



THE WORK OF THE SPIRIT

The Holy Spirit Operating
in Our Lives

VICTORY THROUGH FAITH

From Egypt to Caanan

PUTTING OTHERS FIRST

Loving the Overlooked

**GOD'S
WORD**
FOR LIFE



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God's Word for Life



GWFLIFE



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*CS indicates Christmas Sunday.

LARGE PRINT DAILY DEVOTIONAL GUIDE

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GETTING STARTED

The first page of each week’s material will help you to become familiar with the Truth about God, Truth for My Life, Focus Verse, and Lesson Text to be used in your Sunday school class or small group setting.

DECEMBER 4, 2022

1.1

TRUTH ABOUT GOD
The Holy Spirit gives us new life and hope for eternal life.

TRUTH FOR MY LIFE
I will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

SERIES 1: THE WORK OF THE SPIRIT

THE NECESSITY OF THE SPIRIT



FOCUS VERSE: John 3:5
Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.

LESSON TEXT: John 3:1-8; Acts 19:1-6

SG

TEACHING OUTLINE

LESSON 1.1

Lesson Title: The Necessity of the Spirit

Icebreaker: If you had to make major income adjustments, what is the first budget item you would cut?

I. JESUS STRESSED THE NECESSITY OF RECEIVING THE SPIRIT

- » Why do you believe Jesus chose the image of new birth to describe what happens when we are saved?
- A. Receiving the Spirit Requires Faith and Involves a Sign
 - » Do you remember the first time you heard someone speak in other tongues? What did you think? How did it make you feel compared to when you experienced Him for yourself?
- B. I Must Receive the Spirit to Be Born Again

II. PAUL STRESSED THE NECESSITY OF RECEIVING THE HOLY SPIRIT

- A. True Faith Should Be Followed by the Baptism of the Spirit
 - » Do you believe it is difficult or easy for the average person to believe God for the gift of the Holy Ghost? How can we help someone who has unbelief?
- B. I Must Tell Others about the Necessity of Receiving the Holy Spirit
 - » Can you think of someone with whom you would like to share your testimony of being filled with the Holy Spirit? Purpose to connect with that person this week.

III. YOU MUST BE BORN AGAIN

- A. Essential for Salvation, Sanctification, Ministry, and Resurrection
 - » Describe how the hope of the resurrection has comforted you during a time of loss.
- B. I Will Receive the Gift of the Holy Ghost

Prayer Focus

Lead the group in prayer and consider the following topics of focus:

- » For the Holy Ghost to be poured out on those who desire to be filled
- » For God to use us to share this good news with someone this week

SMALL GROUP TEACHING OUTLINE

The second page provides a Small Group (SG) Teaching Outlines so you can follow along with the main points of the lesson if you choose to bring your Daily Devotional Guide to church. The outline also includes the lesson’s discussion questions so you can be prepared for discussion if you meet in small groups.

BIBLICAL OVERVIEW

Lesson Text: John 3:1-8; Acts 19:1-6

When Nicodemus came to Jesus by night, he began with no questions, only a statement of recognition that Jesus was a teacher who did divine miracles. Jesus could have politely thanked Nicodemus or began a dialogue about miracles, but instead He began to teach on salvation and the new birth experience. Essentially, Jesus' response in John 3:3 answered a question Nicodemus did not ask. However, Jesus knew this topic was more important than any other topic they could have discussed.

Nicodemus's coming to Jesus by night indicated secrecy and possibly shame, but ironically this approach allowed Jesus a platform to be even more candid than usual. Jesus challenged Nicodemus's presuppositions and even questioned his status as a Pharisee and his level of knowledge, a charge that would have undoubtedly caused an uproar in a public setting. Nicodemus's statement of "we know" (John 3:2) was reversed by Jesus' challenge, "thou... knowest not these things?" (John 3:10). Nicodemus's level of knowledge as a Pharisee paled in comparison to Jesus' level of knowledge. Moreover, Nicodemus's focus on secondary things paled in comparison to Jesus' level of focus on more primary things. Nicodemus had an opportunity to increase in revelation but failed due to his presuppositions and inability to understand Jesus' teachings. Furthermore, while Nicodemus could recognize Jesus' status as a teacher and miracle worker, the biggest irony of this passage is Nicodemus's failure to understand Jesus' teaching that the supreme miracle He offered was the new birth experience.

Jesus' emphasis on water and Spirit baptism in John 3 foreshadowed the initial outpouring of the Holy Spirit in Acts 2:1-4 and the subsequent revival of many souls baptized and filled with the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38-41). Many other instances throughout Acts show the fulfillment of Jesus' words in John 3. Acts 19:1-6 provides probably the clearest and most succinct example. Disciples who were baptized unto repentance by John the Baptist had not been rebaptized for the remission of their sins as prescribed in Acts 2:38. They had also not received the Holy Spirit with the evidence of speaking in other tongues. The strong emphasis Jesus placed on rebirth by water and Spirit was understood by the next generation of Christ followers who placed the same level of importance on these experiences and would not allow anyone to have anything less than the fullness of what Christ offered.

JESUS' RESPONSE IN JOHN 3:3 ANSWERED
A QUESTION NICODEMUS DID NOT ASK.

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BIBLICAL OVERVIEW

The third page of each lesson will give you a "high level" Biblical Overview of the Lesson Text. The content will explore the text, its background, and any other pertinent information to help you better understand the setting, purpose, and message of the text.

DAILY DEVOTION

The remaining pages will guide you through your week of personal devotion and study. You are encouraged to complete the Bible Reading plan for each day and explore a portion of the text with the help of a section of Biblical Insight on that part of the text. Next is a Daily Devotion to read and a prompt to reflect and pray about the principles presented.

DAY 1

John 3:1-2

¹ There was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews:
² the same came to Jesus by night, and said unto him, Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God: for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him.

Biblical Insight

Nicodemus was a Pharisee of the Sanhedrin, the chief ruling body among the Jews. Many researchers believe Nicodemus came to Jesus out of his own curiosity and came at night so that his fellow Pharisees would not find out. However, beginning his dialogue with "we know" possibly indicates that he came as a representative of the Sanhedrin who came at night so that the Pharisees could investigate Jesus while publicly maintaining their antagonism of Him. Either way, the fact that one or more Pharisees believed the validity of Jesus' work would have been a threat to the Pharisees' control over the people.

Daily Devotion

Aldous Huxley (1894-1963) was an English author and philosopher. Though he wrote approximately fifty books, his most famous work is the dystopian novel, *Brave New World*. Throughout his life, Huxley was an outspoken agnostic and a sardonic skeptic of God. Yet for all his skepticism, he wrote extensively about God, worship, and Christianity. Like the Pharisees, Huxley investigated Christ. Unfortunately, for all his investigating, Huxley wrote in his book *Ends and Means*, "For myself, as no doubt for most of my friends, the philosophy of meaninglessness was essentially an instrument of liberation from a certain system of morality."

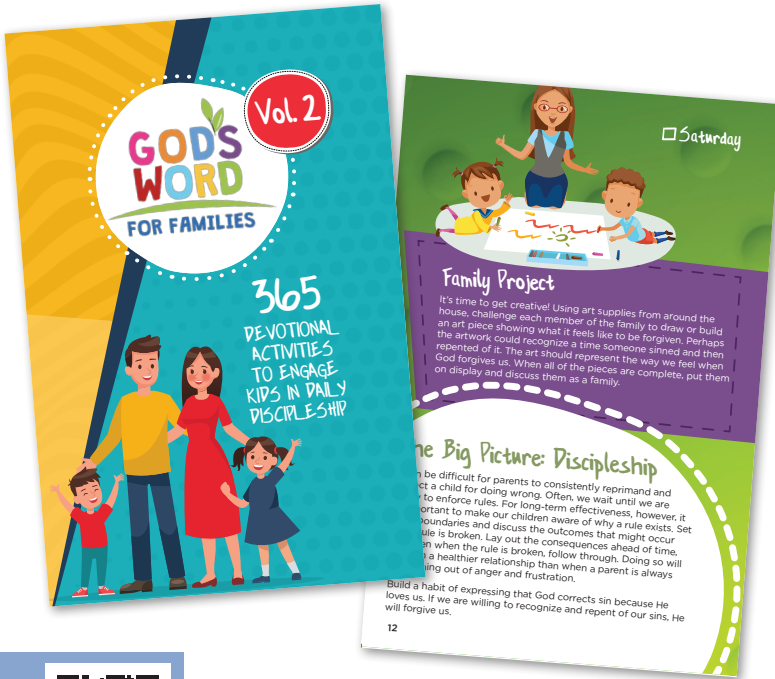
Huxley went on to reveal that he did not reject Christianity because of logic or reasoning, but because Jesus was inconvenient to his lifestyle. To believe in and follow Jesus requires living by a higher moral standard. Like Nicodemus, the Pharisees, and Aldous Huxley, when we encounter Jesus, we must make a choice. Do we pursue a meaningless life because we see Jesus' teachings as too inconvenient, or embrace abundant life by following Jesus' teachings?

Reflection and Prayer

» What can you do to apply this principle to your life today?

11

GOD'S WORD FOR FAMILIES



SCAN TO
PURCHASE



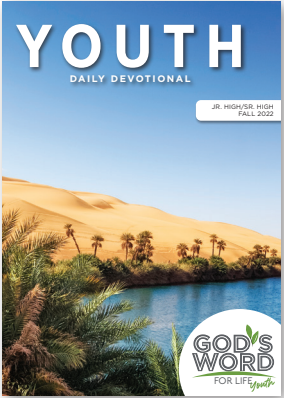
God's Word for Families is a wholly Apostolic discipleship tool designed to help your entire family grow in relationship to God and each other. By exploring a biblical passage from Sunday to Saturday, daily ten-minute activities use a variety of learning styles to engage family members to hear God's voice. Tap in to God's plan for your family by committing to daily discipleship with *God's Word for Families*.

Weekly Overview:

- Sunday — Introduction to the Bible Passage
- Monday — "Why?"
- Tuesday — Analytic Learning
- Wednesday — Worship
- Thursday — Real-life Application
- Friday — Discussion
- Saturday — Family Project

YOUTH DAILY DEVOTIONAL

God's Word for Life equips every age level of the church to study Scripture daily. This resource for youth (ages 12-18) provides a daily Bible passage connected to the week's lesson and a corresponding devotion. Each day ends with a final challenge to apply the message of God's Word with both junior high and senior high options.



PODCAST



The God's Word for Life Podcast presents portions of Scripture with fresh insight and urges adults to think deeply about how the Bible impacts their lives. Each week episodes will encourage listeners to engage with God's Word through reflection and prayer, further develop their personal relationship with Jesus Christ, and live out God's Word in their lives.

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SERIES 1: THE WORK OF THE SPIRIT

This series, “The Work of the Spirit,” will highlight the role of the Holy Spirit in our lives. These lessons will explore the necessity of the Spirit, what it means to be led by the Spirit and empowered by the Spirit, and how we can receive victory through the Spirit. Though we as Apostolics recognize the importance of being filled with the Holy Ghost, this series will challenge each of us to daily surrender to the work of the Spirit in our lives.



SERIES 2: VICTORY THROUGH FAITH

This series, “Victory through Faith,” follows the Israelites as they learn to believe God’s promises and ultimately conquer the Promised Land. These lessons focus on the report of the twelve spies, the crossing of Jordan, the battle of Jericho, and Joshua’s final address to the Israelites. God declared special promises to Israel through Moses and Joshua and has made unfailing promises to each of us through His Word. This series will help us step into promised victory through exercising our faith.



SERIES 3: PUTTING OTHERS FIRST

This series, “Putting Others First,” will take a look at Jesus’ love for the oft overlooked. Jesus welcomed children the world rejected, and He healed a blind man the world ignored. He even ministered to a rich young ruler who had everything but the gospel. While others esteemed riches and authority, Jesus valued service and ministry to one another. Everyone, those with little or much, is welcome in the kingdom of God.

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11

TRUTH ABOUT GOD

The Holy Spirit gives us new life and hope for eternal life.

TRUTH FOR MY LIFE

I will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

THE NECESSITY OF THE SPIRIT



FOCUS VERSE: John 3:5

Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.

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A. Essential for Salvation, Sanctification, Ministry, and Resurrection

» *Describe how the hope of the resurrection has comforted you during a time of loss.*

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DAY 1

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Daily Devotion

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Huxley went on to reveal that he did not reject Christianity because of logic or reasoning, but because Jesus was inconvenient to his lifestyle. To believe in and follow Jesus requires living by a higher moral standard. Like Nicodemus, the Pharisees, and Aldous Huxley, when we encounter Jesus, we must make a choice. Do we pursue a meaningless life because we see Jesus’ teachings as too inconvenient, or embrace abundant life by following Jesus’ teachings?

Reflection and Prayer

» *What can you do to apply this principle to your life today?*

DAY 2

John 3:3-4

- ³ Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.
- ⁴ Nicodemus saith unto him, How can a man be born when he is old? can he enter the second time into his mother’s womb, and be born?

Biblical Insight

The Greek word translated “again” (*anōthen*) can also be translated “from above.” The double meaning was intentional, but Nicodemus clearly did not understand the implications of Jesus’ deliberately chosen verbiage. The phrase “born again” also reminds the reader of John 1:12-13, where those who received God and became His children “were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man but of God.” The prologue foreshadows Jesus’ statement in John 3:4, reminding the reader that this second birth is not physical or controlled by humankind, but spiritual and only poured out by God.

Daily Devotion

In *An Anthropologist on Mars*, neurologist Oliver Sacks recounts a story about Virgil, a fifty-year old man who had been virtually blind since he was ten years old. One day at a routine ophthalmologist visit, Dr. Scott Hamlin offered Virgil hope. There was a possibility that Virgil did not suffer from a hereditary condition, but only cataract surgery could confirm this hypothesis. With nothing to lose, Virgil agreed to the operation.

After the operation, when the bandages were removed, Virgil could see for the first time in years, but with the healing, he faced new obstacles. Shapes, colors, lights, faces, and everything was new. As Sacks writes, “One must die as a blind person to be born again as a seeing person.” Spiritually, the process of being born again heals us of spiritual blindness and results in walking in newness of life (Romans 6:4). With spiritual vision, we will begin to see the world and the Word of God differently.

If you have been born again, what are some things you once could not understand about Scripture that you now understand?

Reflection and Prayer

» *What can you do to apply this principle to your life today?*

DAY 3

John 3:5-6

⁵ Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.

⁶ That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.

Biblical Insight

Some have incorrectly argued that “of water” refers to amniotic fluid, thus signifying physical birth. However, context demonstrates this interpretation cannot be true; Jesus was responding to Nicodemus’s question about physical birth to demonstrate the errancy of his question. Furthermore, John 1:13 indicates that Jesus could not have been talking about physical birth. Finally, simple logic dictates that Jesus was not talking merely about physical birth; obviously those who have never been born of woman could not be saved, for they do not exist. From these contexts as well as the overwhelming examples found in Acts, Jesus was obviously referring to water baptism and Holy Spirit baptism.

Daily Devotion

From the clothes we wear to the rugs we walk on, fabric is integral to how we live and how we express ourselves. One form of self-expression is the color of fabric we choose. Fabric fresh off the loom is full of debris, causing it to be the color greige, a color between beige and gray.

Before the impure greige fabric can be transformed into a useful textile, it must be cleaned and dyed. The process of cleaning parallels repentance. Repentance is the process of acknowledging impurities in our life and asking God to forgive us. His forgiveness removes the impurities, making us “as white as snow” (Isaiah 1:18).

Once the fabric is purified, the fabric is then fully immersed in a dye. In ancient Greece, the process of dying fabric was called *baptizo*. When fabric is baptized in dye, the color seeps into the fibers making it a new color. Similarly, when we are baptized in both the water and the Holy Spirit, we become new. Take a moment right now to thank God for making your life new.

Reflection and Prayer

» *What can you do to apply this principle to your life today?*

DAY 4

John 3:7-8

- ⁷ Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again.
- ⁸ The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit.

Biblical Insight

Jesus again used a double entendre with the words translated “wind” and “Spirit,” which are both the same Greek word *pneuma*. In Old Testament theology, the significance and verbiage of wind-Spirit (Hebrew word: *ruach*) as a life-giving force was well established, appearing as early as the creative *ruach* hovering over the void in Genesis 1:2. Ezekiel alone references *ruach* more than fifty times; Ezekiel’s God-given vision came to him in a “whirlwind” (Ezekiel 1:4), and in the vision of the Valley of Dry Bones, *ruach* is used to refer to God’s Spirit, breath, and wind interchangeably throughout the chapter (Ezekiel 37). The overwhelming Old Testament presence of *ruach* makes Nicodemus’s confusion of Jesus’ language even more astonishing.

Daily Devotion

Before the invention of the sail, boats were pushed along rivers by long poles or rowed with oars that relied on human strength. Without wind, human strength was the only way for the boat to move. Around 4,000 BC, the Egyptians discovered that wind could do more work than oars. As a result, they invented the first sailboat by creating a simple rigging system that suspended a piece of cloth, a sail, in the air. The sail allowed the wind and human strength to work together to reduce the labor.

Without the Holy Ghost, we are like the ancient boats that had no sail. We rely on our human strength to fulfill what God desires. In doing so, we expend a lot of energy and cannot get very far. But when we are full of the Holy Ghost, we are like sailboats. When we work with the Holy Ghost, we can go further and become more of who God wants us to be because the Holy Ghost empowers us. Write out a prayer request asking God to help you with a need you are facing.

Reflection and Prayer

» *What can you do to apply this principle to your life today?*

DAY 5

Acts 19:1-6

- ¹ And it came to pass, that, while Apollos was at Corinth, Paul having passed through the upper coasts came to Ephesus: and finding certain disciples,
- ² he said unto them, Have ye received the Holy Ghost since ye believed? And they said unto him, We have not so much as heard whether there be any Holy Ghost.
- ³ And he said unto them, Unto what then were ye baptized? And they said, Unto John's baptism.
- ⁴ Then said Paul, John verily baptized with the baptism of repentance, saying unto the people, that they should believe on him which should come after him, that is, on Christ Jesus.
- ⁵ When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.
- ⁶ And when Paul had laid his hands upon them, the Holy Ghost came on them; and they spake with tongues, and prophesied.

Biblical Insight

The fulfillment of Jesus' dialogue with Nicodemus is exemplified succinctly in Acts 19:1-6. First, water baptism is demonstrated as having utmost importance, so much so that even the exact way John's disciples were baptized was challenged. If baptism were less important, maybe the exact mode would be left up to personal preference. Second, Holy Spirit baptism is seen as a distinct and necessary experience in addition to water baptism. Moreover, their connection here demonstrates that the efficacy of one influences the other. You cannot be properly Holy Spirit filled without being properly baptized, and vice versa. Both events must be approached with seriousness and intentionality.

Daily Devotion

For many, stumps are overlooked. You may only look at a stump if it is in your path. Dead things do not draw awareness like living things. In the rain forests of New Zealand, two ecologists were hiking amid the magnificent kauri trees and came upon a stump.

"A normal person would just think it's dead. It looks dead to a point, but if you look a bit closer, you can see living tissue," said ecologist Sebastian Leuzinger (*The New York Times*, "Tree Stumps are Dead, Right? This One Was Alive"). While examining other nearby stumps, the ecologists discovered that the difference between the dead stumps and the living stumps was whether the roots had consistent access to fresh water. Where there is water, there is life.

It is the same spiritually. Jesus refers to the baptism of the Holy Ghost as living water (John 7:37-39). When you experience baptism in water and baptism of the Holy Ghost, you receive new life and rivers of living water. Why remain dead when you can have life?

If you have not been baptized in Jesus' name and received the Holy Spirit, who could you talk to today about that experience? If you have already had these experiences, who can you share your testimony with today?

Reflection and Prayer

» *What can you do to apply this principle to your life today?*

1.2

LED BY THE SPIRIT

TRUTH ABOUT GOD

God wants to lead
His people.

TRUTH FOR MY LIFE

I will be led by the
Spirit in all I do.



FOCUS VERSE: Romans 8:14

For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are
the sons of God.

LESSON TEXT: Exodus 13:17-22; Acts 3:1-10; Romans 8:12-17



Lesson Title: Led by the Spirit

Icebreaker: Where is the scariest place you have gotten lost while on a trip?

- I. GOD HAS ALWAYS DESIRED TO LEAD HIS PEOPLE
 - » *Why do you believe God is so committed to leading His people? Why do we need to be so committed to following His leading?*
 - A. Israel Was Led by the Spirit in the Wilderness
 - » *In what ways is the Holy Spirit fire that leads us from within better than the pillar of fire that went before Israel?*
 - B. The Shepherd Desires to Lead His Sheep
 - » *Do you believe more people are comfortable being led or being driven? Why do you believe God chose the former for influencing us?*
 - C. I Will Be Led by the Spirit in All I Do
- II. ACTS 3 SHOWS WHAT HAPPENS WHEN BELIEVERS ARE SPIRIT-LED
 - » *Think of a time over the last few weeks when you believe God led you to a hurting person. Can you look back and see His hand at work in orchestrating the interaction? How?*
 - A. The Spirit Led Peter and John to Minister
 - B. I Will Be Sensitive to the Spirit and to the Needs of Others
- III. BEING LED BY THE SPIRIT, PETER ACTED IN FAITH
 - A. The People Were Amazed at the Power of God
 - B. I Will Act in Faith So Others See the Power of God
 - » *Relate a time when you acted in faith and God came through. What were the consequences of that moment?*

Prayer Focus

- Pray for God to lead you to do what He wants us to do
- Pray for God to help you listen for His voice and for the needs of hurting humanity

BIBLICAL OVERVIEW

Lesson Text: Exodus 13:17-22; Acts 3:1-10; Romans 8:12-17

The children of Israel followed a pillar of cloud and pillar of fire through the wilderness. Later in Exodus 24:15-18, God's presence would once again be represented simultaneously as both a cloud and fire. Throughout the Bible, God's Spirit is frequently represented by a cloud (e.g., Exodus 33:9-10; 40:34-38; Numbers 9:15-22; 1 Kings 8:10-11; Luke 9:34-35) or fire (Exodus 3:2; 1 Kings 18:38; Acts 2:3-4). Both symbols represented totally engulfing nature (such as the glory cloud being too thick for the priests to stand in II Chronicles 5:13-14) and His powerful, "consuming" nature ("Our God is a consuming fire," Deuteronomy 4:24, quoted in Hebrews 12:29).

Surrendering to God means allowing His Spirit to completely saturate and consume our lives. In Acts 3, Peter and John sought God's Spirit regularly at the Temple. The ensuing miracle was the result of a Spirit-filled life. The focus on God's Spirit by Christ-followers "daily" in Acts 2:46 cannot be separated from the fact that the lame man had been brought to the Temple "daily." This same word connects the two stories semantically and reminds the reader that daily (ongoing persistent) needs require daily (ongoing, persistent) focus on God. Being constantly led by God's Spirit will result in miracles.

Being led by the Spirit also leads us into our proper position as children of God as in Romans 8:12-17. Being led is an ongoing activity; only those who are being continually led by the Spirit of God are truly God's children. God's constant presence in our lives is the reason the Holy Spirit "beareth witness" (Romans 8:16) or continually attests to our status as God's children. The Holy Spirit's presence is compelling evidence that we are His children. The opposite is therefore implied; those who are not God's children do not have God's Spirit constantly present to continually lead them and provide proof of their adopted status as "joint-heirs with Christ" (Romans 8:17).

SURRENDERING TO GOD MEANS ALLOWING HIS SPIRIT TO COMPLETELY SATURATE AND CONSUME OUR LIVES.

DAY 1

Exodus 13:17-22

- ¹⁷ And it came to pass, when Pharaoh had let the people go, that God led them not through the way of the land of the Philistines, although that was near; for God said, Lest peradventure the people repent when they see war, and they return to Egypt:
- ¹⁸ but God led the people about, through the way of the wilderness of the Red sea: and the children of Israel went up harnessed out of the land of Egypt.
- ¹⁹ And Moses took the bones of Joseph with him: for he had straitly sworn the children of Israel, saying, God will surely visit you; and ye shall carry up my bones away hence with you.
- ²⁰ And they took their journey from Succoth, and encamped in Etham, in the edge of the wilderness.
- ²¹ And the Lord went before them by day in a pillar of a cloud, to lead them the way; and by night in a pillar of fire, to give them light; to go by day and night:
- ²² he took not away the pillar of the cloud by day, nor the pillar of fire by night, from before the people.

Biblical Insight

This passage demonstrates several aspects of God's caring leadership. First, God protected the Israelites from war and discouragement by not leading them through the land of the Philistines. The wilderness path might have seemed like punishment, but it was actually protection. Second, God provided training and protection for Israel by sending them up "harnessed" or "equipped for battle" (ESV). Third, God demonstrated His faithfulness in keeping His promises and honoring His people by bringing Joseph's bones out of Egypt—a request Joseph made in Genesis 50:25. Finally, God demonstrated His constant mindfulness of Israel by providing a continual sign of fire and cloud before them that He "took not away."

Daily Devotion

In 1944 at the Royal British Military Academy in Sandhurst, England, Supreme Allied General Dwight Eisenhower advised the new officers, "You must know every single one of your men. It is not enough that you are the best soldier in the unit. . . . You must understand their problems." This advice was not a public media stunt for the general; it was how he led.

When walking among the troops, the general noticed a quiet, depressed soldier and asked him how he felt. Having just recovered from a serious wound, the young soldier admitted that he was nervous about returning to the battlefield. Many generals would have tried to bolster the soldier's spirits, but instead Eisenhower replied, "Well, you and I are a great pair, then, because I'm nervous too." Then the general and the young soldier walked along the river together.

Our God is the Lord of Hosts who reigns over everything, yet He has numbered the hairs on your head (Luke 12:7). God is not a distant leader but an ever-present leader. You can trust Him.

Reflection and Prayer

» *What can you do to apply this principle to your life today?*

DAY 2

Acts 3:1-5

- ¹ Now Peter and John went up together into the temple at the hour of prayer, being the ninth hour.
- ² And a certain man lame from his mother’s womb was carried, whom they laid daily at the gate of the temple which is called Beautiful, to ask alms of them that entered into the temple;
- ³ who seeing Peter and John about to go into the temple asked an alms.
- ⁴ And Peter, fastening his eyes upon him with John, said, Look on us.
- ⁵ And he gave heed unto them, expecting to receive something of them.

Biblical Insight

Peter and John’s presence at the Temple was presumably a regular occurrence. Likewise, the lame man was brought to the Temple daily. However, there were several gates that entered the Temple, and large throngs would gather at the Temple at the ninth hour to pray. It is easy to imagine how the disciples could have walked by and missed this lame man during previous visits. However, the correlation between their regular prayer and God’s leading cannot be overlooked. The continual and consistent nature of the disciples’ prayer resulted in increased awareness of the spiritual nature of their surroundings and the need of the lame man by the gate.

Daily Devotion

On the afternoon of May 22, 2013, Ingrid Loyau-Kennet was on a coach bus to Cornwall when she looked out her window and saw a body lying in the middle of the road. Ingrid went to offer first aid to the person on the ground. While Ingrid reacted instinctively to offer aid, approximately seventy spectators gathered at a distance to video. Upon confirming the body had no pulse, two men carrying butcher knives and a gun in blood-covered hands confronted her. Instead of fleeing, Ingrid engaged the men in a ten-minute conversation in which she listened to not only their motives but also to their frustrations until the police arrived.

While Ingrid chose to help a person in distress and de-escalate a situation, others were content with being bystanders. We daily have a choice to simply watch people struggle with physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual needs or we can choose to be their intercessor.

Are you a bystander or a helper? Write down a plan for how you can get involved in a way to help others.

Reflection and Prayer

» *What can you do to apply this principle to your life today?*

DAY 3

Acts 3:6-10

- ⁶ Then Peter said, Silver and gold have I none; but such as I have give I thee: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth rise up and walk.
- ⁷ And he took him by the right hand, and lifted him up; and immediately his feet and ankle bones received strength.
- ⁸ And he leaping up stood, and walked, and entered with them into the temple, walking, and leaping, and praising God.
- ⁹ And all the people saw him walking and praising God:
- ¹⁰ and they knew that it was he which sat for alms at the Beautiful gate of the temple: and they were filled with wonder and amazement at that which had happened unto him.

Biblical Insight

Peter's faith-filled words combined with the faith-filled action of lifting the lame man to his feet to receive his miracle. This miracle served as one fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecy, "then shall the lame man leap" (Isaiah 35:6). The fact that everyone saw the miracle and knew or recognized the man served as further evidence of his longevity at the Temple gate. Being healed earlier in his life would have meant fewer people recognized him, and the miracle wouldn't have been as undeniable nor the testimony as wide-reaching.

Daily Devotion

In 2009, fifty-six-year-old Greg Thomas was diagnosed with inoperable brain cancer and began planning his funeral. When he went to the run-down, old church where he prayed every day, He told God, "Before I leave this earth, Lord, I'd like to do something for you" and decided to repair the church.

Slowly but steadily he worked at the church. As Greg repaired the church, he noticed that his own body felt stronger. Greg's tumors began to shrink. After five years of love and labor, the church was restored to its former glory, and Greg's tumors were gone.

News of Greg's miraculous healing in rural Minnesota spread worldwide through media reports. The restored church is a visible reminder of the miracle of restoration. In an interview with *Readers' Digest*, Greg declared, "While I was restoring the church, God was restoring me."

If you need restoration, ask God, "What can I do for you?" Though we do not barter with God (He works in our lives according to His sovereign will), we want to make sure our focus is first on Him and then ourselves.

Reflection and Prayer

» *What can you do to apply this principle to your life today?*

DAY 4

Romans 8:12-13

¹² Therefore, brethren, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live after the flesh.
¹³ For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die: but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live.

Biblical Insight

The term *debtors* indicates that believers have an obligation to do the things required of true believers, namely following the leading of the Holy Spirit and putting to death our sinful flesh (selfish human nature). Paul uses oxymoronic language to demonstrate the supremacy of living for Christ and the deception of living for the world. Living after the flesh is not life at all, but results in death, whereas killing the flesh results in true life. The Greek word translated *mortify* is in the present tense, indicating we must continually put to death the practices of the sinful nature. This work is not possible through human power but through the Spirit.

Daily Devotion

In 1836, George Müller, a Christian evangelist, and his wife opened their home in Bristol to thirty orphaned girls. Over time, they built new orphanages. Instead of asking for financial support, Müller spent much time in prayer asking God to touch the hearts of donors to provide for the orphans. The children never went to bed hungry.

During his lifetime, Müller cared for over 10,000 orphans and established 117 schools that offered Christian education to more than 120,000 children. When asked what God had taught him the most about life, Müller said, “There was a day when I died, utterly died, died to George Müller, his opinions, preferences, tastes and will, died to the world, its approval or censure, died to the approval or blame even of my brethren and friends, and since then I have studied to show myself approved unto God” (*George Mueller of Bristol: His Life of Prayer and Faith*). It is through putting to death our sinful nature that we can live our lives devoted to serving God and serving others.

Today reflect on your life. How are you doing in keeping your selfish nature in check? Journal about what you can do to put God and others first.

Reflection and Prayer

» *What can you do to apply this principle to your life today?*

DAY 5

Romans 8:14-17

¹⁴ For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God. ¹

⁵ For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father.

¹⁶ The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God:

¹⁷ and if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together.

Biblical Insight

Ancient adoption was not like today's model in the sense that adoption could occur at any age; kings would adopt sons in order to attain a successor. Ancient adoption was about position and privileges. God adopted us, thereby conferring all of His riches and benefits upon us, and His Spirit is our first and most important benefit. This is why God's adopted children are now joint heirs with Christ, the "only begotten Son" (John 3:16). The Aramaic word *Abba* is the intimate form of *Ab*, which means Father. *Abba* would be closer in equivalence to "Daddy" and among the first words a child would learn to utter.

Daily Devotion

On July 14, 1913, Leslie Lynch King Jr. was born in Omaha, Nebraska. In 1916 his mother divorced his abusive, alcoholic father and moved to her parents' home in Grand Rapids, Michigan. There she met and married a paint salesman who adopted the young Leslie and gave him his name, Gerald Ford.

Gerald Ford played football at the University of Michigan, worked as an assistant coach for Yale University football, earned a law degree, served in World War II, was elected to Congress, and became the vice president of the United States. Eventually, Gerald Ford took the oath of office and became the thirty-eighth president of the United States.

With a new father and a new name, the young Ford's life changed drastically. In the same way, our life, both in the present and in eternity, changes when we are adopted by God. Today spend some time reflecting on what your life was like before God adopted you and be intentional in rejoicing in the many ways your life has changed since adoption.

Reflection and Prayer

» *What can you do to apply this principle to your life today?*

1.3

TRUTH ABOUT GOD

God empowers His people.

TRUTH FOR MY LIFE

I will seek to be empowered by the Spirit.

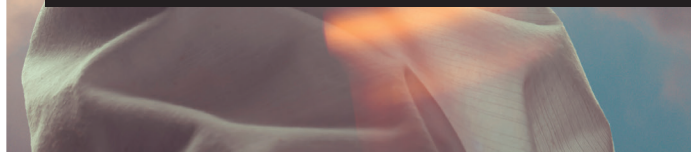
EMPOWERED BY THE SPIRIT



FOCUS VERSE: Acts 1:8

But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judæa, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.

LESSON TEXT: Acts 1:1-8; Acts 4:29-31; Acts 9:32-43



Lesson Title: Empowered by the Spirit

Icebreaker: What is your dream car?

- I. JESUS PROMISED POWER THROUGH THE SPIRIT
 - A. That Power Would Enable Us to Be His Witnesses
 - » *How do you believe the Spirit's empowerment enables us to be witnesses more effectively?*
 - B. I Will Rely on the Spirit's Power to Enable Me to Be God's Witness
- II. GOD'S POWER WAS DEMONSTRATED THROUGH THE EARLY CHURCH
 - A. The First Believers Asked God to Perform Miracles
 - » *How often do you pray for God to perform miracles, signs, and wonders in your church or in your life?*
 - B. Stephen Worked Miracles Because He Was Empowered by the Spirit
 - » *Have you ever felt intimidated to believe God could perform miracles through your prayers because you thought yourself unimportant in the church? If so, what does Stephen's ministry say to you?*
 - C. Peter's Ministry Was Marked by Miraculous Confirmation
 - D. We Can Expect God's Power to Be Demonstrated in Our Lives
 - » *Do you believe miraculous demonstrations are more or less vital to the church's mission today than in the Book of Acts?*
- III. THE SPIRIT STILL EMPOWERS BELIEVERS TODAY
 - A. Jesus Said Miraculous Signs Would Follow Believers
 - » *How do we balance not following signs with sincerely and earnestly desiring them to follow us? Discuss how to keep this in balance.*
 - B. When I Step Out in Faith, God Will Confirm His Message

Prayer Focus

- Pray for God to send miracles, signs, and wonders to confirm His Word
- Pray for God to give you boldness to declare the gospel

BIBLICAL OVERVIEW

Lesson Text: Acts 1:1–8; Acts 4:29–31; Acts 9:32–43

As is common in many New Testament writings, early passages within the Book of Acts provide motifs that resonate and repeat throughout the Book. Acts 1:8 essentially serves as a thesis statement that frames the entirety of Acts and gives an important preview of what is to come. Several key phrases give thematic structure for the entire rest of the Book of Acts: “power,” “Holy Ghost,” “witnesses,” and “uttermost part of the earth.”

“Power” is a repeated phrase and theme throughout Acts. Miracles of healing, the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, mass evangelism, and many other undeniable signs and wonders are the hallmarks of Acts—all powerful events. These only happened through the outpouring and infilling of the Holy Ghost—the driving force of the entire Book of Acts. The Holy Spirit is promised in Acts 1, poured out in Acts 2, and then demonstrated for the rest of Acts. “Witnesses” is also a key phrase. Acts focused heavily on evangelism; every teaching, preaching, and miracle ultimately tied somehow to evangelism. Even the business meetings of Acts 6, 11, and 15 focused on and resulted in how the church could better organize and focus with the purpose of reaching the world with the gospel.

Finally, the phrase “uttermost part of the earth” gave a preview for what the rest of Acts would look like. The geographical implications of this phrase are very important. While the Holy Spirit was poured out in Acts in an upper prayer room in Jerusalem, the story did not end there. How could it, when around sixteen different areas from three continents were present on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:9–11)? The stories of Acts continued to get further and further away from Jerusalem until they ended with Paul living in Rome in Acts 28. What began with 120 people in Jerusalem turned into a global phenomenon only through the Holy Spirit empowering God’s people to be witnesses.

SEVERAL KEY PHRASES GIVE THEMATIC STRUCTURE FOR THE ENTIRE REST OF THE BOOK OF ACTS: “POWER,” “HOLY GHOST,” “WITNESSES,” AND “UTTERMOST PART OF THE EARTH.”

DAY 1

Acts 1:1-6

- ¹ The former treatise have I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to do and teach,
- ² until the day in which he was taken up, after that he through the Holy Ghost had given commandments unto the apostles whom he had chosen:
- ³ to whom also he shewed himself alive after his passion by many infallible proofs, being seen of them forty days, and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God:
- ⁴ and, being assembled together with them, commanded them that they should not depart from Jerusalem, but wait for the promise of the Father, which, saith he, ye have heard of me.
- ⁵ For John truly baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence.
- ⁶ When they therefore were come together, they asked of him, saying, Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?

Biblical Insight

Virtually nothing about Theophilus is known outside of conjecture. However, the Greek name “Theophilus” means “friend of God.” While Theophilus was presumably a real person, the name serves as double entendre to indicate that the content of this letter and the previous letter (The Gospel of Luke) is for all who consider themselves God’s friend. Christ’s teaching about the Kingdom and direction to stay in Acts 1:3-4 led to the disciple’s question in verse 6. However, Christ’s immediate focus was on baptizing them with the Holy Spirit, the first step for anyone seeking Kingdom fulfillment.

Daily Devotion

In the spring of 1837, a gawky man walked into Joshua Speed’s dry goods store needing supplies for a bed, but the price was too expensive for the visitor. Speed decided to offer the man to stay in the room above the store without charge. This relationship began one of the most important friendships in American history. The gawky man would later become the sixteenth president of the United States: Abraham Lincoln.

Speed and Lincoln became inseparable. They shared stories, dreams, fears, and hopes. Over the years, the two men developed a deep understanding of how each other felt and could feel each other’s pain. In the years prior to his presidency, Abraham Lincoln suffered through two suicidal bouts of depression and the only person there for him was Speed.

Strong friendships are built upon vulnerability and openness. It is the same with our friendship with God. Vulnerability increases trust and trust builds intimacy. When are you the most vulnerable before God? When did you last share your hopes, dreams, and fears?

Reflection and Prayer

» *What can you do to apply this principle to your life today?*

DAY 2

Acts 1:7-8

- ⁷ And he said unto them, It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power.
- ⁸ But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judæa, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.

Biblical Insight

The power God has given us is not for the ability to interpret times or seasons. Jesus made it clear during His ministry that only the Father knew all the details of the end times (Matthew 24:36). The power He has given us is not reckless or subject to our interpretation or usage of the power, but for the focused purpose of being “witnesses.” The Greek word for power (*dunamis*) carries the semantic range for “strength” and ability.” This power is also directly linked to the presence of the Holy Spirit; the absence of God’s Spirit means the absence of power, strength, and ability.

Daily Devotion

Research has shown that the most important factor in determining the outcome of court cases is the performance of witnesses in both the depositions and during the trial. While we are not in courtrooms, we are called by God to be witnesses of God’s presence in our lives by sharing our testimonies. It is possible for our testimonies to not be effective. According to Courtroom Sciences, there are four common ways that witness testimonies can go awry.

Cognition refers to witnesses who are not thinking or listening carefully to someone’s questions, resulting in mistakes. When sharing our testimonies, we must listen to questions and think about what we say. Behavior refers to when the witness does not behave appropriately and loses credibility. Emotions refer to fight-or-flight instincts that can be triggered with questions. When the opportunity arises to share our testimony, it is not the time to hide or argue. Lastly, strategy refers to preparing how to answer questions. First Peter 3:15 urges us to be ready to share the reason for our hope.

Think about how you testify to others about what God has done in your life. Consider ways you can more effectively share your testimony.

Reflection and Prayer

» *What can you do to apply this principle to your life today?*

DAY 3

Acts 4:29-31

- ²⁹ And now, Lord, behold their threatenings: and grant unto thy servants, that with all boldness they may speak thy word,
- ³⁰ by stretching forth thine hand to heal; and that signs and wonders may be done by the name of thy holy child Jesus.
- ³¹ And when they had prayed, the place was shaken where they were assembled together; and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and they spake the word of God with boldness.

Biblical Insight

The Greek word *parresia* translated “boldness” is used several times in Acts to describe openness, freedom, and confidence, especially in speech and dialogue. Only Holy Spirit empowerment results in true *parresia*. Furthermore, the disciples’ prayer and desire was not selfish, but for the purpose of furthering the gospel through preaching with signs and wonders in spite of persecution. They were praying correctly according to the promise recorded in Acts 1:8. Correct focus also results in Holy Spirit empowerment. When opponents threatened them, the disciples prayed for God to bring healing. Holy Spirit empowerment will not result in prayers for vengeance but restoration.

Daily Devotion

In 1945 Helen Roseveare publicly declared that she would go anywhere God wanted her to go, whatever the cost. After receiving her doctorate in medicine, God sent Helen to the Congo where she founded a school to train women as nurse-evangelists. After the Congo became independent from Belgium, a civil war broke out. Helen, along with ten other missionaries, were beaten, tortured, cursed, and imprisoned.

Helen felt that God had failed her. Yet, it was in those darkest moments of her life while she was still imprisoned that God met her. She felt overwhelmed by not only His presence but His immense love for her. In her Urbana Missions Conference address in 1976, Helen said, “In the weeks of imprisonment that followed and in the subsequent years of continued service, looking back, one has tried to ‘count the cost,’ but I find it swallowed up in privilege. The cost suddenly seems very small and transient in the greatness and permanence of privilege.”

Do I view serving God as a privilege? Or am I still counting the cost?

Reflection and Prayer

» *What can you do to apply this principle to your life today?*

DAY 4

Acts 9:32-35

- ³² And it came to pass, as Peter passed throughout all quarters, he came down also to the saints which dwelt at Lydda.
- ³³ And there he found a certain man named Aeneas, which had kept his bed eight years, and was sick of the palsy.
- ³⁴ And Peter said unto him, Aeneas, Jesus Christ maketh thee whole: arise, and make thy bed. And he arose immediately.
- ³⁵ And all that dwelt at Lydda and Saron saw him, and turned to the Lord.

Biblical Insight

This story closely parallels the healing of the man at the Temple gate in Acts 3:1-10; both stories involve Peter happening upon a lame man, invoking Christ's name that resulted in healing, and a great revival happening as a result of this miracle. This miracle also demonstrates the result of the promise in Acts 1:8. The power resulted in a miracle, but also in a witness that led to revival. Rarely throughout Acts were physical healings seen for the sake of physical healing alone but were frequently connected to the evangelistic impulse associated with being witnesses.

Daily Devotion

Imagine it is lunch time, and you are waiting in a station for your train when suddenly music starts playing over the speakers. One person begins to dance and before you know it, the train station is full of people dancing a choreographed routine. In that moment, you may find yourself simply enjoying the show, oblivious to the fact that the flash mob was designed as an advertisement.

In 2009 T-Mobile launched a flash mob marketing campaign at the Liverpool Street station in the United Kingdom. The video went viral reaching forty-one million views on YouTube, and there was a significant increase in traffic on the T-Mobile website.

What made flash mob marketing campaigns effective was its ability to grab people's attention. As children of God, we do not need huge, flashy marketing campaigns to peak interest in the gospel. Our love, acts of service, edifying words, and lifestyle of holiness can open doors to witness. Consistent, daily acts will draw the heart, not just the eyes. Write down one area you can strengthen to point people's attention to Jesus.

Reflection and Prayer

» *What can you do to apply this principle to your life today?*

DAY 5

Acts 9:36–41

- ³⁶ Now there was at Joppa a certain disciple named Tabitha, which by interpretation is called Dorcas: this woman was full of good works and almsdeeds which she did.
- ³⁷ And it came to pass in those days, that she was sick, and died: whom when they had washed, they laid her in an upper chamber.
- ³⁸ And forasmuch as Lydda was nigh to Joppa, and the disciples had heard that Peter was there, they sent unto him two men, desiring him that he would not delay to come to them.
- ³⁹ Then Peter arose and went with them. When he was come, they brought him into the upper chamber: and all the widows stood by him weeping, and shewing the coats and garments which Dorcas made, while she was with them.
- ⁴⁰ But Peter put them all forth, and kneeled down, and prayed; and turning him to the body said, Tabitha, arise. And she opened her eyes: and when she saw Peter, she sat up.
- ⁴¹ And he gave her his hand, and lifted her up, and when he had called the saints and widows, presented her alive.

Biblical Insight

Dorcas was her Hebrew name, while Tabitha was her Greek name. In the Hellenistic Period in which she lived, it was common for individuals to have names in multiple languages (e.g., Paul [Greek] and Saul [Hebrew]). This healing parallels the healing of Jairus's daughter (Matthew 9:18–26; Mark 5:22–43; Luke 8:41–56). In both instances, Jesus and Peter were called to visit someone who had passed. The crowd was put out of the room, and the deceased person was taken by the hand and raised back to life. Furthermore, just as the healing of Jairus's daughter "went abroad into all that land" (Matthew 9:26), so the healing of Tabitha "was known throughout all Joppa" (Acts 9:42). This was yet another example of Acts 1:8 "power" resulting in being "witnesses."

Daily Devotion

On July 23, 2018, twelve adolescent soccer players and their coach ventured into the Tham Luang Cave in Northern Thailand. A monsoon flooded the entrance, trapping them miles below the surface where none of the highly trained professionals could reach them. Four days later, on June 27, Rick Stanton, a retired British firefighter and a cave-diving hobbyist, along with his diving partner, John Volanthen, arrived to help while preparing for multiple deaths.

Surprising the divers, all thirteen people were alive. While the evacuation was more of an "underwater wrestling match" because of the adolescents' terror, all thirteen people were rescued successfully. When asked if the rescue was a miracle, Stanton replied, "It was a collaboration between thousands of people; it was exceptional planning. It was miraculous that everything happened but I'm not declaring it a miracle."

If we are not careful, we can give credit of the miraculous to human effort instead of to the miracle maker. Think of something in your life that is directly the result of God's miracle power and take a moment to thank Him.

Reflection and Prayer

» *What can you do to apply this principle to your life today?*



TRUTH ABOUT GOD

God came to be accessible to everyone.

TRUTH FOR MY LIFE

I will worship God no matter my station in life.

WORSHIPING WITH SHEPHERDS AND WISE MEN



FOCUS VERSE: Matthew 2:11

And when they were come into the house, they saw the young child with Mary his mother, and fell down, and worshipped him: and when they had opened their treasures, they presented unto him gifts; gold, and frankincense, and myrrh.

LESSON TEXT: Isaiah 61:1-3; Micah 5:2; Matthew 11:28-29, 2:11; Luke 2:1-18



Lesson Title: Worshiping with Shepherds and Wise Men

Icebreaker: What is the most unique nativity scene you have ever seen?

I. WORSHIPING WITH THE SHEPHERDS

» *What sights and sounds do you often associate with worship?*

A. The Shepherds Left Their Flocks Behind When They Came to Jesus

B. I Will Leave Things Behind When I Come to Jesus

» *Why do you think Jesus asked this rich young man to sell everything and give the money to the poor?*

» *Can you name other people in the Bible who left things behind to show their love and devotion for Jesus?*

II. WORSHIPING WITH THE WISE MEN

A. The Wise Men Brought Gifts When They Came to Jesus

» *Aside from Jesus, who is your favorite character in the Christmas story?*

B. I Will Bring My Gifts When I Come to Jesus

» *What are some other things we can bring to Jesus when we come to worship?*

Prayer Focus

- Pray for God to help you leave behind whatever you need to when you come to Him
- Pray for God to help you bring your gifts to Him when you come to Him

BIBLICAL OVERVIEW

Lesson Text: Isaiah 61:1-3; Micah 5:2; Matthew 11:28-29, 2:11; Luke 2:1-18

God's mission has always been for all humanity. Isaiah 61:1-2, quoted by Jesus in Luke 4:18-19, indicated that the Messiah would come to bring restoration and freedom to society's oppressed and marginalized, which included the poor, brokenhearted, captives, blind, and bruised. Therefore, the first proclamation of Jesus' arrival was granted to shepherds—men who were among the humblest ranks of society.

Within the angel's proclamation was a promise that the "good tidings" would "be to all people" (Luke 2:10). This promise included the shepherds, the Gentile wise men who came from the east to seek the Christ child, and even the Jewish scribes who directed the wise men to Bethlehem but tragically refused to go themselves (Matthew 2:1-12). Ironically, despite having years of prophecies about a coming Messiah, including one which gave the exact location of the Messiah's birth (Micah 5:2), no Jewish scholars or students of Hebrew Scripture arrived at Jesus' birth. Instead, poor shepherds and Gentile stargazers were the first to find Jesus. God used nature to reveal His birth to the shepherds and wise men; even though prophecies had been given, no one with access to those prophecies heeded them. The fact that only humble shepherds and Gentiles arrived at Jesus' birth proved the extent to which Jesus' arrival was truly for all people.

This promise to all people cannot be disconnected from the shepherd's immediate actions in Luke 2:17-18 where they began to make their experience known abroad. Knowing that this promise was for everyone gave them a freedom to evangelize. Their activity of spreading the good tidings paralleled the angels' original proclamation. It forms an *inclusio* (a circular way of connecting two parts of a text like bookends) with the very end of the New Testament in which an invitation for Christ is offered to "whosoever will" (Revelation 22:17).

THE FIRST PROCLAMATION OF JESUS' ARRIVAL WAS GRANTED TO SHEPHERDS—MEN WHO WERE AMONG THE HUMBLEST RANKS OF SOCIETY.

DAY 1

Isaiah 61:1-3

¹ The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me; because the LORD hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek; he hath sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound;

² to proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all that mourn;

³ to appoint unto them that mourn in Zion, to give unto them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness; that they might be called trees of righteousness, the planting of the LORD, that he might be glorified.

Biblical Insight

During Jesus' inaugural sermon in Luke 4:18-19, Jesus quoted a portion of this passage along with a portion of Isaiah 58:6. The original passage in Isaiah addressed Jewish exiles, depicting the liberating provisions of the year of Jubilee (Lev. 25:8-55) and the dawn of a new salvific age. By applying this passage to His own life and ministry, Jesus placed Himself as the sole fulfillment for the salvation and restoration promised in the Old Testament. Moreover, His ministry would be to traditionally overlooked groups within society.

Daily Devotion

During the 1980s, Brazil faced a growing problem with street kids. With the collapse of the family, the growing impoverished class, and a rise in gangs, as many as five million kids were homeless in big cities. Some children and adolescents became armed thieves, prostitutes, and beggars. Instead of trying to help the local children, businessmen hired vigilante gangs of off-duty police to kill the children as they slept, or they sold the children to human-traffickers.

It was into the slums of Brazil that God called a father and son, Jack and Philip Smith, to care for the "least of these." Their ministry began small but has developed into a large charity that focuses on orphanages, vocational training, counseling, and transition plans for child prisoners. David Nowell in *Dirty Faith: Bringing the Love of Christ to the Least of These* writes: "Scripture does not know an arm's length faith. . . it is a faith that finds meaning and fulfillment in servanthood." We must go beyond having faith to living out our faith by serving the hurting, broken, and the outcast as Jesus did. Commit to an act of service today.

Reflection and Prayer

» *What can you do to apply this principle to your life today?*

DAY 2

Micah 5:2

But thou, Beth-lehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting.

Biblical Insight

Ephratah was an ancient name for the city of Bethlehem and was used to distinguish this city from other ancient cities also named Bethlehem. The original prophecy included the recognition that the coming ruler’s advent would be “of old, from everlasting,” indicating His preeminent nature. This statement agrees with John 1:1-2, which stated that the Word (Messiah) coming forth was from “in the beginning” and indeed “was God” Himself. This passage is also quoted in Matthew 2:6 by foreign wise men seeking the Christ child.

Daily Devotion

Sam Walton grew up during the Great Depression in rural Missouri. His childhood was spent milking cows and selling magazine subscriptions. After serving as an Army captain during World War II, Walton used a \$25,000 loan from his father-in-law to purchase a hardware store in 1945. Owning a hardware store allowed Walton to implement innovative entrepreneurial ideals, such as focusing on the needs of American small towns and treating the customer as the boss.

In 1962 Walton opened his first Walmart in Rogers, Arkansas. Up until his death in 1992, Walton remained humble. His vehicle was a red 1985 Ford pickup, and he lived with his wife in the same home for decades. Today, there are approximately 10,500 Walmart stores worldwide.

Walton’s life reminds us to not despise small beginnings. If you are feeling discouraged in your life, ministry, or relationships, remember that God’s timing is perfect. Be patient and be faithful. Remember that we see God’s presence in small beginnings. Journal about ways to stay encouraged.

Reflection and Prayer

» *What can you do to apply this principle to your life today?*

DAY 3

Matthew 11:28–29

²⁸ Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.

²⁹ Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls.

Biblical Insight

Taking on a yoke—a crosspiece connecting two animals for the purpose of labor—and receiving rest might seem an oxymoron until ancient context is considered. Oxen would be yoked together to plow a field; oxen who were weaker or in training might be paired with stronger oxen who could take the brunt of the load. By yoking with Christ and learning from Him, He bears the load we cannot on our own. Before we labored and the only result was being “heavy laden,” but now we can receive rest. His yoke is easy compared to the alternatives: either pulling on our own or being yoked with the enemy.

Daily Devotion

In 2018, a thirty-eight-year-old woman was referred to an oncologist after rapid weight gain. By the time the woman visited the hospital, she had a three-foot-wide, 132-pound tumor engulfing her entire abdomen. She was no longer able to walk, the pressure of the tumor on her digestive tract left her malnourished, and the major blood vessels were compromised. After a five-hour surgery, the team of surgeons successfully removed one of the largest known tumors. With the tumor removed, the woman regained her ability to walk, run, eat, work, and more importantly, smile.

Carrying around weight that we are not built for stresses the body and the mind—a principle that applies in both a physical and spiritual sense. The spiritual application includes burdens such as unforgiveness, shame, condemnation, feelings of inferiority, and fear. Sometimes it is just the cares of life that weigh us down. God did not create us to carry the weights of life alone. God wants to bear the weight and so does your local church. If you are feeling weighed down, remember that you are not alone. Reach out.

Reflection and Prayer

» *What can you do to apply this principle to your life today?*

DAY 4

Luke 2:1-7

- ¹ And it came to pass in those days, that there went out a decree from Cæsar Augustus, that all the world should be taxed.
- ² (And this taxing was first made when Cyrenius was governor of Syria.)
- ³ And all went to be taxed, every one into his own city.
- ⁴ And Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judæa, unto the city of David, which is called Bethlehem; (because he was of the house and lineage of David:)
- ⁵ to be taxed with Mary his espoused wife, being great with child.
- ⁶ And so it was, that, while they were there, the days were accomplished that she should be delivered. ⁷ And she brought forth her firstborn son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger; because there was no room for them in the inn.

Biblical Insight

By edict of Caesar Augustus, Joseph and Mary were forced to return to Bethlehem, the land of Joseph’s lineage, in order to be counted in a census and subsequently taxed. In this timeframe, taxation was part of an elaborate and often corrupt system politicians used to raise money for special projects or personal desires. However, this frustrating inconvenience for Joseph and Mary resulted in Jesus being birthed in Bethlehem according to prophecy. Since many people were from Bethlehem and had returned to be taxed, living spaces were undoubtedly filled to overflowing, which is why they were forced into bunking in a barn with the animals.

Daily Devotion

For the college student, going into DC for her assignment was no easy feat. It required taking the right bus to the metro station, waiting for the correct metro train, switching trains, and then walking to the museum in the rain. When she arrived at the museum, the student discovered that the professor had the wrong date. The exhibit would not open until the following weekend.

Cold, wet, and inconvenienced, the student began the trek in the rain back to the metro station when a Hindu man called out to her, “May I talk to you about Vishnu?” The student replied, “Yes, as long as I can talk to you about Jesus.” The man agreed. By the end of their discussion, the man had tears in his eyes.

“I have never met a Christian like you. Most ignore me or speak down to me. No Christian has ever talked to me. I would like to know more about your Jesus.”

Sometimes what seems inconvenient is simply God positioning us for His glory. Is there a situation in your life that frustrates you? Pray about how God can work through this scenario and ask for His direction.

Reflection and Prayer

» *What can you do to apply this principle to your life today?*

DAY 5

Luke 2:8-13

- ⁸ And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night.
- ⁹ And, lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them: and they were sore afraid.
- ¹⁰ And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people.
- ¹¹ For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord.
- ¹² And this shall be a sign unto you; Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger.
- ¹³ And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying,

Biblical Insight

Shepherds were among the humblest individuals in Jewish society. Even still, these individuals first received word of Jesus' arrival. This instance directly corresponds with Jesus' statement in Luke 4:18 about the good news being delivered to the poor. The phrase translated "bring you good tidings" is one Greek word, the root form of which is euaggelizó. This phrase literally means "to bring good news" or "preach the Gospel." Euaggelizó is the verb form of euaggelion, a noun which means "good news" or "Gospel." The English words "evangelize" and "evangelism" come from these words. Essentially, the shepherds were the first recipients of evangelism, another indication of where God's heart was focused.

Daily Devotion

Hudson Taylor was a missionary to China in the late nineteenth century. Whereas other missionaries ministered in the cities to businessmen and diplomats, Taylor trekked into the interior of China sharing the Gospel where no missionary had gone before. At one point in his ministry, Taylor became ill and had to return to England. Though his body was in England, his heart was still in China. Taylor spent those years translating the Bible into Chinese and recruited more missionaries.

Struggling to find support for missionary work in China, Taylor scolded Christians in England for sitting idly while people were perishing from a lack of knowledge. Later Taylor bemoaned how Christians would rather pray for evangelism than evangelize.

According to a 2019 Discipleship Pathway Assessment study by Lifeway Research, most churchgoers pray for opportunities to talk about Jesus, but less than half of churchgoers have talked about Jesus with someone in the past six months. For us to be effective in evangelism, we must pray and act.

Write down a plan for how you can share the gospel with someone this week. Pray about this commitment and then act on your plan.

Reflection and Prayer

» *What can you do to apply this principle to your life today?*

1.4

TRUTH ABOUT GOD

Only God's Spirit
can produce lasting
victory in our lives.

TRUTH FOR MY LIFE

I will live in victory
through the power
of the Spirit.

VICTORY THROUGH THE SPIRIT



FOCUS VERSE: Romans 8:6

For to be carnally minded is death; but to be spiritually minded is life and peace.

LESSON TEXT: Romans 7:14–8:8



Lesson Title: Victory through the Spirit

Icebreaker: How many steps do you get in each day?

- I. SUBMITTING TO THE SPIRIT IS THE ONLY WAY TO OVERCOME THE FLESH
 - » *Why do you believe it is so difficult for us to overcome our flesh?*
 - A. Jesus' Humanity Submitted to God's Plan in Gethsemane
 - » *Can you think of a time when you prayed this prayer of Jesus regarding your will and His? Share the story and the outcome with the group.*
 - B. I Will Submit to the Spirit through Prayer
- II. I HAVE VICTORY THROUGH THE SPIRIT
 - A. Free from Condemnation and the Law of Sin and Death
 - » *How can we keep this law of sin in our members from becoming an excuse for giving in to temptation?*
 - » *What do you see as the primary differences between conviction and condemnation?*
 - B. I Will Live in the Freedom Granted by the Spirit
- III. WALKING IN THE SPIRIT
 - » *What is your definition of walking in the Spirit? How should walking with Him affect our daily lives?*
 - A. Experiencing Life and Peace through the Spirit
 - B. I Will Live in Victory through the Power of the Spirit

Prayer Focus

- Pray for help committing to walk daily with God
- Pray for God to give you the power you need to overcome temptation

BIBLICAL OVERVIEW

Lesson Text: Romans 7:14–8:8

Multiple keywords frame this passage. The root Greek word *sarx*, meaning “flesh,” appears in multiple forms and is translated as “carnal” and “flesh.” This term is in contrast to *soma*, the Greek word indicating our physical body, which represents the creative work of God and is good. Yet Paul described the concept of *sarx* as his corrupt nature causing him to sin even though he did not want to. *Sarx* is inextricably connected to *hamartia*, which means sin. The modern term *hamartiology*, the study of sin, comes from this word. *Sarx* (our fleshly nature), because of its intrinsic *hamartia* (sin), is incompatible with Christ; this carnality is “enmity against God” (Romans 8:7). *Sarx* is so conflicting that Christ’s incarnation was in the “likeness” (8:3) of *sarx*, yet without *hamartia*. Christ’s advent condemned the *hamartia* in *sarx* (8:3), thereby cancelling any condemnation we might have felt before coming to Christ (8:1).

Another important word is *nomos*, which means law. Multiple *nomos* are referred to in this passage, including the *nomos* “of God,” “in my members,” “of my mind,” “of sin,” “of the Spirit of life,” and “of sin and death.” Sometimes *nomos* appeared to refer to the Old Testament Torah, sometimes clearly referred to the advent of Christ and the infilling of the Holy Spirit, and sometimes was used negatively to refer to the uncontrollable fleshly compulsion to sin. Generally, *nomos* is used throughout this passage to refer to undeniable conditions. Humanity’s sinful nature is a “law” in the sense that it is inescapable by human means. However, another important law also exists: the law “of God” and “of the Spirit.” Christ fulfilled the requirements of the first law (8:4) thus nullifying it. Even in today’s legal context, laws can be ranked in importance by determining what laws take precedence over other laws. Since the law of Christ overrides the law of sin and death, God’s law is more important; however, where the law of Christ is absent, then the law of sin and death will take effect.

HUMANITY’S SINFUL NATURE IS A “LAW” IN THE SENSE THAT IT IS INESCAPABLE BY HUMAN MEANS. HOWEVER, ANOTHER IMPORTANT LAW ALSO EXISTS: THE LAW “OF GOD” AND “OF THE SPIRIT.”

DAY 1

Romans 7:14–16

¹⁴ For we know that the law is spiritual: but I am carnal, sold under sin.

¹⁵ For that which I do I allow not: for what I would, that do I not; but what I hate, that do I.

¹⁶ If then I do that which I would not, I consent unto the law that it is good.

Biblical Insight

The Law was divinely inspired and “spiritual.” The primary problem was never with the Old Testament Law, but carnal, fleshly humanity bound by sin. Verse 15 can refer to our inability to understand our own actions. This verse points to the inexplicable evil ingrained within humanity; even if a person desires to do good, he finds himself performing evil—which he hates. Recognition of our own evil is also a statement of the Law’s goodness, which itself testifies to our enslavement to sin.

Daily Devotion

Have you ever experienced a last-minute panicked cleaning frenzy before visitors arrived at your home? As much as you wanted to see your visitors, you did not want your visitors to see how “lived in” your home was. Typically when expecting houseguests, we want to make a good impression. For some, this good impression includes welcome baskets, artfully arranged pillows, and a spotless home. For others, it means the children’s toys are not in the middle of the room. We fear that visitors will think less of us.

A similar but false belief is that we must clean ourselves up before we can receive the gift of the Holy Ghost. Still others may think that God only wants to hear from us if we are perfect. We can sometimes feel like we are unable to share the gospel with others because we are not enough.

Regardless of how many motivational speakers we listen to or how many self-improvement books we read, it is impossible to become good, perfect, or enough on our own. Only God can transform us.

The good news is that He does exactly that. All of us can come to Him at anytime; He does not require we reach a certain spiritual status to approach Him. He understands our frame, and yet He loves us so much that He transforms us and makes us new creatures.

Reflection and Prayer

» *What can you do to apply this principle to your life today?*

DAY 2

Romans 7:17–20

- ¹⁷ Now then it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me.
- ¹⁸ For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not.
- ¹⁹ For the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do.
- ²⁰ Now if I do that I would not, it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me.

Biblical Insight

The second half of verse 18 can refer to having the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out. This tendency has nothing to do with our willpower or self-control, but rather our ability. The most superhuman ability still cannot overcome sin or earn salvation.

Obvious, quick callbacks to previous verses can quickly be seen. Verse 19 parallels verse 15, and verse 20 parallels verse 17. The word *carnal* in verse 14 and the word *flesh* in verse 18 both come from the same root word *sarx*. In ancient writing, repetitions such as these were used as a method to strongly emphasize one’s point.

Daily Devotion

While comics were popular during the early nineteenth century, it was not until Superman debuted in 1938 and Batman debuted in 1939 that comics and superheroes became integrated into American culture. During the Golden Age (1938–1956), as many as 1.5 million copies were sold per month. The popularity of comics increased because they showed superheroes embodying strength and incredible abilities while also being relatable through weakness.

Kryptonite deprived Superman of his powers, Iron Man was dependent on an arc reactor to keep his heart beating, and Green Lantern’s weakness was fear. While the following comparison is admittedly a comparison of fiction and holy men of old, consider that our biblical heroes of the faith had weaknesses. Gideon is introduced while hiding, Moses expressed uncertainty about his calling, and Paul struggled with his flesh. Weakness is a reminder that we cannot do everything on our own.

It is in weakness that we come to understand true strength—God’s sufficient grace. It is only when we learn to depend upon God in our weakness that we truly understand that God’s power is perfected in our weakness (II Corinthians 12:9–10). Write down a weakness you struggle with and then journal about how you can seek God for help and experience His mighty power.

Reflection and Prayer

» *What can you do to apply this principle to your life today?*

DAY 3

Romans 7:21-25

²¹ I find then a law, that, when I would do good, evil is present with me.

²² For I delight in the law of God after the inward man:

²³ but I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members.

²⁴ O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?

²⁵ I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord. So then with the mind I myself serve the law of God; but with the flesh the law of sin.

Biblical Insight

Verse 24 serves as the natural conclusion of the previous eleven verses. Paul's pervasive sinfulness, lack of self-control, and general carnality made him cry out in frustration that he was a "wretched man." The question "who shall deliver me from the body of death?" (his own body) is answered in the next verse: Jesus Christ. It is important to note that the final sentence of the chapter is not a statement of solution, but rather a recapitulation of the situation: Paul's mind wanted to serve God, but his selfish nature was bound to serve sin.

Daily Devotion

Beginning in 2009, Arthur Livingston struggled obtaining a loan from a mortgage company because credit agencies refused to work with him. In 2011 Livingston discovered that his credit report said, "File not scored because subject is deceased." Since 2009 Livingston's bank had been reporting him as deceased to credit agencies. Not only could he not obtain a loan for a new home, but the inactivity on his credit negatively affected his credit score.

According to Livingston, a "major problem" exists with being deceased. There is also a major problem with being spiritually deceased. When we were spiritually dead, we were bound in sin, fulfilling the lusts of the flesh and desires of the mind (Ephesians 2:1-3). In that state we do not have access to the fruit of the Spirit, to our purpose, or to eternal life with our Creator.

Only the infilling of the Holy Spirit gives us life and victory over death. Today celebrate the blessings in your life as a result of being filled with the Holy Ghost.

Reflection and Prayer

» *What can you do to apply this principle to your life today?*

DAY 4

Romans 8:1-3

- ¹ There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.
- ² For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death.
- ³ For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh:

Biblical Insight

The previous section would lead many to conclude along with Paul that they are indeed quite “wretched” (Romans 7:24); therefore, Paul reminded them not to feel condemnation. The “captivity” (7:23) that prompted the question “who shall deliver me?” (7:24) is answered, “the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free” (8:2). This law reverses and overrides the law of the flesh already mentioned. The *sarx* (flesh) that had controlled Paul was undone by Christ who came “in the likeness” of *sarx*. Obviously Christ had no sin, so while He was fully human, He lacked the sinful nature that had plagued humanity since Adam. Now instead of us experiencing condemnation, sin itself has been condemned.

Daily Devotion

During the early 1900s, an obscure statute existed that empowered New York city mayors to sit as judges. One night in January 1935, during the Great Depression, New York city mayor Fiorello LaGuardia walked into a night court and dismissed the judge. Soon an old woman charged with stealing a loaf of bread to feed her sick daughter and starving grandchildren was brought before him. Her accuser refused to drop the charges.

Mayor LaGuardia told the woman that the law required her to either pay ten dollars or spend ten days in jail. Before the woman could respond, he held up a ten-dollar bill to pay the fine. Then the Mayor fined everyone in the courtroom fifty cents for living in a town where a woman must steal bread to feed her grandchildren.

Today if you have been struggling with feelings of shame or condemnation, it is important to recognize those as the voice of the accuser and not God. There is no condemnation in Christ because He has paid the debt for our sins. Take a moment to give God thanks.

Reflection and Prayer

» *What can you do to apply this principle to your life today?*

DAY 5

Romans 8:4-8

⁴ that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.

⁵ For they that are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh; but they that are after the Spirit the things of the Spirit.

⁶ For to be carnally minded is death; but to be spiritually minded is life and peace.

⁷ Because the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be.

⁸ So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God.

Biblical Insight

The imagery of “walking” is ongoing and continual. The phrase “do mind” in verse 5 can also be translated as setting our minds on something. Together these concepts imply ongoing concentration and commitment. People typically go where they’re looking; a focus on the flesh leads to death, and a focus on spirituality leads to life. It is also for this reason one cannot stop sinning by their own efforts; trying to stop sinning on one’s own means that person’s eyes are still on their flesh and not on God.

Daily Devotion

Typically, when scientists and doctors measure perception and its accompanying brain activity, patients are sitting or lying down. In recent years this practice has changed. Noting that in animals increased body movements lead to increased brain activity, neuroscientists Doctors Barbara Händel and Liyu Cao began investigating the influence of movement on sensory brain areas. They discovered that walking enhances vision and how the brain processes what is seen.

It is no coincidence that the God who created our eyes and ability to walk linked vision and walking together in Scripture. Sitting still, or being spiritually apathetic, limits our spiritual vision, keeping us tied to the lust of the eyes. It is only when we begin walking with God that our spiritual vision will begin to change.

We begin seeing the world differently as things that we once found attractive become ugly. Our eyes will begin seeing people as souls needing the gospel, instead of seeing enemies. It becomes easier to see God’s presence in the small things of life. Think of areas in which you see God’s hand at work.

Reflection and Prayer

» *What can you do to apply this principle to your life today?*

JANUARY 8, 2023

SERIES 2: VICTORY THROUGH FAITH

2.1

THE TWELVE SPIES

TRUTH ABOUT GOD

God desires to reveal His promises to us.

TRUTH FOR MY LIFE

I will seize God's promises in faith.



FOCUS VERSE: Numbers 13:30

And Caleb stilled the people before Moses, and said, Let us go up at once, and possess it; for we are well able to overcome it.

LESSON TEXT: Numbers 13:1-3; 17-33



Lesson Title: The Twelve Spies

Icebreaker: If you remember the dress that went viral online, did you see it as black and blue or gold and white?

I. ISRAEL SELECTED TWELVE SPIES

- A. God Wanted to Show His People the Blessings that Awaited Them
 - » *Why are many people excited and also anxious about the future?*
- B. God Desires to Reveal His Promises to Us
 - » *How does the way our heavenly Father prepares us for opportunities and promises compare to the way our earthly parents do? What is similar and what is different?*

II. UNFAITHFUL SPIES

- A. Ten Unfaithful Spies Expressed Disbelief
 - » *Why do you think different people have widely differing perspectives of the same situation?*
- B. We Must See through God's Eyes
 - » *What are some reasons people of faith fail to pursue and embrace the promises of God?*

III. FAITHFUL SPIES

- A. Two Faithful Spies Expressed Complete Confidence in God
- B. When God Makes Promises to Us, We Must Seize Them with Faith
 - » *What are some other examples of conditional promises of God?*

Prayer Focus

- Pray for God to forgive you if you allow doubt or fear to paralyze you
- Pray for God to help you see life through eyes of faith

BIBLICAL OVERVIEW

Lesson Text: Numbers 13:1-3; 17-33

God ordained the reconnaissance mission into the Canaanite land in order to build the faith of the Israelites and demonstrate to them the goodness of the land to which God was leading them. All men brought back reports of abundant fruit and sustenance in the land; however, ten brought back “an evil report” of the land and its inhabitants, while only two spies, Caleb and Joshua, encouraged the people that they would be able to defeat them.

One of the spies’ complaints was that the land was already inhabited by Hittites, Jebusites, Amorites, and Canaanites. All these areas were regions that God had promised Abraham when God covenanted with him in Genesis 15:17-21. Their report that these groups inhabited the land should have brought more comfort and not less, for these regions had already been promised to their forefather, Abraham.

The reference to giants or “Nephilim” adds a curious mysticism to the report as well. The Nephilim were first referred to in Genesis 6:4. These two references are the only two mentions of Nephilim in the Bible. Their mention, along with the mention that the Israelites were like “grasshoppers” in comparison, possibly adds an element of hyperbole to the spies’ discouraging report.

While the ten spies focused on their own insignificance and inability, Caleb and Joshua focused on God’s significance and ability. Those who focused on the former were discouraged, and the two who focused on the latter were encouraged. Caleb and Joshua exhorted the people that the Lord would give them the land, and “their defence is departed from them, and the LORD is with us: fear them not” (Numbers 14:8-9).

Sadly, because of the decisions made at the end of forty days, the Israelites wandered around in the wilderness forty years (Numbers 14:33). Joshua and Caleb, the two spies who believed they could conquer the land, were also the only two spies who eventually saw the promised land after that forty-year period (Numbers 14:30). In this story, belief and faith in God and His promises carried a direct correlation to possession of those promises.

GOD ORDAINED THE RECONNAISSANCE MISSION INTO THE CANAANITE LAND IN ORDER TO BUILD THE FAITH OF THE ISRAELITES AND DEMONSTRATE TO THEM THE GOODNESS OF THE LAND TO WHICH GOD WAS LEADING THEM.

DAY 1

Numbers 13:1-3

- ¹ And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying,
² Send thou men, that they may search the land of Canaan, which I give unto the children of Israel: of every tribe of their fathers shall ye send a man, every one a ruler among them.
³ And Moses by the commandment of the LORD sent them from the wilderness of Paran: all those men were heads of the children of Israel.

Biblical Insight

This mission was not instigated by Moses or any other Israelites leadership; this operation was commanded by God. The characteristics and identities of the twelve spies also were very important. Not just any twelve men could go. God commanded each one be a ruler (verse 2), also translated “chief” (ESV) or “leader” (NKJV). As leaders these men had authoritative status and cultural influence; their responses would help sway public thought. Moreover, they were representatives of the people; their responses would be in part illustrative of general Israelite opinion.

Daily Devotion

Cranberries and cranberry sauce were once considered a staple food in the eastern states and a delicacy in the western states. Today cranberries and cranberry sauce have almost disappeared from American cuisine, aside from Thanksgiving. This change is due to “The Great Cranberry Scare of 1959.”

Seventeen days before Thanksgiving in 1959, Cabinet Member Arthur Fleming warned that cranberries could be contaminated with an herbicide that caused cancer in rats. Immediately, supermarkets took cranberries off their shelves, governors banned the sale of cranberries, and newspaper headlines decried even touching cranberries.

When the cranberry industry fought back, it was revealed that cranberries had not been tested before Secretary Fleming linked cranberries to cancer. By Thanksgiving shoppers could buy cranberries, but the damage was done. The words from one leader ignited the cranberry scare that wiped out hundreds of small growers, laid off workers, and changed the way American cuisine culture views the small, tart berries decades later.

In a much different realm, think about the power of your speech. Your words have influence in the lives of those you lead. What legacy will your words leave in their lives? What can you do this week to make a positive impact?

Reflection and Prayer

» *What can you do to apply this principle to your life today?*

DAY 2

Numbers 13:17-20

- ¹⁷ And Moses sent them to spy out the land of Canaan, and said unto them, Get you up this way southward, and go up into the mountain:
- ¹⁸ and see the land, what it is; and the people that dwelleth therein, whether they be strong or weak, few or many;
- ¹⁹ and what the land is that they dwell in, whether it be good or bad; and what cities they be that they dwell in, whether in tents, or in strong holds;
- ²⁰ and what the land is, whether it be fat or lean, whether there be wood therein, or not. And be ye of good courage, and bring of the fruit of the land. Now the time was the time of the firstripe grapes.

Biblical Insight

The word translated “southward” is often left untranslated in many modern translations and simply transliterated as “Negev” or “Negeb.” This word could refer to the southern region by that name, simply mean “desert” or “dry place,” or could also refer to a southern direction. In Hebrew it is not uncommon for descriptive words to be used as general directions; for example, the word for sea (*yam*) is also sometimes used to mean “west.” This definition makes sense when considering Israel’s geography; the most significant body of water, the Mediterranean, made up most of their western border. In any case, God instructed Moses to take inventory of the land He had promised.

Daily Devotion

At the beginning of Daniel Defoe’s 1719 novel, the protagonist, Robinson Crusoe, is apathetic towards others, self-serving, and driven by money. His outlook changes when Crusoe becomes the sole survivor of a shipwreck on a deserted tropical island. There Crusoe struggles with isolation and despair, realizing everything he once had valued meant nothing to him anymore. The piece of gold he once had sacrificed everything for was now worthless.

The only thing of value on the island was the very thing he once treated with apathy—the Bible. Through reading and meditating on God’s Word, Crusoe realized he could no longer find contentment in material things.

Sometimes instead of feeling contentment in God, we become fueled by a list of never-ending wants. It is in the deserts and wildernesses of life that God wants to reorient our priorities from being driven by wants to finding contentment in Him. Write a prayer declaring your passion to prioritize God above all else.

Reflection and Prayer

» *What can you do to apply this principle to your life today?*

DAY 3

Numbers 13:21-25

- ²¹ So they went up, and searched the land from the wilderness of Zin unto Rehob, as men come to Hamath.
- ²² And they ascended by the south, and came unto Hebron; where Ahiman, Sheshai, and Talmi, the children of Anak, were. (Now Hebron was built seven years before Zoan in Egypt.)
- ²³ And they came unto the brook of Eshcol, and cut down from thence a branch with one cluster of grapes, and they bare it between two upon a staff; and they brought of the pomegranates, and of the figs.
- ²⁴ The place was called the brook Eshcol, because of the cluster of grapes which the children of Israel cut down from thence.
- ²⁵ And they returned from searching of the land after forty days.

Biblical Insight

The timeframe of forty days appears several times in the Bible. Moses spent forty days on the mountain with God twice, both before and after the golden calf incident (Exodus 24:18; 34:28). Forty days was the length of time Goliath threatened Israel before David fought and killed him (I Samuel 17:16). When Elijah fled from Jezebel, he spent forty days traveling through the wilderness to Mount Horeb (I Kings 19:4-8). Jesus famously spent forty days in the wilderness being tempted by the devil (Matthew 4:1-2). While biblical scholars must be careful not to read too much into numerology, the timeframe of forty is frequently used to indicate instances of struggle and decision-making. This trend might reflect that during the spies' forty days in the promised land, they were struggling to believe God would deliver the land to them.

Daily Devotion

How many choices have you made today?

It is estimated that an adult makes approximately 35,000 conscious decisions each day and 226.7 of those decisions are regarding food (Wansink and Sobal, *The 200 Daily Food Decisions We Overlook*). Neuroscientists discovered that many of our daily decisions are resolved in approximately ten seconds whereas larger decisions can take months or even years. Researchers have also found asking for opinions can decrease or increase the time it takes to make decisions.

When asking a few, well-informed individuals for advice, decisions are made faster and with greater accuracy. In contrast, the more people one asks, it takes longer to make decisions and the accuracy is greatly diminished.

When facing decisions in life, it is biblical to seek wise counsel (Proverbs 12:15). However, we often seek the counsel of people before seeking the counsel of God. We tend to want instant feedback and affirmation. When facing large decisions, it is important for us to turn to God first. We need to make sure we can differentiate His voice among others.

Think back over your prayer time the last week. Did you make time to listen for the voice of God? Spend some time now being quiet in God's presence.

DAY 4

Numbers 13:26-29

- ²⁶ And they went and came to Moses, and to Aaron, and to all the congregation of the children of Israel, unto the wilderness of Paran, to Kadesh; and brought back word unto them, and unto all the congregation, and shewed them the fruit of the land.
- ²⁷ And they told him, and said, We came unto the land whither thou sentest us, and surely it floweth with milk and honey; and this is the fruit of it.
- ²⁸ Nevertheless the people be strong that dwell in the land, and the cities are walled, and very great: and moreover we saw the children of Anak there.
- ²⁹ The Amalekites dwell in the land of the south: and the Hittites, and the Jebusites, and the Amorites, dwell in the mountains: and the Canaanites dwell by the sea, and by the coast of Jordan.

Biblical Insight

Milk and honey were frequently mentioned in reference the Israelite promised land, so much so that the phrase is used colloquially today to refer to prosperous times and places. In the ancient world, milk and honey were indicators of a land’s sustainability because both foods can be harvested without destroying the source of the product. In contrast, the eating of seeds, fruits, vegetables, eggs, or meat will stop future life from developing. Thus, descriptions of land flowing with milk and honey can be interpreted to mean that the land could sustain a large group of people such as the Israelites for a long period of time.

Daily Devotion

One day, while playing with his toys, two-year-old Chase was singing, “Yes means yes. No means no. And yes means yes. So no means no.” Amused, his parent asked, “If yes means yes and no means no, what does *wait* mean?”

Without looking up from his toys, Chase said, “God.”

One of the most difficult times in our life is the waiting period. It can be exhausting physically, emotionally, and spiritually. Sometimes you may wonder if the promise will ever come to pass. You may even second-guess if you heard God correctly.

When God says wait, He is not saying no or never. The season of waiting is a personal invitation into a deeper relationship with God because waiting is meant to be active. We actively wait by trusting in the Lord, doing good, being faithful, delighting in the Lord, and committing to God in all of our ways (Psalm 37:3-5).

Trust His timing.

Reflection and Prayer

» *What can you do to apply this principle to your life today?*

DAY 5

Numbers 13:30–33

- ³⁰ And Caleb stilled the people before Moses, and said, Let us go up at once, and possess it; for we are well able to overcome it.
- ³¹ But the men that went up with him said, We be not able to go up against the people; for they are stronger than we.
- ³² And they brought up an evil report of the land which they had searched unto the children of Israel, saying, The land, through which we have gone to search it, is a land that eateth up the inhabitants thereof; and all the people that we saw in it are men of a great stature.
- ³³ And there we saw the giants, the sons of Anak, which come of the giants: and we were in our own sight as grasshoppers, and so we were in their sight.

Biblical Insight

After Caleb suggests taking possession of the land, the spies who brought back an evil report changed their report. While they had first reported a land that “floweth with milk and honey” and provided ample sustenance for the inhabitants, they then reported that the land “eateth up the inhabitants thereof.” This new description of the land as an unhealthy and dangerous place to live may have been a reference to the frequent warfare between Canaanite and city states, or it may simply have been an exaggeration.

Daily Devotion

Not far from the shores of the Pacific Ocean lies the Nazca Desert in Peru. For centuries the desert has been a source of fascination because the desert’s 170 miles of hard, red soil is broken by a series of trenches. From the ground level, the trenches appear to be lines, and for centuries people believed the trenches were remnants of ancient roads or ancient irrigation.

These hypotheses changed in 1939 when Dr. Paul Kosok flew over the desert in an airplane and discovered that the lines formed symbols and pictures. The random lines only gain meaning when seen from the sky.

Oftentimes we can regard situations in our life as having no purpose simply because we cannot see its purpose. We can find ourselves in the presence of our promised land and deem it too dangerous because we only see things from the ground level. It is important to remember that God’s perspective is different. God sees the entire picture where we only see trenches.

Therefore our faith cannot be dictated by what we see. Take a moment to brainstorm how to trust God during seasons when we can’t see the end result.

Reflection and Prayer

» *What can you do to apply this principle to your life today?*

2.2

CROSSING THE JORDAN

TRUTH ABOUT GOD

God goes before us and removes obstacles from our path.

TRUTH FOR MY LIFE

I will step out by faith and trust the Spirit to lead me.



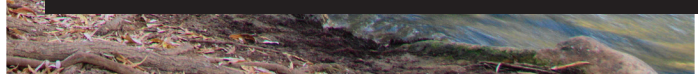
FOCUS VERSES: Joshua 3:11-13

¹¹ Behold, the ark of the covenant of the Lord of all the earth passeth over before you into Jordan.

¹² Now therefore take you twelve men out of the tribes of Israel, out of every tribe a man.

¹³ And it shall come to pass, as soon as the soles of the feet of the priests that bear the ark of the Lord, the Lord of all the earth, shall rest in the waters of Jordan, that the waters of Jordan shall be cut off from the waters that come down from above; and they shall stand upon an heap.

LESSON TEXT: Joshua 3:1-17



Lesson Title: Crossing the Jordan

Icebreaker: Which of Jesus' miracles amazes you most?

- I. THE ISRAELITES PREPARED TO ENTER THE PROMISED LAND
 - » *How can our past failures and lack of faith prepare us for future challenges and opportunities?*
 - A. They Consecrated Themselves
 - » *What are some areas of spiritual consecration where the "pay now and benefit later" principle can be applied? What about the opposite?*
 - B. God Showed He Was with Joshua and the Israelites and He Promised Victory
 - » *Think of a person you know who has great faith. What are some of this person's characteristics?*
 - C. To Live Victoriously, We Must Follow the Leading of the Spirit
- II. THE ISRAELITES CROSSED THE JORDAN RIVER
 - A. By the Power of the Spirit, the Ministry Stepped into the Jordan and God's People Followed
 - » *In what area has God positioned you to lead? How?*
 - B. God Parted the Waters of Jordan
 - C. We Must Step Out by Faith and Trust the Spirit to Lead Us, Believing God Will Make a Way for Us
 - » *What obstacle is currently deterring you from taking a new step of faith?*

Prayer Focus

- Pray for God to help you trust Him and take Him at His word
- Pray for God to help you step out in faith and obey Him

BIBLICAL OVERVIEW

Lesson Text: Joshua 3:1-17

In many ways Joshua serves as a fulfillment of many promises dotting the Pentateuch (the first five Books of the Bible). God promised Abraham that He would give His descendants this land in Genesis 15, and God reiterated His commitment to this promise while the Israelites were still slaves in Egypt (Exodus 6:8), immediately after delivering them from Egypt (Exodus 6:11), and even after the Israelites sinned by building and worshiping a golden calf (Exodus 34:11). Now by crossing over the Jordan, God provided another significant and miraculous step towards total fulfillment of His original promise. However, the purpose of the miracle at the Jordan was far greater than simply helping them cross a river; the crossing was filled with symbolism and promises for even greater things from God.

The Ark, which represented God's presence tabernacled in their midst, preceded the Israelites into the river. This symbolic gesture demonstrated how God had preceded them, preparing a path for them and clearing any obstacles. God told the people of Israel this miracle would demonstrate that God would "without fail drive out" (Joshua 3:10) all the enemies that awaited them in the land of Canaan. God's miracle here was demonstrative of miracles to come; the Israelites were to closely observe this miracle, for it would give them a preview of how God would continue to work for them throughout their conquest of Canaan.

Through the miracle at the Jordan, God demonstrated that as easily as He could halt the flow of the mighty Jordan River, God could render powerless all the nations who stood in their path. Both instances would be an undeniable miracle. On their own the Israelites could not have stopped the flow of the Jordan river, nor could they hope to drive out the people of Canaan, who were undoubtedly much stronger and better equipped for battle.

The miracle at the Jordan also gave them a pattern for how they would conquer the land: by putting God first and stepping out by faith. With the Ark on their shoulders, the priests had to physically enter the water before the water parted and the land dried. Similarly, whenever the children of Israel would put God first and move forward by faith according to His instructions, God would honor their efforts and fight for them.

THE ARK, WHICH REPRESENTED GOD'S PRESENCE TABERNACLED IN THEIR MIDST, PRECEDED THE ISRAELITES INTO THE RIVER. THIS SYMBOLIC GESTURE DEMONSTRATED HOW GOD HAD PRECEDED THEM, PREPARING A PATH FOR THEM AND CLEARING ANY OBSTACLES.

DAY 1

Joshua 3:1-5

- ¹ And Joshua rose early in the morning; and they removed from Shittim, and came to Jordan, he and all the children of Israel, and lodged there before they passed over.
- ² And it came to pass after three days, that the officers went through the host;
- ³ and they commanded the people, saying, When ye see the ark of the covenant of the LORD your God, and the priests the Levites bearing it, then ye shall remove from your place, and go after it.
- ⁴ Yet there shall be a space between you and it, about two thousand cubits by measure: come not near unto it, that ye may know the way by which ye must go: for ye have not passed this way heretofore.
- ⁵ And Joshua said unto the people, Sanctify yourselves: for to morrow the LORD will do wonders among you.

Biblical Insight

The Israelites were to follow two thousand cubits (about three thousand feet) behind the Ark of the Covenant. In preparation for this endeavor, Joshua told the people to “sanctify yourself,” perhaps interpreted as “make yourself holy or consecrate yourself.” The consecration was in preparation for God to do wonders. The command for consecration is presented as the expected preparation for God to do the miraculous; if one expects miraculous provision, one must first undergo sanctification.

Daily Devotion

There is a process in various ecosystems known as “prescribed burns.” This practice is where trees and plants are set on fire for the good of the entire harvest. A designated area is burned to revive and supplement the land’s health. Upon completion, a new ground is ready to be tilled and purposed after the refining of the excess.

Believe it or not, this practice is a safe alternative to letting the forests and bionetworks run rampant and wild. You see, when nature is left to its own devices and not redirected and kept guarded, it will grow uncontrollably. Try willing your grass to stop growing on its own, or the weeds to not overtake your yard without some sort of correction. Nature grows until intervention channels its growth.

The same goes with people. God can sanctify us on a daily basis through our time in His presence, and His work in us should be progressive. This refining, this “prescribed burning” away of what does not belong, helps us become become holy. We don’t simply receive the Holy Ghost and then leave our spiritual selves unchecked. We daily seek Jesus’ work in our hearts to cleanse us, shape us, and prepare us for our journey from now to Heaven.

Jesus never promised a life of comfort and ease. A painful purifying will occur, but there will be glory after it. Think about your prayer time. Are you making room for God to cleanse and shape your heart?

Reflection and Prayer

» *What can you do to apply this principle to your life today?*

DAY 2

Joshua 3:6-8

- ⁶ And Joshua spake unto the priests, saying, Take up the ark of the covenant, and pass over before the people. And they took up the ark of the covenant, and went before the people.
- ⁷ And the LORD said unto Joshua, This day will I begin to magnify thee in the sight of all Israel, that they may know that, as I was with Moses, so I will be with thee.
- ⁸ And thou shalt command the priests that bear the ark of the covenant, saying, When ye are come to the brink of the water of Jordan, ye shall stand still in Jordan.

Biblical Insight

The Ark served as a visible representation of God’s presence in the midst of the Israelites. By the Ark going first, God demonstrated His precedence, clearing the way and making provision for His people. Part of God’s purpose in this miracle was to evoke memories of the Red Sea miracle in the minds of the people to solidify Joshua’s position as the new Moses. God’s same supernatural power that directed Moses to part the Red Sea caused this miracle; the people could easily see the correlation and the same God working both wonders.

Daily Devotion

If you’ve ever taught, volunteered, or been a guest in an elementary school, you know that line leaders are a big deal. Being able to go in front of your classmates and lead them onward is basically the same thing as winning a million dollars in a kid’s world. It is not a responsibility to be taken lightly.

God was the providential “line leader” in the aforementioned passage. He went ahead to prepare the way, as He always does. Historically, we understand that He always leads His people, whether it is beside still waters or right to the face of raging seas that seem to block the intended route.

Friend, perhaps sometimes you feel the nights get so dark you cannot see in front of you, but keep walking. Keep trusting. Keep pushing forward with the knowledge that the wonder-working God of the universe is not only walking beside you, but He has already cleared the way before of you. Today take a moment to bring your obstacle to God and leave it with Him in faith.

Reflection and Prayer

» *What can you do to apply this principle to your life today?*

DAY 3

Joshua 3:9-11

⁹ And Joshua said unto the children of Israel, Come hither, and hear the words of the LORD your God.

¹⁰ And Joshua said, Hereby ye shall know that the living God is among you, and that he will without fail drive out from before you the Canaanites, and the Hittites, and the Hivites, and the Perizzites, and the Girgashites, and the Amorites, and the Jebusites.

¹¹ Behold, the ark of the covenant of the Lord of all the earth passeth over before you into Jordan.

Biblical Insight

Except for the Hivites, all other tribes mentioned in verse 10 are also mentioned in Genesis 15:17-21. In the Genesis text, God made a covenant with Abraham, promising these lands to Abraham's descendants. Echoes of this original promise can also be found in Exodus 13:5, Exodus 33:12, Exodus 34:11, and Deuteronomy 7:1, among other places. Now, through Joshua, God echoed and reaffirmed that covenant. While God was not obligated to redemonstrate His commitment to His original covenant, the miracle of the Jordan would serve as yet another physical demonstration of God's ability to defeat their enemies and His fidelity to His promises.

Daily Devotion

One young adult tells the story of singing the song "I Will Look Up" by Elevation Worship at a final chapel with other group members. The group was full of nostalgia as they looked back over the years.

A portion of the song describes in a simple manner God's closeness and provision in every season of life: "I will *look back* and see that You are faithful. I'll *look ahead* believing You are able." As meaningful as those words were to the group in reflection of their past, the lyrics also resonated beyond those moments.

The message reaches all the way back to the Garden of Eden. From day one of Creation, He provided. If we want to know if God cares and is in control, all we have to do is look back. Though He does not always carry out His provision and miracles the same way twice, His assurances are still "yes and amen." He may change His approaches, but He will never change His promises.

Write a prayer request in the space below. Take time this week to surrender your need to God in prayer, knowing He is faithful.

Reflection and Prayer

» *What can you do to apply this principle to your life today?*

DAY 4

Joshua 3:12-14

- ¹² Now therefore take you twelve men out of the tribes of Israel, out of every tribe a man.
- ¹³ And it shall come to pass, as soon as the soles of the feet of the priests that bear the ark of the LORD, the Lord of all the earth, shall rest in the waters of Jordan, that the waters of Jordan shall be cut off from the waters that come down from above; and they shall stand upon an heap.
- ¹⁴ And it came to pass, when the people removed from their tents, to pass over Jordan, and the priests bearing the ark of the covenant before the people;

Biblical Insight

The selection of the twelve men seems to be in preparation for the memorial of stones that would be erected in Joshua 4:1-9. These stones would be erected in the middle of the Jordan as a testimony of God’s provision to the children of Israel forever. Interestingly, these men were selected prior to the miraculous occurrence; the Lord already had begun planning arrangements for the memorial and testimony because, from His perspective, the miracle was a sure thing. The language of the waters standing in a heap evokes even more Red Sea imagery; Moses famously sang that those waters also stood up in a heap (Exodus 15:8).

Daily Devotion

God has always known the future since the beginning of time. He knew that Adam and Eve would fall. He understood that sin would always be part of humanity, even when He walked blamelessly toward Calvary. He also knew there would be a whole lot of good to be brought about by His people. He knew the outcome of the men in this passage, and what victories they would see. They may not even have understood the brevity of their calling and assignment, but their God, our God did. He was already making plans for their triumph before they ever even thought about a battle.

Maybe you are in the middle of a trial and have lost hope of ever seeing a victory, but God has already gone ahead of you and has started to build a memorial and testimony to your steadfastness. He has begun to prepare a place for you. Jesus is going to help you cross the finish line. He always knew you’d finish strong.

The process of building memorials is so valuable. In the same way memorials helped the Israelites teach the next generation about God’s faithfulness from the past, remembering God’s faithfulness in our lives today helps build our faith (Joshua 4:21-24). Use the space below to journal about a miracle God has done for you in the past that strengthens your faith in difficult times.

Reflection and Prayer

» *What can you do to apply this principle to your life today?*

DAY 5

Joshua 3:15-17

- ¹⁵ and as they that bare the ark were come unto Jordan, and the feet of the priests that bare the ark were dipped in the brim of the water, (for Jordan overfloweth all his banks all the time of harvest,)
- ¹⁶ that the waters which came down from above stood and rose up upon an heap very far from the city Adam, that is beside Zaretan: and those that came down toward the sea of the plain, even the salt sea, failed, and were cut off: and the people passed over right against Jericho.
- ¹⁷ And the priests that bare the ark of the covenant of the LORD stood firm on dry ground in the midst of Jordan, and all the Israelites passed over on dry ground, until all the people were passed clean over Jordan.

Biblical Insight

While there are many similarities between the crossing of the Jordan and the Red Sea, two unique distinctions exist. While Moses simply raised his staff to make the Red Sea part (Exodus 14:16, 22), at the Jordan God required the priests to physically enter into the raging current of the river before the waters would rescind: a literal step of faith. Additionally, at the Red Sea the waters stood up as walls on both sides of them (Exodus 14:22). However, at the Jordan only the waters coming from upstream stood up as a heap, while the waters downstream simply dried up as any river would that has lost its source, only at a miraculously accelerated pace.

Daily Devotion

In C. S. Lewis's *Prince Caspian*, the youngest of siblings, Lucy, questions Aslan, who represents God in the story. In her innocence she asks, "Why didn't You show Yourself? Why didn't You come roaring in like last time and save us?" He gently responds with a simple yet pointed answer, "Things never happen the same way twice, dear one."

Her childlike faith caused her to ask why. She had seen Him do the miraculous before. She had witnessed His glory on full display in the past, so why did He not come in the same thunderous manner again?

Maybe the people crossing the Jordan felt the same. Even though they stepped out in faith, their feet may have been shaking a bit. They had heard the stories, and seen the victories, so why didn't God just do it that way again? Perhaps in His sovereign, unpredictable way, He wanted them to navigate the uncharted waters without a map, so He could wholly be their guide. Could it be that He is asking the same of you?

Reflection and Prayer

» *What can you do to apply this principle to your life today?*

2.3

JERICHO

TRUTH ABOUT GOD

God can provide victory through unconventional means.

TRUTH FOR MY LIFE

I will follow God and trust Him for victory.



FOCUS VERSE: Joshua 6:20

So the people shouted when the priests blew with the trumpets; and it came to pass, when the people heard the sound of the trumpet, and the people shouted with a great shout, that the wall fell down flat, so that the people went up into the city, every man straight before him, and they took the city.

LESSON TEXT: Joshua 6:1-25



Lesson Title: Jericho

Icebreaker: If you could get one photo at any major tourist attraction in the world, where would it be?

I. THE CHALLENGE AT JERICO

- A. God Gave Joshua an Unconventional Battle Plan
 - » *What are some mysterious ways you have seen God lead a person into greater arenas of faith?*
- B. Israel's Obedience
- C. I Will Choose to Obey Even When I Do Not Understand God's Plan
 - » *What are other songs we find easy to sing but harder to live?*

II. MARCHING TO VICTORY

- A. The Israelites Followed God's Plan to the Letter
 - » *Why is it important to obey God's commands even when they do not make sense to us?*
- B. God Gave Israel Total Victory over Jericho
 - » *What commandments in Scripture require great faith but are worth the payoff?*
- C. When We Obey God, He Will Respond and Tear Down Walls in Our Lives
 - » *Why does God respond so favorably to complete obedience?*

Prayer Focus

- Pray for God to help you trust His Word, no matter how many are skeptical of His Word
- Pray for God to help you share His Word, no matter how many are skeptical of His Word

BIBLICAL OVERVIEW

Lesson Text: Joshua 6:1–25

The fall of Jericho was the first demonstration of God's ability to fight for His people and clear out their enemies from before them using unconventional means. The story is certainly unique; all the men of fighting age and ability (around forty thousand men [Joshua 4:13]) would silently circle the city, following the Ark of the Covenant carried by the priest while they blew their horns. On the seventh day, the party circled the city seven times, after which they broke their silence to shout and watch the walls crumble.

Although the story is unique within Scripture, it is not without correlations. In Joshua 3, when the children of Israel crossed the Jordan river, the Ark preceded the people and cleared the path. In Judges 7:19–22, Gideon defeated the Midianites while blowing trumpets and shouting. In I Samuel 4:1–11, the elders of Israel tried to invoke the power of God over their enemies by bringing the Ark of the Covenant into their midst and shouting; however, because of Israel's wickedness, God did not honor this gesture, and the Ark was captured.

Rahab's faith and obedience to God despite opposition served as a microcosm of Israel's response to the walls of Jericho. Both were heralded as great feats of faith in Hebrews 11:30–31. Both are examples of great faith on two different scales. Just as a nation can choose to be faithful to God and receive the benefits of His power and blessing, so an individual can choose to be faithful to God despite the unfaithfulness of the nation around her and can receive the same benefits. The righteousness of the nation around someone does not have to dictate their own personal response to God. Furthermore, God can save both individuals and nations through unconventional means; while Israel was saved by circling Jericho, blowing trumpets, and shouting, Rahab was saved by hanging a scarlet cord out her window (Joshua 2:18). God chooses whatever method He desires to save His people.

THE FALL OF JERICO WAS THE FIRST
DEMONSTRATION OF GOD'S ABILITY TO
FIGHT FOR HIS PEOPLE AND CLEAR OUT
THEIR ENEMIES FROM BEFORE THEM USING
UNCONVENTIONAL MEANS.

DAY 1

Joshua 6:1-7

- ¹ Now Jericho was straitly shut up because of the children of Israel: none went out, and none came in.
- ² And the LORD said unto Joshua, See, I have given into thine hand Jericho, and the king thereof, and the mighty men of valour.
- ³ And ye shall compass the city, all ye men of war, and go round about the city once. Thus shalt thou do six days.
- ⁴ And seven priests shall bear before the ark seven trumpets of rams' horns: and the seventh day ye shall compass the city seven times, and the priests shall blow with the trumpets.
- ⁵ And it shall come to pass, that when they make a long blast with the ram's horn, and when ye hear the sound of the trumpet, all the people shall shout with a great shout; and the wall of the city shall fall down flat, and the people shall ascend up every man straight before him.
- ⁶ And Joshua the son of Nun called the priests, and said unto them, Take up the ark of the covenant, and let seven priests bear seven trumpets of rams' horns before the ark of the LORD.
- ⁷ And he said unto the people, Pass on, and compass the city, and let him that is armed pass on before the ark of the LORD.

Biblical Insight

Two words are used here to describe the trumpet: the Hebrew word *yobel* is translated as “ram’s horn” and the word *shofar* is translated as “trumpet.” *Yobel* is typically used as a descriptor of *shofar*, although it can be used on its own to refer to a wind instrument. Both terms are also found in Exodus 19:13, 16, where the sound of the *shofar* frightened the children of Israel at Sinai. Now the same sound served to frighten their enemies, the people of Jericho. In both instances the sound represented God’s power and presence and dominion over the situation.

Daily Devotion

Located in Orfield Laboratories in Minnesota is a room that is known to be the quietest place on earth. It is tortuously silent. In fact, according to a Smithsonian Museum writer, the longest anyone has been able to handle the room has been no more than forty-five minutes. God has a way of exercising His power in the capacity it is needed. He will get the attention of His children, and their enemies, however He needs to.

When the shofar was sounded, it could not be missed. Even in our quiet places—the ones we attempt to shut God out of—He is there. He may not always shout. He may not always roar, but He always makes sure He is heard in exactly the capacity He needs to be. Wherever you find yourself today, let Him sound the alarm to your enemies that He is in control.

Reflection and Prayer

» *What can you do to apply this principle to your life today?*

DAY 2

Joshua 6:12-16

- ¹² And Joshua rose early in the morning, and the priests took up the ark of the LORD.
- ¹³ And seven priests bearing seven trumpets of rams' horns before the ark of the LORD went on continually, and blew with the trumpets: and the armed men went before them; but the rereward came after the ark of the LORD, the priests going on, and blowing with the trumpets.
- ¹⁴ And the second day they compassed the city once, and returned into the camp: so they did six days.
- ¹⁵ And it came to pass on the seventh day, that they rose early about the dawning of the day, and compassed the city after the same manner seven times: only on that day they compassed the city seven times.
- ¹⁶ And it came to pass at the seventh time, when the priests blew with the trumpets, Joshua said unto the people, Shout; for the LORD hath given you the city.

Biblical Insight

This Scripture in the Book of Joshua records the second time the Ark of the Covenant served as the focal point of God's deliverance for His people. In Joshua 3, the priests entered the river carrying the Ark, allowing the Israelites to cross over. God told the children of Israel that the river crossing would serve as proof "that the living God is among you, and that he will without fail drive out from before you" the inhabitants of Canaan (Joshua 3:10). The river crossing served as a template for how they would defeat their enemies moving forward, by following God's presence and leading symbolized by the Ark.

Daily Devotion

Following the Ark served as a literal portrait of faith. It symbolized following God's presence, yes, but it also showed the people that God does not always work according to how we imagine. The Ark went before them. They were given the command to follow, nothing more, nothing less—just follow.

That process of obediently following is how you walk through the waters that seem to intrude on your path. You put one foot in front of the other, and you follow where His presence leads. It might not add up, but faith would not be faith if you had all the answers. Keep following in His ways, and you will end up victorious and right where you need to be.

Consider how you're doing at following the presence of God. Think about your time in prayer, in God's Word, and in listening for God's voice. Ask God to bless your efforts to follow Him.

Reflection and Prayer

» *What can you do to apply this principle to your life today?*

DAY 3

Joshua 6:17, 19

¹⁷ And the city shall be accursed, even it, and all that are therein, to the LORD: only Rahab the harlot shall live, she and all that are with her in the house, because she hid the messengers that we sent.

. . . .

¹⁹ But all the silver, and gold, and vessels of brass and iron, are consecrated unto the LORD: they shall come into the treasury of the LORD.

Biblical Insight

Everything in Jericho was designated for destruction with two exceptions: Rahab and her family, who feared God and helped the spies exploring Jericho (Joshua 2:1–24); and precious metals to be stored in the Lord's treasury presumably for Tabernacle worship, for God had designated these precious metals as consecrated and holy. When Achan later sinned by keeping gold and silver from Jericho for himself (Joshua 7:21), perhaps the most severe aspect of his sin was the fact that he was technically robbing from God's treasury items dedicated to the Lord.

Daily Devotion

Rahab was labeled a harlot in her day. In the world's eyes, she appeared to be tainted—both used and unusable. However, her place in the Kingdom was special. Rahab would be part of God's orchestrated plan for redemption. The woman who deserved a scarlet letter, instead lowered a scarlet cord and was saved along with her household.

The beautiful thing to note about this story is that God saw fit to save His most precious jewels—Rahab included. The people of that day tried to steal and devalue what meant so much to the Savior. He saw beauty in what was branded as broken, and He consecrated it unto Himself. He looked past her past and saw the rare gem she would become. What others see as worthless, God may already be setting aside for a greater purpose, even if the story does not make sense in the present.

Reflection and Prayer

» *What can you do to apply this principle to your life today?*

DAY 4

Joshua 6:18, 20-21

¹⁸ And ye, in any wise keep yourselves from the accursed thing, lest ye make yourselves accursed, when ye take of the accursed thing, and make the camp of Israel a curse, and trouble it.

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²⁰ So the people shouted when the priests blew with the trumpets: and it came to pass, when the people heard the sound of the trumpet, and the people shouted with a great shout, that the wall fell down flat, so that the people went up into the city, every man straight before him, and they took the city.

²¹ And they utterly destroyed all that was in the city, both man and woman, young and old, and ox, and sheep, and ass, with the edge of the sword.

Biblical Insight

The Hebrew word *herem* in verse 18 is translated “accursed” in the KJV can also be translated as “banned” or “devoted to the Lord for destruction;” in the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible, *herem* is translated to the Greek *anathema*, the same word famously found in I Corinthians 16:22. When the people shouted in verse 20, they did so before they had achieved victory, but their act of faith and worship caused the walls to come tumbling down.

Daily Devotion

Faith is a funny thing. It requires you to be fully and completely reliant on God, even when you cannot see the road ahead of you. Shouting before a victory is just not logical. It really doesn’t make much sense, but God does not always ask for sensical devotion.

We know faith to be the substance of things we hope for and the evidence of things not yet seen (Hebrews 11:1). Could we even take the text another step and add that faith is the substance of “things not heard”?

Imagine how the Israelites felt. Perhaps some wondered why in the world they were walking around the walls over and over again. And even more so, why were they causing so much racket? The reality is that God knew the victory was on the way, even when they did not. He also knew how they would achieve that success. Their obedience opened the door to triumph.

Praising in advance may feel unorthodox, but putting volume behind your faith may be exactly what God is waiting on. Speak to that situation. Shout *before* the victory. The walls are ready to fall!

Reflection and Prayer

» *What can you do to apply this principle to your life today?*

DAY 5

Joshua 6:22-25

- ²² But Joshua had said unto the two men that had spied out the country, Go into the harlot's house, and bring out thence the woman, and all that she hath, as ye sware unto her.
- ²³ And the young men that were spies went in, and brought out Rahab, and her father, and her mother, and her brethren, and all that she had; and they brought out all her kindred, and left them without the camp of Israel.
- ²⁴ And they burnt the city with fire, and all that was therein: only the silver, and the gold, and the vessels of brass and of iron, they put into the treasury of the house of the LORD.
- ²⁵ And Joshua saved Rahab the harlot alive, and her father's household, and all that she had; and she dwelleth in Israel even unto this day; because she hid the messengers, which Joshua sent to spy out Jericho.

Biblical Insight

Because of her simple act of faith, Rahab and her family were saved from destruction; Rahab's devotion to God had a positive impact to save her entire family. Furthermore, they were also fully incorporated into the nation of Israel, where they lived out their days. In His grand foreknowledge, God also knew Rahab's protection would be significant for Israel, as she would become King David's great-great-grandmother. Furthermore, she is eternally significant as she is one of the few women mentioned in the genealogy of Jesus in Matthew 1:5. Her faithfulness is also recorded in Hebrews 11:31.

Daily Devotion

Rahab was making her way through the market on that dry, desert day. She was used to the whispers and dirty looks she would get from the townspeople. She had learned to tune out their banter and their raised eyebrows. She did not have the greatest reputation, but she was trying her best to turn her life around. She knew she was made for more.

When she encountered the spies that afternoon, she knew, even though it put her family at risk, that she had to help. So she did. She nervously hid the men, and that became a turning point for her. Her story shifted, and now her lineage would birth the Messiah. Rahab did not let the labels placed upon her by society dictate her future. She stood scarlet-cord strong and through her obedience and decisions, the world would never be the same.

How has the world attempted to brand you? You have the choice to follow Jesus, even if those around you believe you are not worthy of the call. Take some time to pray today and allow God to strengthen you in the call He has placed on your life to follow Him.

Reflection and Prayer

» *What can you do to apply this principle to your life today?*

2.4

AS FOR ME AND MY HOUSE

TRUTH ABOUT GOD

God wants us to remain firmly committed to Him.

TRUTH FOR MY LIFE

Despite past victories, I must continually commit myself to the Lord.



FOCUS VERSE: Joshua 24:15

And if it seem evil unto you to serve the LORD, choose you this day whom ye will serve; whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the flood, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land ye dwell: but as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD.

LESSON TEXT: Joshua 24:1-24



Lesson Title: As for Me and My House

Icebreaker: Have you ever lost a competition you just knew you were going to win?

I. JOSHUA SUMMONED THE ISRAELITES

- A. Joshua Told of God's Blessings to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob
 - » *Why is it important to remember and share our testimony of God's faithfulness?*
- B. Joshua Recounted the Miracle of the Exodus and Reminded the People of Their Victories
 - » *What are some dangers for people who have not experienced struggles and challenges in life?*
- C. We Must Always Hold On to the Testimony God Has Given Us

II. JOSHUA OFFERED A NEW CHALLENGE

- A. Joshua Commanded the Israelites to Get Rid of Their Idols
 - » *What are some present-day idols that hinder people from completely serving God?*
- B. Joshua Challenged the People to Serve the Lord
 - » *Is it easier to choose God when the rest of the group is choosing Him?*
- C. Joshua Made a Commitment That He and His Family Would Serve the Lord
- D. Despite Past Victories, We Must Continually Commit Ourselves to the Lord
 - » *How can we balance the celebration of past victories with maintaining a laser focus on future battles?*

Prayer Focus

- Pray for God to forgive you if you have any idols in your life
- Pray for God to help you finish strong in your faith

BIBLICAL OVERVIEW

Lesson Text: Joshua 24:1-24

Joshua's recollection of Israel's history and ultimate challenge in Joshua 24 is best viewed in the context of Joshua's life and the events of the Book of Joshua. The reader has observed that God dried up the Jordan river (Joshua 3), tore down Jericho with a march and a shout (Joshua 6), and caused the sun to stand still while hailstones rained down on Israel's enemies (Joshua 10). Moreover, Joshua was the only Israelite currently living who remembered the time before the forty years in the wilderness. He clearly remembered the consequence of not choosing to serve the Lord and trust His provision. Joshua could appreciate the promised land because he had waited forty years to enter it. Joshua was deeply invested in making sure Israel did not make those same mistakes again. Joshua's words in Joshua 24 carry the weight of a lifetime of conviction and perspective.

Joshua's challenge to "choose you this day whom ye will serve" (verse 15) contrasts his later warning that "ye cannot serve the LORD" (verse 19). Joshua's warning seems to be a challenge of their hasty reply, or perhaps a questioning of their understanding or ability. Joshua also wanted to help them understand exactly what their promise meant. As a "holy God," the Lord was elevated far above the inferior gods of the pagans; as a "jealous God," the Lord would not stand to be served behind or alongside those false gods.

The statement that God would "not forgive" is not so much a statement of salvation as it is a recognition of the incompatibility of God's nature with human sin and rebellion. Obviously, God does forgive and is patient with humanity, as the entire Old Testament aptly demonstrates. The sin that God would not forgive is described in verse 20: unrepentant sin that chooses the gods of this world over the one true God.

JOSHUA WAS THE ONLY ISRAELITE
CURRENTLY LIVING WHO REMEMBERED
THE TIME BEFORE THE FORTY YEARS IN
THE WILDERNESS.

DAY 1

Joshua 24:1-4

- ¹ And Joshua gathered all the tribes of Israel to Shechem, and called for the elders of Israel, and for their heads, and for their judges, and for their officers; and they presented themselves before God.
- ² And Joshua said unto all the people, Thus saith the LORD God of Israel, Your fathers dwelt on the other side of the flood in old time, even Terah, the father of Abraham, and the father of Nachor: and they served other gods.
- ³ And I took your father Abraham from the other side of the flood, and led him throughout all the land of Canaan, and multiplied his seed, and gave him Isaac.
- ⁴ And I gave unto Isaac Jacob and Esau: and I gave unto Esau mount Seir, to possess it; but Jacob and his children went down into Egypt.

Biblical Insight

The location of Shechem was significant symbolically. Shechem was also where God promised Abraham that his offspring would possess the land. By revisiting this place, Joshua reflected the promise's fulfillment by renewing the covenant and building a memorial. By beginning the recollection with Terah, who served other gods, Joshua reminded the people of how far God had brought them. Because God had mercy on and blessed Abraham, they had not suffered the same fate as other pagan countries who served other gods. The mention of Terah reminds Israel where they could have been except for God's grace!

Daily Devotion

On a trip to Greece, after touring the ancient remains of the city, the jetlag was pretty fierce for a tourist. She sat in the hotel room listening to the noisy passersby outside the window. Suddenly three words stood out above the chatter as a tour guide proclaimed of the city: "We celebrate ruins."

Ruin is a visible testament to what was, what could be, and what can be built upon. A fitting verse from Proverbs reminds, "Remove not the ancient landmark, which thy fathers have set" (Proverbs 22:28). There is something to be said of the strength of things that get knocked down but still teach valuable lessons.

We celebrate ruins because they serve as a monument to what we once were and what we can become. He is a God of restoration and a God who makes all things new. Sometimes He has to take us back to those original landmarks to remind us of His grace and promises. Write out a prayer of thanksgiving for how God has kept you through difficulty.

Reflection and Prayer

» *What can you do to apply this principle to your life today?*

DAY 2

Joshua 24:5-13

- ⁵ I sent Moses also and Aaron, and I plagued Egypt, according to that which I did among them: and afterward I brought you out.
- ⁶ And I brought your fathers out of Egypt: and ye came unto the sea; and the Egyptians pursued after your fathers with chariots and horsemen unto the Red sea.
- ⁷ And when they cried unto the Lord, he put darkness between you and the Egyptians, and brought the sea upon them, and covered them; and your eyes have seen what I have done in Egypt: and ye dwelt in the wilderness a long season.
- ⁸ And I brought you into the land of the Amorites, which dwelt on the other side Jordan; and they fought with you: and I gave them into your hand, that ye might possess their land; and I destroyed them from before you.
- ⁹ Then Balak the son of Zippor, king of Moab, arose and warred against Israel, and sent and called Balaam the son of Beor to curse you:
- ¹⁰ but I would not hearken unto Balaam; therefore he blessed you still: so I delivered you out of his hand.
- ¹¹ And ye went over Jordan, and came unto Jericho: and the men of Jericho fought against you, the Amorites, and the Perizzites, and the Canaanites, and the Hittites, and the Girgashites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites; and I delivered them into your hand.
- ¹² And I sent the hornet before you, which drave them out from before you, even the two kings of the Amorites; but not with thy sword, nor with thy bow.
- ¹³ And I have given you a land for which ye did not labour, and cities which ye built not, and ye dwell in them; of the vineyards and oliveyards which ye planted not do ye eat.

Biblical Insight

The many stories of God's deliverance of Israel serves as a foundation for the later covenant that Joshua would require of them. By defeating the nations of Egypt, Jericho, and many other nations, God demonstrated the inferiority of their gods and His superior status as the only true God. God not only drove out their enemies through physical might, but also by hornets, a fulfillment of promises made in Exodus 23:28 and Deuteronomy 7:20. God demonstrated His ability to defeat their enemies in multiple ways and provide the Israelites with blessings and prosperity they did not earn (see verse 13).

Daily Devotion

God often works in ways we could not come up with. He has a unique way of getting His point across. Often the way we think He should defeat our enemies is not the way He actually does. Trusting Him to fight our battles in every circumstance is the best way to live.

Consider his use of the hornet. Who knew tiny, winged creatures could be a weapon for battle? Were we choosing a battle plan, we likely would have plotted artillery and massive armies. He chose not to use great beasts, or great armies. His method was lesser, calculated, perfect, and effective.

God often uses what is small and despised to bring about great victories. What battle are you facing today? Give it to the Lord and watch Him work in ways you never thought possible. The fight belongs to Him. Trust Him completely and watch your enemies and your worries scatter. God's got this, friend, even if He has to send in the hornets!

DAY 3

Joshua 24:14–15

- ¹⁴ Now therefore fear the LORD, and serve him in sincerity and in truth: and put away the gods which your fathers served on the other side of the flood, and in Egypt; and serve ye the LORD.
- ¹⁵ And if it seem evil unto you to serve the LORD, choose you this day whom ye will serve; whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the flood, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land ye dwell: but as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD.

Biblical Insight

Verses 14 and 15 are the climax from the buildup of the previous thirteen verses, and even of the previous 23 chapters. The Israelites were instructed to put away other gods because they were inferior. Only God could perform the many incredible feats recorded in the Book of Joshua. But even though the case has been made, God is not dictator; the Israelites would have to choose God for themselves. Joshua, as a good leader of Israel, positioned himself and his family as an example for Israel to follow.

Daily Devotion

You have probably heard it said that God is a gentleman. Though He relentlessly pursues, He will never force Himself into anyone's life. He longs for communion and relationship with His children, but He allows each of us to make the choice as to which direction we will go with our lives.

The children of Israel were sustained in many ways, in many seasons. They had experienced divine deliverance. They had seen God move on their behalf and work in mighty ways, yet many still walked a different direction. He shows Himself faithful in every situation. His track record is one that we can depend on. Yet still, He presents us with the choice—choose you this day whom you will serve. It seems like a no-brainer, but He still calls us to make the decision. What and whom will you choose to follow and devote your life to?

Reflection and Prayer

» *What can you do to apply this principle to your life today?*

DAY 4

Joshua 24:16-21

- ¹⁶ And the people answered and said, God forbid that we should forsake the LORD, to serve other gods;
- ¹⁷ for the LORD our God, he it is that brought us up and our fathers out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage, and which did those great signs in our sight, and preserved us in all the way wherein we went, and among all the people through whom we passed:
- ¹⁸ and the LORD drave out from before us all the people, even the Amorites which dwelt in the land: therefore will we also serve the LORD; for he is our God.
- ¹⁹ And Joshua said unto the people, Ye cannot serve the LORD: for he is an holy God; he is a jealous God; he will not forgive your transgressions nor your sins.
- ²⁰ If ye forsake the LORD, and serve strange gods, then he will turn and do you hurt, and consume you, after that he hath done you good.
- ²¹ And the people said unto Joshua, Nay; but we will serve the LORD.

Biblical Insight

The Israelites verbally confessed what God had done for them. They affirmed they would also serve the Lord, aligning themselves with previous faithful generations who had chosen to serve God. Joshua’s challenge in verses 19-20 sheds light on God’s covenantal nature. Joshua’s implication was that they could not serve God by their own ability. Furthermore, if the Israelites were to break their end of the covenant, they would suffer punishment. Even though God was the obvious choice, Joshua wanted to be sure they did not enter into this covenant casually.

Daily Devotion

The word *surrender* is defined as the act of yielding something to the possession or power of another. It is giving up, abandoning, or relinquishing oneself. In theory, most people view this act as a sign of weakness. Those who cannot handle the battle any longer give up because they realize they cannot take another step or continue without assistance. Completely surrendering is difficult to say the least. It requires brokenness, trust, bravery—and most important—a strength most people do not know they have or perhaps keep locked away.

In Acts 5 Ananias and Sapphira lied and said they gave their all, but in reality, they retained just a small portion of their wealth, and it ended up costing them their lives. What you are preserving for yourself might be what is costing you the furtherance of your ministry, or moving forward with the rest of your life. He wants all of you. In the space below, write out your personal vow to serve the Lord.

Reflection and Prayer

» *What can you do to apply this principle to your life today?*

DAY 5

Joshua 24:22-24

²² And Joshua said unto the people, Ye are witnesses against yourselves that ye have chosen you the LORD, to serve him. And they said, We are witnesses.

²³ Now therefore put away, said he, the strange gods which are among you, and incline your heart unto the LORD God of Israel.

²⁴ And the people said unto Joshua, The LORD our God will we serve, and his voice will we obey.

Biblical Insight

In Bible times the act of bearing witness against yourself indicated that your own statements could later be used to hold you accountable. The children of Israel's words could be used against them, as in a court of law, when considering if they actually had been obedient to God. Joshua thus gave a two-fold instruction for how to partake in the covenant: put away the foreign gods in their midst. This gave the implication that they were still not yet completely purged of all paganism. Sadly, this commitment was not permanent; the Israelites would have to put away the strange gods again in Judges 10:16 and I Samuel 7:3.

Daily Devotion

Choices, by their very nature, imply not only selecting one thing, but also not preferring another. If you pick a red car, you are forgoing all the other colors of vehicles. When you marry your spouse, you are intrinsically deciding not to wed someone else. Contrary to popular belief, you cannot have your cake and eat it too. You have to choose.

When it comes to serving the Lord, you cannot have the best of both worlds. When you decide to follow Him, you are deciding to forsake all other ways of life wholeheartedly and completely serve the Savior. When you choose to follow Him, you are required to put away the former life and things of the world and surrender to His ways. It is more than a fair trade though; a life surrendered to Him is the best and most rewarding way to live. Choose you this day whom you will serve. A life lived for God brings the promise of Heaven and eternity with Him.

Reflection and Prayer

» *What can you do to apply this principle to your life today?*

3.1

WHO BELONGS?

TRUTH ABOUT GOD

God loves and cares for those whom the world overlooks.

TRUTH FOR MY LIFE

I will look for ways to lovingly serve those who are hurting.



FOCUS VERSES: Mark 10:45

For even the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many.

LESSON TEXT: Mark 10:13-22, 41-52



Lesson Title: Who Belongs?

Icebreaker: If you could only speak one last word to your family or friends, what would it be?

I. JESUS' MINISTRY SHOWED THAT HE CARED FOR EVERYONE

A. The Young, the Rich, and the Blind

- » *In what ways can we show love and care for children, particularly those who are not part of our own family?*
- » *Do you feel jealous or insecure when other people excel in areas where you struggle? How can you change those feelings?*

B. I Will Show God's Love to Everyone I Meet

- » *How can we increase our sensitivity to the needs of others, including their spiritual needs?*

II. JESUS' MINISTRY SHOWED THAT HIS HEART WAS SET ON SERVING OTHERS

A. Jesus Ministered Out of Love

B. Some People Rejected Jesus' Love

C. Jesus Called His Disciples to Show Love through Service

- » *If you stood before Jesus today, would He consider you a sheep or a goat? If you feel more like a goat than a sheep, what can you do to change that?*

D. I Will Look for Ways to Lovingly Serve Those Who Are Hurting

- » *What resources or skills can you use to minister to someone in need this week?*

Prayer Focus

- Pray for God to help you see the needs of others even above your own
- Pray for God to use you to meet others' needs

BIBLICAL OVERVIEW

Lesson Text: Mark 10:13–22, 41–52

Jesus Christ consistently loved, valued, and served those the world overlooked. Many stories highlight this fact across a broad spectrum of society: children (Mark 10:13–16), who were seen as an annoyance by the disciples, who tried to prohibit them from coming to Jesus; a rich young ruler (Mark 10:17–22), whose status and wealth would have isolated him from mainstream society; and Bartimaeus (Mark 10:46–52), a blind beggar whose cries caught Jesus' ears.

A key word in this passage is the Greek *diakonos*, which appears in verse 43 as “minister” and literally means a servant. The verb form of this word, *diakoneo*, is found twice in verse 45. This same word is found in Acts 6:2 to describe the ministry of the seven appointed to wait tables. Jesus described His servanthood in the same language as that of a food distributor. Jesus reclaimed this concept and used it to describe how one might aspire to greatness by His metrics: by waiting on others.

Another interesting word in this passage is *epitimao*. In the KJV, this Greek word is translated “rebuked” in verse 13 and “charged” in verse 47, but both instances carry the same weight of meaning. In both cases those in a position of authority who claimed to be following Jesus rebuked or scolded those they deemed to be inferior, presuming Jesus would not have time or interest for them. By making such a presumption, they indicated how fully they had missed Jesus' message of love and care for the “least of these” (Matthew 25:40). While they were supposed to be following and learning from Jesus, He was the only one who saw and cared for marginalized people. The writer of Mark further noted that Jesus loved the marginalized on both ends of the spectrum, from the poor blind beggars to the rich rulers (Mark 10:21). His compassion could not be limited, demonstrating that He was a “servant of all” (Mark 10:44).

JESUS CHRIST CONSISTENTLY LOVED,
VALUED, AND SERVED THOSE THE WORLD
OVERLOOKED.

DAY 1

Mark 10:13–16

- ¹³ And they brought young children to him, that he should touch them: and his disciples rebuked those that brought them.
- ¹⁴ But when Jesus saw it, he was much displeased, and said unto them, Suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not: for of such is the kingdom of God.
- ¹⁵ Verily I say unto you, Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child, he shall not enter therein.
- ¹⁶ And he took them up in his arms, put his hands upon them, and blessed them.

Biblical Insight

In Matthew, Mark, and Luke, the story of the little children brought to Jesus immediately precedes the story of the rich young ruler. The order of these stories contrasted the children's approach and the ruler's. Jesus said the manner in which the children came to Him was a prescription for how others should approach Him as well. This could mean the simplicity and innocence with which they approached, the fact that they approached with no presumptions or possessions weighing them down, or some other combination of factors. Whatever Jesus meant, the rich young ruler clearly did not follow the prescription.

Daily Devotion

Have you ever witnessed a child's first steps? The brain science behind the movement of walking is fascinating. And yet for the toddler, the process is awkward and tentative—a fumbling of arms and legs with inevitably some falls along the way. Still the child is motivated to walk by the person they are moving toward and the joy of the journey. Toddlers risk falling and reach toward an estatic parent's welcoming arms.

We come to Jesus, longing for His reach toward us to welcome us in. Making our way toward Him in this childlike manner shows our dependence on Him. A child, no matter how they get to their caregiver, does so with intention. Sometimes they crawl, sometimes they run, but they always do so with the belief that they will be welcomed and loved.

How do you approach the Father? Do you have childlike, first-steps faith? Or are you clinging tightly to riches that will fade? Write a prayer in the space below to God about why you need Him and how you depend upon Him.

Reflection and Prayer

» *What can you do to apply this principle to your life today?*

DAY 2

Mark 10:17-22

- ¹⁷ And when he was gone forth into the way, there came one running, and kneeled to him, and asked him, Good Master, what shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?
- ¹⁸ And Jesus said unto him, Why callest thou me good? there is none good but one, that is, God.
- ¹⁹ Thou knowest the commandments, Do not commit adultery, Do not kill, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Defraud not, Honour thy father and mother.
- ²⁰ And he answered and said unto him, Master, all these have I observed from my youth.
- ²¹ Then Jesus beholding him loved him, and said unto him, One thing thou lackest: go thy way, sell whatsoever thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come, take up the cross, and follow me.
- ²² And he was sad at that saying, and went away grieved: for he had great possessions.

Biblical Insight

Consider Mark’s record: “Jesus beholding him loved him.” The writer did not take these two facts for granted, but specifically recorded that Jesus also loved the rich young ruler. The Greek word translated “beholding” carries the semantic range of gazing intently upon or considering. Jesus saw not the rich young ruler but his thoughts and intentions. More than that, Jesus loved him. Nothing Jesus said to him was motivated by anything other than love or concern. Jesus loved the rich young ruler just as he loved the children in the preceding story.

Daily Devotion

Just as Jesus suffered and died on a cross for the loftiest of saints, He also died for the rich young ruler—the selfish man who seems to have fallen just out of reach. Though the man seemed to possess all he could desire, an emptiness existed.

The uninhibited, unabashed love the Father shows is the perfect picture of grace. The rich young ruler did not deserve it, but then again, neither does the child whose biggest sin is sneaking a cookie after his mom said no. It is easy to look at the two aforementioned stories and surmise that Jesus loved one more than the other. That’s not so. His love for His children is equal, because though we are all different, we are all precisely that—His children. We are all still learning and still growing. He tells us to approach Him with the innocence and faith of a child, but even when we do not, His love does not waiver. Whatever place you find yourself in—know that there is love, forgiveness and acceptance awaiting you.

Reflection and Prayer

» *What can you do to apply this principle to your life today?*

DAY 3

Mark 10:41-44

- ⁴¹ And when the ten heard it, they began to be much displeased with James and John.
- ⁴² But Jesus called them to him, and saith unto them, Ye know that they which are accounted to rule over the Gentiles exercise lordship over them; and their great ones exercise authority upon them.
- ⁴³ But so shall it not be among you: but whosoever will be great among you, shall be your minister:
- ⁴⁴ and whosoever of you will be the chiefest, shall be servant of all.

Biblical Insight

By seeking to be the greatest through positions of authority, the disciples acted like the Gentiles (unbelievers), and not like Christ-followers. Heathens ruled and lorded over subjects, while Christ-followers were and are called to minister and serve. The word translated “minister” in verse 43 is from the Greek word *diakonos*, which is more commonly translated servant. Additionally, the word translated “servant” in verse 44 is from the Greek word *doulos*, more commonly translated slave. Both of these descriptions necessarily entail submitting to and serving others, a concept opposite of Gentile leadership and even contrary to human instinct. The escalating nature of the two descriptions indicated that increased greatness in God’s kingdom only came by increased servanthood.

Daily Devotion

Jesus was and is the absolutely faultless example of how we are to live our lives. He was the mightiest of Kings, yet He made Himself small. He came to earth in the humblest of circumstances, while still being the holiest.

He could have commanded people left and right to succumb to His every request, but He did not. He chose servitude, and He carried it all the way to the cross. He washed the feet of His disciples. He fed the hungry. He visited widows, orphans, and sinners. He got His hands dirty. He stepped right into the messy and chaotic. The suffering servant was royalty, yet His greatest ambition was to save His people and to meet their needs. Servitude is our highest calling, one that He showed us from the very beginning. It is not about titles, accolades, or platforms. The greatest vocation you have is to serve.

List below the ways you serve your family, church, and community. Pray over the list this week and ask God if you should make any changes.

Reflection and Prayer

» *What can you do to apply this principle to your life today?*

DAY 4

Mark 10:45

For even the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many.

Biblical Insight

Instead of mimicking Gentile leadership, Jesus Christ offered His own example as a pattern to follow. The Greek root word *diakoneo* appears twice, the verb form of *diakonos* used in verse 43; Jesus did not become incarnate to be the recipient of service, but instead to serve others. Moreover, Jesus would “give his life a ransom for many.” He indicated that, to compensate for the guilt of His people, He would offer Himself as the purchase price or ransom for their freedom. These words allude to the messianic prophecy in Isaiah 53:10-11, where the author noted that by making “his soul an offering for sin,” the “righteous servant” shall “justify many.”

Daily Devotion

Many have depicted what that Calvary day might have been like. Easter plays, movies, and other renderings—as well appointed as they may be—can never truly illustrate what it was like. As they hit Jesus, scourged Him, mocked and falsely accused Him, He stayed there, on the cross we deserved. It was slow, and it was agonizing, but the Father gave His own life. He became the suffering servant and example of true love.

That’s an example of servitude. It is giving when it does not make sense. It is emptying ourselves to help others. Our greatest calling is to serve. When we cross Heaven’s threshold we will not hear the words, “Well done, thou good and faithful musician, businessman, evangelist, or soloist.” We will hear the words, “Well done, thou good and faithful servant.”

Reflection and Prayer

» *What can you do to apply this principle to your life today?*

DAY 5

Mark 10:46-52

- ⁴⁶ And they came to Jericho: and as he went out of Jericho with his disciples and a great number of people, blind Bartimæus, the son of Timæus, sat by the highway side begging.
- ⁴⁷ And when he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to cry out, and say, Jesus, thou Son of David, have mercy on me.
- ⁴⁸ And many charged him that he should hold his peace: but he cried the more a great deal, Thou Son of David, have mercy on me.
- ⁴⁹ And Jesus stood still, and commanded him to be called. And they call the blind man, saying unto him, Be of good comfort, rise; he calleth thee.
- ⁵⁰ And he, casting away his garment, rose, and came to Jesus.
- ⁵¹ And Jesus answered and said unto him, What wilt thou that I should do unto thee? The blind man said unto him, Lord, that I might receive my sight.
- ⁵² And Jesus said unto him, Go thy way; thy faith hath made thee whole. And immediately he received his sight, and followed Jesus in the way.

Biblical Insight

Jesus' self-description in verse 45 is immediately followed by an example of His servanthood. Bartimaeus was blind and destitute, rendering him one of the most helpless and overlooked within society. His perception by the general populace is evident by their immediate chastising for his cries. By the standards of the Gentiles as just described in verse 42, Bartimaeus had no place to speak to Jesus. However, being the ultimate "servant of all" (verse 44), Jesus served even Bartimaeus. Interestingly, nobody in the crowd following Jesus paid Bartimaeus any mind except Jesus Himself. If they were truly following (imitating) Him, they would have been concerned about those Jesus focused on serving.

Daily Devotion

The old saying that used to be on wristbands and T-shirts is still relevant today. "WWJD" or "What Would Jesus Do?" is catchy and still relevant. When you see the homeless man begging for food or a blanket, "What would Jesus do?" When you see someone in need and have the capacity to help, "What would Jesus do?" When you pass someone like blind Bartimaeus, think about how Jesus would react.

None of us are perfect, and we cannot possibly help every human who crosses our path. However, do what is in your power when you are able. Say a prayer for those in need as you pass. Reach out to a neighbor or family member you know is in need. Pray and ask God to order your steps and direct you to someone you can help. Being a servant can look like all sorts of things. Let the Lord lead you in every situation, and you can make a difference.

Reflection and Prayer

» *What can you do to apply this principle to your life today?*

3.2

KINGDOM VALUES

TRUTH ABOUT GOD

God's kingdom is about giving and serving, not buying and having.

TRUTH FOR MY LIFE

I will put God first in my life.



FOCUS VERSES: Mark 10:21-22

²¹ Then Jesus beholding him loved him, and said unto him, One thing thou lackest: go thy way, sell whatsoever thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come, take up the cross, and follow me.

²² And he was sad at that saying, and went away grieved: for he had great possessions.

LESSON TEXT: Mark 10:17-31



Lesson Title: Kingdom Values

Icebreaker: What is your most prized possession?

I. THE RICH YOUNG RULER

A. Eternal Life and the One Thing You Lack

» *How is understanding Jesus' identity connected to obeying His commands?*

B. The Young Man Rejected Jesus' Directions

» *Why do you think the lure of wealth is such a powerful temptation? In what ways does material wealth serve as an idol?*

C. I Must Heed Jesus' Call to Total Surrender

» *What gifts do you think God wants to give you? Is anything keeping you from receiving what He wants to give?*

II. JESUS' CALL TO RADICAL SELFLESSNESS

A. The Danger of Trust in Riches and Our Need of the Spirit

» *In what ways can material wealth blind us to our need for God?*

B. Importance of the Kingdom and Its Rewards

C. I Will Put God First in My Life

» *What does putting Jesus first in your life look like?*

Prayer Focus

- Pray that God's Word would point out the areas you need to fully surrender to the Lord
- Pray that your words and desires would please the Lord

BIBLICAL OVERVIEW

Lesson Text: Mark 10:17–31

When the rich young ruler called Jesus “Good Master,” Jesus did not correct the young man; He simply stated there was none good but God. When Jesus quoted the commandments found in Exodus 20:12–16 and Deuteronomy 5:16–20 to the rich young ruler, the young man was quick to insist he had carefully followed all of them. His insistence of his own goodness carries an ultimate irony when we consider that the rich young ruler was indeed speaking to God in the flesh. The rich young ruler tried to uphold His own righteousness before Christ while simultaneously refusing to do the things Christ asked. The young man had a familiarity of the commandments without true relationship with God or knowledge of God’s heart. The rich young ruler proved his trust was not in God but self when he walked away from Jesus, choosing his wealth (and symbolically his own means and abilities) over following Christ and His commandments.

A common misconception of this passage is that Jesus was directly condemning being rich. However, the greater context of Scripture does not support this argument. The New Testament church contained many affluent Christians. However, well-off, land-owning Christians such as Joseph called Barnabas (Acts 4:36–37), Lydia (Acts 16:13–15, 40), and Philemon had learned how to have possessions and yet not trust in them, but rather use them for the betterment of the church.

Jesus’ response in verse 27 to the disciples’ question in verse 26 serves as an important insight to Jesus’ meaning. Salvation is impossible when we attempt to acquire it on our own. Salvation is achievable only when God acquires it on our behalf. The focus, therefore, is not on our ability but God’s. A recognition of our limitation should instill humility; however, a reliance on self results in arrogance, as the rich young ruler demonstrated.

THE RICH YOUNG RULER TRIED TO UPHOLD
HIS OWN RIGHTEOUSNESS BEFORE CHRIST
WHILE SIMULTANEOUSLY REFUSING TO DO
THE THINGS CHRIST ASKED.

DAY 1

Mark 10:17–20

- ¹⁷ And when he was gone forth into the way, there came one running, and kneeled to him, and asked him, Good Master, what shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?
- ¹⁸ And Jesus said unto him, Why callest thou me good? there is none good but one, that is, God.
- ¹⁹ Thou knowest the commandments, Do not commit adultery, Do not kill, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Defraud not, Honour thy father and mother.
- ²⁰ And he answered and said unto him, Master, all these have I observed from my youth.

Biblical Insight

Jesus' comment on the rich young ruler's usage of the word *good* is not a statement of self-degradation but a challenge of the young man's flippant usage of "good." The young ruler proudly boasted that he had followed all the commandments since he was a child; he clearly believed he was a good person. Perhaps his question was designed to show off in front of the crowds following Jesus. However, Jesus reminded him no one was good but God; as good as the rich young ruler thought he was, he still could not attain to complete goodness, which is only true of God Himself.

Daily Devotion

Children are taught at an early age to be good and follow rules. They are innocent and small, but no matter how sweet they may seem, each is born with an innate sin nature. They are taught what is right and wrong, but they—like we all have—will inevitably fall at some point. Romans 7:19 reminds us all that we are flesh (fallible humans) and have to keep striving for redemption daily: "For the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do"

In His infinite wisdom, God shows us what it means to be truly good. He was tempted in every earthly fashion yet overcame every one of those temptations. He is the definition of good. Do not be disheartened. He understands our nature and loves us all in spite of it. We can all rise to the challenge, but we will never be completely good until we reach the one who defines goodness.

Reflection and Prayer

» *What can you do to apply this principle to your life today?*

DAY 2

Mark 10:21-22

- ²¹ Then Jesus beholding him loved him, and said unto him, One thing thou lackest: go thy way, sell whatsoever thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come, take up the cross, and follow me.
- ²² And he was sad at that saying, and went away grieved: for he had great possessions.

Biblical Insight

Consider Mark’s record: “Jesus beholding him loved him.” The writer did not take these two facts for granted, but specifically recorded that Jesus also loved the rich young ruler. The Greek word translated “beholding” carries the semantic range of gazing intently upon or considering. Jesus saw not the rich young ruler but his thoughts and intentions. More than that, Jesus loved him. Nothing Jesus said to him was motivated by anything other than love or concern. Jesus loved the rich young ruler just as he loved the children in the preceding story.

Daily Devotion

If you have been around long enough, you have probably attended your fair share of funerals throughout the years. Of all the memorials and burials you have witnessed, you probably have never once witnessed a hearse followed by a moving truck. We simply do not take material things with us when we leave this world.

When we breathe your last, we leave all our belongings here on earth along with that final breath. The saying that “whoever dies with the most toys wins,” could not be further from the truth. Our earthly possessions account for nothing when it comes to eternity. When we come face to face with our Savior, He will not ask us how much money we had in our bank account, how large our house was, or what kind of car we drove. He will remember the lives we changed, the souls we led to Him, and the way we lived our lives. There is nothing wrong with having nice things, but that should not be our eternal focus.

Take some time to reflect for a few moments. What kind of legacy are you going to leave behind someday?

Reflection and Prayer

» *What can you do to apply this principle to your life today?*

DAY 3

Mark 10:23-25

- ²³ And Jesus looked round about, and saith unto his disciples, How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of God!
- ²⁴ And the disciples were astonished at his words. But Jesus answereth again, and saith unto them, Children, how hard is it for them that trust in riches to enter into the kingdom of God!
- ²⁵ It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God.

Biblical Insight

Jesus reiterated a point in verses 23 and 24 to help demonstrate the difficulty of entering God's kingdom if one is consumed with material wealth. It seems Jesus needed to explain His statement to the disciples a second time, perhaps because they assumed that people with wealth were inherently good people. Notice Jesus' patience in addressing them a second time as His "children." As was often the case in Jesus' teachings, His followers could not process His sometimes counter-intuitive statements, but in this instance He gently elaborated to help them understand Kingdom truths.

Daily Devotion

Trusting in people is difficult, but can you imagine putting that same sort of confidence in inanimate possessions such as cars, houses, or money? Of course, those belongings will never talk down to you or hurt you physically. But inevitably, they will let you down.

Trusting in riches is like trusting in sand; it will shift whichever way the wind does. Putting your reliance in Jesus is the only way to be sustained. He will never let you down. He is the same God He was when the world was framed. He is the same God who parted the seas. When He hung on the cross and proclaimed, "It is finished," He meant that. You do not have to search anymore. You don't have to put your hope in things that fade. He has never failed, and is still taking care of you.

In the space below, draw a line down the middle to create two columns with the headings: "Material Things I Tend to Trust" and "The Promises of God." Jot down things you turn to when you feel you need help (e.g., food, money, friends, and so on). While some or even all of these things may be perfectly fine to lean on, note in the other column the steadfast promises of help God offers that never fail.

Reflection and Prayer

» *What can you do to apply this principle to your life today?*

DAY 4

Mark 10:26–28

- 26 And they were astonished out of measure, saying among themselves, Who then can be saved?
- 27 And Jesus looking upon them saith, With men it is impossible, but not with God: for with God all things are possible.
- 28 Then Peter began to say unto him, Lo, we have left all, and have followed thee.

Biblical Insight

The disciples’ question “Who then can be saved?” mirrored the rich young ruler’s question. Clearly Jesus’ response did not satisfy the question in their mind. Their question should be seen not only as a response to Jesus’ statement about the rich but also Jesus’ evaluation of the rich young ruler. After all, if someone who faithfully followed all the commandments couldn’t be saved by his own merit, who could? Jesus’ reply turned the impetus of salvation away from humanity and onto God; the word translated “man” in the KJV is the Greek word *anthropos*, which is the general word for humankind. Jesus was trying to communicate that humans could not save themselves; only God could.

Daily Devotion

Cruises are a lot of fun. They offer an extensive amount of activities, amenities, beautiful views, and so much food (arguably the best part of any sailing). Back in 2015, while a ship was off the coast of Mexico, a man ended up overboard around 6:00 AM. The vessel was unaware of the man’s fall, and he ended up left alone at sea. Hours later, a Disney cruise ship noticed the man bobbing in the open sea and rescued him. Though that sounds like the least expensive way to get onboard a Disney ship, experts do not recommend it.

The truth is that when we fall, we can be saved, but there is always a limit to what humans can do. When it comes to the true depravity of our souls in the scheme of eternity, no amount of lifeboats, rafts, or medication can get you to Heaven. There is one way, and it is through the Savior Himself. Whatever avenue of life you find yourself in, move toward Him. Call out to Him. He will save you—eternally, like only He can. Write a prayer of thanks today, praising God for saving you.

Reflection and Prayer

» *What can you do to apply this principle to your life today?*

DAY 5

Mark 10:29-31

- ²⁹ And Jesus answered and said, Verily I say unto you, There is no man that hath left house, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my sake, and the gospel's,
- ³⁰ but he shall receive an hundredfold now in this time, houses, and brethren, and sisters, and mothers, and children, and lands, with persecutions; and in the world to come eternal life.
- ³¹ But many that are first shall be last; and the last first.

Biblical Insight

The disciples' perceptions were reversed when Jesus reminded them of the eternal perspective of the gospel. Even if one has sacrificed for the sake of the gospel, the wealth of riches that comes with being part of the body of Christ is far greater, both in this life and eternity. Therefore, in God's economy, the rich young ruler would have been better off penniless but following Christ than having all his wealth and then some. Obviously, this concept reverses the stereotypes imposed by the world: those who are last by the world's standards will be first in God's eyes, and those who are first (such as the rich young ruler) will come last.

Daily Devotion

Trading should normally imply fairness. Kids trade lunch items for ones of equal value, like a pudding for a yogurt, or an apple for an orange. When you return an item to a store for credit, you are able to exchange it for something of equal or lesser value. Rarely will someone barter for bigger. However, a Montreal man changed the game for this concept when he traded a single, red paper clip for a two-story home. Kyle MacDonald was jobless when he decided he was ready to own a home. MacDonald posted a red paper clip online to be traded, and soon had an offer for a pen in the shape of a fish. From there, his trades increased until he landed himself a beautiful, country-side abode.

Though this is rare, it is, in essence, the way our relationship with Jesus works. We come to Him, unable to offer what He really deserves, but He allows us to trade our sins and sorrows for a mansion in glory. When you lay down what you think is worth something, you will be met with an eternity that is worth everything. It's your move.

Reflection and Prayer

» *What can you do to apply this principle to your life today?*

3.3

KINGDOM PRINCIPLES

TRUTH ABOUT GOD

God promotes those who do not promote themselves.

TRUTH FOR MY LIFE

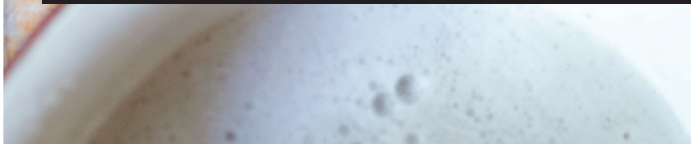
I will follow Jesus' example and serve others.



FOCUS VERSES: Mark 10:43-44

⁴³But so shall it not be among you: but whosoever will be great among you, shall be your minister:
⁴⁴and whosoever of you will be the chiefest, shall be servant of all.

LESSON TEXT: Mark 9:33-37; 10:35-45



Lesson Title: Kingdom Principles

Icebreaker: What talent do you secretly wish you had?

- I. WHO WANTS TO BE THE GREATEST?
 - » *What does popular culture teach us about greatness? Do those lessons confirm or conflict with the teachings of Jesus?*
 - A. Jesus Asked His Disciples about Their Argument
 - » *What talents or possessions have you envied in others? Why do you think you have wanted those particular gifts or blessings?*
 - B. This Is How You Receive Me
 - C. I Will Show Kindness to Others with Humility
 - » *How do you feel when others treat you like a servant?*
- II. WHO WANTS TO BE SERVANT OF ALL?
 - A. The Desire for Position
 - » *How have you felt when others were being given opportunities while you were overlooked? Did you gain a different perspective with time?*
 - B. The Greatest Will Be Servant of All
 - » *In situations where a leader abused power, how could this style of servant leadership have made a difference in the outcome?*
 - C. I Will Follow Jesus' Example and Serve Others
 - » *How can you serve someone else today?*

Prayer Focus

- Pray for God to give me a heart like His, the heart of a servant
- Pray for God to use you to serve others, especially those who cannot give back to you

BIBLICAL OVERVIEW

Lesson Text: Mark 9:33–37; 10:35–45

The order and placement of the stories in Mark 9 serve primarily to demonstrate how self-absorbed the disciples were in relationship to what Jesus was trying to teach them. Their argument in Mark 9:33–34 serves as a perfect example. At the beginning of the chapter, Jesus is transfigured on a mountaintop (Mark 9:2–8); clearly any greatness the disciples thought they had should have paled in comparison to Christ's greatness. After the disciples came off the mountaintop, they failed to cast demons out of a tortured young boy (Mark 9:17–18); how could the disciples purport greatness immediately after this embarrassing failure? After this instance, and directly before they began arguing, Jesus foretold His upcoming death and humiliation on the cross of Calvary (Mark 9:31); how could the disciples talk about greatness when Jesus was talking about submission and sacrifice?

Immediately after the disciples' argument, the disciples wanted to censor a man who cast out a demon in Jesus' name (Mark 9:38)—something they had just failed to do; how could they think about their own greatness when others were being far more effective than them, and the disciples were jealous of their success? The chapter ends with a stern warning from Jesus: "Salt is good: but if the salt have lost his saltiness, wherewith will ye season it? Have salt in yourselves, and have peace one with another" (Mark 9:50). Just like salt becomes worthless when it becomes flavorless, so the disciples had become useless through their ineffectiveness. Through their selfishness, the disciples had become Christ-followers in name only, unable to make a positive impact on the world around them.

James and John's request in Mark 10:35–37 further demonstrates the ineptitude of the disciples. Even after Jesus' continued teachings and miracles, the disciples were still concerned about their own status. Instead of acting like followers of Christ, they were acting like godless Gentiles (Mark 11:42), clambering for position and acclaim. Jesus never had to promote Himself to gain notoriety; He simply served and taught others selflessly. The only one who was perfectly a "servant of all" is also the only one who could hold the status of "chiefest" (Mark 10:44) of all.

THE ORDER AND PLACEMENT OF THE STORIES IN MARK 9 SERVE PRIMARILY TO DEMONSTRATE HOW SELF-ABSORBED THE DISCIPLES WERE IN RELATIONSHIP TO WHAT JESUS WAS TRYING TO TEACH THEM.

DAY 1

Mark 9:33-34

³³ And he came to Capernaum: and being in the house he asked them, What was it that ye disputed among yourselves by the way?

³⁴ But they held their peace: for by the way they had disputed among themselves, who should be the greatest.

Biblical Insight

The dispute among the disciples about who was the greatest is recorded in all three synoptic Gospels (Matthew 18:1-5; Luke 9:46-48). In Matthew's version, the disciples came to Jesus and asked Jesus the question directly. In Luke's version, the disciples appear to be arguing openly so Jesus could hear while not necessarily asking Jesus directly. However, Mark depicted the disciples as embarrassed that they were caught talking about the topic. A high amount of irony can be found in the fact that they had this argument right after they had just failed to cast demons out of a child (Mark 9:18).

Daily Devotion

Social media, though useful and positive in some regards, can be a hinderance. It has been proven that the mental health of some has declined due to the amount of time they spend online and the content they take in. "Keeping up with the Joneses" is nothing new. A spirit of competition rears its ugly head in many ways. Though there is nothing wrong with healthy rivalry when it comes to things such as sports and board games, when it overtakes a person, it becomes corrupt.

The disciples lapsed into unhealthy competition while discussing who was the greatest. Obviously, the answer was Jesus, whom they had walked closely with, but that was not the answer they all shared. The greatest was directly in their midst, yet they missed His fullness while looking for another.

Competition has many disastrous effects, and losing sight of Jesus is an awful consequence. Today take a moment to pray that God will help you shed any tendencies to compare yourselves to others and compete for attention. Consider your time on social media; is this influence helpful or harmful? Do you need to make any changes in your life?

Reflection and Prayer

» *What can you do to apply this principle to your life today?*

DAY 2

Mark 9:35-37

³⁵ And he sat down, and called the twelve, and saith unto them, If any man desire to be first, the same shall be last of all, and servant of all.
³⁶ And he took a child, and set him in the midst of them: and when he had taken him in his arms, he said unto them,
³⁷ Whosoever shall receive one of such children in my name, receiveth me: and whosoever shall receive me, receiveth not me, but him that sent me.

Biblical Insight

Jesus responded to their argument by endorsing them to be a “servant” (Greek: *diakonos*) of all. Jesus took a child into His lap to demonstrate His point. This child is reminiscent of the demon-possessed child a few verses earlier. If the disciples could not learn how to receive a child and be a servant and minister to the child, they had no business debating their own greatness. The disciples were called to be a servant of all but had not cared for and ministered to the demon-possessed child and his father.

Daily Devotion

Jesus demonstrated greatness in a unique way. Instead of boasting of accolades, accomplishments, or status, He shared that being the greatest essentially meant being the least. He was born a king in the most peculiar of locations. He was and is the Savior, yet He chose to get on the ground level with tax collectors and wash their feet. The cross was a form of torture and punishment reserved for the chiefest of sinners. He hung there, blameless, out of servitude and genuine love.

Humanity has a skewed view of rising to the top. Society would suggest that the higher a person climbs, the greater he or she becomes. The truth is that the most successful CEO, the most famous actor, or the richest person in the world is not the most important. There is nothing automatically wrong with accolades, monetary success, or being known. However, we are called to come to Jesus as a child, knowing we are always in need of Him and being willing to serve those around us.

Think back over the course of your life. Perhaps you can see highs and lows as life has taken twists and turns. Do you realize that you are loved by God for who you are and not what you have accomplished? Have you embraced your identity as being not superior or inferior to another based on position? Take a moment to ask God for help in seeing the value of all people.

Reflection and Prayer

» *What can you do to apply this principle to your life today?*

DAY 3

Mark 10:35–37

³⁵ And James and John, the sons of Zebedee, come unto him, saying, Master, we would that thou shouldest do for us whatsoever we shall desire.

³⁶ And he said unto them, What would ye that I should do for you?

³⁷ They said unto him, Grant unto us that we may sit, one on thy right hand, and the other on thy left hand, in thy glory.

Biblical Insight

The request of James and John parallels the argument the disciples had in Mark 9:33–34. Their request demonstrates that the focus of the disciples was still inward; they were so self-absorbed that they were oblivious to what Jesus was trying to teach them. Uniquely, both the argument in Mark 9:33–34 and the request in Mark 10:35–37 immediately follows prophecies from Jesus about His upcoming crucifixion. In both places the selfishness of the disciples is contrasted against the selflessness of Jesus. The disciples were focused on self-promotion; Jesus was focused on sacrifice.

Daily Devotion

In *Ego is the Enemy*, Ryan Holiday paints a very interesting picture of self-promotion: “Find canvases for other people to paint on. Clear the path for the people above you and you will eventually create a path for yourself.”

Putting others before yourself—according to our flesh (selfish human nature)— does not seem altogether natural, but it should. Pronounced quickly, the words *selfish* and *selfless* sound similar, and only a few letters differentiate the terms. However, their definitions are entirely different. To be selfish means to be self-focused and self-centered. As one author put it, selflessness invites the opportunity to put others before oneself and not to think less of yourself, but to think of yourself less.

It would have been easy for the sinless Savior to deny the cross. He knew He did not deserve it. Yet, He gave His disciples and all of humanity the purest and most painful example of what it means to be selfless. Take a few moments and analyze where your life falls on the scale of selfishness versus selflessness.

Reflection and Prayer

» *What can you do to apply this principle to your life today?*

DAY 4

Mark 10:38-40

- ³⁸ But Jesus said unto them, Ye know not what ye ask: can ye drink of the cup that I drink of? and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?
- ³⁹ And they said unto him, We can. And Jesus said unto them, Ye shall indeed drink of the cup that I drink of; and with the baptism that I am baptized withal shall ye be baptized:
- ⁴⁰ but to sit on my right hand and on my left hand is not mine to give; but it shall be given to them for whom it is prepared.

Biblical Insight

The confidence of the disciples in their ability to “drink of the cup” of Jesus Christ further demonstrates their arrogance and lack of understanding of Jesus’ words. These statements are contrasted against the appearance of the cup in the Garden of Gethsemane, where Jesus prayed, “Take this cup from me: nevertheless, not what I will, but what thou wilt” (Mark 14:36). While Jesus prayed, the disciples slumbered (Mark 14:37, 40); when Jesus was arrested, the disciples fled (Mark 14:50). The disciples demonstrated that they were not ready to partake of His cup at that time. However, after they were filled with the Holy Spirit, they would be ready to partake of Christ’s cup; Acts 12:2 records that James was martyred for the cause of Christ and history records similar accounts of various other disciples.

Daily Devotion

Certain societies prioritize exclusivity. Stipulations and regulations are required to belong to clubs and organizations. Outsiders cannot simply decide they want to be part of a country club association, an honors society, or whatever particular establishment or party they desire. In many instances, they have to apply, adhere to a set of standards, pay their dues, and participate in the necessary aspects of being accepted.

In contract, Jesus is no respecter of person. He loves all His children the same. As we follow Him, however, we are called to take up a cross, or pick up the cup, as it were. The disciples loved Him and followed Him extensively, but perhaps when the cup was passed to them, they were not quite ready to follow Him exclusively.

What is God calling you to lay down in order to lift up the cup? He is calling you deeper, but the journey and the agreement requires something from you.

Reflection and Prayer

» *What can you do to apply this principle to your life today?*

DAY 5

Mark 10:41-45

- ⁴¹ And when the ten heard it, they began to be much displeased with James and John.
- ⁴² But Jesus called them to him, and saith unto them, Ye know that they which are accounted to rule over the Gentiles exercise lordship over them; and their great ones exercise authority upon them.
- ⁴³ But so shall it not be among you: but whosoever will be great among you, shall be your minister:
- ⁴⁴ and whosoever of you will be the chiefest, shall be servant of all.
- ⁴⁵ For even the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many.

Biblical Insight

When the other ten disciples heard what had happened, they were upset. Even their response to James and John demonstrated the pettiness and jealousy between them. While the disciples had been embarrassed to say what they were thinking in Mark 9:34, John and James now approached Jesus with brazenness. Jesus' response here mirrors His response earlier in Mark 9:35-37. Here again Jesus admonished the disciples to learn how to be "servants of all" rather than be obsessed with status and acclaim. Once again, Jesus contrasted their selfishness with His own sacrifice. Even the concept of ransom is others-focused; Jesus' work on the cross would be redemption, the same concept of paying the price to free captives or slaves.

Daily Devotion

Often, if we are honest, our intentions actually have a way of being self-gratifying and selfish rather than something the Lord would be pleased with. David recognized this human tendency and insisted on paying a cost for a threshingfloor to sacrifice to God: "I will surely buy it of thee at a price: neither will I offer burnt offerings unto the Lord my God of that which doth cost me nothing" (II Samuel 24:24).

Altars are places we are called to lay things down before God. It is where we are supposed to bring our best, even when we feel our worst. Altars are not always fancy and ornate like some religions create them to be. Many times they are tear-stained and messy.

Serving God and others could come at a high price. You may have to sacrifice your own hopes and dreams and best laid plans, but it will always be worth it. Jesus was teaching this to His disciples in Mark chapter nine, and perhaps He is gently reminding us of it today. We are called to serve Him and His people. Ask Him today to help you with this selfless mission.

Reflection and Prayer

» *What can you do to apply this principle to your life today?*

3.4

A GOD OF JUSTICE

TRUTH ABOUT GOD

Jesus cares about the abused, particularly those who have been abused in His name.

TRUTH FOR MY LIFE

I will love and support those who have been wronged.



FOCUS VERSE: Micah 6:8

He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?

LESSON TEXT: Psalm 146:7-9; Micah 6:6-12; Mark 11:15-19



Lesson Title: A God of Justice

Icebreaker: Is God more merciful or just?

I. JUSTICE IS A BIBLICAL PRINCIPLE

A. God Is Just

» *Why do you think Jesus focused so much of His ministry on the poor and needy? What implications does that have for the church today?*

B. As God's People, We Are to Be Just

» *What does justice look like at your workplace?*

II. WHAT DOES GOD REQUIRE OF US?

A. Sacrifices Alone Are Not Sufficient

B. Do Justly, Love Mercy, Walk Humbly with God

C. I Will Offer to God What He Requires of Me

» *Make a list of blessings you have received because of someone else's sacrifices. How can you sustain that cycle of blessing?*

III. CLEANING OF THE TEMPLE

A. Jesus Discovered Corruption in the Temple and Fiercely Defended the Temple and the Innocent

B. Jesus' Call to Prayer Ensures Our Perspective about Justice Is Right

» *Why is prayer so important to the work of true justice?*

C. I Will Love and Support Those Who Have Been Wronged

» *How does remembering our past help ensure a proper perspective of God's love for others?*

Prayer Focus

- Pray for God to help you do justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with Him
- Pray for God to give you the courage to help relieve others' suffering when you are able

BIBLICAL OVERVIEW

Lesson Text: Psalm 146:7-9; Micah 6:6-12; Mark 11:15-19

Throughout all of Scripture, God demonstrated His concern for the downtrodden, abused, and neglected. The psalmists frequently cried out for justice for these oppressed groups. Psalm 146:7-9 extols the Lord God of Israel as one who displays special concern for many of these groups, including those for whom natural tragedy has come upon them (e.g., “blind,” “fatherless,” “the widow”) and those attacked by nefarious external forces (e.g., “oppressed,” “prisoners”). Regardless of the cause, God’s heart for justice burns for these groups.

The prophet Micah depicted God as one who requires His people to enact justice and love mercy even more than offer burnt offerings and thousands of animal sacrifices. As Christ phrased it, issues of justice and mercy were weightier than the other mandates in the Law (Matthew 23:23). The point was not that the other issues were not important—they were still mandated by God in the Torah—but their motivations for these actions had become corrupted; true religion would serve God with heart, word, and deed.

God’s passion for the disenfranchised was demonstrated plainly when Jesus roughly cast out the moneychangers and merchants in the Temple court in Jerusalem. Beyond mere buying and selling, Jesus would not even let anyone carry merchandise through the temple courts (Mark 11:16).

However, even Jesus’ discipline is not without an opportunity for instruction; God does not discipline without trying to communicate a positive lesson. In the midst of overturned tables and while accosting merchants, Jesus took the opportunity to begin to teach the people. Jesus first quoted Isaiah 56:7, where God spoke through the prophet that the Lord’s house should be called a house of prayer for all people. Jesus then referenced Jeremiah 7:11, “Has this house, which is called by my name, become a den of robbers in your eyes?” His admonishment was deeply scriptural, shaming the scribes and chief priests who had committed to studying the Hebrew Bible and knew better than to allow these activities.

THE PROPHET MICAH DEPICTED GOD AS ONE WHO REQUIRES HIS PEOPLE TO ENACT JUSTICE AND LOVE MERCY EVEN MORE THAN OFFER BURNT OFFERINGS AND THOUSANDS OF ANIMAL SACRIFICES.

DAY 1

Psalm 146:7-9

⁷ which executeth judgment for the oppressed: which giveth food to the hungry.
The Lord looseth the prisoners:

⁸ the LORD openeth the eyes of the blind: the LORD raiseth them that are bowed down: the LORD loveth the righteous:

⁹ the LORD preserveth the strangers; he relieveth the fatherless and widow: but the way of the wicked he turneth upside down.

Biblical Insight

The theme of God's concern for the oppressed is repeated many times throughout Scripture. Today's verses are comparable to similar passages in Isaiah 35:5-6, 61:1-2. Collectively these passages help point forward to the ultimate coming of Jesus Christ, where Jesus referenced this theme during His inaugural sermon in Luke 4:17-21. Furthermore, the concern for the "fatherless and widow" is repeated in James 1:27. This care for the disenfranchised found throughout all of Scripture demonstrates that God has always been concerned for the "least of these" (Matthew 25:45).

Daily Devotion

It is easy for those who have served the Lord for a long period of time to understand how great and mighty of a King He is. Due to His exceeding greatness, it is easy to forget the ordinary ways He often chooses to show up. Though He can show Himself in clouds of fire or bellowing voices, many times He is wrapped in dirty blankets, hungry and thirsty, begging for food and money on the streets. Sometimes we see Him in the faces of the criminal, seeking mercy, the single mom who is trying to make ends meet, or the stranger who is in need of a safe place to rest. (See Matthew 25:40-45.)

The sun rises and sets every day, but we do not always notice. It isn't always elaborate. Sometimes it is common and ordinary, and we tend to miss it while we are searching for the supernatural.

This truth carries over to our sense of compassion and evangelism. We don't have to force religion on people. All we have to do is love them in a way they can relate to, and sometimes that is in the simplest of gestures. We should learn to recognize Jesus in the everyday and in situations with everyone. He's all around us. We can share Him with everyone around us in little ways. Pray about a way you can show compassion and share Jesus with someone this week.

Reflection and Prayer

» *What can you do to apply this principle to your life today?*

DAY 2

Micah 6:6-7

- ⁶ Wherewith shall I come before the LORD, and bow myself before the high God? shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves of a year old?
- ⁷ Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams, or with ten thousands of rivers of oil? shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?

Biblical Insight

Another mention of a one-year-old calf appears in Leviticus 9:3, where Aaron the priest instructed the people of Israel to gather such a calf for a burnt offering. However, despite the historical symbolism of this reference, Micah was demonstrating that even this sacrifice was not the highest requirement in serving God. This passage also is reminiscent of I Samuel 15:22, where the prophet Samuel told King Saul, “to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams.” This passage also reminds the reader of when the psalmist David wrote that God did not ultimately desire burnt offerings, but rather “sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise” (Psalm 51:17).

Daily Devotion

Sacrifice is important to God. All throughout the Bible, you can read stories of bloody, messy animal sacrifices. That was the way, until The Way came. He became the sacrifice, and in turn, the requirements were changed for the rest of time.

We are called to obey, and Scripture teaches us that to God obedience is better than sacrifice. Even with that knowledge and understanding, when we do bring sacrifices, there are new ways of doing so. It is true, we no longer have to lay down slaughtered animals, but we are asked to lay down the messy, wounded, and lifeless things in our lives in exchange for mercy, freedom and grace. He sees when you are hurting. He knows how much pain you have endured. He is waiting at the altar for you to sacrifice what feels destroyed, to gain new life.

Come to Him, no matter how broken your heart and spirit may feel. He is waiting for you.

Reflection and Prayer

» *What can you do to apply this principle to your life today?*

DAY 3

Micah 6:8-12

- ⁸ He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the LORD require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?
- ⁹ The LORD's voice crieth unto the city, and the man of wisdom shall see thy name: hear ye the rod, and who hath appointed it.
- ¹⁰ Are there yet the treasures of wickedness in the house of the wicked, and the scant measure that is abominable?
- ¹¹ Shall I count them pure with the wicked balances, and with the bag of deceitful weights?
- ¹² For the rich men thereof are full of violence, and the inhabitants thereof have spoken lies, and their tongue is deceitful in their mouth.

Biblical Insight

The most well-known verse in the Book (Micah 6:8) serves as the climactic apex of the entire Book. Micah demonstrated that more than anything required in the Torah, God desired a pure heart that serves God and serves others. The Mosaic law had religious and social implications. Micah did not negate the value of their sacrifice, but he sought the underlying motivation for these acts. Walking humbly is an important element that cannot be overlooked; justice and mercy are impossible to love coming from a place of arrogance.

Daily Devotion

We live in a time when self-promotion is rampant. Social media can give ample time and space to those seeking validation. However, when it comes to serving the Lord and His people, it is important not to do it simply to benefit oneself.

Humility is not belittling one's own self, but putting others' needs before your own and, in doing so, not seeking vainglory. A good rule of thumb is to put yourself in the place of the people you are helping. If you were that homeless man in need, would you want your photo posted on the internet at your lowest point in life? Compassion, sensitivity, and humility should call us to serve those in need with no attempt to publicize our service or exploit those we help.

The true reward for helping others is that it brings us into alignment with God's heartbeat. When our heart and our outlook are right, goodness and mercy will flow through us. The motive and method in which we help others can change not only others' lives, but ours as well.

Reflection and Prayer

» *What can you do to apply this principle to your life today?*

DAY 4

Mark 11:15-16

¹⁵ And they come to Jerusalem: and Jesus went into the temple, and began to cast out them that sold and bought in the temple, and overthrew the tables of the moneychangers, and the seats of them that sold doves;
¹⁶ and would not suffer that any man should carry any vessel through the temple.

Biblical Insight

The history of Temple customs helps the reader understand Jesus’ response here and why sacrifices were being sold in the Temple in the first place. Prior to AD 30, sojourners coming to sacrifice at the Temple could buy sacrifices in the local marketplaces on the Mount of Olives. However, in AD 30 the high priest Caiaphas, responding to the increasing xenophobia (fear of strangers) of Jerusalem Jews, allowed markets to be set up in the Court of the Gentiles. They forgot that God’s intention has always been to be a blessing to all people, harkening all the way back to Abraham’s calling in Genesis 12:3.

Daily Devotion

Picture it: a sunny day in the city. Everyone was going about their dealings as usual—buying, selling, trading, bartering. The normal markets and vendors were open for business, but word was spreading quickly about a new location. Locals make their way to. . . to the Temple? It did not make much sense, but the prices of doves and other essential commodities were low, so they decided to give it a try.

As the typical day unfolded, a man busied Himself with leather strips, making a whip (John 2:15). After His task was complete, chaos ensued. Tables flipped as he dumped out the money that had been taken from sincere worshipers and made a powerful declaration to the scattering crowds.

Jesus is serious about sacredness. No matter what others say or do, when it comes to serving God, we must never forget how holy His house truly is. He longs for closeness with His kin, and it is vital that we put that above anything else in our lives.

We are a temple of the Holy Ghost. Are you worshiping God with your temple in ways that please Him or are there any areas where you could make adjustments?

Reflection and Prayer

» *What can you do to apply this principle to your life today?*

DAY 5

Mark 11:17-19

- ¹⁷ And he taught, saying unto them, Is it not written, My house shall be called of all nations the house of prayer? but ye have made it a den of thieves.
- ¹⁸ And the scribes and chief priests heard it, and sought how they might destroy him: for they feared him, because all the people was astonished at his doctrine.
- ¹⁹ And when even was come, he went out of the city.

Biblical Insight

When Caiaphas turned the court of Gentiles into a marketplace, this action took away the designated space and already limited opportunity of the Gentiles to worship and sacrifice at the Temple. Such an action undermined the value of their worship and sent a bold message that Gentiles were not valued or welcome in the Temple. Jesus' response communicated His concern for the Gentiles and also undermined the authority (and probably some financial income) of the religious leadership, which is why the "scribes and chief priests. . . sought how they might destroy him."

Daily Devotion

Anger is known as a secondary emotion. In many circumstances it masks a primary feeling such as fear, sadness, or embarrassment. Caiaphas was angry at Jesus' commands to not mix the worldly treasures with the Temple, but perhaps he was experiencing more than just that. He felt undermined by the true ruler that had stepped on the scene. He did not appreciate that his position as an authoritative monarch was being threatened.

He sought to take Jesus not only out of the Temple, but out of the picture completely. The good news is, Jesus had and has a history of outrunning these types of scenarios, even from the time He was first born. The end result was not the cross, though it seemed that way. He was not destroyed that Calvary day. In fact, it was the opposite.

Sin, death, and a life full of misery were demolished as He hung there blamelessly. Caiaphas, Pilot, Herod, and any other who wanted to hold him down did not win. He has never and will never fail. Just look back. His track record is sure.

Reflection and Prayer

» *What can you do to apply this principle to your life today?*

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