helping you? If you don't have someone, consider asking someone older than you to meet with you regularly for the purpose of growing in discipleship.

Have you been baptized? If not, why not? Talk to your parents or an adult leader to find out why baptism is so important.

Identify one person in your life that you can be intentional with to help them grow in their relationship with Christ.

Write down two practical steps you can take to disciple the person you identified above.

GOING DEEPER

Write a list of all the things that you are a "follower" of. Think about why you follow each of those things, people, teams, etc.

Making disciples is more than "telling people about Jesus." Write down some creative ways that you can help people grow to be better disciples. (Hint: think about Essentials 1-4)

What heart attitudes are stopping you from being a disciple maker?

MEMORY VERSE FOR THE WEEK

"Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age." — Matthew 28:19–20

ed go, baptizing, and "teaching" [v. 20]) describe aspects of the process. all nations. Jesus' ministry in Israel was to be the beginning point of what would later be a proclamation of the gospel to all the peoples of the earth, including not only Jews but also Gentiles.

Matt. 28:20 Teaching is a means by which disciples of Jesus are continually transformed in order to become more like Christ (cf. 10:24–25; Rom. 8:29; 2 Cor. 3:18). observe. Obey. I am with you always. Jesus concludes the commission, and Matthew his Gospel, with the crucial element of discipleship: the presence of the Master, who is "God with us" (cf. Matt. 1:23).

WEEK 6 DEVOTIONS

Spending time in God's Word is essential to growing in your faith in Jesus. The REAP Bible study method is a simple tool that you can use during your quiet times.

READ - Take the time to carefully read the Bible passage with an open heart, asking the Holy Spirit to give you words of encouragement, direction and correction.

EXAMINE - Grab your journal and write out your answers to the questions. Make note of what stands out to you.

APPLY - A great question to ask is "How will I live differently and be different today because of what I just read?"

PRAY - Then, talk with God about the passage and your application. Ask Him to change your heart and life based on the time you've spent in His Word.

DAY 1 — PROVERBS 18:1 & 19:20

Name some people you would consider "wise"?

Where do you think true wisdom comes from?

DAY 2 — 1 TIMOTHY 6:20

From this verse, who do you think Paul is to Timothy?

How do Paul's words to Timothy speak to you today?

DAY 3 — COLOSSIANS 2:8 & 1 PETER 3:15

What is the number one most important thing we have to remember as Christians?

How do these two verses work together and how do they speak to you today?

DAY 4 — EXODUS 18:13-20

What is Moses' Father-in-law going to be for Moses?

Why do you think it is important for Moses to have his Father-in-law teach him?

DAY 5 — MATTHEW 10:33

When you read this, what is your immediate reaction?

Why would Jesus choose to disown us? Does this change your salvation?

DAY 6 — PHILIPPIANS 4:8

How is this verse important when it comes to being a witness to our friends?

In what ways are you not living out this verse?

DAY 7 — GENESIS 12:1 & HEBREWS 11:8

What other scripture does this sound like?

What made it possible for Abram/Abraham to obey God?

Essential #6: Generous Living

Excelling in Generosity

MATTHEW 25:31-46

WEEK

7

Key Questions and Concepts

A transformed life in Christ will cause the believer to live in such a way that generosity overflows no matter the circumstance.

Live with open hands.

Contributing to the needs of others is only made possible by God's undeserved gifts in our lives.

Do you know someone or ever find yourself willing to do only certain things for certain people or only in special circumstances? For instance, opening the door for someone who is older than you and it's raining. Maybe sharing well with your siblings when your parents are watching. What about giving only when it "cool" to give or when you receive attention? We do this in our culture. We elevate certain circumstances as times to give. Sometimes it is almost like we have giving meter and we think we can fill it up for the year on one or two acts of generosity. Now maybe we don't consciously think this way but our actions display our true heart.

That is what is taking place here in Matthew 25. Jesus describes two different sets of people and their actions. Both groups had the same response to the perspective that Jesus had about their actions. However, the first group asked the question because living generously was so natural to them they didn't even notice who it was for. The second group said, if only we knew it was you Jesus we surely would have taken care of your needs.

When it comes to living generously, it really comes down to living with open hands all the time. Willing to care in the best way regardless of circumstances. That may be with time, money, or other resources. It does not require tremendous amounts of money to excel in generosity. It requires a transformed heart in Christ.

***What scares you about God commanding Christians to be generous?
Are there certain things that you would not be happy to let go of in order to be generous?***

In the same way that a fire constantly consumes, selfishness is a fire that cannot be quenched. The only way to stop a fire from consuming more wood is to dump water on it. Similarly, the only way to get rid of our sinful human nature is to dump the power of God through the Holy Spirit into our lives. Allow the Holy Spirit to open your heart, eyes, and hands to live with great generosity. After all, what we have in the first place is made possible by God's underserved gifts in our lives.

5-Minute Commentary

Matt. 25:40 In the context of the parable the least of these refers to those who are most needy among Jesus' brothers—a reference most likely to Jesus' disciples and by extension all believers. The "sheep" are commended for their great compassion for those in need—for the hungry, the thirsty, the stranger; for those who are naked, sick, or in prison. The righteous will inherit the kingdom not because of the compassionate works that they have done but because their righteousness comes from their transformed hearts in response to Jesus' proclamation of the kingdom, as evidenced by their compassion for the "least of these." In caring for those in need, the righteous discover that their acts of compassion for the needy are the same as if done for Jesus himself.

THE MACEDONIAN GIFT

Last week we talked about being a Disciple Maker. Making Disciples is a part of what it means to follow Christ. As we grow in Prayer, Scripture, Faith, and Obedience (Essentials 1-4), we seek to help others walk that path with us. Today we're going to study Essential #6: Generous Living.

What do you think of when you hear the word "generous"?

Maybe you think of rich people who give lots of money to charity, or eating a "generous" portion of food at Thanksgiving dinner. Today's study will help us see that Generosity has to do with more than money; it's not just something rich people do.

Turn to 2 Corinthians 8:1-15. Before you read, it will be helpful to know some background to this passage. Paul tells the story of the church in Macedonia. They had sent a gift of money to the poor in another city. Paul tells about their example (verses 1-5), and then asks the Corinthians to be generous as well (verses 6-15).

Read 2 Corinthians 8:1-5.

List at least 5 different ways that Paul describes the Macedonian church.

- 1)
- 2)
- 3)
- 4)
- 5)

Look carefully at verse 2. What contradictions do you see in this verse? Why might Paul have put these words together?

What could it mean in verse 3 when it says that they "gave beyond their means"?

Read 2 Corinthians 8:4 again.

This is a strange verse. Here's another way to say it: The Macedonians begged Paul for the chance to help the other Christians.

What is strange about this? Why were they so eager to give?

Review

This is a great time to recap all of the essentials.

Definition

Generous – showing a readiness to give more of something, as money or time, than is strictly necessary or expected.

Examples

Joyful, poor, generous, gave beyond their means, had a desire to give, cared for others

Point to Make

Affliction and Joy;
Poverty and Wealth

Matt. 25:41–46 Then he will say to those on his left. In contrast to the sheep (who will "inherit the kingdom"; v. 34), the goats are condemned to the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. The reason for their condemnation is that they are guilty of sins of omission—that is, they have refused to show compassion to the least of these, which is the same as if they failed to have any care for Jesus himself. Given the evident unrighteousness of their hearts, they are condemned to

2 Cor. 8:1–15 The Collection as the Grace of God. Paul begins his discussion of the collection by demonstrating how the Corinthians' generosity to the believers in Jerusalem manifests the grace of God in their lives, to the glory of God in the world. The Macedonians are an example to the Corin-

Read 2 Corinthians 8:6-15.

What is Paul asking the Corinthians to do?

Compare verse 9 to verse 2. What words are repeated?

Read verses 13-14. What reason does Paul give for them to be generous? What does "fairness" have to do with it?

Paul gives another reason in verse 8. What is it?

Verse 15 is a quote from Exodus 16:18. Read Exodus 16:13-21.

What happens in this story? What is manna?

Why might Paul have quoted this story? What does it have in common with our passage in 2 Corinthians 8?

ABUNDANCE AND NEED

What does it mean to have "abundance?" Does it have to do only with money? Give some examples.

What does it mean to have "need?" Give some examples of different needs people have.

What do "abundance" and "need" have to do with generosity?

According to this passage, why should we be generous to others? How might generosity and love be connected?

Point to Make

Paul is encouraging them to put their faith into action and allow God's grace to move from their heart and head into their hands and feet in the action of giving.

Reference

Fairness. Paul was not asking all Christians to share their possessions equally, for he did not ask these wealthy Corinthians to send money to the poorer Macedonians (see 2 Cor. 8:2); he simply asked that Corinth do its fair share in meeting the extreme needs of the Christians in Jerusalem. At the present time in redemptive history the Gentile believers can contribute financially, while the Jewish believers can contribute spiritually with leadership and the ministry of the gospel.

thians in their generous giving. Paul calls the collection an act of "grace" because contributing to the needs of others is made possible by God's undeserved gifts in their lives.

2 Cor. 8:2-5 God's grace was manifested in that the Macedonians gave even though they were poor, not as we expected. What surprised Paul was that the Macedonians also gave themselves first to the Lord (a recommitment of their lives) and then ... to us; they offered not only money but also any other personal help they could give to Paul.

2 Cor. 8:8-10 not as a command. Giving to the Lord's work must be voluntary, not compelled. And

Why is Generous Living an Essential of Life in Christ?

A generous person is someone who uses their portion God has given them to meet the needs of others. Paul urges the Corinthians to use what God has given them to supply for the needs of others.

LIVING GENEROUSLY

Now that we've explored the generous living of the Macedonians and Paul's desire for the Corinthians Christians to be generous as well, let's talk about how we can learn to be generous.

Do you have abundance in your life? Talk about different ways that God has blessed you.

How could you use these areas of abundance to meet the needs of others?

Is it hard for you to be generous? Why or why not?

What are some attitudes or beliefs that prevent us from giving ourselves and our resources to others?

How does selfishness kill generosity?

Think back to the Macedonians who were eager to give. Why were they eager to give? Are you eager to help others? Why or why not?

Identify one person in your life who has a need you can meet. What is their need? How can you meet it?

God is a giver. Remember, you were made in the image of God. God wants you to be like him. Each day you have a choice to live generously. Choose to live with open hands.

Discuss

Help students think through the various areas of abundance, going beyond financial. Talk about how abundance is often relative to circumstance.

when it is voluntary it brings much blessing (cf. 9:5–8). was rich ... became poor. A reference to Christ's preexistent status as the eternal Son of God in heaven (John 1:1–3; Gal. 4:4; Phil. 2:6) and the humility of his incarnation, including his death (Rom. 15:3; Phil. 2:7–8), so that the believer might become rich (salvation and all the benefits that flow from it). this work. What Christ has done for the Corinthians is to be reflected in what they do for others.

2 Cor. 8:12 according to what a person has. Paul did not pressure people to give what they did not have or could not afford to give.

NOW WHAT?

Generosity is essential for Christians. Why?

In what ways was Christ generous to us? What does this have to do with Generous Living?

Selfishness is the opposite of generosity, and we are all selfish at times. Describe the areas of your life that you are selfish on the left. Describe one action you can take to change each area on the right.

GOING DEEPER

How might Prayer and Scripture affect our Generosity?

Think about Christ “becoming poor” for you. What does this say about the importance of Generosity?

Write a prayer below asking God to do whatever it takes to help you to live generously.

MEMORY VERSE FOR THE WEEK

“For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich.” —2 Corinthians 8:9

2 Cor. 8:13–14 Paul was not asking all Christians to share their possessions equally, for he did not ask these wealthy Corinthians to send money to the poorer Macedonians (see 2 Cor. 8:2); he simply asked that Corinth do its fair share in meeting the extreme needs of the Christians in Jerusalem. At the present time in redemptive history the Gentile believers can contribute financially, while the Jewish believers can contribute spiritually with leadership and the ministry of the gospel.

2 Cor. 8:15 Like God’s provision of manna at the first exodus (Ex. 16:18), the provision at the “second exodus” in Christ has also been equally sufficient between Jews and Gentiles so that each may be able to provide for the other.

WEEK 7 DEVOTIONS

Spending time in God's Word is essential to growing in your faith in Jesus. The REAP Bible study method is a simple tool that you can use during your quiet times.

READ - Take the time to carefully read the Bible passage with an open heart, asking the Holy Spirit to give you words of encouragement, direction and correction.

EXAMINE - Grab your journal and write out your answers to the questions. Make note of what stands out to you.

APPLY - A great question to ask is "How will I live differently and be different today because of what I just read?"

PRAY - Then, talk with God about the passage and your application. Ask Him to change your heart and life based on the time you've spent in His Word.

DAY 1 — ACTS 20:35

How did Paul describe his work of helping the weak?

Write out the phrase quoted from Jesus:

DAY 2 — 1 JOHN 1:5-7 & MATTHEW 5:16

Who is light? How can we be in the light? What is the result of being a light?

What are we to do with our light? Why?

DAY 3 — 1 JOHN 3:16-18

What does it require for us to love someone the Christ loved us?

What does it look like in today's culture to have closed hearts towards those in needs?

DAY 4 — PROVERBS 11:24-25

In this passage, compare the one who blesses and the other who withholds.

What will the man who blesses others gain? What will the man who withholds suffer? Will he ever be satisfied?

DAY 5 — 2 CORINTHIANS 9:6-9

Whose decision is it as to how one should give?

What will happen to a person if they choose to give reluctantly? How will God bless one who decided to give generously?

DAY 6 — MATTHEW 6:1-4

What must we be cautious of when helping the needy?

What is the outcome of those who boast about helping the needy?

DAY 7 — MATTHEW 25:31-46

What is the difference between the sheep and the goats?

When we love the least of these, whom else are we serving (see verse 40)?

Essential #7: Transformational Community

Life in Christ, Together

1 CORINTHIANS 12:12-31

WEEK

8

Key Questions and Concepts

All of the Life in Christ Essentials happen within the context of Transformational Community.

Being part of a Transformational Community means pursuing the Life in Christ Essentials together.

We need each other.

Your body is an incredible miracle of God's creation. Think about it. You put a [insert favorite food here] in your mouth, chew it up with teeth designed specifically for chewing, and swallow it through a tube that your stomach shares with your lungs for breathing. Then, without any effort on your part, your body processes the food, turn some of it in to energy and gets rid of the rest, stores that energy for later, and then sends that energy to your thumbs muscles right at the time when you need it to play [insert favorite video game here]. You may not think about everything your body is doing, but even now it is busy at work keeping you alive and allowing you to enjoy your life.

Here's a question to consider about your body: If you had to give up one of your five senses, which one would you choose? The opposite of that question is: Which of your five sense can you not live without? What would happen if you woke up blind tomorrow? Or maybe you lost your sense of smell; how would that affect your life? Take two minutes in your group, giving everyone a quick chance to defend their decision.

***Which of your five senses would you be most reluctant to lose?
How could someone else help you if you lost one of your senses?***

Thankfully, no one is losing any eyes or ears today. However, if you did lose one of your senses, think about the way it would impact your life. If you were suddenly blind, you wouldn't say, "Well, too bad for my eyes." Losing your vision would impact YOU—your whole self, not just your eyes. This is because each part of the body is connected together—they aren't separate parts, but rather are all woven into a single person that you call "me."

Today we're going to see that the Bible calls our church a body. As Christians, we are connected to each other in the same way that the parts of the body are connected. This means that we can't survive on our own. All the Essentials that we've talked about so far will not benefit you if you try to do them apart from the body. Let's look in Romans and see what God's Word has to say.

5-Minute Commentary

1 Cor. 12:18 God arranged. The Corinthians' thinking will be corrected when they consider God's sovereignty in assigning gifts (cf. also vv. 3, 11, 28).

1 Cor. 12:20 many parts, yet one body. One of the key themes in these chapters is unity in the midst of diversity.

Rom. 12:3 God has granted a differing measure of faith to each of his children, and Paul calls upon each to assess himself or herself realistically.

TRANSFORMATIONAL COMMUNITY

The final Essential of Life in Christ is Transformational Community. We started off Week 1 by learning about being connected to Christ, as a branch is connected to a vine (John 15). As we've learned about each Essential, we've talked mostly about how each one works in a person's individual life with Christ. Even our discussion of Disciple Maker and Generous Living were focused on your individual disciple making and generosity.

This week, we shift our focus to how our Life in Christ requires relationships with other Christians. The Bible has a great deal to say about community, because God himself is a community (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit). Our goal today is to discover how God has designed us to live in community, and to see that being connected to Christ also means being connected to others. When we pursue Prayer, Scripture, Faith, Obedience, Disciple Making, and Generosity in the context of Christian community, we experience the transformation of becoming more like Christ.

Read Romans 12:3-8.

Who is Paul referring to when he says "we" in verse 5?

What metaphor does Paul use to describe what the church is like (verse 4)? In what ways is the church like that?

What does Paul command us to do in verse 6? What does this have to do with the "body?" (Hint: think about how a human body works)

Each of us is just one part of the body. We are like an ear, or a foot, or a hand. Each part needs all the others parts, and the body needs each individual part! Each part needs each other. This is the way God has designed the church to work. Each person plays a critical role.

Can you think of any other analogies that describe the way the church should work together? (Hint: think about sports, or buildings, or families)

There are many ways for people to find community. You might be part of a band, sports team, scout troop, or other small group of people where you build relationships with other people. However, the church is different from all of these kinds of community. The reason it's unique is that in the church we are actually connected to one another through Christ. We are as connected to each other as we are connected to Christ. When we have faith in Christ for salvation, we become connected to other people in the Church.

Point to Make

Drive home the uniqueness of the Church and how God specifically equips us to meet each other's needs.

Rom. 12:4–5 The diversity and unity of the church is illustrated by comparison to the human body. Just as the human body is one with many members (lit., body parts, limbs), so the church is united though it is composed of many members. On the theme of the church as the body of Christ, see also 1 Corinthians 12 and Eph. 4:4, 12–16.

Rom. 12:6 The variety of the body is evident from the various gifts God has given the church. in proportion to our faith. Paul instructs prophets to speak only when they have faith or confidence that the Holy Spirit is truly revealing something to them, and not to exceed the faith that God has given them by trying to impress others.

Since Christ is the reason we are connected, then our community should have all the elements of Life in Christ. In other words, the Life in Christ Essentials should define our life together. As we saw in Week 5, the goal of the Christian life is sanctification—becoming more like Christ in every way. Another word we might use instead of sanctification is “transformation.” That’s why this Essential is called “Transformational Community.” When we practice the first six Life in Christ Essentials together, we are transformed into the image of Christ.

PRAYER AND SCRIPTURE

How often to do you pray with other Christians outside of your family?

If you started praying with your friends, would your relationship with them change? Why?

Do you ever study the Bible with friends outside of Sunday morning? Do you think that Bible study with Christian friends is important? Why or why not?

Do you have a consistent Bible study time of your own? Share about it.

Prayer and Scripture are two sides of one conversation: between us and God. If you try to have this conversation all on your own, you will fail! One of the primary purposes of coming to church is to pray and read the Bible together, and encourage one another to do this each day.

Read Hebrews 10:24-25.

How might your small group “stir one another up” in consistent prayer and Bible study, both alone and together.

AUTHENTIC FAITH AND OBEDIENT FOLLOWER

Authentic Faith is faith that is seen. For it to be seen, we need to be around other people who are looking for it! This is true both for yourself and for others. We need to see each other’s faith!

Think of someone outside of your family who you know is a Christian. How do you know they a Christian? How can you see their faith?

Discuss

Help students to think about their relationships with other Christians, especially those in our church, and talk about these questions.

Reference

That is why we provide resources devotions for each lesson.

Rom. 12:7–8 Christians should concentrate upon and give their energies to the gifts God has given them, whether in serving others, teaching God’s Word patiently, or in exhortation and encouragement in the things of God. Thus Paul spotlights three attitudes necessary in exercising particular gifts: (1) those who have a special gift of helping others financially should never give grudgingly but always generously; (2) those who lead often have no one to whom they are accountable, and hence they must beware of laziness; (3) those who show mercy to the hurting must not grow weary but continue to minister with gladness.

Heb. 10:24–25 let us consider. The third and final exhortation in vv. 22–25 calls for serious thinking

What does it mean to be “transparent” with others? Is this a good quality? Why or why not?

The people who you are most “transparent” with have the most influence on your life. Who are you “transparent” with? Do those people help or hurt your faith?

Describe some roadblocks to being transparent with other people in your small group.

God designed us to live our lives as a body. That means we can’t be Obedient Followers on our own! We really do need each other in order to have an abundant Life in Christ.

Do you have other Christians in your life (outside of your family) who challenge and encourage you to be obedient to God? Who are they?

Brainstorm some ways your small group can help each other be Obedient Followers this week. How can you hold each other accountable for what you learn on Sundays?

DISCIPLE MAKER AND GENEROUS LIVING

What intentional steps can you take to “disciple” your Christian friends?

Talk about some needs that your small group could work together to meet.

Being part of a Transformational Community means pursuing the Life in Christ Essentials together. As we pray and study God’s Word, are transparent and hold each other accountable, and make disciples generously together, we are slowly transformed into the image of Christ. God’s design is not just for community, but specifically for the community that transforms us to be holy as He is holy.

Discuss

Help the students think about when transparency is good, and when it is bad.

about other Christians with a purpose to stir up (or “provoke”) them in their love and service (good works). Christian perseverance is thus also a community endeavor. meet together. Community encouragement toward perseverance requires being together. That some were neglecting this duty may have been among the motives for the author’s warnings throughout this book. encouraging. Voicing exhortation with the goal of strengthening another’s faith (see 3:13; cf. 13:22).

NOW WHAT?

Think about each Essential. (Prayer, Scripture, Authentic Faith, Obedient Follower, Disciple Maker, Generous Living). How does being in community help us pursue each one?

Which Essential are you already doing well?

Which Essential is your weakest? How can you be transformed by working on this weakness with those in your small group?

After going through this lesson, what are some ways you can pursue deeper community at church right now? How will you do that?

GOING DEEPER

Read Acts 2:42.

What four things did the first Christian devote themselves to?

Do you see any similarities with the Essentials?

Spend some time praying that you will be changed by your interaction with the church community.

MEMORY VERSE FOR THE WEEK

"So we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one of another."
—Romans 12:5

WEEK 8 DEVOTIONS

Spending time in God's Word is essential to growing in your faith in Jesus. The REAP Bible study method is a simple tool that you can use during your quiet times.

READ - Take the time to carefully read the Bible passage with an open heart, asking the Holy Spirit to give you words of encouragement, direction and correction.

EXAMINE - Grab your journal and write out your answers to the questions. Make note of what stands out to you.

APPLY - A great question to ask is "How will I live differently and be different today because of what I just read?"

PRAY - Then, talk with God about the passage and your application. Ask Him to change your heart and life based on the time you've spent in His Word.

DAY 1 — ACTS 2:42-47

How does this passage describe the early church? What did they do together?

Which of the Life in Christ Essentials can you find in this passage?

DAY 2 — EPHESIANS 4:1-16

Write down the things that this passage says there is "one" of. Why might Paul emphasize "oneness"?

Summarize what this passage says about the goal of community. (Hint: Look at verses 13 and 15). How does being connected to Christ change the way we interact with other Christians?

DAY 3 — 1 CORINTHIANS 12:12-20

What point is Paul making by talking about "the foot."?

Read verse 18 again. What point is Paul making about every Christian?

DAY 4 — 1 CORINTHIANS 12:21-26

What parts of the body have the greatest honor, according to this passage?

How does Paul describe the effect each member of the body has on the other members?

DAY 5 — GENESIS 2:15-23

What did God put Adam in the garden to do?

What was the "problem" that God wanted to solve? How did he solve it?

DAY 6 — GALATIANS 6:1-5

What is Paul telling Christians to do? Why?

Compare and contrast verses 2 and 5. What can you learn from these two verses?

DAY 7 — 1 PETER 2:1-5

How does Paul describe the Christians in this passage?

What does it mean to be a "living stone?" What does this passage teach us about the purpose of gathering together as the church?

LOOKING BACK

You have done a great job this semester as you have learned more about your identity in Christ. It is such a privilege and joy to study Scripture. Take some time to reflect on all that you have learned during this study.

How do you feel now that you have completed this study?

Describe how your future will be impacted because of this study.

So now you are thinking, okay, now that I've completed this study, I know everything I need to know now, right?

Psalms 119:55 says, "In the night I remember your name, O LORD, and I will keep your law." Discipleship isn't about completing a study. It is about a lifestyle of learning and living as you follow Jesus throughout your lifetime. What you have learned throughout this study will become more important to your Christian life in the months, even years, to come. Think about some of the major concepts that you have learned and can live out.

- A Christian is an individual that abides in Christ by faith and produces fruit.
- Apart from Christ we can do nothing.
- God wants us to pray because he wants us to have a relationship with him.
- Scripture is essential to our growth in Christ.
- Scripture is a lamp at my feet and a light for my path.
- God alone determines authentic faith.
- An individual with Authentic Faith will display the fruit of the Spirit.
- The Result of obedience to God's commands is personal holiness/sanctification.
- Our motivation to obey and follow Christ comes from our response to his love for us.
- The goal of discipleship is helping people grow in following Jesus' commands. This is a lifelong process.
- We are all called to make disciples.
- A transformed life in Christ will cause the believer to live in such a way that generosity overflows no matter the circumstances.
- Learned how to live with open hands.
- Contributing to the needs of others is only made possible by God's undeserved gifts in our lives.
- All of the Life in Christ Essentials happen within the context of Transformation Community.
- Being a part of a Transformational Community means pursuing the Life in Christ Essentials together.
- We are the body of Christ. We need each other.

Wow! That's a lot! Now it's time to continue to live out what you have learned in this study.

PSALMS

SONGS OF PRAISE

Is it true that Christianity is unique in the fact that it is a singing and rejoicing faith?

John Piper responded to that question by saying, "Absolutely. I don't think there are any other religions that sing like Christians sing. Christians really make music over their faith."

This study will help students to understand the different styles of Psalms and how they can reflect on them to worship and pray.

Psalms Forward

WHO WROTE PSALMS & WHY IS IT BROKEN UP INTO FIVE BOOKS?

It is uncertain why Psalms is divided into five books. Some sources, including Jewish Midrash traditions, suggest the five-fold division is based on the five books of the Torah (Genesis to Deuteronomy). The division of the Psalms is not based on authorship or chronology, as several authors composed Psalms, and their individual songs are mixed throughout the various collections.

David is listed as the author of 73 psalms, Asaph of 12, and the sons of Korah of 11. Other psalms were written by Solomon, Heman the Ezrahite, Ethan the Ezrahite, and Moses. The earliest extant copy of Psalms is from the Dead Sea Scrolls from about the first century AD. That copy shows that the division into five books extends to at least that time and certainly earlier.

Each of the five books of Psalms ends with a doxology or a song of praise. The final verse of each concluding psalm includes either "Praise the Lord!" or "Amen." Psalm 150, serves as the fitting final doxology, concluding with the words, "Let everything that has breath praise the Lord. Praise the Lord."

HOW TO READ THE BOOK OF THE PSALMS

The Psalms are prayers, but they also happen to be prayers written to God as poems and songs. That means they are not quick, easy reading. Think about reading poetry in your English class at school—you may take a whole class period just to analyze just a few lines of one poem because poems have a lot of meaning packed into just a few words. Keep this in mind as you're reading through the book of Psalms. Other books of the Bible are stories or letters, but the book of Psalms is a book of poetry.

In English, different types of poems have different forms. When you think of an English poem, you probably think of rhyming—this is one of the most common forms. Hebrew poetry has form, too. Instead of being about rhyming, however, it's all about the pairing of ideas and concept—putting two thoughts next to each other in the text.

- A) Sometimes the second thought repeats or restates the first thought.
 - a. Example: Think of an apple and another apple.
- B) Sometimes the second thought is the exact opposite of the first thought.
 - a. Example: Think of an apple and an orange.
- C) Sometimes the second thought restates the first thought, but carries it a little further.
 - a. Example: Think of an apple and a bigger apple.

Remember, these are just the basics, but most of the meaning in the Psalms can be found by building off of these "forms." For example, sometimes these three forms are all used together, or two of them are used in combination, etc. WHAT'S IMPORTANT TO REMEMBER is that when you find yourself getting frustrated and thinking, "Wait, this is saying the same thing over and over again," you're probably right! That's OK. Realize and recognize that the author intends to do that—that's the way Hebrew poetry works. Try to appreciate it and enter into another time and culture instead of saying, "I don't like that—it's different than what I'm used to." Take time. If you try to figure out why the author wrote it this way, you will be rewarded.

PSALM EXPLANATIONS

Scholars have broken the Psalms up into a few different “groupings” that can be helpful in understanding each psalm’s purpose and form. There are eight different types explained below. It should be noted that some people split the Psalms up into more groups than this, and some others use less. The criteria for what makes a psalm one type as opposed to another are neither perfect nor universally agreed upon, so these are just some general guidelines.

In parenthesis after each Psalm category a color is listed. It may help you to color code the Psalm number as you go through this study so you can remember what type of Psalm you are reading.

Torah Psalms (light blue)

“Torah” literally means instruction (and also refers to the five books of Moses, which are the first five books of the Bible—Genesis through Deuteronomy). Torah Psalms focus on the importance of God’s instruction and the role it should play in the life of a believer. Only three out of the 150 Psalms are considered “Torah” Psalms. However, the longest psalm in the Bible (119) is a Torah Psalm. The other two Torah Psalms are Psalm 1 and Psalm 19.

Wisdom Psalms (brown)

Reading a Wisdom Psalm is like reading the book of Proverbs. There’s lots of “practical” advice, contrasting the righteous with the wicked, and the rich and the poor. The emphasis is on trust in the Lord, the gaining of understanding, and the foolishness of solely seeking possessions. Psalms 37, 49, 73, 112, 127, 128, 133 are Wisdom Psalms.

Praise Psalms (yellow)

Praise Psalms aren’t really “studied” so much as they are absorbed. Reading a Praise Psalm is like being in the ocean when a huge wave washes over you. Overwhelmed in the midst of the experience, you’re almost forced to contemplate it. Praise Psalms seem to be relatively easy to understand, but one shouldn’t discard the profound in the simple. Structurally, these psalms present a call to the reader (or the pray-er) to praise God. The psalmist often offers several reasons why God deserves our praise: His absolute power and might, His work as Creator, His control over human history, His mercy, ect. It’s a crime to allow the simplicity of “praise God” to wash over our lives without purifying our hearts. Psalms 8, 29, 33, 47, 65, 78, 93, 95–100, 103–6, 111, 113, 114, 117, 134, 135, 136, 145–50 are Praise Psalms.

Lament Psalms (dark blue)

Lament Psalms were composed from the depths of human despair. These psalms express darker sides of human experience. Worshiping God is stretched to the limit as the psalmist deals with confusion, doubt, disappointment and even anger. These feelings exist for mature Christians. In fact, it seems impossible to be spiritually mature without walking through these dark valleys. Many people enter God’s family during difficult times. The Lament Psalms describe what happens when the spiritual person struggles through crises. Though stretched and strained, the psalmist still hopes in the Lord. Psalms 44, 60, 74, 79, 80, 83, 85, 90, 94, 123, 137 are Lament Psalms.

Zion Psalms (green)

Zion is “an ancient name for various parts of Jerusalem, of Judah and all the land, and also a metaphor for the people of God.” Zion Psalms focus on God’s presence among the Israelites—specifically in Jerusalem, although Zion can also be metaphorical. Since God can be found and known, these psalms “express an intense longing to make a pilgrimage to the Temple of Jerusalem.” Psalms 46, 48, 76, 84, 87, 122 are Zion Psalms.

Thanksgiving Psalms (orange)

While Praise Psalms focus on the glory of who God is, Thanksgiving Psalms tend to be an expression of gratitude for what God has done. Often times these psalms will follow a common form: the author is distressed, then he calls to God for help, then God comes to his rescue. Thanksgiving Psalms are in this way similar to a testimony . . . telling a story about God’s help and thanking Him for what He has done. “These psalms originated as a grateful response to God for a specific act of deliverance, such as healing from illness, which may be a physical manifestation of unforgiven sin (32), deliverance from enemies (18; 92; 118; 138), or simply rescue from trouble (66:14). These psalms assume the presence of the congregation, which is gathered either for worship or for instruction (32:8–11; 34:11–14) and who hear the story of the deliverance. There are hints indicating how these psalms were used in worship: 118:19–29 assumes a procession, while 66:13–15 and 116:12–19 point to a thank offering accompanying the psalm. In Psalm 138 the worshipper is in the outer court of the temple (v 2). At the heart of these psalms is the story of the deliverance, summarized briefly, ‘O Lord my God, I cried to thee for help, and thou hast healed me’ and often expanded.” Psalms 18, 30, 32, 92, 116, 118, 138 are Thanksgiving Psalms.

Royal Psalms (purple)

Rather than having a common form, Royal Psalms have a common theme: the king. It’s important to remember that the psalms were actually songs that were sung and played in a corporate (group) setting. Today in the church we have certain songs for certain types of events—one song might be appropriate to sing on a national holiday, while another might be better used for a wedding. It was the same way in Ancient Israel, and these Royal Psalms were all used at events where the king was involved (his coronation, his victory in battle, the establishment of his kingdom). While these psalms were first used in association with the earthly kings of Israel, many Christians believe them also to be prophetic about the coming Messiah—the King of Kings. Psalms 2, 18, 20, 21, 45, 72, 89, 101, 110, 132 are Royal Psalms.

Liturgical Psalms (red)

Just like Royal Psalms, the Liturgical Psalms were reserved for a certain purpose. These psalms were each used during the order of worship (or liturgy) in the temple—they were for public worship. Just like we have certain songs to accompany different “sacraments” that we take part in (communion, baptism, etc.), these psalms may have been for certain “rites” as well. Psalms 15, 24, 50, 81, 95, 115, 132 are Liturgical Psalms.

Meditate Day and Night

Torah Psalms

JOSHUA 1:6-9

WEEK

1

Key Questions and Concepts

We should meditate on the law of the Lord with our whole heart and mind.

We must dig deep into the treasures of God's Word in order to bear fruit for the kingdom.

The Psalms stand as one of the most unique books among the collection of already unique books that make up the Bible. It's the biggest book, by far. It's quoted more than any other book of the Bible. Although I couldn't prove it, it might even be the most read.

I think the most interesting thing about this book is its dual nature. The Psalms are holy Scripture, and this means they are God's Word for us. The Psalms are also mankind's words to God, for they are a collection of songs, hymns, poems, and prayers dedicated to God. When you or I read a Psalm, we are, at the same time, reading God's Word for us and man's word back to God.

If you struggle with your prayer life (I should probably write WHEN you struggle), the Psalms are a great place to turn. Praying the Psalms back to God can be an amazing experience. People often say, I don't know what to pray. I almost always encourage those individuals to read the Psalms, and then pray them back to God.

The book of Psalms is a book about knowing God... talking to Him honestly and authentically, listening to Him, searching to find out what He's really like. It's a book that documents the journeys of different God-seekers by letting us in on their conversations with the Creator. Through their prayers and songs we can follow the well-worn paths they traveled as they discovered greater intimacy with the Father.

*Have you ever read through all the laws in the Old Testament?
Are there particular rules that you struggle with following in your home?*

This week we are going to focus on a Torah Psalm. Joshua was reminded to meditate on the law of the Lord as they were about to cross over into the promise land. This commandment to reflect was intentional so that they would not be afraid nor forget the Lord their God. The same command to remember the law of the Lord is given to you and I as well. "Torah" literally means instruction (and also refers to the five books of Moses, which are the first five books of the Bible—Genesis through Deuteronomy). Torah Psalms focus on the importance of God's instruction and the role it should play in the life of a believer. Only three out of the 150 Psalms are considered "Torah" Psalms. However, the longest psalm in the Bible (119) is a Torah Psalm. The other two Torah Psalms are Psalm 1 and Psalm 19.

5-Minute Commentary

Psalm 1. The first psalm serves as the gateway into the entire book of Psalms, stressing that those who would worship God genuinely must embrace his Law (or Torah), i.e., his covenant instruction. This psalm takes topics found in wisdom literature such as Proverbs and makes them the subject of song; the purpose is that those who sing the psalm will own its values—namely, they will want more and more to be people who love the Torah, who believe it, who see themselves as the heirs and stewards of its story of redemption and hope, and who seek to carry out its moral requirements. They can delight in the idea of being among the "righteous," feeling that nothing can compare with such blessedness. By its sustained contrast, the psalm reminds readers that in the end there are re-

PSALM 1:1-6

The Way of the Righteous and the Wicked

¹ Blessed is the man
who walks not in the counsel of the wicked,

nor stands in the way of sinners,
nor sits in the seat of scoffers;

² but his delight is in the law of the Lord,
and on his law he meditates day and night.

³ He is like a tree
planted by streams of water

that yields its fruit in its season,
and its leaf does not wither.

In all that he does, he prospers.

⁴ The wicked are not so,
but are like chaff that the wind drives away.

⁵ Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment,
nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous;

⁶ for the Lord knows the way of the righteous,
but the way of the wicked will perish.

ally only two ways to live.

Ps. 1:1–2 Contrast-
ing Sources of Val-
ues. The truly happy
person guides his life
by God's instruction
rather than by the
advice of those who
reject that instruction.

Ps. 1:1 Blessed. The
truly happy person is
happy because God
showers him with
favor. Jesus uses the
Greek equivalent
in Matt. 5:3–11; cf.
also James 1:12. The
Latin translation, bea-
tus, is the source
of the word beati-
tude. the man. A spe-
cific, godly individ-
ual (Hb. ha'ish, "the
man") is held up as
an example for oth-
ers to imitate. Such
teaching by use of a
concrete example is
common in OT wis-
dom literature. wick-
ed ... sinners ...
scoffers. These are
people, even within
Israel, who refuse to
live by the covenant;
the godly person
refuses to follow the
moral orientation of

such people's lifestyle. Some have seen an increasing level of sinfulness in the terms "wicked-sinners-scoffers," together with an increasing loyalty in the metaphors "walk-stand-sit"; however, it is likely that the terms "wicked" and "sinner" here are equivalent, while a "scoffer" is certainly more committed to evil.

Ps. 1:2 the law of the Lord. this could be taken as God's instruction (Hb. Torah, which often designates the Law of Moses), particularly as he speaks in his covenant. For this reason no one should ever think that such a person receives his blessedness by deserving it, since the covenant is founded on God's grace. Meditates describes an active pondering, perhaps even muttering to oneself in pursuit

DIGGING INTO THE TEXT

STOP: Before continuing to these questions, make sure that you have:

- 1) Read the psalm at least twice. The second time, put a "?" next to anything that seems weird or doesn't really make sense.
- 2) Review the psalm categories and introduction to Hebrew poetry in the forward of this book.
- 3) Take a minute to pray and ask God to reveal His truth to you. (Take this seriously; make it more than just a "this-is-something-I-have-to-do" sort of prayer.)

What doesn't make sense in the psalm?

What's confusing?

Underline the nine key words in verse 1 (walk, counsel, wicked; and stand, way, sinners; and sit, seat, mockers). What do you think the psalmist is communicating through this list of three actions?

What are the attributes (v.3) of the "blessed man"?

- 1)
- 2)
- 3)
- 4)

What are the attributes (v. 4-5) of the "wicked"?

- 1)
- 2)
- 3)

What is the "law" of the Lord? Why is it called "law"?

What does it mean to "delight" in the law of the Lord?

Do we have a choice over what we delight in? In other words, can we decide what we like and what we don't like about the "law"? Explain.

Interact

Encourage students to interact with the Scripture and mark their text up in their study book as well as their own Bible.

Interact

Allow time for students to analyze the passage. Ask them to look at it line by line. As we begin this study it is critical to allow them time to process.

Point to Make

Students should see a progression from bad to worse to worst rather than just the same "bad" thing repeated three different ways.

Interact

Utilize the imagery given within the text to make think students think concrete thoughts rather than abstract.

Reference

Law = Instruction.
Law of Moses (Torah)

of insight. Some suppose day and night speaks of the work of professional scholars who spend all their time pondering the words of the law, but in view of the similar instruction in Josh. 1:8, readers should see this as setting the ideal of facing every situation, be it ever so mundane, with a view to pleasing the Lord by knowing and following his Word.

Ps. 1:3–4 Contrasting Fruitfulness. Here are two similes, based on agriculture in ancient Palestine, describing the effects of the two kinds of people.

Ps. 1:3 The first image is that of a tree in a dry climate, which nevertheless thrives because of its

Circle the word "delight" in v. 2 representing all of the law of the Lord.

This psalm says of the blessed man, "whatever he does prospers." What does "prosper" really mean? Look to the text to support your answers.

Reread verses 1-3.

Double underline the word "planted".

Why is the picture of the tree used?

Put a square around the words "fruit" and "prosper".

Does the tree always yield fruit? Does the leaf ever wither? What clues from the text support your answer?

CHAFF—THE SEED COVERINGS AND OTHER DEBRIS SEPARATED FROM THE SEED IN THRESHING GRAIN; THE WORTHLESS PART OF GRAIN THAT IS STRIPPED AWAY FROM THE WHEAT AND THROWN AWAY

Why is the tree different from the chaff?

Draw marks around the word "wind" as if to illustrate the force of the wind.

What does this psalm teach about the future and eternity? Read verse 5 carefully, what ideas are paralleled together?

God has an intimate knowledge about each of us. The word "knows" carries a meaning of more than information about a person, rather a knowledge that has a focus on the relationship with that person. It should encourage us that God knows us that well and approves of us in Christ.

Taking the time to interact with the text will help engage your mind with the heart of the text. Consider writing the words or phrases that you think of next to verse (Example: "meditate" = "think deeply"). Visualize the text and draw pictures. Highlight or mark key words that stand out to you. You could also color the parallel statements within the Psalm. This is perfect time to discover the riches of the Scriptures.

Interact

Why do bad things still happen to people who are "blessed"?

Point to Make

Tree roots dig deep into one place in the same way that the man meditates on the law of the Lord.

Reference

Print a picture of chaff to share or have it ready on your mobile device.

Point to Make

Wicked will fall and the righteous will stand. There is a clear separation. Illustrate this by simply asking one student to stand in your group and another to lie down.

constant supply of water. A tree bears fruit, not for itself, but for others; thus, when the faithful prospers, it is not for himself, nor is the prospering even necessarily material, but he succeeds in bringing benefit to others. See Jer. 17:8 for the same image.

Ps. 1:4 wicked. See v. 1. chaff. This is the husks and straw removed by threshing, and it is lighter than the edible kernels; when a farmer tosses threshed wheat into the air, the wind drives away the chaff. Those who reject God's covenant are like chaff in that they bring no benefit to anyone (cf. 35:5).

Ps. 1:5–6 Contrasting Outcomes of Their Lives. These two verses lead readers to reflect on where these two kinds of life are headed, showing that God will make the contrast last forever.

NOW WHAT?

Using the teachings from the psalm, would you be considered blessed or wicked? Take an honest inventory of your heart and the way you live your life . . . where do you feel you stand?

What is the major difference between the righteous versus the wicked described in verse 1 and verse 3 because both end up stationary (Hint: look at verse 2)?

What do you need to change in order to remove yourself from the wicked messages you hear each day to be able to focus and meditate on the "law of the Lord"?

PRAYER: Pray this text over your small group, family, and friends this next week.

GOING DEEPER

One of the best things that you can do to dig deeper into the riches of God Almighty is to spend time studying, meditating, and reflecting on the Bible. We have an incredible gift to be able to study the Scriptures for ourselves.

The following week of devotions will be focused on looking at the Torah Psalms. "Torah" literally means instruction (and also refers to the five books of Moses, which are the first five books of the Bible—Genesis through Deuteronomy). Torah Psalms focus on the importance of God's instruction and the role it should play in the life of a believer. Only three out of the 150 Psalms are considered "Torah" Psalms. However, the longest psalm in the Bible (119) is a Torah Psalm. The other two Torah Psalms are Psalm 1 and Psalm 19.

Ask the Holy Spirit for the discipline that it takes to have a daily quiet time. Spend time studying the text and come back next week ready to share all that God has spoken to you. Don't forget to color code the Psalm number as described in the Forward on page 5.

MEMORY VERSE FOR THE WEEK

"Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers; but his delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law he meditates day and night. He is like a tree planted by streams of water that yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither. In all that he does, he prospers. The wicked are not so, but are like chaff that the wind drives away. Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous; for the Lord knows the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish."

—Psalm 1:1-6

Prayer

Have your students pray this text over each other before leaving.

Encourage

Inspire students to have a daily quiet time. Have them come back next week ready to share all that God has spoken to them.

Ps. 1:5 Therefore indicates that these verses are the conclusion of the psalm. judgment. This could be any particular judgment that falls on the wicked in this life, but it is more likely the final judgment, which allows some to enter the congregation of the righteous, while excluding others (Eccles. 12:14).

Ps. 1:6 Knows must be something stronger than simply "knows about," since God knows about the wicked and their deepest secrets (cf. 94:8–11). Some have argued that the word means "cares for," but it is better to take this as "knows with affection and approval, i.e., prefers" (cf. Gen. 18:19; Amos 3:2). will perish. That is, end in destruction.

WEEK 1 DEVOTIONS

Spending time in God's Word is essential to growing in your faith in Jesus. The REAP Bible study method is a simple tool that you can use during your quiet times.

READ - Take the time to carefully read the Bible passage with an open heart, asking the Holy Spirit to give you words of encouragement, direction and correction.

EXAMINE - Grab your journal and write out your answers to the questions. Make note of what stands out to you.

APPLY - A great question to ask is "How will I live differently and be different today because of what I just read?"

PRAY - Then, talk with God about the passage and your application. Ask Him to change your heart and life based on the time you've spent in His Word.

Ask the following questions of each passage.

- What is going on in the text? What are the circumstances the author is addressing?
- Who is writing, whom is it being written to, and when was the author writing?
- Does the writer mention anything that might indicate his purpose or intent?
- How do you think the author wants his audience to respond?
- What does this tell me about God?
- What does this tell me about myself?
- How does this point to my need for redemption?
- How will I live differently because of what I just read? Is there something for me to obey, a path to follow, a sin I must repent of, or a blessing to celebrate?

DAY 1 — PSALM 19:1-6

DAY 2 — PSALM 19:7-11

DAY 3 — PSALM 19:12-14

DAY 4 — PSALM 119:1-16

DAY 5 — PSALM 119:17-32

DAY 6 — PSALM 119:33-48

DAY 7 — PSALM 119:49-64

Fix Our Eyes

Torah Psalms

PROVERBS 2:1-5

WEEK

2

Key Questions and Concepts

We must be diligent to fix our eyes on God's Word.

Scripture is truly a treasure of glorious riches.

Through all difficulties God's Word brings us life and we must trust it.

Throughout life we search and strive after many things. What we fixate our focus upon captivates our minds and hearts. Have you ever considered making your focus on the deep and rich treasure of the Bible? Psalm 119 celebrates the gift of God's Torah as the perfect guide for life.

"Torah" literally means instruction (and also refers to the five books of Moses, which are the first five books of the Bible—Genesis through Deuteronomy). Torah Psalms focus on the importance of God's instruction and the role it should play in the life of a believer. Only three out of the 150 Psalms are considered "Torah" Psalms. However, the longest psalm in the Bible (119) is a Torah Psalm. The other two Torah Psalms are Psalm 1 and Psalm 19.

Psalm 119 is the longest psalm, the longest chapter in the Bible, and the most elaborate and carefully structured. The psalm's structure observes a strict acrostic pattern. There are 22 stanzas of eight verses each, following the 22 letters of the Hebrew alphabet in sequence. Within a stanza, the first word of each verse begins with the same letter, the letter to which the entire stanza corresponds. We will see today that even though this pattern severely limits the author's liberty in sustaining his flow of thought, it does not hinder the psalm from accomplishing its goal, which is to enable God's people to admire his Word so strongly that they will work and pray hard to have it shape their character and conduct.

This psalm reflects the view that the Lord, who abounds in steadfast love and faithfulness and who freely and fully forgives his people when they confess their sins (Ex. 34:6–7), loves his people without limit, and therefore also guides the faithful in the way of life that is genuinely good and beautiful.

***What aspects of God's Word do you treasure?
Where would you rank God's Word in value in your life?***

In Psalm 119 there is no pretense of perfection (cf. v. 5), only yearning, trust (vv. 41, 176), and dependence on God. The person who will "keep" God's instructions (attend to them carefully, watch over them, treasure them) will find that his "way" (the moral quality and orientation of his life) will more and more reflect God's own character. Is that something that you want?

5-Minute Commentary

Prov. 2:1–5 The protasis (the if-clause of the conditional) is set out in these verses and calls upon the listener or reader to seek wisdom diligently. Where Wisdom is pictured calling out in the streets in 1:20–21, these verses indicate that wisdom is something to be sought after (if you call out for insight and raise your voice for understanding, 2:3). The first result of heeding wisdom is that one will understand the fear of the Lord (v. 5).

Psalm 119. This psalm belongs conceptually with Psalm 19 and overlaps with such wisdom psalms as Psalms 1 and 112. The psalm uses a number of terms for God's covenantal revelation: "law" (v.

PSALM 119:1-16

Your Word Is a Lamp to My Feet

Aleph

¹ Blessed are those whose way is blameless,
who walk in the law of the Lord!

² Blessed are those who keep his testimonies,
who seek him with their whole heart,

³ who also do no wrong,
but walk in his ways!

⁴ You have commanded your precepts
to be kept diligently.

⁵ Oh that my ways may be steadfast
in keeping your statutes!

⁶ Then I shall not be put to shame,
having my eyes fixed on all your commandments.

⁷ I will praise you with an upright heart,
when I learn your righteous rules.

⁸ I will keep your statutes;
do not utterly forsake me!

Beth

⁹ How can a young man keep his way pure?
By guarding it according to your word.

¹⁰ With my whole heart I seek you;
let me not wander from your commandments!

¹¹ I have stored up your word in my heart,
that I might not sin against you.

¹² Blessed are you, O Lord;
teach me your statutes!

¹³ With my lips I declare
all the rules of your mouth.

1: Hb. *torah*, i.e., instruction); "testimonies" (v. 2: Hb. *'edot*, i.e., what God solemnly testifies to be his will); "precepts" (v. 4: Hb. *piqqudim*, i.e., what God has appointed to be done); "statutes" (v. 5: Hb. *khuqqim* and *khuqqot*, i.e., what the divine Lawgiver has laid down); "commandments" (v. 6: Hb. *mitswot*, i.e., what God has commanded); "rules" (v. 7: Hb. *mishpatim*, i.e., what the divine Judge has ruled to be right); "word" (v. 9: Hb. *'imrah* and *dabar*, i.e., what God has spoken). Except for "precepts" (which appears only in the Psalms), all of these words can be found in Deuteronomy (e.g., Deut. 4:8, 44–45; 6:1; 33:9), and denote God's Word, focusing on its role in moral instruction for his people. The person who will "keep" God's instructions (Ps. 119:2: Hb. *shamar* and *natsar*, i.e., attend to them carefully, watch over them, treasure them) will find that his "way" (v. 5: Hb. *der-*

¹⁴ In the way of your testimonies I delight
as much as in all riches.

¹⁵ I will meditate on your precepts
and fix my eyes on your ways.

¹⁶ I will delight in your statutes;
I will not forget your word.

PSALM 119:81-88

Kaph

⁸¹ My soul longs for your salvation;
I hope in your word.

⁸² My eyes long for your promise;
I ask, "When will you comfort me?"

⁸³ For I have become like a wineskin in the smoke,
yet I have not forgotten your statutes.

⁸⁴ How long must your servant endure?
When will you judge those who persecute me?

⁸⁵ The insolent have dug pitfalls for me;
they do not live according to your law.

⁸⁶ All your commandments are sure;
they persecute me with falsehood; help me!

⁸⁷ They have almost made an end of me on earth,
but I have not forsaken your precepts.

⁸⁸ In your steadfast love give me life,
that I may keep the testimonies of your mouth.

ek and *orakh*, i.e., the moral quality and orientation of his life) will more and more reflect God's own character (cf. 18:30; 145:17). Only a few verses in this psalm lack an explicit mention of God's Word: 119:84, 90–91, 120, 122, 132, 149. The psalm calls these instructions "righteous" (vv. 7, 75, 123, 138, 144, 160, 172), "true" and "sure" (vv. 86, 138, 142, 151, 160), and worthy of trust, hope, and faith (vv. 42, 43, 66). All of these are attributes of God himself, and it is no surprise that God's words would partake of his character. Indeed, the law expresses God's own "steadfast love" (v. 124; cf. vv. 41, 64, 76, 88, 149) and "faithfulness" (vv. 89–91). This psalm reflects the view that the Lord, who abounds in steadfast love and faithfulness and who therefore freely and fully forgives his people when they confess their sins (Ex. 34:6–7), loves his people without limit, and therefore also guides

DIGGING INTO THE TEXT

STOP: Before continuing to these questions, make sure that you have:

- 1) Read the psalm at least twice. The second time, put a "?" next to anything that seems weird or doesn't really make sense.
- 2) Review the psalm categories and introduction to Hebrew poetry in the forward of this book.
- 3) Take a minute to pray and ask God to reveal His truth to you. (Take this seriously; make it more than just a "this-is-something-I-have-to-do" sort of prayer.)

Use the following chart to work through the three sections.

- A) Make a list of the actions/verbs that a blessed person ought to do
- B) Make a list of the actions or promises of God and His Word
- C) Find at least two parallels in each section and explain their meaning
- D) Compare and contrast the overall tone in each section

Verses 1-8

Actions of a blessed person

Verses 9-16

Actions of a blessed person

Verses 81-88

Actions of a blessed person

Actions/Promises of God

Actions/Promises of God

Actions/Promises of God

Parallels/Meanings

Parallels/Meanings

Parallels/Meanings

Overall Tone

Overall Tone

Overall Tone

Example

Verses 1-8

Actions of blessed person: Walk seek, keep, obey

Actions/Promises of God: Not be put to shame, not forsaken

Parallels/Meanings:
Verse 1 & 3 "ways are blameless / do nothing wrong", "walk according to the law of the Lord / walk in his ways" You can see the parallel on every other line. It is being repeated so that it will help the listener to remember and follow the words of the Lord.

Overall Tone: Integrity, obedience

the faithful in the way of life that is genuinely good and beautiful (cf. Ps. 119:124). The psalm speaks the language of one ravished with moral beauty, to which there is only one fitting response—to try to reproduce this beauty, as much as possible, in one's daily life. There is no pretense of perfection here (cf. v. 5), only yearning, and trust (vv. 41, 176), and dependence on God (v. 125). To say that these commands are "true" (v. 160) is to confess that, with all their elements geared to a particular culture and phase of redemptive history, the principles that underlie them are founded on the very nature of things, and of God. This is why Christians can sing these words with the same yearning, trust, and dependence. The psalm does not tell who its author was, nor when it was written. Many scholars think it comes from after the Babylonian exile, but this cannot be proven. The psalmist identifies with

VERSES 1-8

Reread verse 6. Do you feel “shame” when you read the Bible? Should people always feel shame when they consider God’s commands?

Is it possible for people to read the Bible and feel good about the way they are living?

Reread verse 8. What’s the connection between obeying God’s ways and being forsaken by Him?

Why do you think the writer makes this request?

Be honest: Why do you do the good that you do? What truly motivates you to live God’s way?

VERSES 9-16

Based on this passage, what are some specific markers of spiritual maturity?

- | | |
|----|----|
| 1) | 2) |
| 3) | 4) |
| 5) | 6) |

How would you rate yourself on Scripture memory?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Reread verse 15. What does it mean to meditate, to consider God’s Word?

Go through all three sections and underline each time you see a reference for the Word, law of the Lord, ways, statutes, precepts, commands, etc.

VERSES 81-88

Reread this section. In your own words, describe the emotion portrayed here.

Circle each time the passage speaks about longing for God, salvation, or the Word.

Challenge

Is verse 6 a description of your life?

Challenge

Encourage students to stop settling for the “I need to memorize more” answer. See James 4:17.

Have a challenge to see who can quote the most passages of Scripture. If your students struggle ask them to share some things they know are true because they know they are in God’s Word.

Interact

After underlining, ask what point do you think we should get from the text?

Interact

Have you ever felt like the kind of emotion described about God’s Word?

the faithful among God’s people, when they face trials (vv. 50, 67, 71, 75, 107, 153), and when they suffer contempt and ill treatment for their faithfulness, even from members of God’s people who reject his grace (vv. 22–23, 39, 42, 51, 61, 69, 78, 84–86, 95, 121, 122, 134, 150, 157, 161). Even when many of God’s own people forsake him (vv. 21, 53, 139), there will be those who want to pursue faithfulness. This fits, e.g., the time before Ezra and Nehemiah carried out their reforms, but it fits many other times as well. The words of this psalm can enable Christians to embrace its aspiration, both when they sing it and when they use those words as prayers for illumination as they attend to God’s word in public and in private.

Describe the person’s dependency on God’s Word. Write some key phrases from the text to support your answer.

Is it OK to be sad as a Christian? Is it OK for things not to be going so well? Explain.

Why are Christians so good at being fake and so bad at showing what’s real?

Explain verse 88. Is the writer making a “deal” with God? Explain your answer—be sure that the text supports your response.

Use the following chart to work through the three sections:

- A) Identify the overall theme for each section. Start by pulling out some key words from each paragraph. Remember, Psalm 119 is a Torah Psalm. It takes the reality of God’s word and explores what God’s revelation means for our lives.
- B) Each section takes a slice of human experience as it stands in relation to God’s Word. What’s the specific human experience described in each section?
- C) Write a single sentence summary for each section; write the best sentence you can. Use a pencil so you can work to perfect it.

Verses 1-8
Theme/Key Words

Verses 9-16
Theme/Key Words

Verses 81-88
Theme/Key Words

Human Experience

Human Experience

Human Experience

Sentence Summary

Sentence Summary

Sentence Summary

Point to Make

The writer is speaking of his trust in God’s ultimate will along with his complete dependency on God to provide life. Reference Psalm 71:20 and 119:25.

Interact

Use each person’s sentence summary and perfect one summary sentence together.

Example

Verses 81-88
Theme/Key Words:
Hope

Human Experience:
Salvation allow him to endure

Sentence Summary:
Despite difficulties, your Word brings me life and I trust it.

Ps. 119:1-2 Blessed. the truly happy person is happy because God showers him with favor. seek. Cf. vv. 10, 45, 94, 155. with their whole heart. Cf. v. 10 and Deut. 4:29.

Ps. 119:5 The goal of the whole psalm is that each member of the congregation would share in this eager yearning.

Ps. 119:9 young man. Cf. 34:11 and Prov. 2:1.

Ps. 119:81 salvation. See v. 41.

NOW WHAT?

Taking the time to interact with the text will help engage your mind with the heart of the text. Consider writing the words or phrases that you think of next to verse (Example: “meditate” = “think deeply”). Visualize the text and draw pictures. Highlight or mark key words that stand out to you. You could also color the parallel statements within the Psalm. This is perfect time to discover the riches of the Scriptures.

PRAYER: Pick one phrase from Psalm 119 that is important to you and meditate on it.

What will it require of you to treasure God’s Word the way the psalmist describes in Psalm 119?

PRAYER: Pick one phrase from Psalm 119 and pray that Scripture over your best friend.

GOING DEEPER

One of the best things that you can do to dig deeper into the riches of God Almighty is to spend time studying, meditating, and reflecting on the Bible. We have an incredible gift to be able to study the Scriptures for ourselves.

The following week of devotions will be focused on looking at the Torah Psalms. “Torah” literally means instruction (and also refers to the five books of Moses, which are the first five books of the Bible—Genesis through Deuteronomy). Torah Psalms focus on the importance of God’s instruction and the role it should play in the life of a believer. Only three out of the 150 Psalms are considered “Torah” Psalms. However, the longest psalm in the Bible (119) is a Torah Psalm. The other two Torah Psalms are Psalm 1 and Psalm 19.

Ask the Holy Spirit for the discipline that it takes to have a daily quiet time. Spend time studying the text and come back next week ready to share all that God has spoken to you.

MEMORY VERSE FOR THE WEEK

“Open my eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of your law. ” —Psalm 119:18

Ps. 119:83 like a wineskin in the smoke. An unused wineskin, hanging in the rafters, becomes shriveled by the smoke; this is an image of one’s vitality “drying up.”

WEEK 2 DEVOTIONS

Spending time in God's Word is essential to growing in your faith in Jesus. The REAP Bible study method is a simple tool that you can use during your quiet times.

READ - Take the time to carefully read the Bible passage with an open heart, asking the Holy Spirit to give you words of encouragement, direction and correction.

EXAMINE - Grab your journal and write out your answers to the questions. Make note of what stands out to you.

APPLY - A great question to ask is "How will I live differently and be different today because of what I just read?"

PRAY - Then, talk with God about the passage and your application. Ask Him to change your heart and life based on the time you've spent in His Word.

Ask the following questions of each passage.

- What is going on in the text? What are the circumstances the author is addressing?
- Who is writing, whom is it being written to, and when was the author writing?
- Does the writer mention anything that might indicate his purpose or intent?
- How do you think the author wants his audience to respond?
- What does this tell me about God?
- What does this tell me about myself?
- How does this point to my need for redemption?
- How will I live differently because of what I just read? Is there something for me to obey, a path to follow, a sin I must repent of, or a blessing to celebrate?

DAY 1 — PSALM 119:65-80

DAY 2 — PSALM 119:81-96

DAY 3 — PSALM 119:97-112

DAY 4 — PSALM 119:113-128

DAY 5 — PSALM 119:129-144

DAY 6 — PSALM 119:145-160

DAY 7 — PSALM 119:161-176

The Wise Hear and Increase in Learning

Wisdom Psalms

PROVERBS 1:1-7

WEEK

3

Key Questions and Concepts

A major goal of this study is to help students to learn how to study Scripture on their own. Wisdom comes from knowing God's Word.

If you have ever stood in front of a funny mirror, you know that it distorts reality. Satan is a master of deceit and works continually to deceive us into believing his lies. One of his schemes is to convince believers that it is worthless to practice faithfulness.

Sometimes, even the most faithful followers of Jesus are tempted to join the way of the wicked when the results appear to be good. There is a precious warning for us in Psalm 73 against concluding that the whole basis of godliness is a lie.

Psalm 73 is a wisdom psalm, helping those who sing it to rest content even when unbelievers seem to get along without a care in the world. A believer's help comes from taking to heart where the different life paths of the faithful and the unbelievers are headed: each one is going toward either nearness to God or separation from him, a nearness or separation that will apply both now and in the afterlife.

Psalm 73 is a companion to Psalm 49. The singer remembers that he discerned these different destinations while he was in the sanctuary of God, namely, at public worship (which points the congregation to what they should look for as they worship).

*Have you ever stood in front of a funny mirror?
Describe how they distort reality.*

Reading a Wisdom Psalm is like reading the book of Proverbs. There's lots of "practical" advice, contrasting the righteous with the wicked, and the rich and the poor. The way of wisdom, righteousness, and the fear of the Lord is typically set against the way of folly, evil, and scoffing. The emphasis is on trust in the Lord, the gaining of understanding, and the foolishness of solely seeking possessions. Psalms 37, 49, 73, 112, 127, 128, 133 are Wisdom Psalms.

Wisdom Psalms along with the book of Proverbs seek to instill teachability, the willingness to grow in wisdom no matter how mature the faith of the believer. You and I have choice to pursue and receive wisdom.

Believers can rest content even when unbelievers seem to get along without a care in the world because God is our refuge and shield.

5-Minute Commentary

Prov. 1:7 The reason that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of both knowledge and wisdom is that the moral life begins with reverence and humility before the Maker and Redeemer.

Ps. 73:1–3 The Theme: I Envied the Wicked. The motto in v. 1 makes it clear that the whole psalm is a meditation on the problem that God is good to Israel (and esp. to those in Israel who are pure in heart, i.e., for those who love God wholeheartedly; cf. Deut. 6:5), while there seem to be arrogant (or "boastful," Ps. 5:5; 75:4) people who enjoy prosperity. The latter despise the covenant and are proud of their disdain for the faithful (cf. 73:11). The motto is true, but must be properly understood;

PSALM 73:1-28

God Is My Strength and Portion Forever

A Psalm of Asaph.

¹ Truly God is good to Israel,
to those who are pure in heart.

² But as for me, my feet had almost stumbled,
my steps had nearly slipped.

³ For I was envious of the arrogant
when I saw the prosperity of the wicked.

⁴ For they have no pangs until death;
their bodies are fat and sleek.

⁵ They are not in trouble as others are;
they are not stricken like the rest of mankind.

⁶ Therefore pride is their necklace;
violence covers them as a garment.

⁷ Their eyes swell out through fatness;
their hearts overflow with follies.

⁸ They scoff and speak with malice;
loftily they threaten oppression.

⁹ They set their mouths against the heavens,
and their tongue struts through the earth.

¹⁰ Therefore his people turn back to them,
and find no fault in them.

¹¹ And they say, "How can God know?
Is there knowledge in the Most High?"

¹² Behold, these are the wicked;
always at ease, they increase in riches.

¹³ All in vain have I kept my heart clean
and washed my hands in innocence.

¹⁴ For all the day long I have been stricken
and rebuked every morning.

a person holding a simplistic understanding of that motto would become envious, and might even conclude that the whole basis of godliness is a lie.

Ps. 73:4–12 This section describes the apparently carefree lives of the arrogant wicked of v. 3 in a sort of vivid character sketch. They have no pangs, their bodies are fat and sleek (like well-fed animals). In v. 7, their eyes swell out through the fatness of their faces (a sign of prosperity; Job 15:27); yet on the inside, their hearts overflow with follies. The height of their arrogance comes to expression in Ps. 73:11, when they say, How can God know? Is there knowledge in the Most High? They are virtually defying God to prove that he knows their evil and intends to do anything about it. Verse

¹⁵ If I had said, "I will speak thus,"
I would have betrayed the generation of your children.

¹⁶ But when I thought how to understand this,
it seemed to me a wearisome task,

¹⁷ until I went into the sanctuary of God;
then I discerned their end.

¹⁸ Truly you set them in slippery places;
you make them fall to ruin.

¹⁹ How they are destroyed in a moment,
swept away utterly by terrors!

²⁰ Like a dream when one awakes,
O Lord, when you rouse yourself, you despise them as phantoms.

²¹ When my soul was embittered,
when I was pricked in heart,

²² I was brutish and ignorant;
I was like a beast toward you.

²³ Nevertheless, I am continually with you;
you hold my right hand.

²⁴ You guide me with your counsel,
and afterward you will receive me to glory.

²⁵ Whom have I in heaven but you?
And there is nothing on earth that I desire besides you.

²⁶ My flesh and my heart may fail,
but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.

²⁷ For behold, those who are far from you shall perish;
you put an end to everyone who is unfaithful to you.

²⁸ But for me it is good to be near God;
I have made the Lord God my refuge,
that I may tell of all your works.

12 serves as a nice summary of the whole section.

Ps. 73:13–15 The singer unveils his inner turmoil: feeling that it has been worthless to practice faithfulness (all in vain have I kept my heart clean). The faithful are stricken, all the day long, in contrast to the arrogant, who "are not stricken like the rest of mankind" (v. 5). At the same time, being pious, the singer recognizes that to put his bitter feelings into words would have betrayed the generation of your children, i.e., would undermine others' faith.

Ps. 73:16–17 To walk around with such an inner conflict is deeply painful, made worse by how wea-

DIGGING INTO THE TEXT

STOP: Before continuing to these questions, make sure that you have:

- 1) Read the psalm at least twice. The second time, put a “?” next to anything that seems weird or doesn’t really make sense.
- 2) Review the psalm categories and introduction to Hebrew poetry in the forward of this book.
- 3) Take a minute to pray and ask God to reveal His truth to you. (Take this seriously; make it more than just a “this-is-something-I-have-to-do” sort of prayer.)

What’s the relationship between “Israel” and “those who are pure in heart” in verse 1?

Are they the same thing (that is, all of “Israel” is also “pure”)? Are they different? (Are the “pure” a sub-group of Israel, or is it possible to be “pure” without being of Israel?)

Put a set of large brackets around the section that describes the wicked in verses 4-12.

Reread verses 4-12 and write as many descriptions of the “arrogant” that you can find.

- | | |
|----|-----|
| 1) | 2) |
| 3) | 4) |
| 5) | 6) |
| 7) | 8) |
| 9) | 10) |

Do these descriptions ever feel true in our world today? Explain.

Do you think that people who live this way realize what they are doing? Explain.

In your opinion, what is the spiritual condition of the writer according to verses 13-14?

Verse 13 represents a mindset that isn’t true. In reality, it’s never a waste of time to live a pure life.

Why is this verse included in the Bible if it’s not a “right” way to feel?

Reference

Colossians 3:11.

Reference

Consider reading different translations to see how the arrogant are described.

Interact

Even if we shouldn’t feel this way, sometimes we will. Does reading this change your perspective about Scripture?

risome it is to understand this: it seems impossible. But when the singer goes into the sanctuary of God, the holy place where God’s people gather for worship, the light is finally allowed to break through. The key is to contemplate the end (the outcome) of the lives of the arrogant and the faithful.

Ps. 73:18–20 You Will Destroy Them. Here is “their end” (v. 17): God has set the arrogant in slippery places, so that they are destroyed in a moment. This may imply that they will die suddenly and unexpectedly, which certainly does happen; more likely it speaks of the effect of death (see v. 20: you despise them as phantoms). “Phantom” (Hb. tselem) is often rendered “image”; the idea is that what

What's the best thing to do when we find ourselves in this condition?

Look at verses 16-28 and underline the statements that helped the psalmist get out of the "verse 13" mindset.

According to the text, did the psalmist's confusion, frustration, or doubts aggravate God?

What did he discern in verses 18-20?

The solution to the problem is found when the singer goes into the sanctuary of God, the holy place where God's people gather for worship, the light is finally allowed to break through. The key is to contemplate the outcome of the lives of the arrogant and the faithful.

How can God use confusion and doubt to change your life?

In a sense, the writer gives us a warning in verses 1-3. What is it?

Take a look at verse 15. How does our response to the prosperous wicked sway the generation that follows us?

Describe the psalmist's attitude in verses 21-22. What did God teach him in verse 23-28?

What does it require of us if we are to not fall into the same mentality or lifestyle?

How does being near to God and seeing him as a refuge influence your conversations each day?

Taking the time to interact with the text will help engage your mind with the heart of the text. Consider writing the words or phrases that you think of next to verse (Example: "meditate" = "think deeply"). Visualize the text and draw pictures. Highlight or mark key words that stand out to you. You could also color the parallel statements within the Psalm. This is perfect time to discover the riches of the Scriptures.

Reference

The statements may include the things he did, or what God revealed to him when he went into the sanctuary.

Point to Make

God isn't afraid of your honesty, confusion, or doubt. He might just use it to increase your faith.

Point to Make

It is easy to fall into the trap of Satan's schemes that make evil have the appearance of good.

Reference

Verses 23-28 describe a mindset for us to maintain.

Reference

Consider looking up some passages in Proverbs to compare and contrast the ways of the righteous versus the wicked to share with your students.

is left over after they die is a "mere image" of the wicked person's personality—such a person does not have the prospect of a glad afterlife that the godly have.

Ps. 73:21–28 You Keep Me Near You, and That Is What I Need. The final section begins by noting what the singer was like when he harbored his bitter thoughts: I was like a beast toward you. And yet God still had his firm hold on his faithful servant: I am continually with you; you hold my right hand(which is why he brought the singer into the sanctuary, v. 17). Verse 24 sums up the confidence: during the singer's earthly life, you guide me with your counsel (i.e., with instruction from God's Word), and afterward (i.e., after the singer dies) you will receive me to glory (the heavenly honor that

NOW WHAT?

Is there anything in this psalm that you identify with right now in your life? What is it, and why?

What doubts do you have about God? Ask your parents or leader to help you answer your questions.

Who do you know that needs to hear the wisdom you have gained from this lesson? What is your plan to share it with them?

Pick a verse or phrase and meditate on it. (Put the pen and paper down.) What verse did you choose? Why? What did you learn? How were you encouraged?

GOING DEEPER

One of the best things that you can do to dig deeper into the riches of God Almighty is to spend time studying, meditating, and reflecting on the Bible. We have an incredible gift to be able to study the Scriptures for ourselves.

The following week of devotions will be focused on looking at the Wisdom Psalms. Reading a Wisdom Psalm is like reading the book of Proverbs. There's lots of "practical" advice, contrasting the righteous with the wicked, and the rich and the poor. The emphasis is on trust in the Lord, the gaining of understanding, and the foolishness of solely seeking possessions. Psalms 37, 49, 73, 112, 127, 128, 133 are Wisdom Psalms.

Ask the Holy Spirit for the discipline that it takes to have a daily quiet time. Spend time studying the text and come back next week ready to share all that God has spoken to you.

MEMORY VERSE FOR THE WEEK

"But for me it is good to be near God; I have made the Lord God my refuge, that I may tell of all your works" —Psalm 73:28

awaits the faithful). Thus the godly can be satisfied, because they are near God, and thus they have him as the strength of their heart and their portion forever, while the arrogant are now far from God and will remain far from him forever.

Ps. 73:24 receive. Cf. 49:15, using the same term for the same idea.

Ps. 73:25 besides you. That is, "if set beside you, in comparison (and potential competition) with you."

WEEK 3 DEVOTIONS

Spending time in God's Word is essential to growing in your faith in Jesus. The REAP Bible study method is a simple tool that you can use during your quiet times.

READ - Take the time to carefully read the Bible passage with an open heart, asking the Holy Spirit to give you words of encouragement, direction and correction.

EXAMINE - Grab your journal and write out your answers to the questions. Make note of what stands out to you.

APPLY - A great question to ask is "How will I live differently and be different today because of what I just read?"

PRAY - Then, talk with God about the passage and your application. Ask Him to change your heart and life based on the time you've spent in His Word.

Ask the following questions of each passage.

- What is going on in the text? What are the circumstances the author is addressing?
- Who is writing, whom is it being written to, and when was the author writing?
- Does the writer mention anything that might indicate his purpose or intent?
- How do you think the author wants his audience to respond?
- What does this tell me about God?
- What does this tell me about myself?
- How does this point to my need for redemption?
- How will I live differently because of what I just read? Is there something for me to obey, a path to follow, a sin I must repent of, or a blessing to celebrate?

DAY 1 — PSALM 37

DAY 2 — PSALM 49

DAY 3 — PSALM 73

DAY 4 — PSALM 112

DAY 5 — PSALM 127

DAY 6 — PSALM 128

DAY 7 — PSALM 133

Sing for Joy, Don't Harden Your Heart

Praise Psalms

PSALM 100:5

WEEK

4

Key Questions and Concepts

How is obedience related to praise?

If you are a younger sibling you most likely have learned to pay attention to the outcome of your older brother or sister's actions. Psalm 95 beckons those singing it to learn the lesson from the rebellion of a previous generation and commit themselves to faithfully heeding God's "voice."

Psalm 95 draws its lesson from the Israelites' grumbling against Moses because they had no water (Ex. 17:1–7). However, this event did not lead to God's decisive oath found in the psalm. That oath comes in Num. 14:21–35, after the people had listened to the report of the 10 faithless spies and refused to enter the land to take it. The Lord swore ("as I live," Num. 14:21, 28) that not one of those who grumbled in disbelief "shall come into the land" (Num. 14:29–30); the 40 days of spying would yield 40 years of wandering (Num. 14:34). That is, those who refuse in unbelief to obey God's voice (Num. 14:11) would be removed from the people, and there would be a delay in the people carrying out their calling to occupy the land. The psalm takes the incident in Exodus 17 as an early installment of this persistent unbelief, which culminated in refusal to enter the land. The psalm has two parts: the first a celebration of God's kingship and the privilege that his people enjoy as they worship him, and the second a warning not to repeat the rebellion of their ancestors.

Think about how if the Israelites had entered the land as commanded and promised the amount of praise that would have erupted. Instead their unbelief led to disobedience, and therefore, the people did not praise God. In Psalm 95, the psalmist is reminding us that God is the "great King above all gods." A heart that is full of praise is not hardened by unbelief. We have the great joy and privilege respond to God's faithfulness in praise and obedience.

*Describe a time when you have learned from someone else's mistake.
How can a warning against disobedience lead you to praise God?*

Praise Psalms aren't really "studied" so much as they are absorbed. Reading a Praise Psalm is like being in the ocean when a huge wave washes over you. Overwhelmed in the midst of the experience, you're almost forced to contemplate it. Praise Psalms seem to be relatively easy to understand, but one shouldn't discard the profound in the simple. Structurally, these psalms present a call to the reader (or the pray-er) to praise God. The psalmist often offers several reasons why God deserves our praise: His absolute power and might, His work as Creator, His control over human history, His mercy, ect. It's a crime to allow the simplicity of "praise God" to wash over our lives without purifying our hearts. Psalms 8, 29, 33, 47, 65, 78, 93, 95–100, 103–6, 111, 113, 114, 117, 134, 135, 136, 145–50 are Praise Psalms.

When considering the greatness of God, the believer has no other choice but to erupt in praise to God.

5-Minute Commentary

Psalm 95. This psalm can be called a prophetic hymn (cf. Psalm 81 [which also remembers Meribah] and Psalm 82), as it echoes themes found in the OT Prophets; or it can be called a historical psalm (cf. Psalm 78, esp. vv. 7–8), as it draws a lesson from the history of Israel. (There is a fine line between the two categories.) Hebrews 3:7–11 uses Ps. 95:7b–11, placing its audience in an analogous situation to the Israelites in the wilderness: for these Jews to abandon their explicit faith in Jesus in order to return to the safety of "ordinary" Judaism would be like the rebellion of Israel in the wilderness, a mark of unbelief. As in the psalm, Hebrews makes every day a "today" that calls for renewed faithfulness.

PSALM 95:1-11

Let Us Sing Songs of Praise

¹ Oh come, let us sing to the Lord;
let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation!

² Let us come into his presence with thanksgiving;
let us make a joyful noise to him with songs of praise!

³ For the Lord is a great God,
and a great King above all gods.

⁴ In his hand are the depths of the earth;
the heights of the mountains are his also.

⁵ The sea is his, for he made it,
and his hands formed the dry land.

⁶ Oh come, let us worship and bow down;
let us kneel before the Lord, our Maker!

⁷ For he is our God,
and we are the people of his pasture,
and the sheep of his hand.

Today, if you hear his voice,
⁸ do not harden your hearts, as at Meribah,
as on the day at Massah in the wilderness,

⁹ when your fathers put me to the test
and put me to the proof, though they had seen my work.

¹⁰ For forty years I loathed that generation
and said, "They are a people who go astray in their heart,
and they have not known my ways."

¹¹ Therefore I swore in my wrath,
"They shall not enter my rest."

Ps. 95:1–7a The Lord Is King. The members of the congregation singing these verses invite one another to the great privilege of worshiping the Lord, the great God, the great King above all gods. On the kind of kingship attributed to God here, see note on Psalm 93. God is King over creation: it is his, he made it, and he rules over it all (it is in his hand, i.e., under his authority). The marvel of being Israel is that such a majestic King has pledged himself to his people, making them the sheep of his hand (cf. note on 74:1–3). It is no surprise, then, that worship offered to him would be both exuberant (sing, make a joyful noise, thanksgiving, songs of praise) with astonished wonder, and humble (bow down, kneel) before such majesty. The whole person, body and soul, must offer this worship.

DIGGING INTO THE TEXT

STOP: Before continuing to these questions, make sure that you have:

- 1) Read the psalm at least twice. The second time, put a "?" next to anything that seems weird or doesn't really make sense.
- 2) Review the psalm categories and introduction to Hebrew poetry in the forward of this book.
- 3) Take a minute to pray and ask God to reveal His truth to you. (Take this seriously; make it more than just a "this-is-something-I-have-to-do" sort of prayer.)

Describe what you believe it means to praise God?

Circle the specific ways the psalmist suggests to praise God.

Write the actions below.

- | | |
|----|----|
| 1) | 2) |
| 3) | 4) |
| 5) | 6) |

Are these actions to be done in public or private? If both, why?

Underline the reasons a person should praise God as described in verses 3-7.

Close your eyes for a moment and try to picture the descriptions. Explain the impact these truths have on your faith.

What are some things people commonly praise in place of God?

What are some things about God that cause you to praise Him?

What would it require for you to consistently have a mindset of praise?

Is it something that God must do or you? Explain.

Reference

v. 1 sing, shout; v. 2 come, thanksgiving, extol, music, song; v. 6 bow down, kneel v. 8 do not harden your hearts

Interact

Compare and contrast what people exalt over God compared to who God is and what He has done and is doing.

Ps. 95:7b–11 We His People Must Heed His Voice. Since worship includes the priests reading and expounding the Scriptures, the worshipers will hear his voice (v. 7b), and in the rest of the psalm the congregation reminds itself that they must take it to heart, believing and obeying their great King. A previous generation of Israel had instead put God to the test by their unbelief. This section focuses on the inner self, the heart (v. 8, do not harden your hearts; and v. 10, go astray in their heart), where one lays hold of or rejects the grace of the covenant. As explained in the note on Psalm 95, the psalm uses Ex. 17:1–7 together with Num. 14:21–35 to make its point. God will preserve the corporate entity, the "people," in order to achieve his purposes in the world; but he wants the members of

Describe some practical steps you could take to cultivate gratitude for God in your heart?

Verses 7 and 8 give a strong warning against hardening one's heart toward God. What are some practical clues from this psalm that can help us not to have a hard heart?

Reread verse 1.

How could your consistent reflection on your need for a savior and salvation that is in Christ alone impact your praise to God Almighty?

Read Exodus 17:1-7.

What was the complaint and testing of the Lord?

Read Psalm 95:9.

What had the Israelites experienced leading up to that moment in Exodus 17?

How could reflection on their redemption from Egypt have influenced their attitude and ultimately their worship?

At all times it is critical that we remember our salvation story and praise God for it. It helps us have the proper perspective. It also allows us despite all circumstances follow through with specific actions of praise in described in Psalm 95.

Describe the connection between disobedience and unbelief.

What about obedience and belief?

It should be remembered, that salvation is based not on good works but on Jesus' high priestly sacrifice, and anything believers can do to please God comes from his working in them. The opposite of perseverance is disobedience, which was the sin of the faithless exodus generation.

Reference

See verse 7.

Challenge

A couple rarely denies an opportunity to tell their love story because it reminds them of their beginnings and encourages them to love one another more than ever. Consistently sharing your testimony will cause you to reflect on God's faithfulness and spur you on in your faith.

Interact

Does disobedience cause unbelief, or does unbelief cause disobedience? Explain. See Hebrews 3:18-19.

Reference

For deeper study, see how Hebrews 3:9-4:11 interprets Psalm 95.

the people to be joined to him in true faith. If they rebel, they must be removed.

Ps. 95:7b-8 Today, if you hear his voice, do not. Some scholars prefer to take the word "if" in the sense, "if only": "Today, if only you would hear his voice! Do not ..." This, however, loses the connection between "today" (the day on which and of which the congregation sings) and the day at Massah. harden your hearts. The biblical writers use "heart" for the central core of the person's thoughts, feelings, and choices (cf. Prov. 4:23). To "harden the heart" is to make it dull and unresponsive to God, and thus to strengthen it in disbelief.

Ps. 95:11 They shall not enter my rest. In the wilderness context, the "rest" is specifically the place of

NOW WHAT?

Consider the last two weeks—was your life a life of praise. Why or why not?

Consider the condition of your heart today. Would you describe it as “hard” or “soft” toward spiritual things?

Taking the time to interact with the text will help engage your mind with the heart of the text. Consider writing the words or phrases that you think of next to verse (Example: “meditate” = “think deeply”). Visualize the text and draw pictures. Highlight or mark key words that stand out to you. You could also color the parallel statements within the Psalm. This is perfect time to discover the riches of the Scriptures.

GOING DEEPER

One of the best things that you can do to dig deeper into the riches of God Almighty is to spend time studying, meditating, and reflecting on the Bible. We have an incredible gift to be able to study the Scriptures for ourselves.

The following week of devotions will be focused on looking at the Praise Psalms. Praise Psalms aren’t really “studied” so much as they are absorbed. Reading a Praise Psalm is like being in the ocean when a huge wave washes over you. Overwhelmed in the midst of the experience, you’re almost forced to contemplate it. Praise Psalms seem to be relatively easy to understand, but one shouldn’t discard the profound in the simple. Structurally, these psalms present a call to the reader (or the pray-er) to praise God. The psalmist often offers several reasons why God deserves our praise: His absolute power and might, His work as Creator, His control over human history, His mercy, ect. It’s a crime to allow the simplicity of “praise God” to wash over our lives without purifying our hearts. Psalms 8, 29, 33, 47, 65, 78, 93, 95–100, 103–6, 111, 113, 114, 117, 134, 135, 136, 145–50 are Praise Psalms.

Ask the Holy Spirit for the discipline that it takes to have a daily quiet time. Spend time studying the text and come back next week ready to share all that God has spoken to you.

MEMORY VERSE FOR THE WEEK

“Oh come, let us worship and bow down; let us kneel before the Lord, our Maker! For he is our God, and we are the people of his pasture, and the sheep of his hand.” —Psalms 95:6-7

rest, i.e., the land (cf. Deut. 12:9; finally secured with David’s reign, cf. 2 Sam. 7:1, 11); but, since the singing congregation is already in the land, it follows that the psalm is using “rest” as an image of enjoying God’s presence forever (much as Heb. 4:1, 11 does).

WEEK 4 DEVOTIONS

Spending time in God's Word is essential to growing in your faith in Jesus. The REAP Bible study method is a simple tool that you can use during your quiet times.

READ - Take the time to carefully read the Bible passage with an open heart, asking the Holy Spirit to give you words of encouragement, direction and correction.

EXAMINE - Grab your journal and write out your answers to the questions. Make note of what stands out to you.

APPLY - A great question to ask is "How will I live differently and be different today because of what I just read?"

PRAY - Then, talk with God about the passage and your application. Ask Him to change your heart and life based on the time you've spent in His Word.

Ask the following questions of each passage.

- What is going on in the text? What are the circumstances the author is addressing?
- Who is writing, whom is it being written to, and when was the author writing?
- Does the writer mention anything that might indicate his purpose or intent?
- How do you think the author wants his audience to respond?
- What does this tell me about God?
- What does this tell me about myself?
- How does this point to my need for redemption?
- How will I live differently because of what I just read? Is there something for me to obey, a path to follow, a sin I must repent of, or a blessing to celebrate?

DAY 1 — PSALM 8, 29, 33, & 47

DAY 2 — PSALM 65, 78, & 93

DAY 3 — PSALM 95-100

DAY 4 — PSALM 103-106

DAY 5 — PSALM 111, 113-114, & 117

DAY 6 — PSALM 134-136

DAY 7 — PSALM 145-150

We Can Cry for Help

Lament Psalms

1 PETER 5:6-11

WEEK

5

Key Questions and Concepts

God is the same Lord in all the psalms.

What a marvelous God we worship, the psalmist declares, One who is high and lifted up beyond our human experiences but also one who is close enough to touch and who walks beside us along life's way.

We can bring all our feelings to God—no matter how negative or complaining they may be—and we can rest assured that He will hear and understand.

The psalmist teaches us that the most profound prayer of all is a cry for help as we find ourselves overwhelmed by the problems of life.

Trials and tough circumstances are inevitable. We have all failed and faced various difficulties. Surely we will face more in this life. One major lie the enemy tries to convince us of is God doesn't listen or care about our difficulties or he can't handle your frustration or sin. In 1 Peter, we are reminded that even in our suffering, God's people are to give themselves entirely to him, submitting to his wise ordering of their lives. Peter uses the phrase mighty hand of God to bring to mind the exodus, where the Lord delivered Israel from Egypt "by a mighty hand" (e.g., Ex. 3:19; 32:11; Deut. 4:34; 5:15; Dan. 9:15). What that means is those who suffer can likewise be confident that the day of humiliation will not last forever. Whether later in this earthly life or on the last day, God will exalt his people at the proper time.

Lament Psalms were composed from the depths of human despair. These psalms express darker sides of human experience. Worshiping God is stretched to the limit as the psalmist deals with confusion, doubt, disappointment, sin and even anger. These feelings exist even for mature Christians. In fact, it seems impossible to be spiritually mature without walking through these dark valleys. Many people enter God's family during difficult times. The Lament Psalms describe what happens when the spiritual person struggles through crises. Though stretched and strained, the psalmist still hopes in the Lord. Psalms 44, 60, 74, 79, 80, 83, 85, 90, 94, 123, 137 are Lament Psalms.

What causes you to cry out God in despair?

Do you find yourself trying to struggle on your own power rather than leaning on the Lord?

In Psalm 74, the psalmist raises a cry of anguish over a disaster that has befallen God's people; the temple has been laid to ruin (quite possibly the Babylonian destruction of Jerusalem). Thus, this is a community lament. The guilt of the covenant people does not come into view in this psalm, however, that does not deny that the disaster is a judgment on their unfaithfulness. It is important to know that some community laments deal with situations for which the guilt of the people is not the explanation (e.g., Psalm 44; possibly Psalm 77). Psalm 74, like Psalm 77, recounts God's mighty deeds in the past, especially the exodus; here that recounting serves as a ground for the prayer: do not let the Gentiles scorn the God who has done such things.

It should be comforting to us to be able to bring all our feelings to God, and we can rest assured that He will hear and understand. The psalmist teaches us that the most profound prayer of all is a cry for help as we find ourselves overwhelmed by the problems of life.

5-Minute Commentary

Ps. 74:1–3 O God, Why Do You Cast Us Off? God has cast ... off his people (us, i.e., the sheep of your pasture). For God's people as a whole as his sheep, cf. 77:20; 79:13; 95:7; 100:3. The terms purchased and redeemed are taken from Ex. 15:13, 16; Israel is God's people, for whom he has done great deeds in the past, marking them out as his own. This makes the current disaster—where the enemy has destroyed everything in the sanctuary, laying it to perpetual ruins—all the more painful.

Ps. 74:4–8 They Have Destroyed the Sanctuary. The next section details how the Gentiles devastated the sanctuary: they chopped up the wood and set fire to the building. The song calls it your meeting

PSALM 74:1-23

Arise, O God, Defend Your Cause

A Maskil of Asaph.

- ¹ O God, why do you cast us off forever?
Why does your anger smoke against the sheep of your pasture?
- ² Remember your congregation, which you have purchased of old,
which you have redeemed to be the tribe of your heritage!
Remember Mount Zion, where you have dwelt.
- ³ Direct your steps to the perpetual ruins;
the enemy has destroyed everything in the sanctuary!
- ⁴ Your foes have roared in the midst of your meeting place;
they set up their own signs for signs.
- ⁵ They were like those who swing axes
in a forest of trees.
- ⁶ And all its carved wood
they broke down with hatchets and hammers.
- ⁷ They set your sanctuary on fire;
they profaned the dwelling place of your name,
bringing it down to the ground.
- ⁸ They said to themselves, "We will utterly subdue them";
they burned all the meeting places of God in the land.
- ⁹ We do not see our signs;
there is no longer any prophet,
and there is none among us who knows how long.
- ¹⁰ How long, O God, is the foe to scoff?
Is the enemy to revile your name forever?
- ¹¹ Why do you hold back your hand, your right hand?
Take it from the fold of your garment and destroy them!

place (the place that God appointed to meet with his people) and your sanctuary (the holy place, the dwelling place of your name). Given the importance that God himself had placed on the temple, and the promises he had made to be present with his people, it is horrific that these Gentiles have profaned it (i.e., destroyed something holy).

Ps. 74:9–11 And You Seem Silent! It is therefore puzzling that God gives no signs, that he has raised up no prophet to guide his people in such dire distress or to tell them how long it will last. It is even more puzzling why God allows the enemy to continue to scoff and to revile God's name: how can he not strike them down?

- ¹² Yet God my King is from of old,
working salvation in the midst of the earth.
- ¹³ You divided the sea by your might;
you broke the heads of the sea monsters on the waters.
- ¹⁴ You crushed the heads of Leviathan;
you gave him as food for the creatures of the wilderness.
- ¹⁵ You split open springs and brooks;
you dried up ever-flowing streams.
- ¹⁶ Yours is the day, yours also the night;
you have established the heavenly lights and the sun.
- ¹⁷ You have fixed all the boundaries of the earth;
you have made summer and winter.
- ¹⁸ Remember this, O Lord, how the enemy scoffs,
and a foolish people reviles your name.
- ¹⁹ Do not deliver the soul of your dove to the wild beasts;
do not forget the life of your poor forever.
- ²⁰ Have regard for the covenant,
for the dark places of the land are full of the habitations of violence.
- ²¹ Let not the downtrodden turn back in shame;
let the poor and needy praise your name.
- ²² Arise, O God, defend your cause;
remember how the foolish scoff at you all the day!
- ²³ Do not forget the clamor of your foes,
the uproar of those who rise against you, which goes up continually!

Ps. 74:12–17 But You Have Done Wonders in the Past. The next section recalls God’s mighty deeds from the past, in which he has worked salvation(see note on 18:50), including the exodus from Egypt and the journey through the wilderness (74:12–15), and God’s creation and governance of the whole world (vv. 16–17). The OT is constantly reminding its readers that the God who chose Israel to be his people is in fact the very same God who made everything there is. This is the wonder of being Israel; the point of mentioning it here is to show how wrong it is for the Gentiles to disdain this God.

Ps. 74:14 The name Leviathan appears five times in the OT; in Canaanite myths it is the name of a dangerous, dragon-like monster (cf. Job 3:8). The biblical authors are confident that the Lord tri-

DIGGING INTO THE TEXT

STOP: Before continuing to these questions, make sure that you have:

- 1) Read the psalm at least twice. The second time, put a "?" next to anything that seems weird or doesn't really make sense.
- 2) Review the psalm categories and introduction to Hebrew poetry in the forward of this book.
- 3) Take a minute to pray and ask God to reveal His truth to you. (Take this seriously; make it more than just a "this-is-something-I-have-to-do" sort of prayer.)

Take just a few moments to mark what seems confusing or difficult to understand?

Take a look at the first question in the psalm: "Why have you rejected us forever, O God?" Who is "us" and "the people" in this verse?

So did God really reject them forever?

In verse 2, the writer mentions God purchasing his people. In what way did God "purchase" his people?

Also, notice the author's tone is angry, even grieving. Something bad has obviously happened. What is it? (Look at verses 3-8.)

Circle the word "signs" in verse 4 and 9.

Based on the context surrounding each word, how are they used differently? How do these differences better help you understand what is occurring in these verses?

Verses 4-9 are nothing more than the writer telling God what has happened. If God already knows everything, is this a waste of time? Why tell God what He already knows?

Read Psalm 139:4.

Reference

Read Genesis 17:1-8. In verse 7, what key word helps you understand the length of God's promise to His people?

Definition

Redemption—The action of regaining or gaining possession of something in exchange for a payment or clearing debt. In Exodus, He redeemed his people from the Egyptians. The act of Jesus Christ dying on the cross was the cost that was paid to save all of God's people from sin, death, to regain them to God himself.

Point to Make

Sign (v.4) can be referred to the enemy setting up signs as a trophy of victory and/or idols that are profane to the sanctuary. (v.9) sign is in reference to God's presence. The people were without any signs from Him.

umphs over all powers, including the most feared (cf. Isa. 27:1); here, this monster is used as a figure for Egypt. Possible reference to Pharaoh himself and the sea monsters are most likely in reference to the heads of Pharaoh's men. Elsewhere the name is used for fearsome creatures, over which God has control (Job 41:1, probably a crocodile; Ps. 104:26, probably a whale).

Ps. 74:18–23 Have Regard for the Covenant and Deliver Us! The psalm goes on to plead with God, "remember this," as if God could forget (though it feels like he has done so). It is unthinkable for God to deliver the soul of his dove (a clean bird, i.e., Israel) to the wild beasts (i.e., foreign powers), to be torn and devoured. There is no appeal to the people's merit; rather, the appeal is have regard

How does knowing this verse help you to be honest with God? Does God value honesty in prayer? Why?

“‘WOULDN’T HE KNOW WITHOUT BEING ASKED?’ SAID POLLY.
‘I’VE NO DOUBT HE WOULD,’ SAID THE HORSE. ‘BUT I’VE A SORT IDEA HE LIKES TO BE ASKED.’”
—C.S. LEWIS FROM *THE MAGICIANS NEPHEW*

Read Psalm 74:10-11.

What is the psalmist asking God to do?

It seems as if the author is questioning God’s way of doing things. It’s almost like he is correcting God, commanding God, “Why are you doing it like this? Do this instead, God!”

Have you ever felt the same way as the psalmist? You know the promise of His covenant, but you feel as if He has rejected you and insisted He follow your commands instead. If so, when? How long did you feel this way?

If you have never felt like this, do you think it’s because you have a close relationship with God, or because you have not always been aware/honest about your feelings toward God?

The psalmist asks for God to destroy someone else (verse 11). Who is he asking God to destroy? Why?

Is this a righteous or sinful prayer to pray? Is it ever right to pray for someone else’s destruction?

In verses 12-17 the entire tone and focus of the psalm changes. What happens? How does this section change the overall tone of the psalm?

Read verses 18-23.

Verses 18-23 are a series of commands that the writer makes—all directed toward God! Go back through these verses and underline all of the commands: “remember,” “do not hand over,” “have regard,” “do not let,” “rise up,” “do not ignore.”

Reference

Philippians 4:6 describes an honest prayer life.

Reference

The mention of hand (v.11) references the right hand as the instrument which one will wield a sword or stick a blow. The psalmist is asking God to remove his hand from his pocket (an act of restraint) to fight.

Interact

Does God have hands or a garment? If not, why does the psalmist talk about these things in verse 11? Is he mistaken?

Interact

What do verses 12-17 have to do with the rest of the psalm?

for the covenant (God’s promises to the patriarchs) and defend your cause (God chose the people of Israel for his purposes, to bring light to the Gentiles; how will the Gentiles receive the light if they are so busy mocking?).

It seems like the psalmist believes that God will listen as he is telling Him to do these things, or asking these things of Him. Where does this confidence come from?

Why doesn't the psalmist feel the need to use polite phrases like, "please" and "if you would"?

In verse 19, who is the dove and who are the wild beasts? Why does the author choose to use imagery? What do these animals reflect?

We see in Psalm 74 that the author perseveres through his trial and the event of destruction by holding fast to God's promises. So even in our raw emotions, we must remember who He is and whose we are. When the times of affliction come, we must know and be able to remember His promises. So let's close by looking at a few of His promises for us.

Read Matthew 28:18-20.

What is the promise Jesus gives us?

Read John 14:15-31.

List at least 5 promises in this passage:

- 1)
- 2)
- 3)
- 4)
- 5)

How will you commit to remembering God's promises for you during despair and destruction?

Reference

The dove is a name of endearment for one beloved. Wild beasts are referring to the men who are destroying the temple (quite possibly the Babylonians in the destruction of Jerusalem).

NOW WHAT?

Taking the time to interact with the text will help engage your mind with the heart of the text. Consider writing the words or phrases that you think of next to verse (i.e. “meditate” = “think deeply”). Visualize the text and draw pictures. Highlight or mark key words that stand out to you. You could also color the parallel statements within the Psalm. This is perfect time to discover the riches of the Scriptures.

What are some verses or phrases that stand out as particularly meaningful? Explain why.

PRAYER: It was already mentioned that verses 4-9 are the author telling God about what has gone on. Practice this kind of praying today. Talking to someone means telling them what’s going on in your life, what you’re feeling, thinking, and what’s happening. Often times we only talk to God when we have something to ask Him or something to thank Him for. If you only talked to a friend when you wanted to ask for something or say “thank you” for something, you wouldn’t talk to that friend very often! So practice this “normal” kind of communication with God. Start by telling Him about your day today. Write it out in a journal. He already knows, but He wants to hear it from you.

GOING DEEPER

Read John 15:18-16:4.

How is this passage similar to Psalm 74?

One of the best things that you can do to dig deeper into the riches of God Almighty is to spend time studying, meditating, and reflecting on the Bible. We have an incredible gift to be able to study the Scriptures for ourselves.

The following week of devotions will be focused on looking at the Lament Psalms. Lament Psalms were composed from the depths of human despair. These psalms express darker sides of human experience. Worshiping God is stretched to the limit as the psalmist deals with confusion, doubt, disappointment and even anger. These feelings exist for mature Christians. In fact, it seems impossible to be spiritually mature without walking through these dark valleys. Many people enter God’s family during difficult times. The Lament Psalms describe what happens when the spiritual person struggles through crises. Though stretched and strained, the psalmist still hopes in the Lord. Psalms 44, 60, 74, 79, 80, 83, 85, 90, 94, 123, 137 are Lament Psalms.

Ask the Holy Spirit for the discipline that it takes to have a daily quiet time. Spend time studying the text and come back next week ready to share all that God has spoken to you.

MEMORY VERSE FOR THE WEEK

“Yet God my King is from of old, working salvation in the midst of the earth.” —Psalm 74:12

WEEK 5 DEVOTIONS

Spending time in God's Word is essential to growing in your faith in Jesus. The REAP Bible study method is a simple tool that you can use during your quiet times.

READ - Take the time to carefully read the Bible passage with an open heart, asking the Holy Spirit to give you words of encouragement, direction and correction.

EXAMINE - Grab your journal and write out your answers to the questions. Make note of what stands out to you.

APPLY - A great question to ask is "How will I live differently and be different today because of what I just read?"

PRAY - Then, talk with God about the passage and your application. Ask Him to change your heart and life based on the time you've spent in His Word.

Ask the following questions of each passage.

- What is going on in the text? What are the circumstances the author is addressing?
- Who is writing, whom is it being written to, and when was the author writing?
- Does the writer mention anything that might indicate his purpose or intent?
- How do you think the author wants his audience to respond?
- What does this tell me about God?
- What does this tell me about myself?
- How does this point to my need for redemption?
- How will I live differently because of what I just read? Is there something for me to obey, a path to follow, a sin I must repent of, or a blessing to celebrate?

DAY 1 — PSALM 44 & 60

DAY 2 — PSALM 74 & 79

DAY 3 — PSALM 80

DAY 4 — PSALM 83 & 85

DAY 5 — PSALM 90 & 94

DAY 6 — PSALM 123

DAY 7 — PSALM 137

Focused on Eternity

Zion Psalms

PSALM 100:1-2

WEEK

6

Key Questions and Concepts

The purpose of this psalm to open the eyes and hearts of God's people to the staggering privilege of being a welcome guest in God's own house.

Wickedness offers no reward that can even remotely compare to the joy and pleasure of God's house.

This is a psalm celebrating pilgrimage to Jerusalem in order to worship at the temple. It is very much like the hymns in praise of Zion as God's special place (e.g., Psalm 122), although this one especially focuses on the delight of going to worship there. The setting is most likely a time when the sanctuary was located in Zion (84:7) and when a king (most likely from David's line) ruled and protected the pilgrims (worshippers). According to Deuteronomy 16:16 the pilgrimage was an obligation to the people of God.

Zion—city of God—is “an ancient name for various parts of Jerusalem, of Judah and all the land, and also a metaphor for the people of God.” Zion Psalms focus on God's presence among the Israelites—specifically in Jerusalem, although Zion can also be metaphorical. Since God can be found and known, these psalms “express an intense longing to make a pilgrimage to the Temple of Jerusalem.” Psalms 46, 48, 76, 84, 87, 122 are Zion Psalms.

The purpose of singing this psalm is to cultivate the delight of getting to worship in Zion, and to open the eyes and hearts of God's people to the staggering privilege of being a welcome guest in God's own house. This psalm speaks to how our worship shouldn't be burdensome or mechanical.

Also, there is an emphasis to write deep into their souls the conviction that wickedness offers no reward that can even remotely compare to the joy and pleasure of God's house.

*Is your delight in God alone enough to sustain you?
Do you ever find yourself restrained in worship?*

For each of us, our own worship of renewed purpose and redemption should flow out of a heart of humility as we remember the fallen state from which He raised us, and the redemption that we experience through His grace. It truly is a delight to be able to come together to worship in the way that psalmist exclaims. May our worship forever be changed!

5-Minute Commentary

Ps. 84:1–4 Blessed Are Those Who Dwell in God's Courts. The song opens by describing God's house, the central sanctuary in Jerusalem. It is lovely and delightful, because it is the Lord's dwelling place; this is why the pious soul longs, yes, faints for the courts of the Lord: this is where the worshiper actually meets the living God—no wonder his heart and flesh sing for joy. (Israelite worship was not “quiet” or “restrained”: how could it be, if these beliefs are true?) The marvel is that God's house is a welcoming place; if even the sparrow finds a home there, and the swallow too, then the humble and faithful Israelite need not fear that God will turn him away. Those who dwell in your house. These are people with constant access to the sanctuary (see note on 23:5–6); they are ever

PSALM 84:1-12

My Soul Longs for the Courts of the Lord

To the choirmaster: according to The Gittith.
A Psalm of the Sons of Korah.

¹ How lovely is your dwelling place,
O Lord of hosts!

² My soul longs, yes, faints
for the courts of the Lord;
my heart and flesh sing for joy
to the living God.

³ Even the sparrow finds a home,
and the swallow a nest for herself,
where she may lay her young,
at your altars, O Lord of hosts,
my King and my God.

⁴ Blessed are those who dwell in your house,
ever singing your praise! *Selah*

⁵ Blessed are those whose strength is in you,
in whose heart are the highways to Zion.

⁶ As they go through the Valley of Baca
they make it a place of springs;
the early rain also covers it with pools.

⁷ They go from strength to strength;
each one appears before God in Zion.

⁸ O Lord God of hosts, hear my prayer;
give ear, O God of Jacob! *Selah*

⁹ Behold our shield, O God;
look on the face of your anointed!

singing God's praise because they can attend the services so readily. Such people are blessed, truly happy.

Ps. 84:5–9 Blessed Are Those Who Journey to Zion. The next section describes those who make the journey to Zion to worship at such a sanctuary; they are blessed. Their strength is in God, to sustain them on the way; the highways are in their hearts, which probably means that they actually want to go (pilgrimage was obligatory [Deut. 16:16], but should never become mechanical or burdensome). The location of the Valley of Baca is unknown; it seems to have been a dry place, but the faithful pilgrims make it a place of springs (which probably means that they delight in this valley as much as if

¹⁰ For a day in your courts is better
than a thousand elsewhere.
I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God
than dwell in the tents of wickedness.

¹¹ For the Lord God is a sun and shield;
the Lord bestows favor and honor.
No good thing does he withhold
from those who walk uprightly.

¹² O Lord of hosts,
blessed is the one who trusts in you!

it were well-watered, being so happy to be on the way). These pilgrims go from strength to strength (i.e., they keep on finding new levels of strength for the journey), until each one appears before God in Zion (cf. Deut. 16:16). Prayer for the king (the shield and anointed) closes the section; not only does he protect the pilgrims, but he is called to represent Israel before God, to model faithfulness for the whole people, and thus to keep the whole people securely serving God.

Ps. 84:10–12 Blessed Are Those Who Trust in the Lord. The final section describes the person who trusts in the Lord: he sincerely prefers one day in God's courts to a thousand anywhere else; and he prefers even the lowest task of service in the house of my God to any gain he might have if he were

DIGGING INTO THE TEXT

STOP: Before continuing to these questions, make sure that you have:

- 1) Read the psalm at least twice. The second time, put a "?" next to anything that seems weird or doesn't really make sense.
- 2) Review the psalm categories and introduction to Hebrew poetry in the forward of this book.
- 3) Take a minute to pray and ask God to reveal His truth to you. (Take this seriously; make it more than just a "this-is-something-I-have-to-do" sort of prayer.)

After your first read through, what part of Psalm 84 jumps out as particularly meaningful? Explain why.

What parts are confusing or difficult to understand?

Circle the adjective used in vs. 1 to describe God's dwelling place. What are some synonyms of the adjective used that come to your mind?

In vs. 2, describe in your own words, the emotion the reader is feeling / expressing. To what or who is he feeling these emotions toward?

Underline and define the words "home" and "nest" in verse 3.

What do these words imply about the permanence of the sparrows place?

Why does the author bring up sparrows and nests? What does that have to do with God?

Draw a box around each time the word "blessed" is used.

What does "blessed" mean?

Underline these characteristics of those who are blessed in verses 4-5.

Definition

Lovely – Beautiful,
Captivating, Pleasant,
Delightful

Point to Make

He is feeling great desire and great happiness towards God's presence.

Reference

Home: the place where one lives permanently, especially as a member of a family. Nest: a structure of place made or chosen by a bird for laying eggs and sheltering its young. The Sparrow is there to stay - not just "visiting."

Point to Make

The author desires a place to stay and make permanent residence there - not just visit. He wants to dwell there.

Definition

Blessed – having a sacred nature; connected with God.; very welcome, pleasant, or appreciated.

to dwell in the tents of wickedness (i.e., to fashion his life in opposition to the covenant, perhaps along the familiar lines of the Gentiles). This is the person who finds God to be a sun and shield (he gives the light of life, and protection), upon whom the Lord bestows favor and honor (such a person will not trust in these or turn them into a source of pride). Those who walk uprightly are those whose faith is genuine, which leads to a life that aims at doing God's will; no good thing does God withhold from them, because they are living in his light. The chief good thing, in this psalm, is to be welcomed in the temple. The faithful can enjoy other things only insofar as they express the life of the upright. Such people are blessed indeed!

The phrase "highways to Zion" is used in vs. 5 in the ESV. The term "pilgrimage" is used in the NIV. Define "pilgrim." What is a highway and to where is it leading? What do you think it means that this is in their hearts?

Do you view yourself as a pilgrim? Would it change the way you approached each day if you saw yourself as moving towards a heavenly destination? How?

THE VALLEY OF BACA—ALL ANCIENT VERSIONS HAVE "VALLEY OF WEEPING"
DESCRIBED AS STERILE, AND VOID OF WATER

Why is it significant that there would be "springs" and "pools" in the Valley of Baca?

What could the "Valley of Baca" be compared to in your own life?

What would it look like for your life to become a "place of springs"?

Valley of Baca would be suffering, difficulties, and discouragements in your own life. For their to be "springs" or "pools" through this difficult season would mean blessings in the middle of the hard season. We go through suffering, but there is life and joy admits this time because of the joy of God's presence and his working through it.

What does the author request of God in verse 8-9?

Rewrite vs. 10 in your own words.

What is the sentiment being expressed?

Definition

Pilgrim – a person who passes through life as if in exile from heavenly homeland or in search of it.
Highway – main road leading to this place where God is, his heavenly dwelling.

Point to Make

"In their hearts" means that their greatest desire and what they long after is to be with God. That is their goal and what they are seeking after, even if they are not physically there yet.

Point to Make

This implies water in a place void of water. A place of sustenance in a place where people would expect to be none.

Point to Make

This implies water in a place void of water. A place of sustenance in a place where people would expect to be none.

Why does the author call God a "sun" and a "shield"? What characteristics go along with these metaphors? (vs. 11)

Define "favor" and "honor" in verse 11.

What does it mean "no good thing does he withhold"?

What is the overall theme of the psalm?

What could fuel your own personal desire to be in God's presence?

NOW WHAT?

How does your perspective about eternity change based on your study of Psalm 84?

What do you need to change in order to set your mind on your eternal home rather than the pleasures of this world?

PRAYER: Ask God to help you set your mind on your eternal home with Him. Ask him to help you have an eternal perspective about

Taking the time to interact with the text will help engage your mind with the heart of the text. Consider writing the words or phrases that you think of next to verse (Example: “meditate” = “think deeply”). Visualize the text and draw pictures. Highlight or mark key words that stand out to you. You could also color the parallel statements within the Psalm. This is perfect time to discover the riches of the Scriptures.

GOING DEEPER

One of the best things that you can do to dig deeper into the riches of God Almighty is to spend time studying, meditating, and reflecting on the Bible. We have an incredible gift to be able to study the Scriptures for ourselves.

The following week of devotions will be focused on looking at the Zion Psalms. Zion is “an ancient name for various parts of Jerusalem, of Judah and all the land, and also a metaphor for the people of God.” Zion Psalms focus on God’s presence among the Israelites—specifically in Jerusalem, although Zion can also be metaphorical. Since God can be found and known, these psalms “express an intense longing to make a pilgrimage to the Temple of Jerusalem.” Psalms 46, 48, 76, 84, 87, 122 are Zion Psalms.

Ask the Holy Spirit for the discipline that it takes to have a daily quiet time. Spend time studying the text and come back next week ready to share all that God has spoken to you.

MEMORY VERSE FOR THE WEEK

“Blessed are those whose strength is in you, in whose heart are the highways to Zion”
—Psalm 84:5

WEEK 6 DEVOTIONS

Spending time in God's Word is essential to growing in your faith in Jesus. The REAP Bible study method is a simple tool that you can use during your quiet times.

READ - Take the time to carefully read the Bible passage with an open heart, asking the Holy Spirit to give you words of encouragement, direction and correction.

EXAMINE - Grab your journal and write out your answers to the questions. Make note of what stands out to you.

APPLY - A great question to ask is "How will I live differently and be different today because of what I just read?"

PRAY - Then, talk with God about the passage and your application. Ask Him to change your heart and life based on the time you've spent in His Word.

Ask the following questions of each passage.

- What is going on in the text? What are the circumstances the author is addressing?
- Who is writing, whom is it being written to, and when was the author writing?
- Does the writer mention anything that might indicate his purpose or intent?
- How do you think the author wants his audience to respond?
- What does this tell me about God?
- What does this tell me about myself?
- How does this point to my need for redemption?
- How will I live differently because of what I just read? Is there something for me to obey, a path to follow, a sin I must repent of, or a blessing to celebrate?

DAY 1 — PSALM 46

DAY 2 — PSALM 48

DAY 3 — PSALM 76

DAY 4 — PSALM 84

DAY 5 — PSALM 87

DAY 6 — PSALM 122

DAY 7 — JOHN 14:15-31 & 1 CORINTHIANS 3:16

Only the Forgiven are Truly Happy

Thanksgiving Psalms

ROMANS 4:7-8

WEEK

7

March 20 is International Day of Happiness. No pressure to be happy right!?!? Each year articles are written describing the top things that make people happy. Based on how the question is worded, responses include everything from time with family and friends, pets, finding money, or even a freshly made bed. If asked to name the top 5 things that make you happy, many of us wouldn't even think to say what Psalm 32 suggests to be the most important thing to make you happy.

Psalm 32 is usually classified as a thanksgiving hymn, in which the worshipers give thanks to God for the joy of having their sins forgiven. Because of v. 3 ("when I kept silent"), it has been common to connect this psalm with Psalm 51; but as there is no clear indication of this from either the title of the psalm or its body, it is better to take this psalm as geared more generally to the experience of confession and forgiveness.

While Praise Psalms focus on the glory of who God is, Thanksgiving Psalms tend to be an expression of gratitude for what God has done. The most important thing that we have to be thankful for as believers is the salvation we have received in Christ alone.

***What makes you happy? Create a top 5 list.
How does forgiveness from someone feel when you have done something wrong?***

Often times Thanksgiving Psalms will follow a common form: the author is distressed, then he calls to God for help, then God comes to his rescue. Thanksgiving Psalms are in this way similar to a testimony . . . telling a story about God's help and thanking Him for what He has done. "These psalms originated as a grateful response to God for a specific act of deliverance, such as healing from illness, which may be a physical manifestation of unforgiven sin (32), deliverance from enemies (18; 92; 118; 138), or simply rescue from trouble (66:14). These psalms assume the presence of the congregation, which is gathered either for worship or for instruction (32:8–11; 34:11–14) and who hear the story of the deliverance. At the heart of these psalms is the story of the deliverance, summarized briefly, 'O Lord my God, I cried to thee for help, and thou hast healed me' and often expanded." Psalms 18, 30, 32, 92, 116, 118, 138 are Thanksgiving Psalms.

Key Questions and Concepts

Only the forgiven are truly happy. That true happiness leads to genuine thanksgiving.

Believers are urged to accept this instruction about ready confession and to be glad in the Lord, who shows such goodness to his people.

This lesson presents a great opportunity to explain the Gospel. The Gospel is much more than "not going to Hell." When communicating the Gospel it is imperative to clearly state that believers are adopted by God Almighty and are heirs as sons and daughters. This is the most glorious aspect of the Gospel.

5-Minute Commentary

Psalm 32 can be classified as a "penitential psalm" (cf. Psalms 6; 38; 51; 130; 143).

Ps. 32:1–5 The Doctrine: Only the Forgiven Are Truly Happy. Verses 1–2 state the theme, answering the question, "Who is truly happy (or blessed)?" Then vv. 3–5 recount a personal experience that supports this theme. The terms "transgression," "forgiven," "sin," and "iniquity" all echo Ex. 34:6–7, the fundamental expression of God's kindness and mercy toward those who receive his covenant. No one needs to compel God to show mercy; rather, the faithful confess their sins because they believe he is merciful. Note how several words here appear in a mirror pattern, which binds all five verses

PSALM 32:1-11

Blessed Are the Forgiven

A Maskil of David.

¹ Blessed is the one whose transgression is forgiven,
whose sin is covered.

² Blessed is the man against whom the Lord counts no iniquity,
and in whose spirit there is no deceit.

³ For when I kept silent, my bones wasted away
through my groaning all day long.

⁴ For day and night your hand was heavy upon me;
my strength was dried up as by the heat of summer. *Selah*

⁵ I acknowledged my sin to you,
and I did not cover my iniquity;
I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the Lord,"
and you forgave the iniquity of my sin. *Selah*

⁶ Therefore let everyone who is godly
offer prayer to you at a time when you may be found;
surely in the rush of great waters,
they shall not reach him.

⁷ You are a hiding place for me;
you preserve me from trouble;
you surround me with shouts of deliverance. *Selah*

⁸ I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go;
I will counsel you with my eye upon you.

⁹ Be not like a horse or a mule, without understanding,
which must be curbed with bit and bridle,
or it will not stay near you.

¹⁰ Many are the sorrows of the wicked,
but steadfast love surrounds the one who trusts in the Lord.

¹¹ Be glad in the Lord, and rejoice, O righteous,
and shout for joy, all you upright in heart!

together: "forgiven ... covered [Ps. 32:1] ... cover ... forgave [v. 5]." There is a contrast in the kind of covering: when God "covers" sin, he graciously blots it out (cf. 85:2); when man "covers" his sin, he is sinfully hiding it (cf. Prov. 28:13).

Ps. 32:1–2 Paul uses 32:1–2a in Rom. 4:7–8 to show that "not counting sin" (which he treats as another way of counting righteousness) has always been done "apart from works." Deceit refers to deceiving man or God about one's own sins. To mention the spirit reinforces in the worshipers that they must combine the right words with the right intentions.

DIGGING INTO THE TEXT

STOP: Before continuing to these questions, make sure that you have:

- 1) Read the psalm at least twice. The second time, put a "?" next to anything that seems weird or doesn't really make sense.
- 2) Review the psalm categories and introduction to Hebrew poetry in the forward of this book.
- 3) Take a minute to pray and ask God to reveal His truth to you. (Take this seriously; make it more than just a "this-is-something-I-have-to-do" sort of prayer.)

What is confusing or difficult to understand?

According to verses 1-2, what is the condition for the forgiven?

Underline each time you see the word sin, transgression, iniquity.

Why is sin (v. 1) compared with deceit (v. 2)? Aren't there other sins besides deceit?

Do these verses talk about ALL KINDS of sinners, or just the sinners who are deceitful?

Describe the importance of combining the right words with the right intentions.

According to verses 3-5, how can someone get to the "blessed" state?

- 1)
- 2)
- 3)

From your understanding, what does it mean to "deal" with your sin?

Circle the words that have to do with the mouth in verses 3-5.

What are some roadblocks that hinder you from dealing with it?

Point to Make

Happy, blessed. The truly happy person is happy because God showers him with favor.

Definition

Deceit – refers to deceiving man or God about one's own sins.

Point to Make

Scripture uses the term "spirit" to describe the intent of the heart. We shouldn't fool ourselves into thinking that God doesn't know our hearts when we speak and ask for grace and mercy from our sins.

Point to Make

- 1) Don't conceal sin.
- 2) Acknowledge sin.
- 3) Confess and repent of the sin.

Reference

See 1 John 1:9 on how repent of sin.

Ps. 32:3–5 For. These verses support the theme that only the forgiven are truly happy. They recount a time when I kept silent, i.e., when the singer refused to confess his sins in order to have God forgive them. The lost vitality of vv. 3–4 is really a mercy; it is God's hand ... heavy upon his faithful, to help them come to the point of confessing. Having come to that point, the singer acknowledged his sin, and God forgave the iniquity of his sin; this brings the psalm back to v. 1, with the implication that the singer has now learned more fully the blessedness of being forgiven.

Ps. 32:6–11 Application: Confess Our Sins Freely. The opening word of this section, therefore, shows that it is drawing a lesson for everyone who is godly, namely, to offer prayer (of confession) ... at a

Describe the cause and effect for verses 3-6.

Verse 3 – Cause:
Effect:

Verse 4 – Cause:
Effect:

Verse 5 – Cause:
Effect:

Verse 6 – Cause:
Effect:

Whose hand is being described in verse 4? What is the purpose of his hand pressing him?

Why does this passage describe physical effects that happen when a person doesn't deal with sin? Do these really happen?

When you allow sin to go "unchecked" in your life, what happens to you personally? Is there any change in your life . . . if so, what is it?

Describe the freedom the psalmist speaks of in verse 3-5 must have felt like.

Is the "covering" in verse 1 the same "covering" in verse 5? Why is it good for the sin to be covered in one verse, but not the other?

Does verse 6 mean only Christians can pray?

What does "while you can be found" mean in verse 6? If God is loving, won't we always be able to find Him? Explain.

In reference to verses 6-7, the man is not only blessed by what God does not do, punishment for sin, but what God does for him to preserve him from trouble.

Point to Make

It's called conviction. Romans 2:4-5. A guilty conscience and all the agonies that go with it are a gift to the unrepentant.

Interact

How does an unrepentant heart steal the joy of salvation? How does confession and repentance bring about verse 1 in an individual's life?

Point to Make

You get the sense the psalmist is overwhelmingly excited to be in a relationship with God. Without freedom there is no thanksgiving. The purpose of confession is to bring about thanksgiving.

Point to Make

There will come a day when there will no longer be a time. Our days are numbered but only God knows the number.

time when God may be found; i.e., do not be foolish and wait indefinitely (cf. v. 9). The godly are not expected to be sinless; rather, they are those who believe God's promises and confess their sins (similarly the righteous, v. 11). Verses 6-7 are addressed to God, whom the faithful find to be a hiding place; vv. 8-11 are addressed to fellow worshipers, urging them to accept this instruction about ready confession and to be glad in the Lord, who shows such goodness to his people.

Explain the metaphor of the horse and mule.

How are verses 3-4 an image of verse 9?

Compare verse 7 and 10.

WHEN IT IS THE LORD WHO MAKES US GLAD, WE WILL FIND OURSELVES COMING TO HIM IN PRAYER RATHER THAN SEEKING OUR PLEASURE ELSEWHERE.

This psalm is classified as a Thanksgiving Psalm; yet, it speaks a lot about confession. How does confession lead to thanksgiving?

WHAT IS SO BLESSED ABOUT HAVING OUR TRANSGRESSIONS FORGIVEN? O, THAT WE MIGHT CHERISH OUR FORGIVENESS MORE! —JOHN PIPER

Compare the affections you feel for things and people in this world with the affection you feel for Jesus and for being forgiven through his death. If you find that your heart leaps up more vigorously for anything else than it does for the forgiveness of God, repent.

Considering where you stand with your faith right now, how is this psalm personally inspiring or challenging for you?

Point to Make

The way not to be a mule is to humble ourselves to come to God in prayer, confess our sin, and accept his direction and protection.

Point to Make

This is a promise that God's love will surround with love the person who trusts him.

NOW WHAT?

What are some verses or phrases that stand out as particularly meaningful? Explain why.

Do you have sin in your life that has not been confessed? Repent now. Listen to the warning.

Taking the time to interact with the text will help engage your mind with the heart of the text. Consider writing the words or phrases that you think of next to verse (Example: "meditate" = "think deeply"). Visualize the text and draw pictures. Highlight or mark key words that stand out to you. You could also color the parallel statements within the Psalm. This is perfect time to discover the riches of the Scriptures.

GOING DEEPER

One of the best things that you can do to dig deeper into the riches of God Almighty is to spend time studying, meditating, and reflecting on the Bible. We have an incredible gift to be able to study the Scriptures for ourselves.

The following week of devotions will be focused on looking at the Thanksgiving Psalms. While Praise Psalms focus on the glory of who God is, Thanksgiving Psalms tend to be an expression of gratitude for what God has done. Often times these psalms will follow a common form: the author is distressed, then he calls to God for help, then God comes to his rescue. Thanksgiving Psalms are in this way similar to a testimony . . . telling a story about God's help and thanking Him for what He has done. "These psalms originated as a grateful response to God for a specific act of deliverance, such as healing from illness, which may be a physical manifestation of unforgiven sin (32), deliverance from enemies (18; 92; 118; 138), or simply rescue from trouble (66:14). These psalms assume the presence of the congregation, which is gathered either for worship or for instruction (32:8–11; 34:11–14) and who hear the story of the deliverance. There are hints indicating how these psalms were used in worship: 118:19–29 assumes a procession, while 66:13–15 and 116:12–19 point to a thank offering accompanying the psalm. In Psalm 138 the worshipper is in the outer court of the temple (v 2). At the heart of these psalms is the story of the deliverance, summarized briefly, 'O Lord my God, I cried to thee for help, and thou hast healed me' and often expanded." Psalms 18, 30, 32, 92, 116, 118, 138 are Thanksgiving Psalms.

Ask the Holy Spirit for the discipline that it takes to have a daily quiet time. Spend time studying the text and come back next week ready to share all that God has spoken to you.

MEMORY VERSE FOR THE WEEK

"Be glad in the Lord, and rejoice, O righteous, and shout for joy, all you upright in heart!"
—Psalm 32:11

WEEK 7 DEVOTIONS

Spending time in God's Word is essential to growing in your faith in Jesus. The REAP Bible study method is a simple tool that you can use during your quiet times.

READ - Take the time to carefully read the Bible passage with an open heart, asking the Holy Spirit to give you words of encouragement, direction and correction.

EXAMINE - Grab your journal and write out your answers to the questions. Make note of what stands out to you.

APPLY - A great question to ask is "How will I live differently and be different today because of what I just read?"

PRAY - Then, talk with God about the passage and your application. Ask Him to change your heart and life based on the time you've spent in His Word.

Ask the following questions of each passage.

- What is going on in the text? What are the circumstances the author is addressing?
- Who is writing, whom is it being written to, and when was the author writing?
- Does the writer mention anything that might indicate his purpose or intent?
- How do you think the author wants his audience to respond?
- What does this tell me about God?
- What does this tell me about myself?
- How does this point to my need for redemption?
- How will I live differently because of what I just read? Is there something for me to obey, a path to follow, a sin I must repent of, or a blessing to celebrate?

DAY 1 — PSALM 18:1-24

DAY 2 — PSALM 18:25-50

DAY 3 — PSALM 30:1-7

DAY 4 — PSALM 30:8-12

DAY 5 — PSALM 116:1-7

DAY 6 — PSALM 116:8-14

DAY 7 — PSALM 116:15-19

A Thankful Heart Leads to Rest

Thanksgiving Psalms

HEBREWS 10:24-25

WEEK

8

Key Questions and Concepts

We can rejoice because God hears our cries for help in our times of need.

Choosing to walk with the Lord leads to rest because the redemption is complete in Jesus Christ. It is not of our own doing.

While Praise Psalms focus on the glory of who God is, Thanksgiving Psalms tend to be an expression of gratitude for what God has done. Often times these psalms will follow a common form: the author is distressed, then he calls to God for help, then God comes to his rescue. Thanksgiving Psalms are in this way similar to a testimony . . . telling a story about God's help and thanking Him for what He has done.

This is a hymn of personal thanksgiving for God's care. The specific circumstance is a deliverance from impending death (vv. 3, 8-9, 15); the words of the psalm may be generalized to other kinds of dramatic answers to prayer in a time of dire need. The psalm is notable for its assumption that one's thanks for this very personal deliverance are properly consummated in public worship. These words are an excellent form for God's people to use in giving public thanks after their own emergencies.

In Romans and 1 Corinthians the church is described as the body of Christ and when one part of the body rejoices, the rest of the body rejoices with it. You may not realize it, but your thankful heart can dramatically influence the rest of the Church.

***Have you ever considered how your thankful heart influences other within the Church?
How does hearing about God's provision or deliverance for someone else increase your faith?***

The encouragement that we each receive as we gather together dramatically influences our faith. Think about how hearing about God's provision or deliverance for someone else has the potential to increase your faith. Let's be careful to not dismiss the benefit having a thankful heart as we worship together.

Thanksgiving Psalms assume the presence of the congregation, which is gathered either for worship or for instruction (32:8-11; 34:11-14) and who hear the story of the deliverance. "These psalms originated as a grateful response to God for a specific act of deliverance, such as healing from illness, which may be a physical manifestation of unforgiven sin (32), deliverance from enemies (18; 92; 118; 138), or simply rescue from trouble (66:14). At the heart of these psalms is the story of the deliverance, summarized briefly, 'O Lord my God, I cried to thee for help, and thou hast healed me' and often expanded." Psalms 18, 30, 32, 92, 116, 118, 138 are Thanksgiving Psalms.

5-Minute Commentary

Ps. 116:1-4 I Love the Lord, Who Has Heard My Prayer. The psalm opens with a straightforward statement of its overall theme: I love the Lord, because he has heard my voice and my pleas for mercy. The people of Israel are urged to love the Lord in response to his covenant blessings (e.g., Deut. 6:5; 11:1); that love grows as the faithful experience God's work among the community and in their own lives. Likewise, the singer called on the name of the Lord in distress (Ps. 116:4), and now resolves to call on him as long as I live (v. 2).

Ps. 116:3 The snares of death and the pangs of Sheol are probably the same thing; he was on the

PSALM 116:1-19

I Love the Lord

¹ I love the Lord, because he has heard
my voice and my pleas for mercy.

² Because he inclined his ear to me,
therefore I will call on him as long as I live.

³ The snares of death encompassed me;
the pangs of Sheol laid hold on me;
I suffered distress and anguish.

⁴ Then I called on the name of the Lord:
"O Lord, I pray, deliver my soul!"

⁵ Gracious is the Lord, and righteous;
our God is merciful.

⁶ The Lord preserves the simple;
when I was brought low, he saved me.

⁷ Return, O my soul, to your rest;
for the Lord has dealt bountifully with you.

⁸ For you have delivered my soul from death,
my eyes from tears,
my feet from stumbling;

⁹ I will walk before the Lord
in the land of the living.

¹⁰ I believed, even when I spoke:
"I am greatly afflicted";

¹¹ I said in my alarm,
"All mankind are liars."

brink of dying (cf. vv. 8, 15). On Sheol as a poetic name for the grave.

Ps. 116:4 called on the name of the Lord. This can be a general term for invoking a deity in prayer (e.g., 1 Kings 18:24), but more often refers to a prayer that is part of public worship (cf. Gen. 4:26; 12:8; Ps. 105:1), which is likely the case here in view of the same term in 116:13. Thus the request was made as part of a worship service.

Ps. 116:5–7 The Lord Deals Bountifully with His Own. The answer to the urgent prayer leads to reflection on the character of God, namely, that he is gracious, merciful (cf. Ex. 34:6), and righteous (i.e.,

¹² What shall I render to the Lord
for all his benefits to me?

¹³ I will lift up the cup of salvation
and call on the name of the Lord,

¹⁴ I will pay my vows to the Lord
in the presence of all his people.

¹⁵ Precious in the sight of the Lord
is the death of his saints.

¹⁶ O Lord, I am your servant;
I am your servant, the son of your maidservant.
You have loosed my bonds.

¹⁷ I will offer to you the sacrifice of thanksgiving
and call on the name of the Lord.

¹⁸ I will pay my vows to the Lord
in the presence of all his people,

¹⁹ in the courts of the house of the Lord,
in your midst, O Jerusalem.
Praise the Lord!

reliably faithful). The pious should know this already; and yet the experience being celebrated has made these notions all the more real to the believer.

Ps. 116:8–11 You Delivered My Soul from Death. The song returns to the desperate situation from which the person has been delivered: death, tears, stumbling. These cover a wider variety of circumstances than simply the death of one's body, and may be the psalmist's invitation to the singers to apply the psalm more generally to experiences of need. The psalm also leads the thankful person to see how to make good use of the deliverance: I will walk before the Lord (i.e., in love, faith, and obedience toward him).

DIGGING INTO THE TEXT

STOP: Before continuing to these questions, make sure that you have:

- 1) Read the psalm at least twice. The second time, put a "?" next to anything that seems weird or doesn't really make sense.
- 2) Review the psalm categories and introduction to Hebrew poetry in the forward of this book.
- 3) Take a minute to pray and ask God to reveal His truth to you. (Take this seriously; make it more than just a "this-is-something-I-have-to-do" sort of prayer.)

After reading through the psalm, what is confusing or difficult to understand?

Look throughout the psalm, what motivates the psalmist to love God?

- | | |
|----|----|
| 1) | 2) |
| 3) | 4) |
| 5) | 6) |
| 7) | 8) |

What has God done in your life to "save" and help you?

Is it wrong to call on the name of the Lord in the midst of trouble? Explain.

Describe a time in your life when you were overcome with "trouble and sorrow." What happened? What did you do? Did you turn first to God for help? Did you only rely on your own strength?

Verse 8 gives a list of things the psalmist has been delivered from. Make your own list of things you have been delivered from.

- 1)
- 2)
- 3)
- 4)
- 5)

How does your experience of God's grace, righteousness, or compassion influence when you call on Him?

Point to Make

1. God heard his voice. 2. God is gracious. 3. God is compassionate. 4. God is righteous. 5. God saved him. 6. Delivered from death, tears, & stumbling. 7. Freedom from chains. 8. Salvation.

Ps. 116:10 I believed, even when I spoke. In 2 Cor. 4:13, Paul uses the Greek Septuagint of this line, "I believe, and so I spoke." Paul is narrating the kinds of desperate trials from which God has rescued him, and thus it is fitting that he would borrow these words.

Ps. 116:11 All mankind are liars. In Rom. 3:3 Paul borrows the Greek wording, "every (human) one is a liar," to emphasize God's truthfulness (which honors the context of the psalm, cf. Ps. 116:5).

Ps. 116:12–19 How Shall I Show My Thanks to Him? The final section raises the question, What shall I render to the Lord for all his benefits to me? The answer is, with acts of public worship, as the follow-

What does it mean to be simple or simple-hearted (verse 6)? How does this verse help answer this question?

Underline all of the past tense statements. Place a star next to all of the "I will..." (future tense) statements. Put a square around the present tense statement in verse 7.

How do the past tense statements lead the psalmist to make the future statements?

How do the future statements lead to the present tense statement?

How can verse 7 be powerful for your life?

According to verse 9, what is the purpose of deliverance in verse 8?

How does a thankful heart cause a desire to repay? Have you ever considered trying to repay the Lord? Can we? Is worship repayment?

This passage repeats the same verse twice (v. 14 and 18)? Why is this important?

Describe the logic of being freed from chains but now a servant.

What would it mean for you to "fulfill your vows" to the Lord? Have you made any commitments to Him that you need to "make good" on?

Why is the presence of others important?

How does this psalm challenge or encourage you to worship God better?

Point to Make

Verse 6 speaks of being brought low or humbled. The psalmist is recognizing his great need because he cannot rescue himself.

Interact

How can an eternal mindset help you rest in the present?

Reference

See Romans 12:1-2 for a proper response to God's great mercy.

ing phrases show: the cup of salvation (perhaps a part of the sacrifice of thanksgiving, v. 14); in the presence of all his people; and in the courts of the house of the Lord. The personal deliverance is a benefit to the whole people, and the entire congregation shares in giving thanks (cf. Rom. 12:15).

NOW WHAT?

PRAYER: Thank God for his willingness to provide a way so you could have a relationship with Him. Thank Him for the everyday grace that meets you in the midst of your sinfulness. Thanks Him for pleasure it is to know Him. Spend time thanking him for what is overflowing in your heart.

After reading this psalm, what are some verses or phrases that stand out as particularly meaningful? Explain why.

Taking the time to interact with the text will help engage your mind with the heart of the text. Consider writing the words or phrases that you think of next to verse (Example: "meditate" = "think deeply"). Visualize the text and draw pictures. Highlight or mark key words that stand out to you. You could also color the parallel statements within the Psalm. This is perfect time to discover the riches of the Scriptures.

GOING DEEPER

One of the best things that you can do to dig deeper into the riches of God Almighty is to spend time studying, meditating, and reflecting on the Bible. We have an incredible gift to be able to study the Scriptures for ourselves.

The following week of devotions will be focused on looking at the Thanksgiving Psalms. While Praise Psalms focus on the glory of who God is, Thanksgiving Psalms tend to be an expression of gratitude for what God has done. Often times these psalms will follow a common form: the author is distressed, then he calls to God for help, then God comes to his rescue. Thanksgiving Psalms are in this way similar to a testimony . . . telling a story about God's help and thanking Him for what He has done. "These psalms originated as a grateful response to God for a specific act of deliverance, such as healing from illness, which may be a physical manifestation of unforgiven sin (32), deliverance from enemies (18; 92; 118; 138), or simply rescue from trouble (66:14). These psalms assume the presence of the congregation, which is gathered either for worship or for instruction (32:8–11; 34:11–14) and who hear the story of the deliverance. There are hints indicating how these psalms were used in worship: 118:19–29 assumes a procession, while 66:13–15 and 116:12–19 point to a thank offering accompanying the psalm. In Psalm 138 the worshipper is in the outer court of the temple (v 2). At the heart of these psalms is the story of the deliverance, summarized briefly, 'O Lord my God, I cried to thee for help, and thou hast healed me' and often expanded." Psalms 18, 30, 32, 92, 116, 118, 138 are Thanksgiving Psalms.

Ask the Holy Spirit for the discipline that it takes to have a daily quiet time. Spend time studying the text and come back next week ready to share all that God has spoken to you.

MEMORY VERSE FOR THE WEEK

"Return, O my soul, to your rest; for the Lord has dealt bountifully with you." —Psalm 116:7

WEEK 8 DEVOTIONS

Spending time in God's Word is essential to growing in your faith in Jesus. The REAP Bible study method is a simple tool that you can use during your quiet times.

READ - Take the time to carefully read the Bible passage with an open heart, asking the Holy Spirit to give you words of encouragement, direction and correction.

EXAMINE - Grab your journal and write out your answers to the questions. Make note of what stands out to you.

APPLY - A great question to ask is "How will I live differently and be different today because of what I just read?"

PRAY - Then, talk with God about the passage and your application. Ask Him to change your heart and life based on the time you've spent in His Word.

Ask the following questions of each passage.

- What is going on in the text? What are the circumstances the author is addressing?
- Who is writing, whom is it being written to, and when was the author writing?
- Does the writer mention anything that might indicate his purpose or intent?
- How do you think the author wants his audience to respond?
- What does this tell me about God?
- What does this tell me about myself?
- How does this point to my need for redemption?
- How will I live differently because of what I just read? Is there something for me to obey, a path to follow, a sin I must repent of, or a blessing to celebrate?

DAY 1 — PSALM 32

DAY 2 — PSALM 92:1-9

DAY 3 — PSALM 92:10-15

DAY 4 — PSALM 118:1-7

DAY 5 — PSALM 118:8-18

DAY 6 — PSALM 118:19-29

DAY 7 — PSALM 138

The King over All

Royal Psalms

MATTHEW 16:13-16

WEEK

9

Key Questions and Concepts

God is a bondage breaker, not a bondage bringer.

We can defy God and perish, or surrender to Him and be blessed.

Who sits on the throne of your heart?

Psalm 2 is set at a time when the Gentile kingdoms that are part of the Davidic empire seek to throw off Israelite rule, this psalm recalls the promises made to the Davidic king at his coronation and notes that the Gentiles will find lasting joy only as subjects of this king. When the people of God sing Psalm 2, they remind themselves of how God made David and his descendants to be kings in order to enable them to fulfill the very purpose for which Abraham was called (to bring blessing to all nations, Gen. 12:1–3). Thus it can be called a royal psalm. With its prospect of a worldwide rule for the house of David, the psalm also looks to the future, when the Davidic Messiah will indeed accomplish this; in fact, the scope of such an accomplishment calls for a ruler who is more than a mere man.

Like many Psalms, the theme of Psalm 2 is emphasized in the final verse. We can defy God and perish, or surrender to Him and be blessed. The Psalm itself does not identify its author, but Acts 4:25–26 clearly attributes it to David.

***What would it be like to experience a king that rules over all the nations of the earth?
Would you want to be that king? Why or why not?***

Rather than having a common form, Royal Psalms have a common theme: the king. It's important to remember that the psalms were actually songs that were sung and played in a corporate (group) setting. Today in the church we have certain songs for certain types of events—one song might be appropriate to sing on a national holiday, while another might be better used for a wedding. It was the same way in Ancient Israel, and these Royal Psalms were all used at events where the king was involved (his coronation, his victory in battle, the establishment of his kingdom). While these psalms were first used in association with the earthly kings of Israel, many Christians believe them also to be prophetic about the coming Messiah—the King of Kings. Psalms 2, 18, 20, 21, 45, 72, 89, 101, 110, 132 are Royal Psalms.

It may be a bit hard to relate to what is like to have king who rules over all the nations because we simply have not experienced that in our lifetime. However, we can know our own hearts. We can know for certain who sits on that throne.

5-Minute Commentary

Ps. 2:1–3 The Gentile Kings in Revolt. In vv. 1–2 several kings of Gentile peoples who are vassals (subordinate nations) of the Davidic king propose a revolt to throw off Israelite rule; in v. 3 they speak their goal.

Ps. 2:2 Anointed. Samuel anointed both Saul (1 Sam. 10:1) and David (1 Sam. 16:13), setting them apart as king, whose task was to rule Israel and to embody covenant faithfulness. The word Messiah comes from transliterating the Hebrew word for “Anointed,” and the word Christ comes from translating “Anointed” into Greek. For the Gentiles to rebel against the heir of David is to rebel against

PSALM 2

- ¹ Why do the nations rage
and the peoples plot in vain?
- ² The kings of the earth set themselves,
and the rulers take counsel together,
against the Lord and against his Anointed, saying,
- ³ "Let us burst their bonds apart
and cast away their cords from us."
- ⁴ He who sits in the heavens laughs;
the Lord holds them in derision.
- ⁵ Then he will speak to them in his wrath,
and terrify them in his fury, saying,
- ⁶ "As for me, I have set my King
on Zion, my holy hill."
- ⁷ I will tell of the decree:
The Lord said to me, "You are my Son;
today I have begotten you.
- ⁸ Ask of me, and I will make the nations your heritage,
and the ends of the earth your possession.
- ⁹ You shall break them with a rod of iron
and dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel."
- ¹⁰ Now therefore, O kings, be wise;
be warned, O rulers of the earth.
- ¹¹ Serve the Lord with fear,
and rejoice with trembling.
- ¹² Kiss the Son,
lest he be angry, and you perish in the way,
for his wrath is quickly kindled.
Blessed are all who take refuge in him.

the Lord who installed him; it is also to cut themselves off from their only hope of knowing the one true God. In Acts 4:25–26, the early Christians saw the persecution they faced as the same kind of foolish rebellion.

Ps. 2:4–6 Heaven's Perspective on the Revolt. Since the Lord is not dismayed, neither do his people need to be. In fact, God laughs at the rebels and declares his firm purpose to establish the throne of David as he has promised.

Ps. 2:7–9 The Davidic King Speaks. The king recalls what God had said at his coronation. Lying be-

DIGGING INTO THE TEXT

STOP: Before continuing to these questions, make sure that you have:

- 1) Read the psalm at least twice. The second time, put a "?" next to anything that seems weird or doesn't really make sense.
- 2) Review the psalm categories and introduction to Hebrew poetry in the forward of this book.
- 3) Take a minute to pray and ask God to reveal His truth to you. (Take this seriously; make it more than just a "this-is-something-I-have-to-do" sort of prayer.)

Define "royal."

Circle all of the royal language in this Psalm.

List each character (or set of characters) that is mentioned (don't forget the writer).

- 1)
- 2)
- 3)
- 4)
- 5)

The Psalm can be split into four parts (every three verses). Come up for a title for each part. Write them between each section as well as below.

Verses 1-3:

Verses 4-6:

Verses 7-9:

Verse 10-12:

What is being described in these verses 1-3? From what you know of the Old Testament, is this an accurate picture of what happened throughout the Old Testament?

Respond to the following: Those who oppose the LORD and His Anointed think of God as a bondage-bringer. This attitude is evidence of spiritual insanity because God is a bondage-breaker, not a bondage-bringer.

TO A GRACELESS NECK THE YOKE OF CHRIST IS INTOLERABLE, BUT TO THE SAVED SINNER IT IS EASY AND LIGHT ... WE MAY JUDGE OURSELVES BY THIS, DO WE LOVE THAT YOKE, OR DO WE WISH TO CAST IT FROM US?" SPURGEON

Definition

Royal – having the status of king or queen or a member of their family.

Reference

- 1) Kings of the earth
- 2) The Lord
- 3) Anointed King / Davidic King / Writer
- 4) Us = Israel
- 5) Other nations

Reference

V. 1-3 – The Gentile kings in revolt
V. 4-6 – Heaven's perspective on the revolt
V. 7-9 – The Davidic King speaks
V. 10-12 – Advice to the Gentile Kings

hind this is the promise that the line of David will be sure forever before the Lord (2 Sam. 7:16) and that the obedience of the peoples will come to the ruler from the tribe of Judah (Gen. 49:10), together with the very purpose for choosing Abraham and his offspring.

Ps. 2:7 decree. That is, the divine oracle spoken when the king took his throne. The Lord said. Although many suppose that this psalm is for the crowning of a king, the past tense indicates that the king recalls the oracle at a later time of trouble. You are my Son. In 2 Sam. 7:14, God says that he will take the heir of David as a "son." The people as a whole are called the "son of God" (see Ex. 4:22-23; Ps. 80:15; Hos. 11:1), and the king is called the "son of God" because he represents and

In the context of this Psalm, who is "The LORD's Anointed"? What is special about this person? How is he related to God?

Read 2 Samuel 7:1-17.

Describe the similarities between this passage of Scripture and Psalm 2?

How does 2 Samuel 7 help us understand Psalm 2?

For the Gentiles to rebel against the heir of David is to rebel against the Lord who installed him; it is also to cut themselves off from their only hope of knowing the one true God.

Why might this Psalm have been placed second in the book of Psalms? Compare and contrast to Psalm 1.

Why might this Psalm have been sung in ancient Israel? What point is being made? How would this point have impacted the people singing it?

Read Hebrews 1:5.

What does this quotation of Psalm 2:7 teach us about Christ? How does Christ relate to Psalm 2?

Draw a Large crown next to verses 4-6.

What is Lord's perspective about the revolt of the other nations?

How should God's people respond to revolt based upon how Lord in Heaven responds?

Above the word "break" in verse 9, write the word "rule."

Point to Make

The Lord's Anointed is the heir of David who is ultimately Messiah, Christ Jesus.

Point to Make

The first psalm was moral, and shows us our duty, so Psalm 2 is evangelical, and shows us our Savior.

Point to Make

They sang this to remind themselves of how God made David and his descendants to be kings in order to enable them to fulfill the very purpose for which Abraham was called (to bring blessing to all nations)

Point to Make

This citation from Ps. 2:7 invokes the whole Psalm: the Messiah is the Anointed One (Ps. 2:2), is king over all (Ps. 2:6-8), and especially is God's Son.

embodies the people (see also Ps. 89:27). Hebrews 1:5 brings Ps. 2:7 together with 2 Sam. 7:14: this shows that the argument of that book assumes that Jesus is the messianic heir of David (the Son of God), into whom God has also folded the priestly office. In Acts 13:33 (a speech of Paul) and Rom. 1:4, Paul portrays the resurrection of Jesus as his coronation, his entry into his Davidic rule.

Ps. 2:8 nations. That is, the Gentiles, including those in revolt (v. 1). The primary messianic picture of the OT is of the heir of David who will lead his people in bringing the light to the nations, by making them his subjects; this is how the nations of the earth will find blessing for themselves in him (see Gen. 22:18; see also Ps. 72:8-11, 17); thus Paul looks forward to the obedience of faith among

How does the promise, described in 2 Samuel 7:16, that the line of David will be sure forever influence the king's response in verse 7-9? Does he seem confident?

What is the warning described in verse 10-12? Is it a command or a suggestion?

Is it possible to live out verse 11? If so, how?

What does the text mean by "kiss the son?"

If the other rulers choose to reject the king, whom are they really rejecting?

What do you think it would be like to have king? What is good about a king? What is bad? Why might God have set up Israel with a king?

What do we learn about God from this Psalm's focus on kingship? How does the king relate to God?

What difference does it make in your life that Jesus is the Son of God? Do you think of Jesus as King? Why or why not?

Interact

What challenges do we face understanding kings who rule over others?

all the nations (Rom. 1:5).

Ps. 2:9 break (Hb. tero'em). As the esv footnote says, the Septuagint (used in Rev. 2:27; 12:5; 19:15) renders this as "rule"; this comes from using the same Hebrew consonants with different vowels (tir'em).

Ps. 2:10–12 Advice to the Gentile Kings. The kings must understand that the ruler whom they reject is not just another human ruler but is God's own appointed king for the sake of the whole world. Therefore they serve their best interest by submitting to David's heir.

NOW WHAT?

Taking the time to interact with the text will help engage your mind with the heart of the text. Consider writing the words or phrases that you think of next to verse (Example: “meditate” = “think deeply”). Visualize the text and draw pictures. Highlight or mark key words that stand out to you. You could also color the parallel statements within the Psalm. This is perfect time to discover the riches of the Scriptures.

How does God keeping his promise about the line of David increase your faith?

What have you continued to try to rule in your own life rather than letting King Jesus control?

PRAYER: King of kings, forgive me for when I have plotted against your rule in my life. I trust in your provision and perfect plan. I choose to serve you with gladness because I know you are good King who keeps His promises. I trust in you to be my refuge and to protect me against the enemy.

GOING DEEPER

One of the best things that you can do to dig deeper into the riches of God Almighty is to spend time studying, meditating, and reflecting on the Bible. We have an incredible gift to be able to study the Scriptures for ourselves.

The following week of devotions will be focused on looking at the Royal Psalms. Rather than having a common form, Royal Psalms have a common theme: the king. It’s important to remember that the psalms were actually songs that were sung and played in a corporate (group) setting. Today in the church we have certain songs for certain types of events—one song might be appropriate to sing on a national holiday, while another might be better used for a wedding. It was the same way in Ancient Israel, and these Royal Psalms were all used at events where the king was involved (his coronation, his victory in battle, the establishment of his kingdom). While these psalms were first used in association with the earthly kings of Israel, many Christians believe them also to be prophetic about the coming Messiah—the King of Kings. Psalms 2, 18, 20, 21, 45, 72, 89, 101, 110, 132 are Royal Psalms.

Ask the Holy Spirit for the discipline that it takes to have a daily quiet time. Spend time studying the text and come back next week ready to share all that God has spoken to you.

MEMORY VERSE FOR THE WEEK

“Then Pilate said to him, “So you are a king?” Jesus answered, “You say that I am a king. For this purpose I was born and for this purpose I have come into the world—to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth listens to my voice.” —John 18:37

Ps. 2:10 kings ... rulers of the earth. See v. 2.

Ps. 2:12 Kiss the Son. “Son” (bar) is Aramaic in form, leading some to offer other translations (such as “purely”), or even to suggest large-scale repairs to the Hebrew text (e.g., to make it say “his feet”). But the Aramaic-sounding term is well-suited to a Gentile audience (the kings in revolt). The Son is the heir of David (v. 7). The kiss denotes religious homage, and the Davidic king deserves it (v. 2). It is possible that the he and him of this verse refer to the Lord (from v. 11), though it is more natural to find a reference to the Son, who acts in God’s name. He is therefore the one in whom the faithful take refuge.

WEEK 9 DEVOTIONS

Spending time in God's Word is essential to growing in your faith in Jesus. The REAP Bible study method is a simple tool that you can use during your quiet times.

READ - Take the time to carefully read the Bible passage with an open heart, asking the Holy Spirit to give you words of encouragement, direction and correction.

EXAMINE - Grab your journal and write out your answers to the questions. Make note of what stands out to you.

APPLY - A great question to ask is "How will I live differently and be different today because of what I just read?"

PRAY - Then, talk with God about the passage and your application. Ask Him to change your heart and life based on the time you've spent in His Word.

Ask the following questions of each passage.

- What is going on in the text? What are the circumstances the author is addressing?
- Who is writing, whom is it being written to, and when was the author writing?
- Does the writer mention anything that might indicate his purpose or intent?
- How do you think the author wants his audience to respond?
- What does this tell me about God?
- What does this tell me about myself?
- How does this point to my need for redemption?
- How will I live differently because of what I just read? Is there something for me to obey, a path to follow, a sin I must repent of, or a blessing to celebrate?

DAY 1 — PSALM 18

DAY 2 — PSALM 20-21

DAY 3 — PSALM 45

DAY 4 — PSALM 72

DAY 5 — PSALM 89

DAY 6 — PSALM 101

DAY 7 — PSALM 110

Celebrating God's Presence

Liturgical Psalms

PSALM 24

WEEK

10

Key Questions and Concepts

How will you approach the next time you "come into God's presence" in corporate worship with your brothers and sisters?

How might you use this psalm (and others) to "come into God's presence" when you pray by yourself?

Just like Royal Psalms, the Liturgical Psalms were reserved for a certain purpose. These psalms were each used during the order of worship (or liturgy) in the temple—they were for public worship. Just like we have certain songs to accompany different "sacraments" that we take part in (communion, baptism, etc.). Another example that we experience is a responsive reading. Psalms 15, 24, 50, 81, 95, 115, 132 are Liturgical Psalms.

Psalm 24 seems fitted for some liturgical occasion. The most commonly viewed occasion is the celebration of when David brought the ark of the Lord into Jerusalem (2 Samuel 6). This would explain the interest in God's presence in Ps. 24:3–6, and the address to the gates in vv. 7–10.

The Ark of the Covenant was the place God manifested His presence in the tabernacle. While the Lord was present among His people in the exodus (Ex. 13:17–18, 21–22), He localized this presence in the tabernacle for the benefit of His sinful people. The tabernacle was constructed so that the Lord would be among His people: "And let them make me a sanctuary, that I may dwell in their midst" (Ex. 25:8). But in an even more specific way, the ark served as the place of the presence of God. The fact that the ark was the place of the Lord's presence among His people brought great assurance to the people of God.

Even though Psalm 24 appears to be like a knock-knock joke in the last portion of this psalm, it is a reminder to the entire congregation that only the King of glory is worthy to enter the inner sanctuary.

*Have you ever wondered why we have responsive readings in worship?
Can you imagine what it would be like to bring in the Ark of the Covenant to the temple?*

The psalm asserts the astounding idea that the God who created and owns everything is the very same God into whose presence the faithful worshiper enters because of the covenant with Israel. This is the privilege of being Israel, and such too defines their mission, namely, to bring God's fame to all his creation, and especially to all mankind.

5-Minute Commentary

Ps. 24:1–2 The Lord Is Creator and Owner of All. The Lord, the covenant God of Israel, is the one who founded the world (cf. Gen. 1:1–2:3, where he is called God, the transcendent Creator). The focus here is on the earth as the dry land, where human beings dwell, as distinguished from the waters (cf. Gen. 1:9–10). Paul quotes Ps. 24:1 in 1 Cor. 10:26 to explain that since God owns everything, foods are included, and thus may be enjoyed without worries.

Ps. 24:3–6 Who Receives Blessing from Him? This section reminds the worshipers of a recurring theme in the OT: although every Israelite may attend worship at the sanctuary (the hill of the

PSALM 24

A Psalm of David.

¹ The earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof,
the world and those who dwell therein,

² for he has founded it upon the seas
and established it upon the rivers.

³ Who shall ascend the hill of the Lord?
And who shall stand in his holy place?

⁴ He who has clean hands and a pure heart,
who does not lift up his soul to what is false
and does not swear deceitfully.

⁵ He will receive blessing from the Lord
and righteousness from the God of his salvation.

⁶ Such is the generation of those who seek him,
who seek the face of the God of Jacob. *Selah*

⁷ Lift up your heads, O gates!
And be lifted up, O ancient doors,
that the King of glory may come in.

⁸ Who is this King of glory?
The Lord, strong and mighty,
the Lord, mighty in battle!

⁹ Lift up your heads, O gates!
And lift them up, O ancient doors,
that the King of glory may come in.

¹⁰ Who is this King of glory?
The Lord of hosts,
he is the King of glory! *Selah*

Lord, his holy place), not everyone will really receive blessing (v. 5) or will genuinely enjoy the status of righteousness (v. 5). God expects his people to embrace their privileges from their hearts, and to show that in their behavior (vv. 4, 6). This theme appears elsewhere in the Psalms (e.g., Ps. 15:1–5; 51:16–19) as well as in Proverbs (e.g., Prov. 15:8) and the Prophets (e.g., Isa. 1:11–17). The Hebrew for clean (Ps. 24:4) can also be translated “innocent”; clean hands are those that have acted innocently toward others (Gen. 20:5; Ps. 26:6; 73:13). Likewise the pure heart is the one cleansed of all unworthy motives toward other people. (The [Gk.] for “pure heart” lies behind the sixth beatitude, Matt. 5:8.) Thus true piety is shown both in hunger for God (Ps. 24:6) and in fair and generous dealing with one another (v. 4). to what is false. I.e., to idols.

DIGGING INTO THE TEXT

STOP: Before continuing to these questions, make sure that you have:

- 1) Read the psalm at least twice. The second time, put a "?" next to anything that seems weird or doesn't really make sense.
- 2) Review the psalm categories and introduction to Hebrew poetry in the forward of this book.
- 3) Take a minute to pray and ask God to reveal His truth to you. (Take this seriously; make it more than just a "this-is-something-I-have-to-do" sort of prayer.)

Psalm 24 is considered written during the occasion when David's brought the Ark of the Covenant to the place prepared for it in the sanctuary. It is important to remember that the Ark of the Covenant was the considered to be the very presence of God. The intention of it was to lead the people to live a life beyond the show of external rituals to a genuine holy life and faith in God.

What clues can you find within Psalm 24 would cause you to consider that this was the purpose of the Psalm?

Who was allowed into the most holy place within the tabernacle? What were the qualifications?

Do we have any event that corresponds to this in our church? Compare and contrast what you know about Israel's worship with our worship today.

Look at verses 1-2. What do these verses remind us about God? How does this truth about God set us up for the rest of the Psalm?

Discuss this statement: Emotion is an important part of worship. How do Psalms help us with this? Are there any dangers of emotions during worship?

Write the question in verse 3 in your own words in the space below.

What is the "hill of the LORD" in verse 3?

Point to Make

The Holy of Holies was accessible only to the Israelite high priest once a year on the Day of Atonement.

Point to Make

The beginning is a quick reminder that the Lord is creator and owner of all. The whole earth belongs to him, and everything it contains. His presence is *already* everywhere.

Interact

What emotion do these images cause us to feel?

Ps. 24:7–10 Lift Up Your Heads, O Gates! Readers may imagine this as the call and response before the gates of Jerusalem: in v. 7 the procession bearing the ark announces God's presence in the ark, seeking entry into his sanctuary; Who is this King of glory? (v. 8a) is the reply, asking for further identification. The procession then says who the Lord is (The Lord, strong and mighty, the Lord, mighty in battle!), and then repeats the request for entry (v. 9). Again the doorkeepers reply, asking for identification (v. 10a), and again the procession identifies the Lord (v. 10b).

Read the description of the person who can “ascend” the hill of the LORD (v. 4-6). Write the condition required in verse 4 in your own words.

What body parts are described in verse 4?

- 1)
- 2)
- 3)

What role do these verses play in the overall Psalm?

Does worship at church ever cause you to consider your purity before God? Why or why not?
What can we learn from this Psalm about coming before God in worship?

Do verses 4-6 point toward Jesus? Explain.

Consider the words used to describe God in verses 7-10. What do these verses tell us about God?

How should this change the way that we approach God? What are some wrong ways of approaching God?

Verse 10 calls God the “King of glory.” What is glory?

In what situations in your life might this Psalm be helpful to read? When do you need to be specifically reminded of God’s glory and might?

PRAYER: Psalms can easily be used as songs or prayers. Spend a few minutes using this Psalm to pray with your small group, reflecting on the truths about God and man. Don’t forget to think about how Jesus is the only one who can truly ascend the holy hill of God.

Reference

1) Hands. 2) Tongue. 3) Heart. These are organs of action, speech and feeling, which compose character.

Point to Make

Vs. 4-6 help clarify for the worshipper that they are not worthy to ascend the hill of the Lord. Which leads to their response in the last portion of the psalm.

Point to Make

Lord of hosts describes God by a title indicative of supremacy over all creatures, especially the heavenly armies.

Reference

Glory – high renown, magnificence, supreme beauty

Interact

Name some things that we give glory to besides God? How do we “glorify” those things? Why?

NOW WHAT?

Do verse 4-6 describe you? If not, what needs to change?

Taking the time to interact with the text will help engage your mind with the heart of the text. Consider writing the words or phrases that you think of next to verse (Example: “meditate” = “think deeply”). Visualize the text and draw pictures. Highlight or mark key words that stand out to you. You could also color the parallel statements within the Psalm. This is perfect time to discover the riches of the Scriptures.

GOING DEEPER

One of the best things that you can do to dig deeper into the riches of God Almighty is to spend time studying, meditating, and reflecting on the Bible. We have an incredible gift to be able to study the Scriptures for ourselves.

The following week of devotions will be focused on looking at the Liturgical Psalms. Just like Royal Psalms, the Liturgical Psalms were reserved for a certain purpose. These psalms were each used during the order of worship (or liturgy) in the temple—they were for public worship. Just like we have certain songs to accompany different “sacraments” that we take part in (communion, baptism, etc.), these psalms may have been for certain “rites” as well. Psalms 15, 24, 50, 81, 95, 115, 132 are Liturgical Psalms.

Ask the Holy Spirit for the discipline that it takes to have a daily quiet time. Spend time studying the text and come back next week ready to share all that God has spoken to you.

MEMORY VERSE FOR THE WEEK

“Who shall ascend the hill of the Lord? And who shall stand in his holy place? He who has clean hands and a pure heart, who does not lift up his soul to what is false and does not swear deceitfully.”
—Psalm 24:3-4

WEEK 10 DEVOTIONS

Spending time in God's Word is essential to growing in your faith in Jesus. The REAP Bible study method is a simple tool that you can use during your quiet times.

READ - Take the time to carefully read the Bible passage with an open heart, asking the Holy Spirit to give you words of encouragement, direction and correction.

EXAMINE - Grab your journal and write out your answers to the questions. Make note of what stands out to you.

APPLY - A great question to ask is "How will I live differently and be different today because of what I just read?"

PRAY - Then, talk with God about the passage and your application. Ask Him to change your heart and life based on the time you've spent in His Word.

Ask the following questions of each passage.

- What is going on in the text? What are the circumstances the author is addressing?
- Who is writing, whom is it being written to, and when was the author writing?
- Does the writer mention anything that might indicate his purpose or intent?
- How do you think the author wants his audience to respond?
- What does this tell me about God?
- What does this tell me about myself?
- How does this point to my need for redemption?
- How will I live differently because of what I just read? Is there something for me to obey, a path to follow, a sin I must repent of, or a blessing to celebrate?

DAY 1 — PSALM 15

DAY 2 — PSALM 24

DAY 3 — PSALM 50

DAY 4 — PSALM 81

DAY 5 — PSALM 95

DAY 6 — PSALM 115

DAY 7 — PSALM 132

LOOKING BACK

You've completed a short overview of the Psalms! It is my prayer that the time you spent in God's Word truly led you toward becoming a better worshiper. It is such a privilege and joy to study Scripture. Take some time to reflect on all that you have learned during this study.

How do you feel now that you have completed this study?

Describe how your future will be impacted because of this study.

So now you are thinking, okay, now that I've completed this study, I know everything I need to know now, right?

Psalms 119:55 says, "In the night I remember your name, O LORD, and I will keep your law." Discipleship isn't about completing a study. It is about a lifestyle of learning and living as you follow Jesus throughout your lifetime. What you have learned throughout this study will become more important to your Christian life in the months, even years, to come. Think about some of the major concepts that you have learned and can live out.

- One must dig deep into the treasures of God's Word in order to bear fruit for the kingdom.
- We should meditate on the law of the Lord with our whole heart and mind.
- Despite difficulties, God's Word brings us life and we must trust it.
- Scripture is a treasure of glorious riches. We must be diligent to fix our eyes on God's Word.
- Believers can rest content even when unbelievers seem to get along without a care in the world because God is our refuge and shield.
- When considering the greatness of God, the believer has no other choice but to erupt in praise to God.
- Discussed how is obedience related to praise.
- We can bring all our feelings to God—no matter how negative or complaining they may be—and we can rest assured that He will hear and understand.
- God is the same Lord in all the psalms.
- Wickedness offers no reward that can compare to the joy and pleasure of God's house.
- Understand the staggering privilege of being a welcome guest in God's own house.
- Believers are urged to accept this instruction about ready confession and to be glad in the Lord, who shows such goodness to his people.
- Only the forgiven are truly happy. That true happiness leads to genuine thanksgiving.
- We can rejoice because God hears our cries for help in our times of need.
- We can defy God and perish, or surrender to Him and be blessed.
- God is a bondage breaker, not a bondage bringer.
- Examined the approach of "coming into God's presence" in corporate worship.

Wow! That's a lot! Now it's time to continue to live out what you have learned in this study.

CRITICAL ISSUES

RELATIONSHIPS

Relationships are a blessing. However, they are often difficult. Discerning the truth from the lies in how to build healthy relationships is becoming more challenging with our connected world.

In this study we will be looking into the eternal Word of God for direction to develop healthy relationships with our friends, parents, becoming a person of integrity, dealing with conflict, and responding to authority with Christlikeness.

Your Relationship with the Lord

DEUTERONOMY 6:1-9

WEEK

1

Key Questions and Concepts

Your relationship with Christ is foundational for all of your other relationships. If your connection with God is off, every other relationship you have will be affected.

We have a choice as to what we want to make our foundation. What is your foundation for a relationship? Is it your wants and desires out of the relationship? Or is something that is kingdom minded?

Connect

Show pictures of old phones or what an old dial phone sounded like dialing or ringing.

Believe it or not, there was a time before cell phones. Today it seems that they are everywhere. Some have even called them essential to survival. Much of the United States residents are using cell phones. In some countries the number of cell phone subscriptions has surpassed the number of inhabitants. The rate of the cell phone sales in the U.S. exceeded the birth rate in 2012. This obviously leads to mobile phone manufactures and communication companies making billions of dollars a year.

*How many cell phones does your family own?
Why do you think cell phones are so popular?*

Why do we want a cell phone? It is because we want to be connected to sports, calls, messages, email, news, etc. To get all that you need a cell phone with a great connection. Cell phone companies fight about who has the best download speeds, network access, call quality, message capabilities, etc. Of course, they all claim they are the best. The bottom line is that the in order to effectively use a cell phones there has to be a strong connection.

As we begin this study we will look at the foundation of relationships. We'll begin by studying the Great Commandment, which lays out the primary connections and clearly shows the most important connection we have.

The bottom line is that all relationships have a foundation. We have a choice as to what we want to make our foundation. What is your foundation for a relationship? Is it your wants and desires out of the relationship? Or is something that is kingdom minded?

In this session you will learn about the greatest connection of all, your relationship with God. Without a connection to God, all other connections are meaningless. You will discover how to connect to God and how to make your connection with Him a strong one.

You'll end the session with a discussion of how God gives us identity and the importance of the Word in defining who we are. God gives us our identity. He loves us, sent His Son, saved us, and gave us His Word so we can have a better understanding of who we are.

5-Minute Commentary

Matt. 22:36 the great commandment. The rabbis engaged in an ongoing debate to determine which commandments were "light" and which were "weighty" (cf. 23:23). The Law refers here to the entire OT.

Matt. 22:37-38 love the Lord your God ... heart ... soul ... mind. This command from Deut. 6:5, repeated twice daily by faithful Jews, encapsulates the idea of total devotion to God and includes the duty to obey the rest of God's commandments (cf. Matt. 5:16-20). "Heart," "soul," and "mind" do not represent rigid compartments of human existence but rather together refer to the whole person.

A STRONG CONNECTION

Read Matthew 22:34-40.

What are the three relationships that Jesus talks about here?

- 1)
- 2)
- 3)

These two commandments are the foundation of all our relationships.

Why do you think Jesus started with God? What value does a relationship with God add to other relationships?

List three qualities about God that make him the best foundation for all our relationships.

- 1)
- 2)
- 3)

Why would a relationship with God be required for good relationships? Describe how a stable relationship with Jesus can help your relationships with others.

THREE CONNECTION KILLERS

Static of Sin
1 John 1:8-10

Ignoring the Call
John 12:44-50
Romans 1:18-32

No Service
John 8:47

When have you experienced sin affecting your relationship with God?

Sin causes major interference for your connection with God. The easiest way to avoid the static of sin is the stay close to the source of your connection, Jesus.

Ignoring God’s Spirit in your life will cause major connection problems. Whenever you feel God calling, you must answer!

You may not have a connection with God because you have never called on Him to be your Savior.

Point to Make

Here Jesus quoted the passage known as the Shema, found in Deut. 6:5, which was quoted daily by devout Jews.

Point to Make

God, Neighbor, Yourself

Point to Make

People are tough to predict because their moods and attitudes change multiple times a day. God is a solid foundation for all relationships because He never changes.

Interact

Does God communicate with us today? How do we hear him?

Interact

Describe the importance of walking in the light and how that produces fellowship according to 1 John 1.

Matt. 22:39 You shall love your neighbor as yourself. See Lev. 19:18, 34. Love signifies a concrete responsibility to seek the greatest good of one’s neighbors, both Jew and Gentile.

Matt. 22:40 The kingdom life that Jesus initiated—summarized in these two commandments—fulfills the deepest longings of human beings created in the image of God to display his glory.

1 John 1:8 we deceive ourselves. The devil (3:8) or the world (2:15) may contribute to human straying, but in the end each individual bears responsibility for his or her own sin.

Look at the following definition of a relationship. Does this definition describe your connection with God?

RELATIONSHIP — THE CONNECTION BETWEEN TWO OR MORE PEOPLE OR GROUPS AND THEIR INVOLVEMENT WITH EACH OTHER, ESPECIALLY AS REGARDS TO HOW THEY BEHAVE AND FEEL TOWARD EACH OTHER AND COMMUNICATE OR COOPERATE.

Circle the words in the definition that could describe a relationship with God.

Read Matthew 22:37.

THREE WAYS FOR HOW WE ARE TO CONNECT TO GOD.

1) A _____ connection.

Read Romans 10:9-10.

A relationship with God starts with the heart. The heart is the center of your physical and emotional life. That means your connection with God requires all of your physical and emotional resources.

2) A _____ connection.

Read Matthew 11:29.

A soul connection means that all of your desires are directed toward God. A total soul connection is made when you are completely satisfied in God.

How is your fulfillment in Christ impact your relationships?

3) A _____ connection.

The point is simple. God loves us very much and we are to love Him with everything we have – our heart, soul and mind. Connecting with your mind means that your thoughts are centered on God. This doesn't mean that you don't think about anything else. It means that you filter through the question, "Will this thought or action glorify God?"

How could the question of "will this thought or action glorify God?" impact your relationships?

A PROPER VIEW

Read Matthew 22:37-40.

Fill in the Blank

1) heart 2) soul 3) mind

Point to Make

As you read Romans 10:9-10, have the students circle both times the word HEART is used in the verses. Emphasize that Christianity isn't just a bunch of rules you follow with your mind and will; it is a love relationship that changes your heart.

Conclusion

End this section by emphasizing the big picture: God loves us and we should love Him back with everything we have. That is what is meant by a love relationship with God.

Point to Make

You should love your neighbor in the same way that you love yourself. Lose either part and you are not obeying the command.

1 John 1:9 Christians must confess (their) sins, initially to receive salvation and then to maintain fellowship with God and with one another (v. 3). faithful and just to forgive. God is "slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, forgiving iniquity and transgression" (Num. 14:18). Yet John also makes it clear (1 John 3:6, 9) that persistent unrepented sin is not the mark of a Christian—God "will by no means clear the guilty" (Num. 14:18).

1 John 1:10 his word is not in us. A person may have heard and assented to the gospel message, but until it brings him to acknowledge his sin, it has not taken root.

To love your neighbor as yourself, you have to first have a healthy relationship with and understanding of God and yourself. That comes from a correct view of your identity. God has a lot to say about your identity, and it is very different than what the world says about you.

Write a brief description next to each passage that describes your identity in Christ.

John 1:12 –
Ephesians 2:10 –
Galatians 5:1 –
Romans 15:7 –
Galatians 4:7 –
Romans 3:24 –
1 Corinthians 3:16 –
2 Corinthians 5:17 –
Ephesians 1:4 –

Put a star beside those things in the list that you find it hard to remember or hard to understand.

When you listen to the confusing messages from the world rather than God, you are bound to live a life of self-condemnation, wishing you were someone else; God offers a very different view of yourself.

“LOVING YOURSELF” DOESN’T MEAN THAT YOU SPOIL YOURSELF, DO EVERYTHING YOU WANT, AND FORGET ALL ABOUT SELF-CONTROL. INSTEAD, LOVING YOURSELF MEANS SEEING YOURSELF AS GOD SEES YOU. IT MEANS UNDERSTANDING THAT YOU HAVE SELF-WORTH BECAUSE GOD LOVES YOU.

Loving ourselves is really allowing God’s love to affect who we are. It’s not being fine with our sins, bad habits, and mistakes. It is allowing His love, His truth, and His grace to change us. When His love affects us, it can then affect the others around us. With a proper view of your identity in Christ you see others differently. Your identity in Christ is essential in loving others.

Point to Make

Self-worth should not come from people’s changing opinions or from inconsistent feelings; rather it should be based on God’s unchanging love and the principles in these verses.

Point to Make

John 1:12 – You are child of God.
Ephesians 2:10 – Made by Him to do great things.
Galatians 5:1 – Set free from sin.
Romans 15:7 – Accepted by Christ.
Galatians 4:7 – No longer a slave, but a child and an heir.
Romans 3:24 – Justified and redeemed.
1 Corinthians 3:16 – Temple of the Holy Spirit, who dwells in you.
2 Corinthians 5:17 – New creation in Christ.
Ephesians 1:4 – Chosen, holy and blameless before God.

Rom. 1:18–32 The Unrighteousness of the Gentiles. God’s wrath is righteously revealed because people suppress the truth about the one true God and turn to idolatry (vv. 18–23). The consequence of idolatry is the moral disintegration of human society (vv. 24–32).

Rom. 10:9–10 If you confess with your mouth does not mean that a spoken affirmation of one’s faith is a “work” that merits justification, but such confession does give outward evidence of inward faith, and often confirms that faith to the speaker himself. that God raised him from the dead. Paul does not mean that people need to believe only this individual event with no understanding of Christ’s death, but rather they need to believe in the resurrection along with the whole complex of truth con-

NOW WHAT?

When did you begin a relationship with God? Do you ever doubt that you have relationship with God? If you have questions, talk to your parents or your leader about that today.

Look at the connection killers once again in the lesson. Write down three practical ways you can avoid them this next week.

- 1)
- 2)
- 3)

List a way you can improve each of the following:

- 1) Heart connection:
- 2) Soul connection:
- 3) Mind connection:

Describe your overall connection with God?

On a scale of 1-10, who influences your identity the most?

God 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 The world

Do you struggle with self-worth? How would remembering how God sees you change your struggles?

GOING DEEPER

Revelation 2:4 calls God our “first love”; He’s called that for several reasons. One reason is that He loved us before we loved Him. Another is that our first love is supposed to come before and be the foundation of our other loves. Your relationship with God is the foundation of all your other relationships. If your connection with God is off, every other relationship you have will be affected.

Why do you think a proper identity is important to loving ourselves?

MEMORY VERSE FOR THE WEEK

Matthew 22:37 — “And he said to him, ‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’”

nected with it, particularly Jesus’ sin-bearing death in mankind’s place, followed by his resurrection that showed God the Father’s approval of Christ’s. with the heart one believes. Saving faith is not mere intellectual agreement but deep inward trust in Christ at the core of one’s being.

Matt. 11:29 yoke. The wooden frame joining two animals (usually oxen) for pulling heavy loads was a metaphor for one person’s subjection to another, and a common metaphor in Judaism for the law. The Pharisaic interpretation of the law, with its extensive list of proscriptions, had become a crushing burden (cf. 23:4) but was believed by the people to be of divine origin. Jesus’ yoke of discipleship, on the other hand, brings rest through simple commitment to him (cf. 1 John 5:3).

WEEK 1 DEVOTIONS

Spending time in God's Word is essential to growing in your faith in Jesus. The REAP Bible study method is a simple tool that you can use during your quiet times.

READ - Take the time to carefully read the Bible passage with an open heart, asking the Holy Spirit to give you words of encouragement, direction and correction.

EXAMINE - Grab your journal and write out your answers to the questions. Make note of what stands out to you.

APPLY - A great question to ask is "How will I live differently and be different today because of what I just read?"

PRAY - Then, talk with God about the passage and your application. Ask Him to change your heart and life based on the time you've spent in His Word.

DAY 1 — MATTHEW 22:34-40

How does verse 37 point to the fact that we should love God with our whole being?

Why do you think this is the great and first commandment?

DAY 2 — DEUTERONOMY 6:4-5

Why is it important that God is one?

Why might the commandment for us to love God with our whole being flow out of the statement that God is one?

DAY 3 — DEUTERONOMY 6:6-9

What are some things these verses say that we should do as a result of loving God?

How can you practically do some of those things this week?

DAY 4 — MATTHEW 6:19-24

Why can someone not serve two masters? Give an example in life of how that would be a problem.

What are some "masters" you fight against to devote yourself fully to God?

DAY 5 — ROMANS 10:8-10

What role does the heart play in your relationship with the Lord?

What are some examples of how someone could show outward signs of loving God, but not have a heart that loves God?

DAY 6 — MATTHEW 15:1-9

In what way were the Pharisees and scribes hypocrites?

How does being a hypocrite conflict with loving God with your whole being?

DAY 7 — 1 JOHN 1:15-17

What are some things that pull us away from loving God with our whole being?

What is a specific area in your life where you battle the things of the world? How can you fight it?

Your Relationship with Your Neighbors

JOHN 15:9-17

WEEK

2

Key Questions and Concepts

God purposefully created us with the desire to be with other people and with a desire to love and be loved.

Do we recognize and care for the person on the outside of our social circle?

Jesus is the example to follow in loving our neighbors.

Connect Point

Let's say a dozen roses cost \$50 from a florist. That would mean that florist could be giving away around \$25,000 in merchandise. Even if the roses cost more or less, they are still dealing in the thousands of dollars. Is that really worth it so people can get to know each other?

Each year Bill O'Shea's Florist, in Hasbrouck Heights, New Jersey, sponsors an event called Good Neighbor Day. Bill's business is one of many FTD florists that has celebrated FTD Good Neighbor Day since 1994. The day is designated for people to meet and get to know their neighbors and encourages all neighbors to help create a friendlier, more caring and compassionate world through the gift of flowers.

Thousands of bouquets of a dozen roses are given away all across the country on a first-come-first-served basis. No purchase is necessary. Each customer is asked to keep one for themselves and to give the other eleven roses away to different people, and in so doing, help create a friendlier, more caring community while brightening the day of many other people. It's all about being a good neighbor and loving and serving them.

Name several of your neighbors?

What would you do for a get-to-know-you event like flower idea?

People in today's culture are more distant from their neighbors than ever. It has almost become too easy to disconnect from the people who live 100 feet from you. Culturally, we put up fences; rarely invite people over to our homes, and can go years without speaking to them. Love for our neighbor and love for God go hand-in-hand. How can you love your neighbor if you never talk to them?

The Bible is a book about relationships, from start to finish. God's view of relationships gives purpose for living and guidelines that will protect us along the way. Many people struggle with relationships because they see a lack of purpose, lack of hope, limited view of life, etc. in their relationships. So what are my relationships with others supposed to look like? What is the purpose of relationships?

As we know from last week, God is the basis of the love that changes us, and we then share that love with others. Jesus' life was the most loving life the world has ever seen. It is His love for us and our love for Him that affects all of our relationships. Today you will discover who your neighbors are and the importance of sharing God's love with them. Let's listen to hear a word from our Maker that might be different than what you might expect.

5-Minute Commentary

John 15:10–11 Obedience is not to be equated with drudgery; it is all about joy. The OT prophets envisioned a period of great end-time rejoicing. God threatened judgment if his people would not serve him "with joyfulness and gladness of heart" (Deut. 28:47–48). that my joy may be in you. Just as Jesus had great joy in obeying his Father even in the midst of opposition, so Christians will have joy in obedience.

John 15:13–14 You are my friends implies a stunning level of comfortable personal interaction with one who is also the eternal, omnipotent Creator of the universe (see 1:1–3, 10). In the OT, only Abra-

WHO IS MY NEIGHBOR?

Read Matthew 22:34-40.

Last week we learned that God is the foundation of all our relationships and how His love changes us. Today we turn our attention to how at the same time we are to love our neighbor. When Jesus makes these statements in this passage he immediately communicates we are created for relationships, and all of our relationships are to be marked by love. Far too often we avoid loving our neighbor because we feel ill equipped, we simply don't notice them, or because we know relationships are messy.

Write down the names of three people who are your neighbors.

- 1)
- 2)
- 3)

Read Luke 10:25-37.

1) You may think you are too clean for your neighbor (v. 31).

It was a priest who refused to help the hurt man. In doing so completely missed an opportunity to share the love of God with someone in need.

2) You neighbor may not have a good social standing (v. 32).

Describe a time when Jesus acted as though he was too good for someone?

Levites were important people because they helped the priests perform the sacrifices in the temple. Maybe the reason that he didn't help was because he had to prepare the sacrifices and he would be unclean if he helped. It's interesting that those that helped others make sacrifices for their uncleanness were not able to help those that were unclean. He may have thought that he was too good to help, but those who want to love their neighbor will cross social lines to do it.

Describe a social setting that you face regularly where if you were to really love your neighbor it would be a stretch for you.

3) Your neighbor may be from a different race (v. 33-35).

Samaritans were considered a mixed race by the Jews and looked down upon, but this was the man that stopped. This man understood that neighbors are people from all nations, races, and backgrounds. So who is your neighbor? Jesus said that he or she is anyone that passes by. God brings many people your way and they are all your neighbors.

Point to Make

God purposefully created us with the desire to be with other people and with a desire to love and be loved. We must form relationships with others in the ways God intended.

Point to Make

Help the students imagine the reaction of the crowd when the two highly respected characters in the story did nothing and the unlikely hero is from a hated race.

Point to Make

Jesus didn't act as though he was better. He welcomed the poor, needy, and children. He even welcomed women who at that time hardly had any rights.

Interact

How neighborly is your church? Discuss how welcome people of other religions, social standing, and races are at church and student ministry.

ham (2 Chron. 20:7; Isa. 41:8) and by implication Moses (Ex. 33:11) are called "friends of God." Here Jesus extends this privilege to all obedient believers.

John 15:16 You did not choose me does not negate the disciples' willing decision to follow Jesus when he called them. Jesus is emphasizing that the ultimate factor in determining who would follow him was Jesus' own choice. That you should go and bear fruit implies that the purpose of Christ's choosing people is not merely that their sins be forgiven and they have eternal life but also that their lives be fruitful and productive in fulfilling God's purposes. For key passages on the doctrine of election, see Romans 9 and Ephesians 1

HOW CAN I LOVE MY NEIGHBOR?

Ultimately, Jesus' question and statement (v. 36-37) corrects the lawyer's improper question (v. 29). The proper question is not "who is my neighbor?" but "how can I be a neighbor?"

1) Make the change in your house first.

Who does God love more?

Me My neighbor Everyone

When we understand God's love for us, we understand God's love for others. We see people differently. We see them not as just a person that can do something for me; rather, we see them as a soul that Jesus died for so they could be united with the Father!

Read John 15:9-11.

Jesus wants us to "remain" in His love. Why?

2) Take it to the whole block.

Read 1 John 4:12.

Do others know that you are a Christian? How?

3) Get rid of the privacy fences.

Read Matthew 25:37-40.

Who would our culture classify as the "least of these"? How do you show love to these people consistently?

Many people don't want "those kinds of people" around them. This parable shows us that when we care for others, especially the "least of these," we care for Jesus. God was honored when these people showed love to the "least of these." It is obvious within this text that this happened regularly. There was a pattern of love and concern for others around them.

4) Fulfill the law of the Lord.

Read Romans 13:8-10.

Point to Make

He tells us that He wants our joy to be complete. He wants us to have inner joy that satisfies. It also leads to John 15:12.

Point to Make

God's love does not stop with you; it still has to be completed. How? It is complete when you share God's love with others. This is what Jesus commanded us in Matthew 28.

Interact

Do we recognize and care for the person on the outside of our social circle? The individual may not quite fit in with your group of friends. They may not be injured and bleeding in a ditch. However, they are often hurting on the inside.

Luke 10:28-29 You have answered correctly. There is nothing wrong with the lawyer's answer. do this, and you will live. Knowledge of "What shall I do to inherit eternal life?" is insufficient. One must "do this." Jesus is about to show the lawyer that he falls far short of following these commands. who is my neighbor? An improper question, because the lawyer was trying to exclude responsibility for others by making some people "non-neighbors." A more appropriate question would be, "How can I be a loving neighbor?"

Luke 10:30 The route of the Jericho road, still visible today, included long stretches of rocky terrain that made it a useful base of operations for robbers.

All the laws can be fulfilled by loving God, ourselves, and others. What this passage (and Matthew 22:39-40) is saying is that these few verses sum up all the other verses about what to do and what not to do to others.

There were hundreds of Old Testament laws; here are a few. Circle those that you would be keeping by loving God and others fully.

Don't kill (Exodus 20:13)

Honor your parents (Exodus 20:12)

Don't kidnap (Exodus 21:16)

Don't talk badly about others (Leviticus 19:16)

Don't seek revenge (Leviticus 19:18)

Don't steal (Exodus 20:15)

Don't hate others (Leviticus 19:17)

Don't worship idols (Deuteronomy 6:1)

Read John 15:12-17.

What is His command in verse 12?

When our one true love is God, He will give us joy that nothing else is capable of providing. He will then teach us how to practice love and friendship with each other. As we make our place in His love, our love for others will supernaturally come out. He says that we can be friends with God if we obey His command.

5) Follow the path before you.

Read John 13:34-35.

Jesus showed us what love was by the things He did. List some ways He showed love to others:

"TO SAY THAT LOVE IS A FEELING OR ANYTHING OF THE KIND IS REALLY AN UN-CHRISTIAN CONCEPTION OF LOVE...CHRIST'S LOVE WAS NOT AN INNER FEELING; IT WAS THE WORK OF LOVE WHICH WAS HIS LIFE." —SOREN KIERKEGAARD

How will others know we are Jesus' disciples (v. 35)? Circle your answer.

A) By thinking we are better than others.

B) By telling people they are going to hell.

C) By loving others.

When Jesus' love has changed us, then it will also change the way we treat others. The Bible calls God our "first love" (Revelation 2:4) for a good reason. God was the one who first loved us. It is that love that changes our lives and then flows to everyone around us. When our love for God is first, our love for all people will supernaturally come.

Interact

John 15:5-8 Jesus talked about Him being the vine and us the being the branches. His love flows through us and produces the fruit of loving others.

Interact

V. 12 tells us that we should love people in the same way He loves us. See v. 13.

Interact

Do you usually think of love as a feeling? What is wrong with thinking of it that way?

Interact

Revelation 2:4 was written to some people who had lost their "first love." If our first love is wrong, can any other love we have be right? It is that love that is supposed to be the foundation of all other loves.

Luke 10:31-33 passed by on the other side. A tangible way of describing his unwillingness to love his neighbor. Samaritan. Culturally, it would have been unthinkable for a Samaritan to help a Jew (cf. John 4:9; 8:48). Thus Jesus makes the additional point that to love one's neighbor involves showing care and compassion even to those with whom one would not normally have any relationship (cf. Jesus' command to "love your enemies"; Luke 6:27, 35).

Luke 10:34-35 The Samaritan ministers to the injured and suffering robbery victim. set him on his own animal. The man was too injured to walk. The Samaritan brought him to an inn, where he cared for him, and gave the innkeeper two denarii (the equivalent of two days' salary) to continue caring

NOW WHAT?

Jesus' love does not end with us. We are to receive God's love and pass it along. Name 3 things that you would do to show God's love to other people this week.

- 1)
- 2)
- 3)

Write down the initials of two people who are tough to love. Next to their initials describe how you can begin to try to love them as your neighbor.

- 1)
- 2)

Describe a healthy view of what a good relationship with God involves? In your journey through life, where do you think you are in your relationship with God? Would you be willing to try to make God your "one true love"? Why or why not?

GOING DEEPER

Think back to the Good Samaritan story. Who are you the most like: the priest who was too busy, the Levite who was too important, the Samaritan who helped others, or the man who needed the help? How are you like him?

Are you concerned for your neighbors who do not know Jesus? How often do you pray for them? Have you told them about your love for God and His love for them?

Jesus' life can be summed up in one word: Love. He came to this world because of His love for us. He spent years listening, healing, serving and caring for people because of love. He died a terrible death because He loved us so much. His love for us and our love for Him, is the foundation of all our relationships.

"ALEXANDER THE GREAT, CAESAR, AND HANNIBAL CONQUERED THE WORLD BUT THEY HAD NO FRIENDS...JESUS FOUNDED HIS EMPIRE UPON LOVE, AND AT THIS HOUR MILLIONS WOULD DIE FOR HIM...HE HAS WON THE HEARTS OF MEN, A TASK A CONQUEROR CANNOT DO."

—NAPOLEON

MEMORY VERSE FOR THE WEEK

Matthew 22:39 — "And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself."

for him. Jesus underscores the Samaritan's compassionate care, extending to whatever more cost and care may be needed.

John 13:34–35 Love must be the distinguishing mark of Jesus' disciples. Jesus' "new command" takes its point of departure from the Mosaic commands to love the Lord with all one's powers and to love one's neighbor as oneself (Lev. 19:18; cf. Deut. 6:5; Mark 12:28–33), but Jesus' own love and teaching deepen and transform these commands. Jesus even taught love for one's enemies (Matt. 5:43–48). The command to love one's neighbor was not new; the newness was found in loving one another as Jesus had loved his disciples (cf. John 13:1; 15:13).

WEEK 2 DEVOTIONS

Spending time in God's Word is essential to growing in your faith in Jesus. The REAP Bible study method is a simple tool that you can use during your quiet times.

READ - Take the time to carefully read the Bible passage with an open heart, asking the Holy Spirit to give you words of encouragement, direction and correction.

EXAMINE - Grab your journal and write out your answers to the questions. Make note of what stands out to you.

APPLY - A great question to ask is "How will I live differently and be different today because of what I just read?"

PRAY - Then, talk with God about the passage and your application. Ask Him to change your heart and life based on the time you've spent in His Word.

DAY 1 — MATTHEW 22:34-40

Why is the second commandment like the first commandment?

Why do all the other commandments rest on the first and second commandment?

DAY 2 — JOHN 13:31-35

What is "new" about the commandment?

Why is this a sign that we are Jesus' disciples?

DAY 3 — JOHN 15:9-17

According to this passage, how do we abide in God's love?

What are some ways you can love others as Jesus has loved you?

DAY 4 — 1 JOHN 3:11-18

If you do not love, where do you "abide"?

What is a way you can "share the world's goods" with someone?

DAY 5 — 1 JOHN 4:7-12

In what ways should our love for others be like God's love for us?

How is God's love perfected in us if we love one another?

DAY 6 — 1 JOHN 4:13-21

Why does loving others give us confidence for the Day of Judgment (vs. 17)?

Agape love is described as "intelligent, purposeful attitude of esteem and devotion." Is there anyone you should love more in this way?

DAY 7 — MATTHEW 25:31-46

What separates the righteous from the unrighteous in this passage?

What are some reasons we often don't love others in the ways described here?

Your Learning and Teaching Relationships

PROVERBS 9:9

WEEK

3

Key Questions and Concepts

You've heard it said, "When all else fails, read the instructions," and sadly that is often the case with the Bible. It should never be the last resort, rather the first place we go for direction in relationships.

How can you tell who is a good person to ask for advice?

All of us need to be looking for Paul-type relationships we can learn from and Timothy-type relationships we can teach in.

Connect Point

Discuss with your students where they are gaining most of their information regarding relationships. (Peers, school, TV, social media, parents, God? Maybe in that order?)

If you were to do a simple Google search for relationship advice you would get over 632,000,000 links offering you advice. If that seems too daunting to look at then there is Dr. Phil, Dr. Laura, Oprah and countless others who offer advice on TV. Another option is to just read the magazines at the check-out lines in the grocery store. Not to mention, the portraits we see of relationship advice on social media and videos online. They will tell you how to fix your relationships and how to make your life better.

Self-help sections in the bookstores are larger than ever. TV and radio counselors have millions of fans. People are looking to many places for direction, however, there is an extremely important question that we must ask; "How do we know if their advice is worth our time to listen?" That is an important question to ask because the people that you listen to could affect you for the good or bad.

If you open up the pages of Scripture you will find quite a bit of direction when it comes to relationships. Today we'll look at Paul and Timothy to see where they went for advice and how the Bible serves as the ultimate source for guidance.

***Who is the first person you go to for advice?
Do you think that you should be careful with whom you ask for advice?***

As we study we'll look at two groups of relationships. Those whom you look up to and learn from, and those who look up to you and learn from you. We'll see that surrounding ourselves with wise, godly people can have a positive effect on all our relationships. The word "mentor" is defined as "a wise and trusted counselor or teacher." Although "mentoring" doesn't appear in the Bible, Scripture does give us numerous examples of mentoring. Moses was mentored by his father-in-law Jethro, first as son-in-law and then as a leader (Exodus 18). The mentoring relationship between Eli and Samuel prepared Samuel for the tasks and responsibilities that were his after Eli's death (1 Samuel 1–4). Jesus mentored His disciples (Luke 9), and both Barnabas and Paul excelled in mentoring (Acts 9–15).

We're all on a journey, and some are farther along than others. We can learn a lot from those who are further down the road, and we can help those who haven't gone as far as we have. We are not meant to be alone on our journey, but many people are alone. We need others with us. Some to learn from, some to be held accountable by and some to teach. All are important connections we need to make.

5-Minute Commentary

Prov. 9:7–9 These verses present three statements about what happens if one corrects a scoffer or the wicked (vv. 7a, 7b, 8a) plus three contrasting statements about reproofing a wise man (vv. 8b, 9a, 9b). The point is twofold: if a person desires to be wise, he must examine how his heart responds to wise reproof or correction (see v. 12); and in order to be wise with others, he must have the prudence to observe other people's actions. It is clear that the "wise" or "righteous" person does not rest content with his attainment, nor is he presented as morally "perfect." He becomes still wiser, and will increase in learning, through correction.

DISCERNING INFLUENCES

Timothy is a young man in the middle of life struggles. Paul wrote to encourage him to remember that he has found his direction for all of his relationships from God's Word. As you look at Paul's instruction today, consider whether you are taking advantage of what God has made available to you.

1) Be careful of those who lead us in the wrong direction in life.

Read 2 Timothy 3:1-9.

Not everyone will take you where you want to go. Actually, some potential friends will actually come between you and the Lord. Paul warns Timothy to watch out for those who are a negative influence.

Write down the negative characteristics of people listed in the verses:

What would your life look like in ten years if you followed those people's example?

Paul tells us to have nothing to do with this kind of person. Why?

Think about the people to whom you go for help. Do they have any of the characteristics listed in verses 1-9?

____ Yes ____ No

According to verse 5, is it always easy to distinguish the kind of influence someone may be?

2) Be ready to follow those who lead us in the right direction in life.

Read 2 Timothy 3:10-17.

Timothy's life was changed forever through Paul's encouragement, guidance, and advice. They both knew where to go for help.

A) IMITATE GODLY EXAMPLES THROUGH TOUGH TIMES (V. 10-14).

How many times in these verses do you see words related to persecute or suffer? What are some ways that we "suffer" or are "persecuted?"

Interact

How can you tell who is a good person to ask for advice? How do you know that his or her advice is biblical?

Reference

Read 1 Corinthians 15:33. Also, Colossians 2:20-23 talks of philosophies that have an "appearance of wisdom," but are useless. The only way we can separate true biblical wisdom from imitations that sound good is to thoroughly know Scripture.

Point to Make

A godly influence will always encourage you to not give up in your relationship with God, while an ungodly influence may pull you from God in tough times.

2 Tim. 3:2-5 This "list of vices" vividly describes the negative impact of those who were opposing Paul and Timothy. The list begins and ends with references to misplaced love—i.e., people who are lovers of self, lovers of money (v. 2), and lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God (v. 4).

2 Tim. 3:5 Paul uses a common technique, emphasizing an item in a list (vv. 2-5) by placing it either first or last and expanding upon it more than the other items in the list: while Paul and Timothy's opponents have the external appearance of godliness, they do not have its real essence. Power means the present, effective working of God in and through believers' lives. "Godliness" (Gk. eusebeia) means genuine piety, including holiness, reverence, faith, and love and devotion to God. In 2 Tim.

Paul said (v. 11) that someone was able to rescue him from the hardships of life. Who was it?

B) GO TO GOD'S WORD (V. 15-17).

There are a lot of good books out there, and some even have solid wisdom in them. However, no book contains the amount of truth, wisdom, and direction that the Bible does. In tough times, look for people who point you to the Bible.

Verse 16 tells us that the Bible is "useful" for four things. List them.

- | | |
|----|----|
| 1) | 3) |
| 2) | 4) |

WHO ARE YOU LEARNING FROM?

1) Find a mentor.

We all have struggles in our relationships. The question is, "to whom do you go for help?" We must be careful in choosing those we learn from. Timothy looked up to Paul. He spent time with Paul, got advice from him, and had his life changed forever from that relationship.

A) A MENTOR GIVES YOU WISE INSTRUCTION.

Read 2 Timothy 4:1-6.

Paul had trained Timothy in his profession and continued to teach him for years. Do you know what you want to do when you "grow up?" Is there someone who could teach you about that?

B) A MENTOR MODELS THE KIND OF LIFE YOU WANT.

Read 2 Timothy 4:7-8.

Paul lived a powerful life and never stopped living for Jesus. Timothy knew that was the kind of person he needed to be around.

I TEACH WHAT I KNOW, BUT I REPRODUCE WHO I AM. —JOHN MAXWELL

C) A MENTOR RUBS OFF ON YOU.

Read Proverbs 13:20.

Explain how this passage could impact your life this next week? Year? 20 years?

Point to Make

Faith in Christ doesn't promise an end to tough times; instead it provides strength to make it through them.

Interact

Give an example how the Bible is useful in the four areas.

Point to Make

There is no reason to make all the mistakes yourself. A mentor is someone who can pass on lessons from mistakes they have made.

Interact

What are some things accountability partners should talk about? Would it make you read the Bible more or stop a bad habit if you knew someone was going to ask you about it?

1:7, Paul linked "power" to the presence of the Holy Spirit, and this power enabled perseverance through suffering (1:8; see 2:1) and faithful defense of the gospel (1:14). The people referenced in 3:1–9 claim to know God, but their lives are devoid of the work of the Spirit, which would have resulted in holiness, perseverance, and effectiveness in advancing God's kingdom. Avoid such people. This is the only command in vv. 1–9. This avoidance most likely involves excommunication. Although there may appear to be a contradiction between this and the exhortation in 2:24–26, the point in 2:24–26 is to seek the repentance of such people. In 3:5, however, Paul envisions those who remain obstinate and states clearly that there comes a time when such people must be excluded from Christian fellowship.

2) Find an accountability partner.

An accountability partner is someone who asks you the tough questions that others won't ask you. They encourage, help you through your struggles and in your relationship with God.

QUALITIES OF AN ACCOUNTABILITY PARTNER:

A) The same gender as you. B) Someone you trust. C) Someone who wants you to grow in Christ.

Read Galatians 6:1-2.

Not only do we need to learn from others; others need to learn from us. Everyone can teach another person, even you!

WHO ARE YOU TEACHING?

1) Find a person to disciple.

Name three things you have learned that you could teach to another person.

- 1)
- 2)
- 3)

Paul called Timothy his "son in the faith" because they were so close (1 Timothy 1:2). Instead of looking only to people who were already mature, he spent time developing young Timothy into a great leader.

Read Acts 18:24-28.

These two older Christians took young Apollos aside and taught him what he did not understand. What are some other ways they could have responded to him? What was the outcome in v. 28?

Read Romans 10:14.

Your story is one of the best tools you have to share your relationship with Jesus. Tell others:

- 1) What your life was like before Jesus.
- 2) How you began your relationship with him.
- 3) How your life has changed. It's that's simple.
- 4) How you see him working in your life now.

All of us need to be looking for Paul-type relationships we can learn from and Timothy-type relationships we can teach in. When we surround ourselves with these kinds of people, our lives will be blessed.

Reference

Proverbs 27:17

Point to Make

Your students may have a hard time believing that someone could ever learn from them. Help them see that younger siblings, kids in the church, and people at school are probably looking up to them already.

Reference

1 Timothy 4:12

2 Tim. 3:10–17 Call to Hold Fast to Scripture and Paul's Example. This paragraph opens with a clear, strong contrast: "You, however." The false teachers live and teach one way (vv. 1–9), but Paul provides a totally different model for Timothy. The repetition of "my" in vv. 10–11 places clear emphasis on Paul as the model for faithful living and ministry, in contrast to that proposed by the opponents.

2 Tim. 4:1–8 The Ultimate Charge. Having just reminded Timothy of his early training in Scripture and of the power and divine origin of Scripture (3:15–17), Paul exhorts him to preach this word (4:2ff.). Chapter 3 ends with a reference to being competent and equipped, and 4:1–8 then describes the specific "good work" of leadership that Timothy is now to show himself competent to do:

NOW WHAT?

Think about the people you turn to for advice. Are they godly people? Do they encourage you in your walk?

Look back through the lesson and think about the four different relationships mentioned. Then answer the following questions by writing people's initials below:

Who are some people you might consider asking to be a mentor?

Who is someone you would consider asking to be an accountability partner?

Who are some people you could help disciple?

Who are some people who need to hear your story of how you met Jesus?

PRAYER: Ask God to show you a new way of seeing relationships—through His eyes. Ask for God's guidance in all of these relationships. If you feel that He is directing you to do something in one of these relationships, circle those initials and do what you feel led to do.

GOING DEEPER

What keeps us from going to God for help?

What issues about relationships do you feel God is not knowledgeable about?

Why do we often go to those who are struggling like us rather than God?

MEMORY VERSE FOR THE WEEK

Proverbs 13:20 – "Whoever walks with the wise becomes wise, but the companion of fools will suffer harm."

vv. 1–2 present the charge, followed by the reason why this is necessary (vv. 3–4); v. 5 returns to the charge in contrast to the evil of the current situation; and in vv. 6–8 Paul provides another example, heightening the seriousness of his charge with a reminder that his death is imminent.

Gal. 6:1 you who are spiritual. This does not refer to an elite class of Christians but rather to those who have more maturity and experience in the Christian life and who are therefore in a position to help their beleaguered brother or sister. The adjective "spiritual" means "living and walking according to the Holy Spirit" and includes, but is not limited to, the qualities listed in Gal. 5:22–23.

WEEK 3 DEVOTIONS

Spending time in God's Word is essential to growing in your faith in Jesus. The REAP Bible study method is a simple tool that you can use during your quiet times.

READ - Take the time to carefully read the Bible passage with an open heart, asking the Holy Spirit to give you words of encouragement, direction and correction.

EXAMINE - Grab your journal and write out your answers to the questions. Make note of what stands out to you.

APPLY - A great question to ask is "How will I live differently and be different today because of what I just read?"

PRAY - Then, talk with God about the passage and your application. Ask Him to change your heart and life based on the time you've spent in His Word.

DAY 1 — PROVERBS 1:1-7

What is the purpose of the book of proverbs, according to these verses? How do you get wisdom? Write down whom you learn from on a regular basis. Evaluate how these sources relate to Proverbs 1.

DAY 2 — MATTHEW 7:24-27

Write down the two kinds of people described in this passage. What is Jesus commanding us to do in these verses? What determines whether a house stands or falls?

DAY 3 — PSALM 119:1-16

How does this Psalm talk about the God's commands? What are the results of following God's word, according to this passage? How might these verses help us as we influence others and are influenced by them?

DAY 4 — PROVERBS 2:1-15

Which verse stands out to you in this passage? Where does it tell us that wisdom comes from? How are you seeking wisdom? Who do you seek it from? Who is your most trusted advisor?

DAY 5 — EXODUS 18:13-27

Consider this fascinating story. What advice does Moses father-in-law (Jethro) give to him? What reasons does Jethro give for his advice? Does Moses take the advice? What can we learn from this story about God? What can we learn about ourselves? Do you have someone in your life to help point out errors?

DAY 6 — ACTS 18:24-28

What did Priscilla and Aquila do for Apollos? Why did they do this? How did this impact his life? What can you do to imitate Priscilla and Aquila?

DAY 7 — 2 PETER 3:8-10

What do learn from this passage about the nature of this current world? What will be the result at the end of time? Do you believe this passage is true? How might this change the way that we think about helping others learn about Christ? How might it change the way that we think about our own relationship with Christ?

Your Relationship with Your Friends

PROVERBS 12:26

WEEK

4

Key Questions and Concepts

Friendship is an important part in your life. Following God's plan for friendship allows for His name to be glorified and for our frustrations to be minimized.

How can you tell if a person who claims to be your friend really cares about you?

It is important for you to live out the qualities that you are looking for in a friend.

Every July a sandcastle contest is held at Southern California's Imperial Beach. Hours of time are spent erecting truly magnificent sandcastles. Adding to the challenge is the time frame: the makers of the castles must finish by 1pm so the judges can decide the winner before the tide rolls in and washes away the masterpieces.

Building relationships is kind of like building a house. A solid foundation is required. Your desire to have friends and to connect well with people is absolutely normal. You were made for relationship. What are the proper materials for building a relationship that will endure? Jesus modeled several different elements that are essential to strong relationships.

*What would you include if you were building the ultimate sandcastle?
What are some characteristics of a good friend?*

Great friendships fulfill two primary emotional needs: love (both being loved and loving others) and worth (having self-worth and having worth to others). It requires a lot of time and energy into fulfilling these needs and developing solid friendships.

We know that friendships are vital to everyone. However, we have to be careful of whom we choose to be our close friend and need to put time and effort into finding quality, long-lasting friendships. Today, you'll look at what the Bible says about friendships, becoming a great friend and what to look for in a friend.

Friends make our lives more rewarding, help us through tough times, and give us opportunities to help others. Consider how many true friends you have. Not people whom you just see at school or joke around with, but friends who love you and help you grow?

5-Minute Commentary

1 Pet. 1:13 set your hope fully. The fullness of grace and its complete work will come only when Jesus returns, and believers are to long for that day. They do so by thinking rightly about reality and by living sober-minded and sensible lives in this present evil age.

1 Pet. 1:14–15 While living on this earth, Christians have to fight the desires of sin, so they are called to be obedient children, separated from evil in all that they do. They are to be holy (cf. Lev. 18:2–4), for that accords with the character of God who is holy and has called believers to himself.

FRIENDSHIPS ARE A BLESSING

A) We need friends so we will be encouraged.

Read Philippians 2:19-23.

We can see in this passage that Paul genuinely enjoys his friend. He speaks very highly of his friend, and appears anxious to see him again. Because of Timothy, Paul was not alone and was able to share his problems with someone. God gives us friends so that we can have the encouragement and help to make it through tough times and someone to be happy with in the good times.

B) We need friends to keep us on our feet.

Read Ecclesiastes 4:10.

Write the names of your close friends.

A real friend talks with you about more than the latest movie, the score of the game, and who said what to whom. They share what is on their hearts and want to know what is on yours.

A FRIEND IS ONE WHO MAKES ME DO MY BEST —OSWALD CHAMBERS

BE A PERSON OF GODLY CHARACTER.

Read 1 Peter 1:13-16.

Rather than following the example of those in the world and their selfish desires, Peter holds out God as an example of trustworthy character. The command is to be holy in all of our conduct.

Here we see that Christians are supposed to be different. How? What does that look like?

We are not supposed to conform to the old, evil desires such as, selfishness, prejudice, lust, jealousy, greed, laziness, hatred, or harshness just to name a few. Instead, when we are changed on the inside, these are replaced by new desires.

Beside the words above, write the new desires God gives us to replace the old ones.

Being holy is important, but we are not supposed to be holy and lock ourselves in our rooms. Our changed lives are meant to impact others, especially our friendships.

Discuss

Psychological studies tell us that it is better to have one good friend than ten shallow friends. Why is that? Do you agree or disagree with that research?

Interact

Do you have a friend who knows stuff about you that no one else knows? If so, then they are able to help you with the things that only they know you struggle with. They can tell you things that no one else can. Friends are important to keep you accountable and help you grow.

Interact

Be careful in this lesson in regards to teaching students to “do this” and “do that,” rather than teaching them who they are to “be” in Christ.

Eph. 5:1–2 imitators. Believers are to imitate God’s holiness in all of their conduct. They are to be like him, not as slaves trying to earn a wage but as children—and beloved children at that! loved. The past tense does not suggest that Christ has stopped loving us but only that, when he gave himself up for us, it was the supreme act of his love (see John 15:13).

1 John 4:10 God’s love sets the standard for the love Christians are called to embody. propitiation. Sin brings divine wrath. On the cross, Jesus bore that wrath for our sins (see 2 Cor. 5:21).

John 13:1–17 With his crucifixion imminent, Jesus washes his disciples’ feet as a final proof of his

BE A PERSON THAT IMITATES GOD'S EXAMPLE.

Read Ephesians 5:1-2 and John 15:13.

Paul gives us a pretty clear instruction to those that are children of God. We are to imitate God. To live in such a way that displays the sacrificial love of Christ. You may be wondering how to do that; here are four specific ways:

1) BE A FRIEND THAT SACRIFICES — 1 JOHN 4:10-12

We imitate God, first, by being a person who loves. He showed us what love was, and we must show that same love to others.

2) BE A SERVANT LEADER — JOHN 13:1-17

What did Jesus do in this passage to show them the way as a visionary and leave them an example for a leader?

In those days servants washed feet. What does a servant look like today?

3) BE A PROTECTOR — JOHN 10:11-15

What does this passage say Jesus is willing to do to protect His sheep?

Should you see yourself as his defender or protector for your friends? What about those outside your social circle?

4) BE A TEACHER — MATTHEW 28:19-20

The last thing Jesus told His followers was to be a people who make disciples and who teach others what he had taught them.

DISCIPLE – A FOLLOWER OF CHRIST IN LEARNING AND LIVING.

It is hard to see yourself as a teacher of what God has taught you?

Point to Make

Some teens have adopted a survival-of-the-fittest mindset. They see weaker students getting picked on and accept it as the way things are. That mindset comes more from Darwin than the Bible, which challenges us to love and defend the hopeless.

Point to Make

You have more influence on your friends than you think. Share with your friends who you are becoming in Christ.

love for them, setting an example of humility and servanthood and signifying the washing away of sins through his death. In a striking demonstration of love for his enemies, Jesus washes all of his disciples' feet, including those of Judas. Jesus' act is all the more remarkable, as washing people's feet was considered to be a task reserved for non-Jewish slaves. In a culture where people walked long distances on dusty roads in sandals, it was customary for the host to arrange for water to be available for the washing of feet. Normally, this was done upon arrival, not during the meal.

John 10:11 In the OT, God as the true shepherd is contrasted with unfaithful shepherds who will be judged by him (Psalm 23; Isa. 40:11; Jer. 23:1–4; Ezekiel 34; Zech. 11:4–17). But David or the Davidic

Do you think if you lived out these 4 qualities you would have a hard time making friends? How would they change your current friendships?

Do you have a friend that exhibits these qualities? Take some time to encourage them and say thanks this week.

WHAT KIND OF PEOPLE MAKE GOOD FRIENDS?

Obviously the qualities we just talked about are important to look for in a friend. The book of Proverbs has a lot of advice to offer in regards to some qualities to look for in a friend.

Next to each passage below write what the verse means in your own words:

- A) Proverbs 17:17 —
- B) Proverbs 18:24 —
- C) Proverbs 22:11 —
- D) Proverbs 27:6, 9 —
- E) Proverbs 27:17 —

Why would a real friend tell you the truth even when it is tough?

GOOD FRIENDS DON'T...

Next to each passage below write what the verse means in your own words:

- A) Proverbs 10:23 —
- B) Proverbs 18:2 —
- C) Proverbs 11:12 —
- D) Proverbs 16:28 and 17:4 —
- E) Proverbs 26:18-20 —

Is it wrong to gossip about someone, even if it is the truth? Why? Is sarcasm healthy?

Point to Make

Adversity does not mean to cause problems, rather, a brother is born to help you through adversity. Real friends don't leave when times are tough. They will be there for you no matter what you need.

Point to Make

You can know a lot about a person by what comes out of his or her mouth. Encouraging and kind words come from someone with a good heart.

Discuss

How can you tell if a person who claims to be your friend really cares about you?

Point to Make

Some people openly talk badly about other people, even those they claim to be friends with. However, you never have to worry about what a true friend is saying about you when you're not there.

Messiah is also depicted as a (good) shepherd (2 Sam. 5:2; Ps. 78:70–72; Ezek. 37:24; Mic. 5:4), as is Moses (Isa. 63:11; cf. Ps. 77:20). Jesus as God and man is the fulfillment of both of these themes. The reference to the "good shepherd" who lays down his life for the sheep calls to mind young David, who literally risked his life for his sheep (1 Sam. 17:34–37). But Jesus surpassed David in that he gave his life on the cross for his sheep. See also John 10:15.

Matt. 28:19 The imperative (make disciples, that is, call individuals to commit to Jesus as Master and Lord) explains the central focus of the Great Commission, while the Greek participles (translated go, baptizing, and "teaching" [v. 20]) describe aspects of the process. all nations. Jesus' ministry in Israel

NOW WHAT?

Would you commit to pursuing the four character traits of God as listed on the previous page? Rank them from your strongest to your weakest areas.

What are you willing to devote time and energy into developing real friendships?

The best way to get a good friend is to be a good friend. Are you being a good friend? Give an example to explain your answer.

Are there people you spend time with that discourage you or pull you down? If so, what do you need to do?

Are your friendships God-honoring? What steps do you need to take to move in that direction?

GOING DEEPER

We use the word “friend” often to talk about people we go to a movie with or who sit near us at church. But are they really a true friend? Look at the definitions below. Beside each, guess how many of each type of relationship you have. Also, write the initials of those you consider companions and true friends below.

Stranger — a person whom you haven’t met.

Acquaintance — a person whose name you know and have spoken with.

Pal/buddy — a person you talk to and/or you do things with every once in awhile.

Close companion — a person who knows you better than most and you speak to almost every day.

True friend — a person who knows your heart; a person who helps grow.

PRAYER: Spend some time praying to God, asking Him to show you ways to be a better friend. Then take some time to specifically pray for a few of your friends.

MEMORY VERSE FOR THE WEEK

Proverbs 12:26 — “One who is righteous is a guide to his neighbor, but the way of the wicked leads them astray.”

was to be the beginning point of what would later be a proclamation of the gospel to all the peoples of the earth, including not only Jews but also Gentiles. The name (singular, not plural) of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is an early indication of the Trinitarian Godhead and an overt proclamation of Jesus’ deity.

Matt. 28:20 Teaching is a means by which disciples of Jesus are continually transformed in order to become more like Christ (cf. 10:24–25; Rom. 8:29; 2 Cor. 3:18). observe. Obey. I am with you always. Jesus concludes the commission, and Matthew his Gospel, with the crucial element of discipleship: the presence of the Master, who is “God with us” (cf. Matt. 1:23).

WEEK 4 DEVOTIONS

Spending time in God's Word is essential to growing in your faith in Jesus. The REAP Bible study method is a simple tool that you can use during your quiet times.

READ - Take the time to carefully read the Bible passage with an open heart, asking the Holy Spirit to give you words of encouragement, direction and correction.

EXAMINE - Grab your journal and write out your answers to the questions. Make note of what stands out to you.

APPLY - A great question to ask is "How will I live differently and be different today because of what I just read?"

PRAY - Then, talk with God about the passage and your application. Ask Him to change your heart and life based on the time you've spent in His Word.

DAY 1 — 1 THESSALONIANS 5:11

What effect does encouragement have on you?

Why are some specific ways that you could encourage the people in your small group this week?

DAY 2 — PROVERBS 22:24-25

When a friend is upset and angry what is your typical response?

Describe how being close to someone who has an anger issue could impact you.

DAY 3 — PHILIPPIANS 1:3-4

What about your friends makes you overflow with thankfulness?

How often do you pray for your friends? Take some time each day this week to pray for your friends.

DAY 4 — EPHESIANS 4:32

What does it mean to be tenderhearted?

Describe how the forgiveness of Christ helps you to forgive others.

DAY 5 — PROVERBS 20:7

Describe the importance of living with integrity.

How does living with integrity impact the generations that follow you?

DAY 6 — EPHESIANS 4:29

Have you considered how your speech can build up or tear down? Try to count the number of times you speak positively and negatively tomorrow.

How can your speech benefit others that are listening to you?

DAY 7 — 1 PETER 5:5-7

Describe how having a spirit of humility could increase the depth of your friendships.

How has pride destroyed your relationships in the past?

Dealing with Difficult Relationships

JAMES 4:1-3

WEEK

5

Key Questions and Concepts

Help students define the modern day equivalent of Jesus' conflict resolution strategy, and to commit to following it.

Though it may be difficult and go against our fleshly desires for revenge, vindication, and being right, following Christ means dealing with others with tenderness, compassion, and humility.

Conflict doesn't have to be a bad thing; it can be something that, if handled correctly, strengthens our relationships and us.

Ever had a difficult relationship? Of course you have. Conflict is a part of life. It arises when people disagree or can't get along for whatever reasons. Some causes of conflict are: Having different views on an issue. Having different goals. Not understanding another person. Simply not getting along. The list goes on, but these are just symptoms. The root of the issue James tells us begins within us.

Conflict starts in the heart, a truth that Jesus acknowledged in Matthew 15:19. According to the book of Proverbs the heart is the wellspring of life, so we must protect what enters it, and we must pay attention to both what comes out of it and what it reveals to us about ourselves. Conflict, for instance, can bring out the worst in all of us—but it doesn't have to. In fact, conflict doesn't have to be a bad thing; it can be something that, if handled correctly, strengthens our relationships and us.

***What causes the majority of your relationship conflicts?
What is the longest time period you have gone without a relational conflict?***

There is a right way to deal with conflict in your relationships. Jesus had a lot to say about conflict resolution. Our focus for Bible study today is dealing with a difficult relationship. All of us have experienced a difficult relationship. We will discuss how a Christ-follower should handle these circumstances. Jesus was very clear when laying out the proper steps for experiencing reconciliation with those who have wronged us.

The specific steps to dealing with difficult relationships are important but so is having the proper attitude. If we are going to follow Christ and handle relationships as He did, we must also have His attitude. This is one of humility, tenderness, and compassion.

Your relationships with family and friends will, at times, get messy. People are imperfect and will fall short of your expectations. So develop the emotional muscles to honestly face and lovingly work through conflict. Ultimately, you have a responsibility on your end to live at peace with others (Romans 12:18). It is how others see the Lord (Hebrews 12:14).

5-Minute Commentary

James 4:1 In contrast to those who make peace, quarrels and fights are caused by the passions or self-centered desires ("hedonism" comes from Gk. *hēdonē*, "passions") that are causing these people to make war against each other in the church. This is extremely violent language for dissension, and some even think it should be taken literally of people killing each other (v. 2), though it is best to view this as a metaphor for the devastating effect of unrestrained hostility.

James 4:2 This verse consists of several short statements; there was no punctuation in ancient Greek, and various translations connect the statements in different ways. The esv punctuation works well

THE REALITY OF CONFLICT

How prevalent is conflict in your life? Would you say it's something you deal with a lot? Or not very much?

Describe some things that may cause conflict between friends. Describe some common ways people today, especially teenagers, may handle conflict.

If you're being honest, how likely are you to handle conflict in a way you would consider healthy?

Not healthy 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Very healthy

HOW PEOPLE DETERMINE IF THE CONFLICT IS WORTH IT?

A) **The situation** - whether it is something you consider minor or very important.

B) **Who is involved**- if you consider the other person a valued friend or not.

C) **Personalities** - one person may be passive and pretend the problem doesn't exist while another may be more aggressive and act out in anger.

There are many different ways people handle conflict. Unfortunately, in our world, many choose to handle conflict in ways that may be hurtful, damaging, or even dangerous. However, if we are trying to live our lives as Christ-followers, we must handle conflict according to the way He has instructed.

Read Matthew 18:15-17.

Jesus often did His teaching in parables, or stories, that make His instruction relatable. Some of these parables were symbolic or metaphorical and required a certain level of interpretation. However, when it comes to handling conflict in relationships with other Christians, Christ was very clear in describing a step-by-step process.

When teenagers have disagreements or conflict, how do they normally respond at first?

Look at verse 15. What does Jesus tell us is the first step to handling conflict? Why do you think that may be difficult?

There are many reasons why people choose to bring other people into a conflict rather than approaching the other person one on one. When people feel they have been wronged, they often find comfort in having people to support their side of the story or point of view. For a Christ-follower, talking about conflict with other people is never the first step to take.

Interact

What does conflict in your relationships make you feel like?

Point to Make

Most often we tell other people our side of a story rather than deal with the person we are in conflict with. There is a sense of building teams or sides.

Point to Make

You are to go to the person you have a conflict with and discuss it between the two of you.

when comparing this verse to 3:13–18: people desire and covet (Gk. *zēloō*, cf. *zēlos*, “jealousy,” 3:14), which leads to the terrible wars and infighting in the church. You do not have, because you do not ask is a reminder that believers should ask God for what they seek rather than fighting each other. Prayerlessness results in failure to receive many of God's blessings. James does not imply that God wills to grant sinful, selfish desires (4:3), but bringing requests before God can have a purifying influence on one's desires.

James 4:3 you ask wrongly. Not all prayers are pleasing to God, only those consistent with his will as revealed in Scripture (cf. 1 John 5:14–15). Rather than seeking to honor God and advance his

According to the passage we read, what is the second step to handling conflict?

How do you know you need to take this step?

Read Deuteronomy 19:15-17.

When Jesus tells His followers to “take one or two others along, so that ‘every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses,’” He is quoting from part of the Law that is found in Deuteronomy 19.

Based on the response of the first confrontation and the passage you just read from Deuteronomy, why do you think Jesus would have you include other people in conflict resolution at this point?

Notice that Jesus doesn’t tell us to choose one or two people who will see your side, agree with you, or defend you even if you’re wrong. When you choose the right people, they can also offer wise counsel to both people involved.

How should you choose the people to go with you? Are there certain traits they should have?

It’s important to understand that Jesus was not encouraging the offended person to find someone who would simply support them, back them up, and help them to be right. His desire is for Christ-followers to work toward reconciliation in relationships.

We live in a culture often has and encourages a “me first” attitude. We are told we must look out for ourselves. When two people have an argument or experience conflict, they typically desire to be right more than admitting a wrong. Christ calls His followers to behave differently. We see in this passage that He calls His followers to use all possible avenues to restore relationships.

As with the first step of reconciliation in verse 15, there are two possible responses. What are these?

Read Matthew 18:17.

Jesus offers one more step if the first two don’t work. What is the third step?

Point to Make

You take the next step if the person you are in conflict with will not listen or try to work out the problems.

Point to Make

The person you are having conflict with may be angry, defensive, or willing to say anything that would allow them to appear innocent or victimized. Bringing one or two along serve the purpose of having witnesses in the event of false statements being made.

Point to Make

Traits to look for: Wisdom, being able to see both sides of the story and help both people see where they may be wrong, and Christ-followers.

kingdom purposes, such prayers seek only to gratify self-centered passions (Gk. *hēdonē*), or desires. James is not saying all pleasure is wrong (cf. Gen. 1:31; Ps. 16:11; 84:1–4, 10–12; 1 Tim. 6:17), only pleasure that does not have the glory of God as the goal (1 Cor. 10:31).

Matt. 18:15 go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If a matter can be settled without getting others involved, that will keep rumors and misunderstandings from multiplying and will keep the conflict from spreading (cf. Prov. 25:9). gained. The ultimate objective is restoration of the offending brother or sister to the path of discipleship.

This is not something we are accustomed to seeing in the church today. What are some ways we can put this instruction into practice when dealing with conflict in relationships?

Is there any guarantee that this is going to work to reconcile the relationship? If none of these steps work, what does Jesus tell His followers they should do?

You cannot force them to restore the relationship, however, if the day comes when they are repentant and willing to reconcile the relationship, every effort should be made for restoration. Though people like tax collectors and pagans were known to behave in opposition to Christ's ways, grace and forgiveness were always available for them. We must have the same attitude and willingness to forgive that Christ demonstrated.

For us to have true reconciliation and for Christ's steps to resolving conflict to work, we must go into this process with the proper attitude. That attitude is one that should mirror Christ's own attitude.

Read Philippians 2:1-11.

These verses give a description of Christ's attitude and instruct His followers to have this same attitude. What is one word that can be used to summarize this attitude?

Why does our attitude matter when resolving conflict?

REVIEWING THE PROCESS

- 1) Put on the attitude of Christ (humility)
- 2) Approach one-on-one
- 3) Include one or two others
- 4) Bring it to the church
- 5) Separate yourself
- 6) Maintain attitude of grace and forgiveness

This list is one that comes from Christ. If we want to live as Christ-followers and live our lives as He did, then we must follow His instructions. Commit to handling future conflict this way.

We have been given a plan to deal with conflict. We must be careful how we handle the conversations within the process. On the next page there is a simple list of Biblical principles to help you walk through conflict resolution conversations.

Point to Make

The third step brings the first two together. They build together rather than stand alone. Some ideas may include: meeting together with a small group leader or your student minister. This meeting should also include the people who were part of your second meeting.

Point to Make

Humility

Point to Make

If we go into a conflict with an attitude of pride instead of humility, true godly reconciliation will never occur.

Matt. 18:16 Evidence of two or three witnesses follows the guideline in Deut. 19:15 and refers to witnesses of the subsequent confrontation described in this verse, not necessarily eyewitnesses to the original offense (Matt. 18:15).

Matt. 18:17 If the offending party of vv. 15–16 will not repent after the matter has been brought before the entire church, then he or she is to be excluded from the fellowship and thought of as an unbeliever. Gentile and tax collector describes those who are deliberately rebellious against God.

Phil. 2:5–11 Christ's Example of Humble Service. This passage is often referred to as the "hymn of

SEVEN C'S FOR DEALING WITH CONFLICT

1) Call on God — When experiencing conflict, seek wisdom from God. He will give you clear direction on how to proceed. God is interested in your life, your problems, and your heart. Why? So you can bring honor to His name as you learn how to get along better with others in your life.

2) Check your emotions — As a human being dealing with conflict, you may get very emotional in the moment, and your emotions can interfere with how well you handle conflict. So try to look at a situation without letting how you feel determine how you will act. That doesn't mean you can't tell someone how you feel. Just don't let your emotions be the only factor or the key factor that determines your behavior.

3) Consider the other person's point of view — Look at the situation from their perspective. This different point of view may help you see something important that you have missed, and you may recognize they have a valid point.

4) Communicate in person — Technology is a great tool. However, it is not the best way to deal with conflict. The person with whom you're trying to resolve a conflict needs to be able to hear not only your point of view but also the emotions behind the words. Person to person is still the best way to resolve a conflict.

5) Confront in love — Going in love will always start the process off right. We see in the Bible God deals with us in His loving-kindness (Psalm 36:10; 40:11; 42:8).

6) Careful with your words — How you say things—the words and tone of voice and the facial expressions you choose—can help or hinder your efforts to resolve a conflict. Calmly speaking words that lead to fixing the problem will always help. Thoughtless comments will prolong the healing process and can even ruin a relationship. The words you choose as well as the way you choose to say them do matter, so choose wisely.

7) Create peace — Peacemakers are those who show grace to others even during hard times. God calls us to create peace in any and every conflict we deal with. Sometimes efforts to resolve a conflict can start off rough, but the goal is make peace and as a result enjoy a healthier, stronger relationship.

Conflict can enslave you, keep you focused on yourself, and destroy your relationships. Satan would love for that to happen (John 10:10). Wanting to ruin your life and the loves of your friends and family. The enemy will always interfere with your efforts to resolve a conflict, but God has a different plan.

God wants you to experience freedom; God does not want you to be a slave to conflicts. He wants every conflict in your life to be resolved in ways that make your relationships grow stronger. It's not easy, but dealing with a conflict can help you grow. If you just ignore difficult relationships, however, you won't benefit in any way. Face your conflicts and watch God work.

Reference

Proverbs 15:1

Reference

Matthew 5:9

Christ." Paul depicts Christ's example of service in a stirring poem that traces his preexistence, incarnation, death, resurrection, and ascension to the right hand of God. Paul wrote this magnificent theology to encourage the Philippians to consider other people's interests first (see v. 4). Jesus is the paradigm of genuine spiritual progress: not a self-aggrandizing struggle for supremacy, but a deep love for God and neighbor shown in deeds of service. Verses 6–11 have some clear indications of poetic structure, leading some to believe that this is a pre-Pauline hymn adapted by Paul. It is just as likely, however, that Paul composed the hymn for this setting. In view of the myriad theological questions that arise in these verses, it is critical to keep two things in mind: (1) these verses were written not to spur Christians to theological debate but to encourage greater humility and love; and (2) the

NOW WHAT?

When you think about dealing with difficulties in your relationships, what do you think is the most difficult part of what Jesus tells us we should do?

Sometimes it's so much easier to talk to our friends when someone is difficult than to talk to them. How do you think that could affect a relationship? Do you think it would make it harder to reconcile?

Is there anyone that you need to walk through the process of restoration with? Would you commit to doing that this week?

GOING DEEPER

Read 3 John 1:9-10.

THREE CHARACTERISTICS OF A TOXIC RELATIONSHIP ARE REVEALED IN THIS PASSAGE:

- 1) The relationship is always centered on the needs and wants of one person.
- 2) One person doesn't treat the other well.
- 3) One person doesn't like the others' friends.

Are you involved in a toxic relationship either as the recipient of the poison or as the toxin? Explain why that relationship deserves the label "toxic."

Prayerfully take a brief inventory of the main relationships in your life, which ones—if not toxic—are, to be honest, not pleasing to God?

What needs to be different in each of those relationships—and what will you do to make those positive changes? Or should one or more of these relationships—for your own good—be terminated?

MEMORY VERSE FOR THE WEEK

Romans 12:18 — "If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all."

Connect

Some students may need help getting out of a toxic relationship. Reference this section if you perceive the need in your small group.

summary of Christ's life and ministry found here is not unique: the same themes are evident throughout the NT.

WEEK 5 DEVOTIONS

Spending time in God's Word is essential to growing in your faith in Jesus. The REAP Bible study method is a simple tool that you can use during your quiet times.

READ - Take the time to carefully read the Bible passage with an open heart, asking the Holy Spirit to give you words of encouragement, direction and correction.

EXAMINE - Grab your journal and write out your answers to the questions. Make note of what stands out to you.

APPLY - A great question to ask is "How will I live differently and be different today because of what I just read?"

PRAY - Then, talk with God about the passage and your application. Ask Him to change your heart and life based on the time you've spent in His Word.

DAY 1 — GENESIS 3:1-13

What is the primary and immediate consequence of Adam and Eve's sin (verse 7)?

How does this affect the way that we think about the root cause of sin and distress in the world?

DAY 2 — GENESIS 3:14-19

List the different ways that God declares that there will be trouble in the world in his passage. How many of them deal with relationships? Why might this be the case?

How do you see the fruit of this in the relationships that you have?

DAY 3 — GENESIS 4:1-16

What is the root cause of the problem between Cain and Abel? How and why does this affect their relationship with each other?

Think about how your relationship with God affects the relationships that you have with other people?

DAY 4 — PROVERBS 25:15-28

Circle each verse that deals with relating to others. Write down some of the most important sayings.

Do you see any themes? Big ideas? What sort of words characterize how we ought to live in relationship to others according to these proverbs?

DAY 5 — JAMES 4:1-10

What does James say about the cause of fights and quarrels among people? Where do they begin?

How can you fight against the specific desires you have that have caused difficulty with others?

DAY 6 — JAMES 4:11-12

What does it mean to judge your neighbor? What does this passage say about judging your neighbor and the law? How do these relate?

What causes us to judge our neighbor? How should we fight against this desire?

DAY 7 — GALATIANS 5:16-26

What are "desires of the flesh" and "desires of the Spirit?" How can we distinguish them in ourselves?

Do you see the fruit of the Spirit in your own life? Which ones? What is the cause for these to be evident in our lives?

Your Relationship with Authority

TITUS 3:1-2

WEEK

6

Key Questions and Concepts

Reinforce the importance of the parent as the primary disciplinarian. Speak highly of parents and encourage students to love and respect their parents. Do not allow students to disparage their parents.

The most important thing we can understand about people in authority is that God put them there. They deserve respect, not because of what they do but because of the One who put them in authority.

Connect

The Leaning Tower of Pisa is one of the most popular buildings in the world. Millions of tourists a year visit the bell tower and climb its 296 steps. Discuss the students all the effort engineers have put into saving the tower and if it was worth it.

Can you picture what the Leaning Tower of Pisa looks like? Construction began on the tower in 1173 and very soon a problem became evident, it began to lean. In the early 1990s, the tower began to lean too far. Seeing that the 180-foot tower would soon become dangerous engineers were commissioned to design a system to save the landmark, but keep its famous lean.

First, the engineers had to stabilize the ground so that the vibrations of their machines would not cause the tower to fall. They did this by injected liquid nitrogen into the ground to freeze it. Once the ground was secure, they proceeded to install cables inside the tower in order to pull the structure more upright. The engineers hope that their underground cable system will hold the tower at a constant lean so that it will be able to remain in place, but not be in danger of falling.

*Do you think the tower is worth spending millions of dollars to save? Why or why not?
Why would God establish anyone in authority?*

In many ways we are like the Leaning Tower of Pisa. If we were left to fend for ourselves, we would be out of balance and heading toward catastrophe. Thankfully, God had a better idea. God established authorities in order to keep us grounded. Our parents, the government, and teachers are just a few examples of authority that God has put in power in order to hold us in place.

Authority surrounds you every day of your life. However, just because you are surrounded by it, doesn't mean your attitude about it honors God. Christians are supposed to be different, respecting and honoring those in authority. Today we'll look at our connection with our parents and other authorities and God's intentions for these relationships to help guide us to an abundant life in Christ.

5-Minute Commentary

Eph. 6:1 Children. The second family relationship illustrating submission to proper authority (5:21) is that of children and parents. The Mosaic law prescribed death for the child who struck or cursed a parent (Ex. 21:15, 17; Lev. 20:9), and Paul lists such disobedience as one of many grave sins (Rom. 1:30; 2 Tim. 3:2). However, Paul urges in Eph. 6:1-3 the positive duty of children to obey their parents. Obedience is due to both parents; the mother's submission to her husband does not remove her parental dignity but rather increases it. In the Lord modifies the verb "obey." right. What makes such obedience "right" or "just" is that it conforms to God's holy commandment, quoted in vv. 2-3.

PARENTS ARE PART OF GOD'S DESIGN

Some animals lay eggs, leave, and never see their offspring. Other types of animals must be separated from their babies or they will use them as food. Humans have a very different relationship with their parents.

Why do humans have this unique relationship with parents?

Read Genesis 1:28 and 4:1-2.

How did you get your parents? Circle your answer.

I chose them

They chose me

God chose them for me

In the first chapters of the Bible we see God creating many things, even parents. In Genesis 4:1 Eve says, "With the help of the Lord I have brought forth a man." She knew that God had made her a parent. God has also given parents an extremely important role in the life of their children.

Read Deuteronomy 6:5-7.

God designed the parent/child relationship as the primary place that children learn about God. It's at home where kids learn who God is, if He is important, and how He wants us to live. If it is God's design to give parents the important role of diligently teaching us about God, then how are we supposed to relate to our parents?

Read Ephesians 6:1-3.

God tells us not to simply obey our parents, but to honor them as well. What's the difference? See the definitions below and discuss the importance of actions:

OBEY – TO LISTEN TO AND FOLLOW THE INSTRUCTIONS OF SOMEONE

HONOR – TO SHOW RESPECT TO OR GIVE A HIGH STATUS OR SOMEONE

GOD HAS GIVEN YOU 4 WAYS TO HONOR YOUR MOTHER AND FATHER:

1. To prize highly (Exodus 20:12)
2. To care for (Psalm 91:15)
3. Show respect for (Leviticus 19:3)
4. Obey (Deuteronomy 21:18-21, Ephesians 6:1-3)

The real challenge/question is not what should you do, but what will you do when it comes to obeying and honoring your parents? When will you apply prize, care, respect, and obedience?

God has given us some key ways that we can honor our parents. We will take a look at just a few of them.

Point to Make

It's easy for a teen to put all the blame for a bad relationship on the parents, but that might not be fair. Teens need to work on the relationship with their parents just as much.

Interact

Give an example when you obey your parents, but don't honor them.

Point to Make

What do you do if your parents ask you to do something that is illegal or sinful? You honor them by obeying God's Word and refusing to sin (Ezra 20:18-19). It's however, a minor point because few of those in the group will ever face this decision.

Interact

A Chinese proverb says, "to understand your parents' love, you must raise children yourself." Do you agree or disagree?

Eph. 6:2-3 Honor. Children obeying their parents (v. 1) is in part how they honor them; see also Prov. 31:28, which describes children rising to bless a wise and godly mother. promise. There were earlier commands of God with promises (e.g., Gen. 17:1-2), but this is the first and only of the Ten Commandments to contain a promise (see also Ex. 20:12). The obedience of children is evidence that they know God, and it results in receiving blessings from God.

1 Pet. 2:13-14 Christians are to be subject to every civil authority (cf. Rom. 13:1-7). To punish includes not just deterring evil but carrying out retribution against those who do evil. By contrast, governments are to praise or reward those who do good, thus encouraging more good behavior.

1) Accept Your Parents' Discipline.

Read Proverbs 15:5.

Read the following verses. Describe what God tell parents to do?

Proverbs 13:24 – Show love by:

Proverbs 23:13-14 – Save your children's lives by:

Proverbs 29:17 – Bring peace to your home by:

2) Learn From Your Parents.

Read Proverbs 22:6.

Circle how you would complete this sentence: My parents...

Have a lot to teach me May teach me a little Have nothing I can learn from

3) Your Obedience Honors The Lord.

Read Colossians 3:20.

God is honored when you honor your parents. How? We obey God, which honors Him. We also glorify Him by being an example to our friends, showing them that Christianity's view of relationships is different.

Have you ever thought about how your relationship with your parents influences the way that your friends see Jesus? Describe why it matters.

WHAT ABOUT OTHER AUTHORITIES?

Other authorities include the government, employers, police, teachers, and church leaders. Submitting to another person involves surrendering what you want and doing what another person says. Not exactly a popular idea in our culture.

Read Romans 13:1-6.

Who puts someone in a position of authority?

If God has placed whom He wanted in charge, and we choose to disobey this authority, we have disobeyed God. Remember, when we disobey God, we will be judged for our actions. When God puts people in authority, He also gives them the power to enforce their authority.

Point to Make

God commands parents to discipline their children. That means if you resist their discipline, then you are resisting what God commanded them to do.

Point to Make

God commands parents to train their children. They are supposed to instruct, coach and encourage you.

Interact

Does Ephesians 6:1-3 still apply if you disagree with your parents?

Point to Make

The most important thing we can understand about people in authority is that God put them there. They deserve respect, not because of what they do but because of the One who put them in authority.

1 Pet. 2:15-17 The godly lives of believers will put to silence any false charges raised against them. Freedom in Scripture is not a license to sin but expresses itself in devotion to what is good (cf. Gal. 5:13-14). everyone. All people deserve the same honor and respect as the emperor. Only God is to be feared. Believers should have a tender love for each other as members of the same family.

1 Pet. 2:18-20 Masters had extensive authority over slaves, and slaves were often mistreated by their masters. Still, Peter calls on slaves to be subject even to evil masters, with all respect. Gracious thing comes from "grace" (Gk. charis) and in this context seems to be synonymous with credit. Both words indicate that God's people will receive a reward from him if they endure suffering righteously. Cf.

Read 1 Peter 2:13-17.

Name each person or institution described in this passage.

Describe the purpose of your submission to authority.

Read 1 Peter 2:18-25 and Acts 5:27-29.

Reconcile the two passages. In one Jesus laid down his rights and allowed something terrible to happen to him and in the other passage apostles rebelled against the authorities.

If the people in the government are not acting like "God's servants" what should Christians do?

Is there a difference between not liking what an authority directs versus a direct contradiction of the commands of Scripture? How are we to respond?

The general principle is for Christians to submit to authority. God called you to do what is right regardless of the circumstances or consequences.

There is one other authority that is in your life that God desires you to respect and honor as well. This group of people cares deeply for you and your walk with Christ.

Read 1 Peter 5:1-5 and Hebrews 13:17.

Describe the pressure that church leaders face knowing that they are called by God to "keep watch over you."

Your pastor, student pastor, DC leaders, and other church leaders have been placed in your church by God. They have a very important job and God commands us to respect and honor them.

Despite instances of poor leadership, of which many examples are provided in the books of Judges, 1 Kings, and 2 Kings (as well as in today's world), God assures us that a balance, respect, kindness, and submission are part of His plan. In short, God assures believers that temporary troubles never should trump the exhilarating ecstasy that awaits us with Him.

Interact

Be specific about the right and wrong ways to talk about individuals placed in authority that you consider doing a poor job. Be careful with this activity.

Interact

The general principle is for Christians to submit to authority. Several other passages show that God approves of Christians disobeying government, but only when obedience to government would mean disobeying God (see Ex. 1:17, 21; 1 Kings 18:4–16; Est. 4:16; Dan. 3:12–18; 6:10; Matt. 2:12; Acts 5:29; Heb. 11:23). There were even times when God raised up leaders to rebel against the government and deliver his people from evil rulers (Exodus 1–14; Judg. 2:16; Heb. 11:32–34).

Luke 6:34–35, where *charis* is translated "credit" and is parallel with "reward" (Gk. *misthos*). "Gracious thing" could also mean that patient endurance of suffering is evidence of God's grace at work. The two interpretations are compatible, for along with God's enabling grace come his favor and blessing.

1 Pet. 2:21–22 Christ's substitutionary sacrifice in which he gave his life for sinners is unique, and yet those he has saved may follow Christ's example when they suffer unjustly, even though their sufferings do not atone for sin. This crucial verse underscores the sinlessness of Christ and his substitutionary death for sinners (cf. 3:18). Jesus' freedom from deceit alludes to Isa. 53:9.

NOW WHAT?

On a scale of 1-10, how hard is it to obey your parents?

Very hard 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Very easy

On a scale of 1-10, how hard is it to honor them?

Very hard 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Very easy

Do you need to work on strengthening your relationship with you parents? Name three ways you can improve that relationship.

- 1)
- 2)
- 3)

Is there something you need to talk to your parents about? If so, what is it? When will you talk to them about it?

PRAYER: Are you thankful for your parents/guardians? Spend a few minutes thanking God for your family. Also, take time today to thank them for what they do to provide for you and to help you become an adult.

GOING DEEPER

The most important relationship with someone in authority is our relationship with God. The Bible gives Him many titles of authority, such as Father, King, Judge, Master, Almighty God, and Lord. Those titles remind us to show Him the respect He deserves as we talk to Him and about Him. He is the ultimate authority that one day everyone will have to answer to.

Circle the title above that is easy for you to think of God as. Underline the one that is most difficult to see God as.

Do you believe that most people show God the respect He deserves?

MEMORY VERSE FOR THE WEEK

Exodus 20:12 – “Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long in the land that the Lord your God is giving you.”

Apply

People can disrespect God by the words they use about Him, misusing His name, and how they speak to Him in prayer. Have the students discuss how to show God the respect He deserves.

1 Pet. 2:23 when he suffered, he did not threaten. It is common to long for retaliation in the face of unjust criticism or suffering, but Jesus behaved like the meek lamb of Isa. 53:7. He could do so because he continued entrusting both himself and those who mistreated him entirely to God, knowing that God is just and will make all things right in the end. Likewise believers, knowing that God judges justly, are able to forgive others and to entrust all judgment and vengeance to God (cf. Rom. 12:19). Every wrong deed in the universe will be either covered by the blood of Christ or repaid justly by God at the final judgment.

WEEK 6 DEVOTIONS

Spending time in God's Word is essential to growing in your faith in Jesus. The REAP Bible study method is a simple tool that you can use during your quiet times.

READ - Take the time to carefully read the Bible passage with an open heart, asking the Holy Spirit to give you words of encouragement, direction and correction.

EXAMINE - Grab your journal and write out your answers to the questions. Make note of what stands out to you.

APPLY - A great question to ask is "How will I live differently and be different today because of what I just read?"

PRAY - Then, talk with God about the passage and your application. Ask Him to change your heart and life based on the time you've spent in His Word.

DAY 1 — EXODUS 20:12-17

How does the commandment about honoring parents relate to the others?

Why might this commandment be the first of one that relates to how we treat other people?

DAY 2 — GENESIS 9:18-27

What is the difference between how Ham treat's Noah and how Shem and Japheth treat him? Notice the result of their actions in v. 25-27. What can we learn from this story about God's design for families?

DAY 3 — GENESIS 5:1-5

Compare Genesis 5:3 to Genesis 1:26. How do they relate? Why is this significant?

How should this affect the way we think about and relate to our parents?

DAY 4 — JOHN 5:19-24

Describe Jesus' relationship to His Father (God)? Why do they have this kind of relationship?

How does Jesus relationship to his Father impact the relationship we have with our earthly mother and father? Why is it important that God has been revealed to us specifically as a Father?

DAY 5 — 1 JOHN 3:1-3

How does this passage describe our relationship to God? How does this passage impact your understanding of what it means to be a child of your parents? How does your experience of being a child to your parents affect how you view being a child of God?

DAY 6 — JOHN 17:20-26

What does Jesus ask his Father for in this prayer? What might it mean for us to be "one" with Jesus as Jesus is "one" with the Father? What can we learn about Jesus relationship to God, and the way that he acts as a Son? How should this affect our actions as sons and daughters of our parents, and of God?

DAY 7 — GALATIANS 4:1-7

What is the difference between a slave and a child? What does this passage claim about our relationship to God? How do we come to have this relationship with God, according to Paul?

What is an heir? What sorts of things do people inherit from their earthly parents? What sort of things will the sons of God inherit from Him?

LOOKING BACK

You have done a great job this semester as you have studied the Old Testament kings. All throughout Scripture, God's people are instructed to remember the works and words of God. By doing this, we are better able to keep His law. Take some time to reflect on all that you have learned during this study.

How do you feel now that you have completed this study?

What have you learned about your future during this study?

So now you are thinking, okay, now that I've completed this study, I know everything I need to know now, right?

Psalms 119:55 says, "In the night I remember your name, O LORD, and I will keep your law." Discipleship isn't about completing a study. It is about a lifestyle of learning and living as you follow Jesus throughout your lifetime. What you have learned throughout this study will become more important to your Christian life in the months, even years, to come. Think about some of the major concepts that you have learned and lived out.

- Your relationship with Christ is foundational for all of your other relationships.
- God purposefully created us with the desire to be with other people and with a desire to love and be loved.
- Recognized the importance of caring for the person on the outside of our social circle.
- Jesus is the example to follow in loving our neighbors.
- Discovered the qualities of a good person to ask for advice.
- All of us need to be looking for Paul-type relationships we can learn from and Timothy-type relationships we can teach in.
- Following God's plan for friendship allows for His name to be glorified and for our frustrations to be minimized.
- Considered the necessity for you to live out the qualities that you are looking for in a friend.
- Defined the modern day equivalent of Jesus' conflict resolution strategy.
- Discovered the importance of treating others with tenderness, compassion, and humility.
- Learned that conflict doesn't have to be a bad thing; it can be something that, if handled correctly, strengthens our relationships and us.
- Reinforced the importance of the parent as the primary disciple-maker.
- Learned to speak highly of and love and respect our parents.
- The most important thing we can understand about people in authority is that God put them there. They deserve respect, not because of what they do but because of the One who put them in authority.

Wow! That's a lot! Now it's time to continue to live out what you have learned in this study.



FUEL STUDENT MINISTRY
CARMEL BAPTIST CHURCH
www.carmelstudents.org
www.carmelbaptist.org