

DAILY DEVOTIONAL GUIDE
ADULT | FALL 2021



n *upon
A'-sāph.
unto God our
noise
Or, for
Asaph
Deut. 32.14
Heb. with
also
and

the pleasant
y.
the trumpet in the
the time appointed,
feast day.
was a statute for
law of the God of

ordained in Joseph
ny, when he went out
land of Egypt: ^swhere
language that I under-

ved his shoulder from
n: his hands ^swere de-
m the pots.
d thee; ^mI answered thee
cret place of thunder: I
thee at the waters of
bāh. Sē'-lāh.
ar, O my people, and I will
unto thee: O Israel, if thou
arken unto me;
ere shall no ^sstrange god be
e; neither shalt thou worship
strange god.
I am the LORD thy God,
ch brought thee out of the
d of Egypt: ^vopen thy mouth
le, and I will fill it.

5 Or, for
Asaph
d 2 Chr. 19.6

e ver. 6

f Deut. 1.17

6 Heb. Judge

7 Or, against
g Ps. 114.
h Jer. 23

i Job 29.12
Prov. 24.11

8 Heb. pass
away
k Mic. 3.1

l Ex. 2.23
Ps. 50.15

m Ex. 19.1
n Ps. 11.3

9 Heb. m

o Ex. 17
p Ex. 22

John

1 Or,
q Ps. 50

r Ps. 4

s Deu
Is.
t Mi
u Ps
R
x E
2

ould not
Israel

**GOD'S
WORD**
FOR LIFE

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DAILY DEVOTIONAL GUIDE

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36 Research Park Court
Weldon Spring, MO 63304
www.pentecostalpublishing.com
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Manufactured in USA
September 2021, 6912111.

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HOW TO USE THIS DAILY DEVOTIONAL GUIDE

GETTING STARTED

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

SEPTEMBER 5, 2021

SERIES 1: IN THE BEGINNING

1.1

PURPOSE IN CREATION

LESSON BIG IDEA
I will develop a fulfilling relationship with God.

TRUTH ABOUT GOD
God desires to have relationships with humanity.



FOCUS VERSE: Genesis 2:7-8
* And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul.
* And the Lord God planted a garden eastward in Eden; and there he put the man whom he had formed.

LESSON TEXT: Genesis 2:1-9, 18-25

8

BIBLICAL OVERVIEW

Lesson Text: Genesis 2:1-9, 18-25

As the first verse of the Bible declares, God created everything that exists. Someone suggested, "After Genesis 1:1, everything else is commentary." As you read Genesis 1 and then continue into Genesis 2, you notice something interesting right away. The account of the creation of humanity is seen first in Genesis 1:26-28, but it appears again beginning in Genesis 2:7. The two records are not the same.

The first two chapters of Genesis do not describe different creative events. Instead, the second chapter focuses in greater detail on some of God's work on the third, fifth, and sixth days. These include trees, birds, various animals, and people.

In general, the overview in Genesis 1 and the more detailed account in Genesis 2 present a bright and hopeful perspective of a glorious future worthy of God's magnificent creation. The hint of a dark shadow falls, however, in the second telling.

Fruit trees are mentioned first in Genesis 1:11. The trees were a good thing (Genesis 1:12). So what is this about "the tree of knowledge of good and evil" in the second account of creation (Genesis 2:9)? Adam had just begun his 930 years on earth. Why the warning so soon about death? What did it have to do with this tree God had made to grow from the ground?

How can it be that God formed Adam of the dust of the ground and then evaluated His own creative work as "not good" (Genesis 2:16)? As Genesis unfolds, we see God at work in humanity and that the promise of ultimate redemption would be fulfilled gives us power over death and hope of eternal life.

THE FIRST TWO CHAPTERS OF GENESIS DO NOT DESCRIBE DIFFERENT CREATIVE EVENTS.

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BIBLICAL OVERVIEW

Page 2 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.

DAY 5

Bible Reading Plan
Genesis 19 □ 20 □ 21 □ 22 □ | Matthew 5 □

Genesis 2:21-25

²¹And the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon Adam, and he slept: and he took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh instead thereof.

²²And the rib, which the Lord God had taken from man, made her a woman, and brought her unto the man.

²³And Adam said, This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh: she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man.

²⁴Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh.

²⁵And they were both naked, the man and his wife, and were not ashamed.

Biblical Insight

Genesis 1:27 records the creation of the first woman. She is the "help meet," Adam's necessary equivalent, made from Adam's flesh and bones. Adam said, "She shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man" (Genesis 2:23). The word translated man here is *ish*. The word translated woman is *ishshah*, a feminine form.

Genesis 2:24 is a key to the subject of marriage. Both Jesus (Matthew 19:5) and Paul quoted it (Ephesians 5:31-32). The verse validates marriage as the formation of a new and permanent family unit characterized by oneness. In a marriage like this, there is no shame (Genesis 2:25).

Daily Devotion

The loving Creator placed humanity amid the garden. The garden provided everything humanity needed to flourish. Still, the garden would require careful attention to yield the benefits the Creator desired. Similarly, the loving Creator placed humanity in marriage to thrive relationally. Marriage was God's provision for a relational void. However, it would still require careful attention to yield the benefits the Creator desired.

The health of marriages does not depend on big moments. Relationships live or die in the daily decisions of a couple's life. Godly choices in private and purposeful efforts in public create an environment of grace for holy growth and maturity. The fruit of the marriage is simply the result of healthy personal decisions and intentional public commitments of faith.

If a couple is not seeing the fruit desired in a marriage, it is either a root or a climate issue. "Marriage," as Paul Tripp explains, "is a sinner married to a sinner in a fallen world with a faithful God" (*Habits of a Healthy Marriage*). Careful attention to the private and public life will yield the desired results of the Creator.

Reflection and Prayer

• What can you do to apply this to your life today?

DAILY DEVOTION

Pages 3-7 will guide you through your week of personal devotion and study. You will be 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.

SMALL GROUP PARTICIPANT'S GUIDE

Page 8 provides a Small Group (SG) Participant's Guide that is designed to be used for those who meet in small groups. The SG Participant's Guide corresponds to the SG Teaching Outline forms in the Adult Lesson Guide.

SG PARTICIPANT'S GUIDE

LESSON

1.1

Lesson Title: Purpose in Creation

Scripture Focus: Genesis 2:7-8.

The Lesson in Context

The Word of the Lord that was given to the people of Judah through Jeremiah continues to give us encouragement and confidence for what God will do in our future. Jeremiah wrote God's plans for His people. "For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the Lord, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope" (Jeremiah 29:11, NKJV).

God has a purpose in our existence and a wonderful plan for our lives. Out of all His creation, God chose us to fulfill His plan in this world. In the words of one of George MacDonald's characters in David Elginbrod, he said, "I would rather be what God chose to make me than the most glorious creature that I could think of. For to have been thought about—born in God's thoughts—and then made by God, is the dearest, grandest, most precious thing in all thinking" (*The Complete Works of George MacDonald*).

Considering all God has done and the great love with which He loves us, we should naturally want to develop a passionate relationship with our God.

Group Discussion

1. How did you derive your beliefs about our origin? Have your views changed over the years? Explain.
2. Is there something you have seen or somewhere you have visited that caused you to marvel at God's incredible creativity? Explain.
3. In what ways would people act differently if they believed in God as the Creator and as the moral authority over all humanity?
4. In what ways are we responsible for the earth and its many creatures?
5. What is our purpose in the earth and what is our responsibility to God?

My Prayer for the Upcoming Week

How do you want to be different because of what you have experienced today?

DIGITAL PLANNER

Make plans, set goals, develop spiritual habits, and evaluate your daily, monthly, and yearly progress, all in the context of God's Word for Life. This annual digital planner helps adults organize their lives around God's Word, engage with specific portions of the God's Word for Life materials, and pursue the goals, dreams, and desires God has placed in their hearts.



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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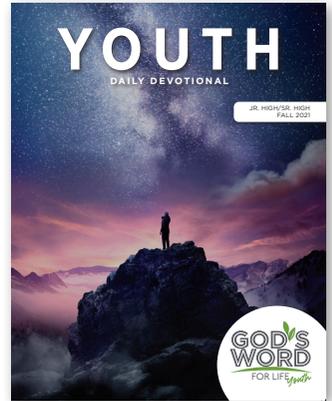


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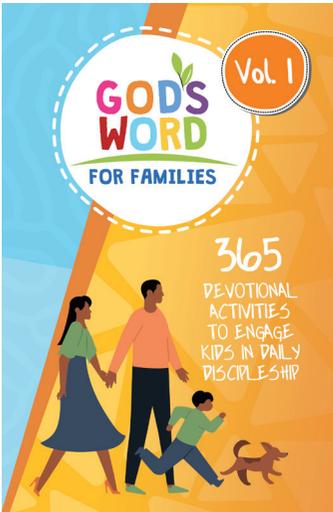
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YOUTH DAILY DEVOTIONAL

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.



GOD'S WORD FOR FAMILIES



God's Word for Families is not your average devotional. With 365 ten-minute devotional activities designed around a variety of learning styles, each week's devotions will reinforce what your family is learning at church. This wholly Apostolic discipleship tool will help you engage your family members in God's Word every day of the week.



SERIES 1: IN THE BEGINNING

This series, “In the Beginning,” will cover four hallmark events found at the beginning of the Bible: Creation, the Fall, Noah’s obedience, and the Tower of Babel. These five lessons will highlight both the majesty of God’s creation and the disobedience of humanity in turning from God. In addition, this series will focus on the message that God’s plan is perfect, and He still offers hope to humanity.



SERIES 2: A VOICE IN THE WILDERNESS

This series, “A Voice in the Wilderness,” will span from the birth of John the Baptist to the pivotal moment when John baptized Jesus. Isaiah prophesied a voice would come crying from the wilderness, “Prepare ye the way of the Lord.” John the Baptist was that voice, and his ministry cleared a path for the Messiah, Jesus Christ. This series will help you recognize how the prophetic plan of God unfolded through the miraculous births of both John and Jesus.



SERIES 3: PRAISE YE THE LORD

This series, “Praise Ye the Lord,” will look at four of the more recognizable Psalms: Psalm 1, Psalm 23, Psalm 51, and Psalm 150. The themes of God’s blessings, mercy, comfort, and power are on full display in these passages. This series will help you understand the importance of walking in righteousness, depending upon our Shepherd, having a clean heart, and praising God.

BIBLE READING PLAN FOR THIS QUARTER

Week 1 Day 1 - Gen. 1-5; Matt. 1 Day 2 - Gen. 6-9; Matt. 2 Day 3 - Gen. 10-14; Matt. 3 Day 4 - Gen. 15-18; Matt. 4 Day 5 - Gen. 19-22; Matt. 5	Week 5 Day 1 - Exod. 37-40; Matt. 23 Day 2 - Lev. 1-5; Matt. 24 Day 3 - Lev. 6-10; Matt. 25 Day 4 - Lev. 11-13; Matt. 26 Day 5 - Lev. 14-19	Week 9 Day 1 - Deut. 14-19 Day 2 - Deut. 20-25; Mark 14 Day 3 - Deut. 26-30; Mark 15 Day 4 - Deut. 31-34; Mark 16 Day 5 - Josh. 1-3; Luke 1
Week 2 Day 1 - Gen. 23-26; Matt. 6 Day 2 - Gen. 27-30; Matt. 7 Day 3 - Gen. 31-34; Matt. 8 Day 4 - Gen. 35-39; Matt. 9 Day 5 - Gen. 40-44; Matt. 10	Week 6 Day 1 - Lev. 20-23; Matt. 27 Day 2 - Lev. 24-27; Matt. 28 Day 3 - Num. 1-3; Mark 1 Day 4 - Num. 4-6; Mark 2 Day 5 - Num. 7-9; Mark 3	Week 10 Day 1 - Josh. 4-9; Luke 2 Day 2 - Josh. 10-13; Luke 3 Day 3 - Josh. 14-18; Luke 4 Day 4 - Josh. 19-22; Luke 5 Day 5 - Josh. 23-24; Luke 6-7
Week 3 Day 1 - Gen. 45-48; Matt. 11 Day 2 - Gen. 49-50; Matt. 12-15 Day 3 - Exod. 1-5 Day 4 - Exod. 6-8; Matt. 16 Day 5 - Exod. 9-12; Matt. 17	Week 7 Day 1 - Num. 10-13; Mark 4 Day 2 - Num. 14-17; Mark 5 Day 3 - Num. 18-20; Mark 6-7 Day 4 - Num. 21-25; Mark 8 Day 5 - Num. 26-30	Week 11 Day 1 - Judg. 1-5 Day 2 - Judg. 6-9; Luke 8 Day 3 - Judg. 10-14; Luke 9 Day 4 - Judg. 15-19; Luke 10 Day 5 - Judg. 20-21; Luke 11
Week 4 Day 1 - Exod. 13-17; Matt. 18 Day 2 - Exod. 18-22; Matt. 19 Day 3 - Exod. 23-26; Matt. 20 Day 4 - Exod. 27-30; Matt. 21 Day 5 - Exod. 31-36; Matt. 22	Week 8 Day 1 - Num. 31-33; Mark 9 Day 2 - Num. 34-36; Mark 10 Day 3 - Deut. 1-4; Mark 11 Day 4 - Deut. 5-10 Day 5 - Deut. 11-13; Mark 12-13	Week 12 Day 1 - Ruth 1-4 Day 2 - 1 Sam. 1-3; Luke 12 Day 3 - 1 Sam. 4-9 Day 4 - 1 Sam. 10-12; Luke 13 Day 5 - 1 Sam. 13-14; Luke 14
<p>This Bible Reading Plan, if followed, will walk you through the entire Bible in a one year span.</p>		Week 13 Day 1 - 1 Sam. 15-18 Day 2 - 1 Sam. 19-21; Luke 15 Day 3 - 1 Sam. 22-24; Luke 16 Day 4 - 1 Sam. 25-29 Day 5 - 1 Sam. 30-31; Luke 17

1.1

PURPOSE IN CREATION

LESSON BIG IDEA

I will develop a fulfilling relationship with God.

TRUTH ABOUT GOD

God desires to have relationship with humanity.



FOCUS VERSE: Genesis 2:7-8

⁷ And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul.

⁸ And the Lord God planted a garden eastward in Eden; and there he put the man whom he had formed.

LESSON TEXT: Genesis 2:1-9, 18-25

BIBLICAL OVERVIEW

Lesson Text: Genesis 2:1-9, 18-25

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In general, the overview in Genesis 1 and the more detailed account in Genesis 2 present a bright and hopeful perspective of a glorious future worthy of God’s magnificent creation. The hint of a dark shadow falls, however, in the second telling.

Fruit trees are mentioned first in Genesis 1:11. The trees were a good thing (Genesis 1:12). So what is this about “the tree of knowledge of good and evil” in the second account of creation (Genesis 2:9)? Adam had just begun his 930 years on earth. Why the warning so soon about death? What did it have to do with this tree God had made to grow from the ground?

How can it be that God formed Adam of the dust of the ground and then evaluated His own creative work as “not good” (Genesis 2:18). As Genesis unfolds, we see God at work in humanity and that the promise of ultimate redemption would be fulfilled giving us power over death and hope of eternal life.

THE FIRST TWO CHAPTERS OF GENESIS
DO NOT DESCRIBE DIFFERENT CREATIVE
EVENTS.

DAY 1

Bible Reading Plan

Genesis 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐ | Matthew 1 ☐

Genesis 2:1-3

¹ Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them.

² And on the seventh day God ended his work which he had made; and he rested on the seventh day from all his work which he had made.

³ And God blessed the seventh day, and sanctified it: because that in it he had rested from all his work which God created and made.

Biblical Insight

The first verse of Genesis 2 reminds us of the first verse of Genesis 1. Although the KJV reads *heaven* in Genesis 1:1 and *heavens* in Genesis 2:1, the Hebrew word is the same in both cases. Genesis 2:2-3 shows the ending of God's creative work. He had finished what He set out to do, so God rested.

Daily Devotion

Have you ever driven around town on a chilly crisp Christmas morning? The streets look deserted. A beautiful stillness fills the air. It is the closest example of a sabbath rest we enjoy as a society. Yet the holy pause only lasts a brief moment before the hustle and bustle crash in again with the frantic pace of another year.

Rush wears out the soul. So our loving Creator invites us to celebrate rest. But this is not just any rest. It is God's rest. God's rest offers freedom from conflict, confusion, and cravings. God's rest provides peace, tranquility, and stillness. God's rest offers hope in Christ.

"There remains therefore a rest for the people of God. For he who has entered His rest has himself also ceased from his works as God did from His. Let us therefore be diligent to enter that rest" (Hebrews 4:9-11, NKJV).

Sabbath rest for the soul required the work of the Cross. Rest takes work. Today, "be diligent to enter that rest." Repent from the hurry and create space for God. It may be why God created the Sabbath, after all, so we would pause long enough to be with our Creator.

Reflection and Prayer

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

DAY 2

Bible Reading Plan

Genesis 6 □ 7 □ 8 □ 9 □ | Matthew 2 □

Genesis 2:4-6

⁴ These are the generations of the heavens and of the earth when they were created, in the day that the Lord God made the earth and the heavens,

⁵ and every plant of the field before it was in the earth, and every herb of the field before it grew: for the Lord God had not caused it to rain upon the earth, and there was not a man to till the ground.

⁶ But there went up a mist from the earth, and watered the whole face of the ground.

Biblical Insight

The word translated *generations* appears ten times in Genesis (2:4; 6:9; 10:1; 11:10; 11:27; 25:12; 25:19; 36:1; 36:9; 37:2). Sometimes translated history, it expresses the idea of “a written record of past events” (Logos Bible Software). In Genesis, it marks the natural divisions of the book.

Why the need for a history of plants and herbs before the creation of Adam? Since there was no one to till the ground, the Lord God caused no rain. A mist provided moisture. To produce according to its potential, the earth needed humans to provide cultivation (Genesis 2:15).

Daily Devotion

Work. What images come to mind when you read the word *work*? Too often we feel overwhelmed at our job. We long for a break from the stress. So we plan vacations to escape. Or work reveals our shortcomings and how we never quite measure up. So we are driven but seldom content in our efforts. Work feels at times like an unruly taskmaster—not the gracious provision of our Creator.

Notice, though, God created work before sin disrupted His creative purpose. God’s desire is for us to find His pleasure in our work. Vocational holiness calls us to see work as a gift. “We are called to do good work as a means by which we bring glory to the Creator” (Gordon Smith, *Called to Be Saints*).

God’s creative purpose for work does not destroy us, define us, or rule us. God’s creative intent for vocational pursuits offers another opportunity to experience His joy. Today may you experience His joy in your work and find the strength to pursue His purpose for your life.

Reflection and Prayer

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

DAY 3

Genesis 10 □ 11 □ 12 □ 13 □ 14 □ | Matthew 3 □

Genesis 2:7-9

⁷ And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul.

⁸ And the Lord God planted a garden eastward in Eden; and there he put the man whom he had formed.

⁹ And out of the ground made the Lord God to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight, and good for food; the tree of life also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of knowledge of good and evil.

Biblical Insight

In Genesis 1:26-27, we learned that God made humans, male and female, in His image and likeness. Now we discover additional detail. The LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground. The word translated “man” is the Hebrew *adam*, commonly transliterated *Adam*. Since *adamah*, translated “dust” means ground or land, we could say this means Adam was an *earthling*.

No one knows for sure the location of the Garden of Eden. Because it was *eastward*, many assume it was east of the Promised Land. The names of the four rivers associated with the garden may confirm this vicinity.

Daily Devotion

In *Mortal Lessons*, physician Richard Selzer described a poignant scene in a hospital room after he performed surgery on a young woman’s face. Dr. Selzer carefully removed a tumor in her cheek, but to do so required severing a facial nerve. Now, her face would always remain twisted in paralysis. When he visited her bedside after surgery, she and her young husband held hands, awaiting his prognosis.

The young woman asked, “Will my mouth always be like this?” Dr. Selzer responded, “Yes, it will. The nerve was cut.” She nodded in silence. Her young husband smiled and said, “I like it. It’s kind of cute.” Then, her husband bent down to kiss her crooked mouth, twisting his lips to match hers. He wanted to show her that their kiss still worked.

When God formed humanity from the dust, He created us in the image of His holiness. Yet when sin destroyed our righteousness, our Creator did not turn away. He saw our brokenness and came close to reconcile us back to Him (II Corinthians 5:19). God showed us that His love still worked: “The essence of holiness lies in restoring God’s image in us” (Derek Tidball, *The Message of Holiness*).

Reflection and Prayer

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

DAY 4

Bible Reading Plan

Genesis 15 □ 16 □ 17 □ 18 □ | Matthew 4 □

Genesis 2:18-20

¹⁸ And the Lord God said, It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him.

¹⁹ And out of the ground the Lord God formed every beast of the field, and every fowl of the air; and brought them unto Adam to see what he would call them: and whatsoever Adam called every living creature, that was the name thereof.

²⁰ And Adam gave names to all cattle, and to the fowl of the air, and to every beast of the field; but for Adam there was not found an help meet for him.

Biblical Insight

The only aspect of creation God declared “not good” had to do with the man being alone. Isolation is unhealthy. Adam needed “an help meet.” The words “help meet” must not be collapsed into *helpmate*. The two Hebrew words translated “help meet” refer to an essential helper, one Adam could not do without and who was equivalent to him.

Since we know how things turned out, it is somewhat shocking to see that God’s next step was to parade beasts and birds before Adam, giving him an opportunity to name them. None of these creatures answered Adam’s need for “an help meet.”

Daily Devotion

In *A Year in Treblinka*, Yankel Wiernikln shared heart-wrenching memoirs about surviving the holocaust. One memory occurred in a boxcar train on the way to the infamous prison camp, Auschwitz.

The Nazis locked Yankel and the prisoners in a boxcar for the night with no food or blankets. An older man from Yankel’s hometown happened to be next to him. It was deathly cold, and the older man was shivering. Yankel wrapped his arms around him and did everything he could to keep his elderly neighbor warm. Long, arduous hours passed in the bitter cold. Then morning came, and the sun finally appeared to warm the boxcar. But the sun’s light also revealed a horror. As Yankel looked around the car, all he saw were frozen bodies. No one made it through the night. Everyone died but Yankel and his elderly neighbor.

“The old man survived because somebody kept him warm,” Yankel explained. “I survived because I was warming somebody else.”

It is not good to be alone. “If two lie down together, they will keep warm; But how can one be warm alone?” (Ecclesiastes 4:11, NKJV). Find someone to keep warm today.

Reflection and Prayer

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

DAY 5

Bible Reading Plan

Genesis 19 ☐ 20 ☐ 21 ☐ 22 ☐ | Matthew 5 ☐

Genesis 2:21–25

²¹ And the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon Adam, and he slept: and he took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh instead thereof;

²² and the rib, which the Lord God had taken from man, made he a woman, and brought her unto the man.

²³ And Adam said, This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh: she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man.

²⁴ Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh.

²⁵ And they were both naked, the man and his wife, and were not ashamed.

Biblical Insight

Genesis 1:27 records the creation of the first woman. She is the “help meet,” Adam’s necessary equivalent, made from Adam’s flesh and bones. Adam said, “She shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man” (Genesis 2:23). The word translated *man* here is *ish*. The word translated *woman* is *ishshah*, a feminine form.

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Daily Devotion

The loving Creator placed humanity amid the garden. The garden provided everything humanity needed to flourish. Still, the garden would require careful attention to yield the benefits the Creator desired. Similarly, the loving Creator placed humanity in marriage to thrive relationally. Marriage was God’s provision for a relational void. However, it would still require careful attention to yield the benefits the Creator desired.

The health of marriages does not depend on big moments. Relationships live or die in the daily decisions of a couple’s life. Godly choices in private and purposeful efforts in public create an environment of grace for holy growth and maturity. The fruit of the marriage is simply the result of healthy personal decisions and intentional public commitments of faith.

If a couple is not seeing the fruit desired in a marriage, it is either a root or a climate issue. “Marriage,” as Paul Tripp explains, “is a sinner married to a sinner in a fallen world with a faithful God” (*Habits of a Healthy Marriage*). Careful attention to the private and public life will yield the desired results of the Creator.

Reflection and Prayer

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

Lesson Title: Purpose in Creation

Scripture Focus: Genesis 2:7-8.

The Lesson in Context

The Word of the Lord that was given to the people of Judah through Jeremiah continues to give us encouragement and confidence for what God will do in our future. Jeremiah wrote God's plans for His people, "For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the Lord, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope" (Jeremiah 29:11, NKJV).

God has a purpose in our existence and a wonderful plan for our lives. Out of all His creation, God chose us to fulfill His plan in this world. In the words of one of George MacDonald's characters in David Elginbrod, he said, "I would rather be what God chose to make me than the most glorious creature that I could think of. For to have been thought about—born in God's thoughts—and then made by God, is the dearest, grandest, most precious thing in all thinking" (*The Complete Works of George MacDonald*).

Considering all God has done and the great love with which He loves us, we should naturally want to develop a passionate relationship with our God.

Group Discussion

1. How did you derive your beliefs about our origin? Have your views changed over the years? Explain.
2. Is there something you have seen or somewhere you have visited that caused you to marvel at God's incredible creativity? Explain.
3. In what ways would people act differently if they believed in God as the Creator and as the moral authority over all humanity?
4. In what ways are we responsible for the Earth and its many creatures?
5. What is our purpose in the earth and what is our responsibility to God?

My Prayer for the Upcoming Week

How do you want to be different because of what you have experienced today?

1.2

GOD'S REDEMPITIVE PLAN

LESSON BIG IDEA

I will find hope in God's redemptive plan and receive forgiveness for my sins.

TRUTH ABOUT GOD

Although God judges sin, He also made a way for redemption.



FOCUS VERSE: Genesis 3:14-15

¹⁴ And the LORD God said unto the serpent, Because thou hast done this, thou art cursed above all cattle, and above every beast of the field; upon thy belly shalt thou go, and dust shalt thou eat all the days of thy life:

¹⁵ And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel.

LESSON TEXT: Genesis 3:1-24



BIBLICAL OVERVIEW

Lesson Text: Genesis 3:1-24

Genesis 3 reveals the reason for the hint of dark shadows in Genesis 2. A serpent appeared who questioned God's word. The man and woman were where they should not have been, near the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. The woman may not have known precisely what God had said when He instructed Adam about the tree. Consequently, she listened to the serpent when it undermined God's warning and suggested God wanted to keep some good thing from the man and woman.

The forbidden tree was beautiful, and its fruit was good for food, like all the permitted trees. Also, it offered the promise of wisdom. The woman succumbed, ate the fruit, and offered it to her husband. He followed her example.

Suddenly, everything changed. The man and woman realized they were naked and discovered shame. They tried to deal with this problem by their own efforts.

Then there was a voice. The Lord God was walking in the garden. They quickly went into hiding when He called. Finally Adam answered in fear. He had never known this emotion before. He blamed his wife for his disobedience. Then God called the woman to account, and she blamed the serpent. The Lord cursed the serpent and set consequences for the man and woman.

For the first time, Adam named his wife. She was Eve. Her name means "life-giver." Yet in contrast, physical death invaded creation for the first time because God had to kill animals to clothe Adam and Eve to conceal their nakedness.

God announced that humans had become "as one of us." God was no longer the only one who could recognize good and evil. Humans could now decide for themselves. To prevent people from living forever in this fallen condition, the Lord expelled them from the Garden of Eden, putting cherubims and a flaming sword in place to prevent them from further access to the one tree that could have offered life.

Adam and Eve traded paradise for toil. Now Adam would till the ground from which His Creator had taken him.

GOD WAS NO LONGER THE ONLY ONE WHO COULD RECOGNIZE GOOD AND EVIL.

DAY 1

Bible Reading Plan

Genesis 23 □ 24 □ 25 □ 26 □ | Matthew 6 □

Genesis 3:1-5

¹ Now the serpent was more subtil than any beast of the field which the Lord God had made. And he said unto the woman, Yea, hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden?

² And the woman said unto the serpent, We may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden:

³ but of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God hath said, Ye shall not eat of it, neither shall ye touch it, lest ye die.

⁴ And the serpent said unto the woman, Ye shall not surely die:

⁵ for God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil.

Biblical Insight

The word translated *subtil* means the serpent was skilled in deception. When first heard, the snake's words seemed to be just what God had said: "Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden." However, God had told Adam, "Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat" (Genesis 2:16).

At first, Eve's answer suggests she was well-informed. But God had said nothing about touching the tree. At this, the serpent blatantly denied God's warning and claimed God wanted to keep her in the dark so she could not make her own decisions about good and evil.

Daily Devotion

Do we live with a "shall not" or a "mayest freely" view of God? Indeed, God speaks clearly about what is contrary to His will. It is interesting to note the language God used to communicate His boundaries to Adam and Eve. God emphasized the multitude of blessings. Satan highlighted restrictions. Satan works to discourage and deceive by twisting the will of God into a negative perspective.

Have you ever seen a baby take his or her first steps? Those steps are a pathetic example of human mobility. But Mom and Dad and everyone around pulled out their phones and shared the first steps with the world. We celebrate and encourage progress.

Satan condemns the failed efforts. God celebrates progress.

So if you fall short of your goal to read the Bible in a year, instead of beating yourself up over not reaching your goal, celebrate that you are reading your Bible. If you fall short of your intent to pray for an hour today, celebrate the precious time you did have with God. Live with a "mayest freely" view of God. He rejoices in every step you take toward Him.

Reflection and Prayer

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

DAY 2

Bible Reading Plan

Genesis 27 ☐ 28 ☐ 29 ☐ 30 ☐ | Matthew 7 ☐

Genesis 3:6-9

⁶ And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave also unto her husband with her; and he did eat.

⁷ And the eyes of them both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together, and made themselves aprons.

⁸ And they heard the voice of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day: and Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God amongst the trees of the garden.

⁹ And the Lord God called unto Adam, and said unto him, Where art thou?

Biblical Insight

Having been lured by the serpent's deceptive words, Eve's view of the forbidden tree changed. Like the permitted trees of Eden's Garden, its fruit looked good to eat. The tree was pleasant to the eyes. Convinced that eating the fruit would grant wisdom, she shared it with Adam.

The serpent had promised their eyes would open, and they did. But Adam and Eve did not like what they saw. They were naked. They tried to reverse the consequences of their disobedience.

Then they heard God's voice and tried to hide. But God called to Adam, "Where art thou?"

Daily Devotion

Imagine experiencing severe pain in your stomach. Your loved ones encourage you to go to the doctor, and you reluctantly decide to go. But when you arrive at the doctor, you tell her everything is fine. Instead of sharing your pain with the doctor, you hide your weakness. Hiding your weakness from the doctor hurts your health. Attempting to hide your weakness from God hurts your spiritual health.

God knows everything. Thus, when He asked Adam and Eve, "Where are you?" the question allowed Adam and Eve to confess their sin and reveal their desperate need for mercy and healing. Instead, they made excuses and cast blame.

God still graciously responded with compassion because God is love. Adam and Eve, however, missed an opportunity. Showing weakness would have been their greatest strength at that tragic moment.

Where are you today? What weaknesses have you attempted to hide from God? Hiding only hurts you. Confess your faults. Allow the grace of God to heal you today.

Reflection and Prayer

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

DAY 3

Bible Reading Plan

Genesis 31 □ 32 □ 33 □ 34 □ | Matthew 8 □

Genesis 3:10–15

¹⁰ And he said, I heard thy voice in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself.

¹¹ And he said, Who told thee that thou wast naked? Hast thou eaten of the tree, whereof I commanded thee that thou shouldest not eat?

¹² And the man said, The woman whom thou gavest to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I did eat.

¹³ And the Lord God said unto the woman, What is this that thou hast done? And the woman said, The serpent beguiled me, and I did eat.

¹⁴ And the Lord God said unto the serpent, Because thou hast done this, thou art cursed above all cattle, and above every beast of the field; upon thy belly shalt thou go, and dust shalt thou eat all the days of thy life:

¹⁵ and I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel.

Biblical Insight

When Adam heard God's voice, he confessed his fear and acknowledged his nakedness. He blamed Eve for his condition, indirectly accusing God. Next, God asked the woman what she had done. She blamed the serpent for deceiving her. Turning to the snake, God told him that he—who had been more deceptive than any beast—would now be more cursed than every beast.

Daily Devotion

Genesis 3:15, an early promise of the Messiah, includes three statements of enmity: (1) between the deceptive snake and the deceived woman, (2) between the snake's descendants and the woman's descendants, and (3) between a single male descendant of Eve (i.e., the Messiah, Jesus) and the serpent who deceived Eve (i.e., Satan).

In *The Power of Meaning*, Emily Esfahani Smith shares the remarkable, heartbreaking story of Emeka Nnaka. Emeka played defensive end for a semi-pro team. Tragically, a routine tackle left him paralyzed from the neck down. The depth of his suffering after the accident led to some serious soul-searching.

"The truth is," Emeka confessed, "[Before the accident] I was a guy who partied a lot. I was living a purposeless life." Afterward, Emeka started serving at his church as an adviser to youth and sharing his story. "It wasn't until I started serving people that a light came on," Emeka explained, "and I realized who I really am—today, I'm someone who tries to put other people first." Emeka returned to college, finished his degree, and continued in a master's program for counseling. Still paralyzed, he believes his life today has more spiritual meaning than ever before. God writes redemptive stories. Discover hope in the suffering. Live redemptively today.

Reflection and Prayer

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

DAY 4

Bible Reading Plan

Genesis 35 ☐ 36 ☐ 37 ☐ 38 ☐ 39 ☐ | Matthew 9 ☐

Genesis 3:16-19

¹⁶ Unto the woman he said, I will greatly multiply thy sorrow and thy conception; in sorrow thou shalt bring forth children; and thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee.

¹⁷ And unto Adam he said, Because thou hast hearkened unto the voice of thy wife, and hast eaten of the tree, of which I commanded thee, saying, Thou shalt not eat of it: cursed is the ground for thy sake; in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life;

¹⁸ thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee; and thou shalt eat the herb of the field;

¹⁹ in the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return.

Biblical Insight

Sin has consequences. For Eve, there would be sorrow in childbearing, and her husband would rule her. For Adam, the ground would be cursed with thorns and thistles, foreign to Eden. His work to feed his family was difficult his entire life. The Eden of Genesis before the Fall included no such consequences, but Adam and Eve's rejection of God's plan changed everything.

Daily Devotion

In an individualistic society, we view sin from an individual perspective. True, sin damages personal relationships with God and leads to spiritual death if left unrepented. The effects of sin, though, result in devastating consequences far beyond an individual. Genesis reveals the heartbreaking reality of sin. When parents play with sin, children fight generational habits of destruction.

Now, no person lives without fault, and belonging to Christ frees us from condemnation. The difference between a sanctified person and a sinner is sin "becomes your permanent enemy, not your secret lover" (Timothy Tennent, *The Call to Holiness*). The courage to fight sin involves not only protecting ourselves but protecting the ones we love from the unintended consequences of sin. We recognize the long-lasting ramifications and destroying effect of sin on the people we love, so we war against it.

And we do not fight alone. We fight sin together. The power of sin's destruction thrives in darkness. A holy community diffuses the power of sin through accountability and confession: "Confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed" (James 5:16, NKJV).

Reflection and Prayer

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

DAY 5

Genesis 40 □ 41 □ 42 □ 43 □ 44 □ | Matthew 10 □

Genesis 3:20-24

²⁰ And Adam called his wife's name Eve; because she was the mother of all living.

²¹ Unto Adam also and to his wife did the Lord God make coats of skins, and clothed them.

²² And the Lord God said, Behold, the man is become as one of us, to know good and evil: and now, lest he put forth his hand, and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live for ever:

²³ therefore the Lord God sent him forth from the garden of Eden, to till the ground from whence he was taken.

²⁴ So he drove out the man; and he placed at the east of the garden of Eden Cherubims, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to keep the way of the tree of life.

Biblical Insight

The plural pronoun *us* in Genesis 3:22 gives no hint of plurality within God. The noun translated *God* is the plural *Elohim*. But in the Hebrew language, the verb controls the number of the noun. In this case, the verb translated *said* is singular, referring to God as singular. When accompanied by singular verbs, the Hebrew language uses plural nouns to indicate fullness and intensity. This usage is sometimes called the plural of majesty.

Apparently, God spoke to His angels, the only other intelligent beings in existence. This idea seems to be confirmed by His use of the cherubims to prevent access to the tree of life.

Daily Devotion

God is wholly holy. All of God's attributes are complete and in full perfection. One characteristic of God's character is not more representative of Him than another (Timothy Tennent, *The Call to Holiness*).

We rate God's attributes in a hierarchy based upon our experience. When a prodigal experiences God's forgiveness, she places great value on His mercy. When a family endures the gross damage of prison-worthy sins, they value His righteous judgment. But God is wholly loving and just, as only He can be.

When God banished humanity from the garden, God's justice served as a pure act of love. If they had remained in the garden, they would have had access to the Tree of Life and lived forever separated from a relationship with God. Banishing humanity from the garden demonstrated God's love and initiated His preordained plan of reconciliation through Christ.

Justice and love were on full display on the Cross as in the Garden. On the Cross, the Creator identified with the creation and reconciled His creation back to Him in a pure expression of justice and love. God is love. God is just. God is for us.

Reflection and Prayer

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

Lesson Title: God's Redemptive Plan

Scripture Focus: Genesis 3:14–15

The Lesson in Context

The map of deliverance spans all of recorded history and beyond, even to the foundation of the earth. Jesus was “the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world” (Revelation 13:8). His love still reaches for all humanity: “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life” (John 3:16).

What was lost in the Garden of Eden was restored at the cross. The Tree of Life was transplanted from the Garden to Golgotha. Through the sacrifice of the Lamb of God, we have the promise of eternal life. John the Baptist proclaimed Jesus to be “the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world” (John 1:29), and His death, burial, and resurrection provided salvation and the opportunity to be restored to the life lost in the Garden. We find hope in God's redemptive plan and receive forgiveness for sins.

Group Discussion

1. Have you ever tried to imagine what it would have been like to live before there was any sin? What would a perfect world look like?
2. What are some wrong choices you have made in life? As you look back at those mistakes, what is your reaction?
3. Why would people choose the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil over the Tree of Life?
4. Have you seen situations where something obviously wrong was twisted into something to celebrate? How does a new spin make the evil acceptable for some people?
5. How do we experience the gospel today? In what ways does it change our lives?

My Prayer for the Upcoming Week

How do you want to be different because of what you have experienced today?

1.3

OFFERING OUR BEST

LESSON BIG IDEA

I will offer God my best.

TRUTH ABOUT GOD

God expects us to give our best to Him.



FOCUS VERSE: Genesis 4:4

And Abel, he also brought of the firstlings of his flock and of the fat thereof. And the LORD had respect unto Abel and to his offering.

LESSON TEXT: Genesis 4:1-15; Romans 7:14-20



BIBLICAL OVERVIEW

Lesson Text: Genesis 4:1-15; Romans 7:14-20

When Eve gave birth to Cain, she may have thought he was the male descendant promised in Genesis 3:15. Cain was, she said, “a man from the LORD.” The LORD had told the serpent, “He shall bruise your head” (NKJV). The serpent had deceived her, ruining what had been the perfect life, and the thought of turning that around would have been delightful. But this was not yet to be. Cain was the first murderer.

Next, Eve gave birth to Abel, a man of faith who knew how to worship the LORD (Hebrews 11:4). The meaning of a biblical name is often significant. Rather than merely being simple labels, the names of people in the Bible can describe personality traits, destinies, and so forth. Abel’s name can mean “breath,” suggesting the brevity of his life.

When Cain saw God had rejected his offering while accepting that of his younger brother, he was angry. The LORD asked the reason for his anger. Abel had done the right thing, and if Cain did the same, he also would be accepted. But sin was crouching at Cain’s door, desiring to rule Cain. If Cain conquered sin, he would find favor with God.

Instead, Cain yielded to temptation and murdered Abel. Then he lied to the LORD. As a result, Cain was cursed. He would not succeed as a farmer, and he would spend his life as a fugitive and vagabond. Cain complained, “My punishment is greater than I can bear.” He was sure he would suffer Abel’s fate.

At this point we see an amazing act of mercy. Cain deserved death. Later, capital punishment for murder was inaugurated after Noah’s flood, and it was included in the Law of Moses. But in Cain’s case, the LORD marked Cain to prevent anyone from killing him.

Romans 7:14-20

We admire Paul, whose conversion and contribution to first-century Christianity sets an example for us as we seek to live in a way that glorifies God. Therefore, we may struggle with his words in Romans 7:14-20. He confessed to being carnal and to doing what he hated. His problem, he said, was that sin was dwelling in him. He wanted to do the right thing, but he couldn’t figure out how to do so. Unlike Cain, however, Paul found a way to conquer sin. It was through Jesus Christ, our Lord (Romans 7:25).

UNLIKE CAIN, PAUL FOUND A WAY TO CONQUER SIN.

DAY 1

Bible Reading Plan

Genesis 45 □ 46 □ 47 □ 48 □ | Matthew 11 □

Genesis 4:1-5

¹ And Adam knew Eve his wife; and she conceived, and bare Cain, and said, I have gotten a man from the Lord.

² And she again bare his brother Abel. And Abel was a keeper of sheep, but Cain was a tiller of the ground.

³ And in process of time it came to pass, that Cain brought of the fruit of the ground an offering unto the Lord.

⁴ And Abel, he also brought of the firstlings of his flock and of the fat thereof. And the Lord had respect unto Abel and to his offering:

⁵ but unto Cain and to his offering he had not respect. And Cain was very wroth, and his countenance fell.

Biblical Insight

Adam and Eve began the process of adjusting to life as they had not known it and as it was not meant to be. God had commanded them to multiply and fill the earth, and the births of their first two sons were steps in that direction. The individuality that would be characteristic of people is demonstrated by Cain's vocation of farming and Abel's role as a shepherd. Both of them had an inherent knowledge of worship; they both offered sacrifices to the LORD. But something about their offerings caused God to respect one and not the other. Abel's offering was motivated by faith; Cain's was not (Hebrews 11:4).

Daily Devotion

Cain wasted worship. Like Cain, throughout history people have wasted worship on self, creation, and fallen angels instead of honoring their Creator. People erected temples to so-called gods, hoping to connect with the divine. Every culture has desperately sought to express worship, but misplaced worship wastes worship.

“Worship,” as Louie Giglio noted, “is our response to what we value most” (*Wired for a Life of Worship*). And nothing in this world is worthy of our worship except God. To value anything more than God leaves the human soul longing for more. God designed the human soul to find ultimate fulfillment in an obedient relationship with Him. Whatever we love most reflects the actual object of our worship. The object of our affection orients our focus and serves as the driving force for life. Everyone has an altar, and every altar has a throne.

What do you value most? Take inventory of your time, energies, passions, and finances today. Who or what is on the throne of your life? If it is anything other than Christ, it is wasted worship. Allow your Creator to reclaim the throne of your life.

Reflection and Prayer

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

DAY 2

Bible Reading Plan

Genesis 49 □ 50 □ | Matthew 12 □ 13 □ 14 □ 15 □

Genesis 4:6-9

⁶ And the Lord said unto Cain, Why art thou wroth? and why is thy countenance fallen?

⁷ If thou doest well, shalt thou not be accepted? and if thou doest not well, sin lieth at the door. And unto thee shall be his desire, and thou shalt rule over him.

⁸ And Cain talked with Abel his brother: and it came to pass, when they were in the field, that Cain rose up against Abel his brother, and slew him.

⁹ And the Lord said unto Cain, Where is Abel thy brother? And he said, I know not: Am I my brother's keeper?

Biblical Insight

Some of the earliest conversations the LORD had with people were in response to their sins. They often began with questions (Genesis 3:9, 11, 13; 4:6-9). Sin produces a tendency to shift blame and to be dishonest when God questions us.

When the LORD asked Cain where his brother was, Cain answered, in so many words, "I don't know. I'm not responsible for him." But Cain knew exactly where Abel was, and he knew why he was there. Cain had yielded to temptation; sin was ruling over him.

At that moment in human history, anger produced a twenty-five percent murder rate.

Daily Devotion

Worship reveals the heart. The tragic story of Cain shows how Abel's orientation was toward God, while Cain had his eyes on Abel. The obsession with being better than Abel consumed Cain. God graciously appealed to Cain to repent: "Why are you angry? And why has your countenance fallen? If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin lies at the door. And its desire is for you, but you should rule over it" (Genesis 4:6-7, NKJV). Sadly, Cain would not repent. Instead, he allowed the desires of sin to destroy life.

Sin desires to rule and to be on the throne of our hearts. When people worship money, the lust of the eyes rules the heart. Greedy people sacrifice friendships for monetary gain. When people worship pleasure, the lust of the flesh rules the heart; marriages end in divorce. When people worship status, the pride of life rules the heart; prejudiced people belittle fellow humans. The result of sin's rule of the heart is destruction and death.

Today, let us devote solemn reflection to the tragic realities of sin. God offers life through repentance. Let us repent afresh and let our hearts reveal our love for Him.

Reflection and Prayer

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

DAY 3

Bible Reading Plan

Exodus 1 2 3 4 5

Genesis 4:10-14

¹⁰ And he said, What hast thou done? the voice of thy brother's blood crieth unto me from the ground.

¹¹ And now art thou cursed from the earth, which hath opened her mouth to receive thy brother's blood from thy hand;

¹² when thou tillest the ground, it shall not henceforth yield unto thee her strength; a fugitive and a vagabond shalt thou be in the earth.

¹³ And Cain said unto the Lord, My punishment is greater than I can bear.

¹⁴ Behold, thou hast driven me out this day from the face of the earth; and from thy face shall I be hid; and I shall be a fugitive and a vagabond in the earth; and it shall come to pass, that every one that findeth me shall slay me.

Biblical Insight

Cain bore full responsibility for what he had done. He had no excuse. Even his vocation of farming now bore a curse. The ground would refuse to cooperate with him. How would he survive? He would wander aimlessly, isolated from God and other people. If he did meet someone, Cain was sure he would be killed. He had been angry when his offering was not accepted by God; now Cain would be a bitter loner. Even his name would be absent from genealogies (1 Chronicles 1:1).

Daily Devotion

Have you ever traveled on a plane? When you're in the sky, it can be a wonderful experience. You look down at a sea of humanity, busily going from one place to another like tiny ants.

Life takes on a new perspective from above. Why are we here? Is there a reason for all of this? What is the point?

After his fateful sin, Cain realized the answer to all of life's questions begin and end with God. "My punishment is greater than I can bear! ...I shall be hidden from Your face; I shall be a fugitive and a vagabond on the earth" (Genesis 4:13-14, NKJV). Cain realized life without God is no life at all.

Life makes sense when we attempt to view it from God's perspective. God made us for Him. We receive His glory in a covenant relationship so that we can reflect His glory in the world. Finding our Creator and connecting with His purposes is the one thing we are all seeking.

People are all around you. Many of them may feel like Cain, roaming as a vagabond on the earth. Shine God's grace and let them know they have a purpose today.

Reflection and Prayer

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

DAY 4

Bible Reading Plan

Exodus 6 ☐ 7 ☐ 8 ☐ | Matthew 16 ☐

Genesis 4:15

And the Lord said unto him, Therefore whosoever slayeth Cain, vengeance shall be taken on him sevenfold. And the Lord set a mark upon Cain, lest any finding him should kill him.

Biblical Insight

The LORD's response to Cain's complaint demonstrated remarkable mercy. Cain deserved to die, but God expressed woe to anyone involved in his death. To prevent anyone from taking Cain's life, God placed a mark on Cain that warned any potential killers against carrying out their plans. We do not know what the mark was, but anyone who killed Cain would have suffered seven times what would have been the usual vengeance for murder.

This warning suggests there were already other people living on earth in addition to Cain and his parents (Walter A. Elwell, *Evangelical Commentary on the Bible*). Leaving the presence of the LORD, Cain traveled East to the land of Nod. The Hebrew word transliterated *Nod* can mean to "move to and fro" and "to grieve." Either would be appropriate to describe Cain's situation. (See Genesis 4:16.)

Daily Devotion

Cain's story is our story. The narrative of Cain reveals the difficulty humans have in dealing with rejection and defeat. No one escapes it. It is the human experience. And when confronted with our human condition of sin, we have a choice to make. We sin, or we repent.

Cain chose not to listen to God and followed a destitute journey to the land of Nod. Some characters in the biblical narrative give us hope, and some warn us of destructive paths. In Cain's story, we see how the choices we make define our destiny.

Recent research seeks to understand how narrative can help us make sense of our tragedy in life. Some studies found that the more people thought about their current future self, the happier they were. People almost seemed nostalgic for the future. Visions of the future gave hope because the ideas of the future put new realities within reach.

Today, why not spend time thinking about where your current decisions will lead? Do we want to end up with a story like Cain? Instead, let's create a better future in the blessings of God and start making decisions to see that future become a reality.

Reflection and Prayer

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

DAY 5

Bible Reading Plan

Exodus 9 ☐ 10 ☐ 11 ☐ 12 ☐ | Matthew 17 ☐

Romans 7:14–20

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.

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

Why would we want to compare Paul with Cain? Cain murdered Abel, a man of faith who worshiped the true God. Paul was responsible for the deaths of many early Christians. Thinking he was doing service to God, Paul devoted himself to destroying as many believers as possible. But whereas Cain murdered, lied to God, and complained about his punishment, Paul immediately responded in faith when Jesus said, “Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?” (Acts 9:4). In humble repentance, Paul confessed his sins repeatedly and acknowledged he was the chief of sinners and the least of the apostles (1 Timothy 1:15; 1 Corinthians 15:9).

Daily Devotion

Imagine a house for sale that is advertised as a “handyman’s special.” One buyer sees the crumbling chimney, the overgrown shrubs, the broken windows, the 1940s kitchen, the missing shingles, and the outdated wiring. His shoulders sag, and he walks away. It’s too much work.

Another buyer sees the same house but looks ahead to what it will be when it is restored. He sees his kids playing in the yard, guests laughing on the porch, and a meal cooking in the kitchen to be enjoyed around the table.

Same house for each buyer? Yes. Same possibilities? Yes. But only one buyer can see what he needs to do to make a new reality.

Thankfully, God looked at humanity and saw possibility in our brokenness. Even after the acts of Cain and the grievous sins that would follow, God showed mercy. God looked ahead to the humility of people like Paul.

As you stand in the front yard of your life and look at your house today, what do you see? Do you only see the problems? Do you pretend they aren’t there? Or do you see the issues the way God sees them—with hope in His power to change you?

Reflection and Prayer

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

Lesson Title: Offering Our Best

Scripture Focus: Genesis 4:4

The Lesson in Context

Sacrifice is good for us. We give to God to show Him how important we think He is, not so He can see how special we are. When people commit their lives to a cause in obedience to God, it is a sacrifice. It will cost them something. It is not a deal or an arrangement. God does not owe people for what they do, even if it literally costs them their lives. God did the same for us when He manifested Himself in flesh and became obedient unto the death of the cross.

The best response we can give to God's call on our lives is to say, "I will offer my best and will not expect a reward. I will choose to follow God in every way I know how because that is my best service to Him. I will not compare my sacrifice to the sacrifice of others; I will compare it to what He asks of me."

Group Discussion

1. Which of the Ten Commandments benefit the individual who obeys them? Explain.
2. Can you think of Bible characters who did what God expected of them, and were blessed because of their obedience?
3. Share a time when you chose good over evil. Describe the benefits that ensued.
4. What could Cain have done to rectify his situation?
5. What has it been like when you talked with people who have given their lives to ministry?

My Prayer for the Upcoming Week

How do you want to be different because of what you have experienced today?

1.4

OBEDIENCE TO GOD'S WORD

LESSON BIG IDEA

I will obey God's Word and enjoy the salvation He gives.

TRUTH ABOUT GOD

God saves people who obey His Word.



FOCUS VERSE: Genesis 6:22

Thus did Noah; according to all that God commanded him, so did he.

LESSON TEXT: Genesis 6:5-21; 8:15-22



BIBLICAL OVERVIEW

Lesson Text: Genesis 6:5-21; 8:15-22

The spiritual condition of the earth's population in Noah's day was so thoroughly corrupt God planned to destroy His entire living creation. Scripture describes human behavior as great wickedness, continually evil imaginations and thoughts, and violence. The LORD planned to eradicate not only all humans but also everything that breathed.

The LORD said, "It repenteth me that I have made them." The word translated repenteth means God was grieved that He had created living things. After reading about such a seemingly hopeless situation on planet earth, the words of Genesis 6:8 are almost astounding: "But Noah found grace in the eyes of the LORD."

What is this grace Noah found, and why did he find it? The sense of the word translated grace is that God had "a feeling of favorable regard" for Noah (Logos Bible Software). The reason Noah found grace is explained in the next verse; he was just and perfect, and he walked with God, just as his great grandfather Enoch had done (Genesis 5:21; I Chronicles 1:3).

Genesis 6:9 is the second of ten times in the book the word translated generations appears, marking a natural division in the book. (See Genesis 2:4; 6:9; 10:1; 11:10; 11:27; 25:12; 25:19; 36:1; 36:9; 37:2.)

Noah's ark became a symbol of baptism's role in New Testament salvation (I Peter 3:20-21). Due to the grace Noah found with God, the LORD established a covenant with him rather than including Noah and his family in the deadly world-wide deluge. When the earth dried, Noah, his family, and the creatures selected for survival disembarked. After Noah's offering, God blessed him and his family, giving them a commission similar to the one He gave Adam and Eve in Genesis 1. (See Genesis 9:1-7.)

NOAH FOUND GRACE IN THE EYES
OF THE LORD.

DAY 1

Exodus 13 □ 14 □ 15 □ 16 □ 17 □ | Matthew 18 □

Genesis 6:5-7

⁵ And God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.

⁶ And it repented the Lord that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him at his heart.

⁷ And the Lord said, I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the earth; both man, and beast, and the creeping thing, and the fowls of the air; for it repenteth me that I have made them.

Biblical Insight

Wickedness, evil, repentance, grief, destruction: these words seem to go together. They do, but not in the way we may think at first. Ordinarily, we would think those repenting had been wicked and evil. It is hard for us to imagine God repenting. The translation “it repenteth me” (KJV) may seem odd. The NKJV renders the phrase: “I am sorry.” Either translation is possible, because the form of the Hebrew verb is reflexive. This term means the subject of the verb both carries out and receives the action of the verb (Logos Bible Software).

Daily Devotion

Skeptics often hold a convenient theology that ignores logic and Scripture. Skeptics find it challenging to imagine the God of justice we see in Genesis. However, all views are exclusive when pushed to their logical end. For example, skeptics claim that all good people should go to Heaven. Well, what about the bad people? What about a murderer? The skeptical view of what is good excludes terrible people from redemption.

On the other hand, Christianity offers the most inclusive, exclusive truth, as Timothy Keller once noted. Christianity provides the opportunity for good and bad people—even people on death row—to experience forgiveness through repentance and faith in the gospel.

Skeptics still want justice, but who will execute justice? Without God, no outside force exists to determine what is just and unjust. Justice devolves into culturally situated views based upon whatever entity is in power. In Scripture, however, we find a holy, righteous God cleansing the earth of injustice.

Today, don't let the skeptics confuse you. Live with the expectation that all wrongs will be made right “just as it was in the days of Noah” (Luke 17:26, NKJV).

Reflection and Prayer

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

DAY 2

Bible Reading Plan

Exodus 18 □ 19 □ 20 □ 21 □ 22 □ | Matthew 19 □

Genesis 6:8-10

⁸ But Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord.

⁹ These are the generations of Noah: Noah was a just man and perfect in his generations, and Noah walked with God.

¹⁰ And Noah begat three sons, Shem, Ham, and Japheth.

Biblical Insight

Had Noah not found favor with God, it seems the human race and all other living things would have come to an end at that time. But Noah, his wife, their three sons—Shem, Ham, and Japheth—and their wives were the means for preserving humanity and all other breathing things.

Noah's lifestyle stood out like a beacon in what was otherwise an utterly corrupt society. He was just and perfect, and he walked with God. His great grandfather, Enoch, also walked with God, "and he was not; for God took him" (Genesis 5:24). In a sense, God also took Noah, but by a different means.

The New Testament tells us Noah was a man of faith (Hebrews 11:7) and a preacher of righteousness (II Peter 2:5).

Daily Devotion

Amid the vastness of humanity, our lives can seem inconsequential. Most of us live simple lives. We wake up, spend time with the Lord, go to work, come home, spend time with our family, and relish the time we have with our church family. Sure, we have highlights in life but not many exploits that will make it into the history books.

But what if faithfulness is the greatest accomplishment? In the Genesis account, we discover God shows acute interest in the day-to-day activities of humanity. He sees the grievous sins committed. And he saw the righteousness of Noah: "Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord" (Genesis 6:8, NKJV). Noah elicited the attention of God by his faithfulness. Noah's righteousness would lead to God commissioning a historical work that would save humanity's future. But it began with simple daily obedience.

Today, "whatever you do, do it heartily, as to the Lord and not to men" (Colossians 3:23, NKJV). God sees. God cares. Your faithfulness arrests the attention of Heaven.

Reflection and Prayer

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

DAY 3

Exodus 23 ☐ 24 ☐ 25 ☐ 26 ☐ | Matthew 20 ☐

Genesis 6:11-17

¹¹ The earth also was corrupt before God, and the earth was filled with violence.

¹² And God looked upon the earth, and, behold, it was corrupt; for all flesh had corrupted his way upon the earth.

¹³ And God said unto Noah, The end of all flesh is come before me; for the earth is filled with violence through them; and, behold, I will destroy them with the earth.

¹⁴ Make thee an ark of gopher wood; rooms shalt thou make in the ark, and shalt pitch it within and without with pitch.

¹⁵ And this is the fashion which thou shalt make it of: The length of the ark shall be three hundred cubits, the breadth of it fifty cubits, and the height of it thirty cubits.

¹⁶ A window shalt thou make to the ark, and in a cubit shalt thou finish it above; and the door of the ark shalt thou set in the side thereof; with lower, second, and third stories shalt thou make it.

¹⁷ And, behold, I, even I, do bring a flood of waters upon the earth, to destroy all flesh, wherein is the breath of life, from under heaven; and every thing that is in the earth shall die.

Biblical Insight

God did not leave Noah on his own to figure out a way to survive the flood. He gave Noah precise plans to build an ark wherein “eight souls were saved by water” (1 Peter 3:20). Based on the ark’s dimensions, it would have been a stable vessel with more than 1.5 million cubic feet of gross space and a displacement about 10 percent greater than the USS Enterprise aircraft carrier. God has never left us to design our own plan of salvation. He has provided every detail, making clear what must be done to be saved. No guesswork is needed.

Daily Devotion

Perhaps you’ve heard this proverbial story about prayer. During a severe flood, a man found himself stranded on the rooftop of his house. In desperation, he cried out for God to help him. Soon a man in a rowboat appeared. “Come on! Get in the boat! The floodwaters are rising!” The stranded man yelled back, “No, it’s okay! God will save me!” Then a motorboat came by. “Come on! Get in the boat! The floodwaters are rising fast!” But the stranded man yelled back again, “No, it’s okay! God will save me!”

Finally the National Guard came by in a helicopter and lowered a lifeline down to the man. “Grab on! The floodwaters are rising! There’s no time left!” But the stranded man yelled again, “God will save me!” Then the waters rose, and the man drowned. In Heaven, he asked God, “Why didn’t you save me? I believed You would. I don’t understand why you would let me drown?” God replied, “I sent you a rowboat, a motorboat, and the National Guard. What more did you expect?” Today, keep your eyes open. God’s provision may be more straightforward than you thought.

Reflection and Prayer

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

DAY 4

Bible Reading Plan

Exodus 27 ☐ 28 ☐ 29 ☐ 30 ☐ | Matthew 21 ☐

Genesis 6:18-21

¹⁸ But with thee will I establish my covenant; and thou shalt come into the ark, thou, and thy sons, and thy wife, and thy sons' wives with thee.

¹⁹ And of every living thing of all flesh, two of every sort shalt thou bring into the ark, to keep them alive with thee; they shall be male and female.

²⁰ Of fowls after their kind, and of cattle after their kind, of every creeping thing of the earth after his kind, two of every sort shall come unto thee, to keep them alive.

²¹ And take thou unto thee of all food that is eaten, and thou shalt gather it to thee; and it shall be for food for thee, and for them.

Biblical Insight

Before the flood, God promised Noah He would make a covenant with him. This covenant would provide for the preservation of people and all other living things. It is obvious that both male and female are required for life to be preserved. The phrase "after their kind" leaves no room for Darwinian evolution. As living things reproduced after their kind, there would be adaptations within species, but no new species would result from reproduction (Genesis 1:24-25).

Daily Devotion

Contemporary understandings of love seem to have drifted from a biblical interpretation. In Scripture, covenants served as the relational foundation between God and humanity, as we see with Noah. Covenant was an obligation imposed by a superior on an inferior. To obey led to salvation and life. To disobey led to destruction. In the Genesis narrative, God, the superior, offered hope to Noah, the inferior. Noah's obedience led to the fulfillment of promises of the covenant.

Covenant was a "life-or-death decision" in which people entered a committed relationship with Yahweh and revered Him above all. "The basic principle is love," Peter C. Craigie explained. "It was in love that the covenant was initiated by God in the first place, and by love, the people were to maintain their close relationship to God" (The New International Commentary on the Old Testament: Deuteronomy). Covenant was not a Disney-fairytale-hot-pink kind of love, but a scriptural, self-sacrificial love that Yahweh established as the new covenant with humanity in due time.

Today, reflect on your understanding of love in your relationship with Jesus Christ. How does it compare to the covenantal account in Scripture?

Reflection and Prayer

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

DAY 5

Exodus 31 □ 32 □ 33 □ 34 □ 35 □ 36 □ | Matthew 22 □

Genesis 8:15-22

¹⁵ And God spake unto Noah, saying,

¹⁶ Go forth of the ark, thou, and thy wife, and thy sons, and thy sons' wives with thee.

¹⁷ Bring forth with thee every living thing that is with thee, of all flesh, both of fowl, and of cattle, and of every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth; that they may breed abundantly in the earth, and be fruitful, and multiply upon the earth.

¹⁸ And Noah went forth, and his sons, and his wife, and his sons' wives with him:

¹⁹ every beast, every creeping thing, and every fowl, and whatsoever creepeth upon the earth, after their kinds, went forth out of the ark.

²⁰ And Noah builded an altar unto the Lord; and took of every clean beast, and of every clean fowl, and offered burnt offerings on the altar.

²¹ And the Lord smelled a sweet savour; and the Lord said in his heart, I will not again curse the ground any more for man's sake; for the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth; neither will I again smite any more every thing living, as I have done.

²² While the earth remaineth, seedtime and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night shall not cease.

Biblical Insight

God established the Noahic Covenant after Noah left the ark (Genesis 8:20-9:17). It was an unconditional covenant, guaranteeing God would never again destroy the earth with water. He would put no new curse on the ground, the natural order of seasons would continue, animals would fear humans, and people could eat meat. This covenant is still in effect and will continue until the renovation of the earth by fire (II Peter 3:12-13).

Daily Devotion

Nealya quietly prayed over her three-year-old great-granddaughter, Sarah. She held to her apostolic faith and desired to see her family come to the fullness of truth one day. God made a promise, and Nealya believed it. But Nealya would pass from this life without ever seeing the promise fulfilled.

Decades later, Sarah was now married and pregnant with her first child. She was so young when Nealya prayed over her; it was a vague memory. But while visiting family for Thanksgiving, she came across an old tape-recording Nealya made for the family. "Oh, my babies," Nealya shared, "there are a lot of faiths out there, but I tell you, there's nothing like that Pentecostal peace." Sarah couldn't believe it! Her great-grandmother was Pentecostal! Sarah had been filled with the Holy Spirit and baptized in Jesus' name, but she didn't know anyone in her family had the same experience until she heard Nealya on the recording!

Sarah and her husband wanted their soon-to-be-daughter named "Promise," but they had not chosen her first name yet. So Sarah decided she would be called "Nealya Promise" in honor of her great-grandmother. God keeps His promises.

Reflection and Prayer

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

Lesson Title: Obedience to God's Word

Scripture Focus: Genesis 6:22

The Lesson in Context

The world is a mess and we all need saving. We cannot make choices for anyone else, but we can choose for ourselves; we can obey God's plan and enjoy the benefits. Like with the Flood, God's end-time salvation will both judge the disobedient and save the obedient.

It is critical we view salvation with a right perspective. God promises to be faithful and graceful toward us, both now and forever. He invites us to be a part of His incredible kingdom. Yet many people respond like the girl in the story. They ask questions like, "Do I have to be baptized to be saved? Do I have to speak in tongues and live a holy life?" Such questions are preposterous in light of the amazing offer God is making. How sad when people discuss salvation in terms of what we have to do. Salvation is not a "have to" thing; it is a "get to" thing.

When we follow God's Word and accept His invitation to salvation, we get to enjoy infinite rewards both now and in eternity.

Group Discussion

1. Why do you think some people reject the reality of Creation or a great flood?
2. Why do some people have a difficult time believing God loves them and wants them to be part of His kingdom?
3. What guidelines has God given for our safety and benefit?
4. Christians often feel misunderstood and sometimes even mistreated. The truth is: everyone feels that way at times. However, what advantage do we have as believers in this regard?
5. What are the odds that you and I would be able to hear and respond to the plan of salvation if we had not yet heard it? What would it be like to be "out there" not having heard the good news?

My Prayer for the Upcoming Week

How do you want to be different because of what you have experienced today?

1.5

WORSHIPPING THE ONE TRUE GOD

LESSON BIG IDEA

I will worship the one true God.

TRUTH ABOUT GOD

God resists the proud.



FOCUS VERSE: Genesis 11:4

And they said, Go to, let us build us a city and a tower, whose top may reach unto heaven; and let us make us a name, lest we be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth.

LESSON TEXT: Genesis 11:1-9; Proverbs 16:18-19; James 4:6-10

BIBLICAL OVERVIEW

Lesson Text: Genesis 11:1-9; Proverbs 16:18-19; James 4:6-10

The biblical location Shinar is known in history as Sumer. While once believed to be a biblical myth, in the late nineteenth century archaeology verified the existence of the great Sumerian civilization. The Sumerians are credited with the invention of the wheel, lever, and pulley; the potter's wheel, sailboat, and plow; the first systems of geometry, trigonometry, and astronomy; the first system of writing; the earliest known codes of law; the first democracy, dictatorships, priesthood, and royalty; the development of the city-state; and the creation of literary, musical, and architectural forms that influenced future civilizations (Genesis 11:2).

Ancient Sumer was a huge marshland with neither sufficient stones for quarrying nor trees for logging. Its cities were made of baked brick. The word translated *slime* in Genesis 11:3 is *asphalt* or *bitumen*. To the immediate north was a region where petroleum hydrocarbons pooled on the surface. The ancient Sumerians discovered many uses for petroleum products including making mortar, paving their roads, and fueling their fires. Some scholars suggest the civilization of the Akkadian successors of the Sumerians fell because of climate change. The previously cool, moist growing season was replaced by an arid climate. Some argue that a volcanic eruption produced these changing weather patterns in the ancient Near Eastern world while others attribute them to the lasting effects of the Flood (Genesis 11:3).

Such towers are known as ziggurats. Babel may mean gate of God, but its connection with *balal*, translated *confound* (i.e., confuse) in Genesis 11:9, suggests the meaning *confusion*.

Such a scattering of the human race would produce a biological founder effect. When a new population is founded by groups isolated from the larger genetic population, the new population loses some of its genetic variation. As a result the two populations may be distinctively different, both genetically and as a result of the environment. Thus, diversity of language groups led to diversity of physical appearance within groups of humanity. Whereas a genetic preference for a type of skin pigmentation may have been individually expressed before Babel, after the scattering it could become the genetic preference for an entire people group, with the frequency of fairly large variation in pigmentation dropping steeply (Genesis 11:8).

Babel is almost certainly the same city as Babylon. Therefore, Babylon would have been the oldest city on earth (Genesis 11:9).

BABEL IS ALMOST CERTAINLY THE SAME CITY AS BABYLON.



DAY 1

Bible Reading Plan

Exodus 37 □ 38 □ 39 □ 40 □ | Matthew 23 □

Genesis 11:1-5

¹ And the whole earth was of one language, and of one speech.

² And it came to pass, as they journeyed from the east, that they found a plain in the land of Shinar; and they dwelt there.

³ And they said one to another, Go to, let us make brick, and burn them throughly. And they had brick for stone, and slime had they for mortar.

⁴ And they said, Go to, let us build us a city and a tower, whose top may reach unto heaven; and let us make us a name, lest we be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth.

⁵ And the Lord came down to see the city and the tower, which the children of men builded.

Biblical Insight

From the creation of humanity, God commanded them to *replenish* the earth (Genesis 1:28). The Hebrew word translated *replenish* means *fill*. This command was renewed after the flood (Genesis 9:1). It was never God's intention that the spread of humanity would be geographically limited. He made the earth to be inhabited (Isaiah 45:18).

Some think God was displeased with the building of the Tower of Babel because the builders thought it would protect them if there were another flood. This speculation is not the case. Their stated purpose was to make a name for themselves and to prevent them from scattering "upon the face of the whole earth" (Genesis 11:4).

Daily Devotion

In *Voyages of the Pyramid Builders*, Schoch and McNally make an interesting point, "Pyramids carry the same message: All humankind shares a common history, one in which civilization began in a single place and spread across the globe." Throughout history, humans erected massive monuments around the world, and Schoch and McNally see these monuments as compelling evidence of civilization's unity. Pyramids of various sorts appear in the ancient African kingdom of Kush, in ancient Mesopotamia and Sumer (the likely source of the biblical account of the Tower of Babel), in England and Ireland, in India and throughout Southeast Asia, in medieval Cambodia, in ancient China, in the Valley of Mexico, in the ancient Olmec and Mayan realms of southern Mexico, Guatemala, Honduras, Belize, and El Salvador, along the Mississippi, and Peru's coastal region.

The compelling argument grabs our attention at least. It may also confirm the self-centered thrust when humanity defied God with the Tower of Babel. Rebellion, self-glorification, and false worship unite the remnants of ancient civilizations we see today. But like these ancient ruins, without God, no effort of humankind will ever endure. We must humble ourselves before God.

Reflection and Prayer

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

DAY 2

Bible Reading Plan

Leviticus 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐ | Matthew 24 ☐

Genesis 11:6–9

⁶ And the Lord said, Behold, the people is one, and they have all one language; and this they begin to do: and now nothing will be restrained from them, which they have imagined to do.

⁷ Go to, let us go down, and there confound their language, that they may not understand one another's speech.

⁸ So the Lord scattered them abroad from thence upon the face of all the earth: and they left off to build the city.

⁹ Therefore is the name of it called Babel; because the Lord did there confound the language of all the earth: and from thence did the Lord scatter them abroad upon the face of all the earth.

Biblical Insight

The LORD acknowledged that when people unite as one, they can achieve whatever they wish. Since their plan opposed His purpose, the LORD said, "Go to, let us go down, and there confound their language, that they may not understand one another's speech" (Genesis 11:7). If they could not communicate, they could not succeed. The plural pronoun us does not indicate plurality of persons within God. The Hebrew *Yahweh*, rendered "LORD," is a singular verb, as is the verb translated "said." Thus, the plural us cannot have the singular "LORD said" as its antecedent. Grammatically, the LORD spoke to someone here, as in Genesis 1:26, 3:22, and Isaiah 6:8. Theories differ as to whom God spoke, but one could conclude from the biblical pattern of God involving angels in His work that He spoke to His angels about His plan for Babel.

Daily Devotion

Have you ever tried to communicate with someone who speaks a different language than you? Even soliciting simple instructions can frustrate. Now imagine trying to convey an elaborate architectural building plan without a shared language.

Several have noted the unique parallel to the Tower of Babel found on the Day of Pentecost. "This Jesus God has raised up, of which we are all witnesses. Therefore being exalted to the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He poured out this which you now see and hear" (Acts 2:32-33, NKJV). Instead of confounding people with speech, God united people through the initial sign of the Holy Spirit's infilling. Languages that once divided people now joined people. Where rebellion once divided people, now, repentance could unite.

Many lessons apply, but one poignant principle we learn from Scripture is that anything of significance we do with God and other people will require humility as well as unity. Otherwise, God's opposition and division will make the efforts futile: "God resists the proud but gives grace to the humble" (James 4:6). Live humbly today.

Reflection and Prayer

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

DAY 3

Bible Reading Plan

Leviticus 6 □ 7 □ 8 □ 9 □ 10 □ | Matthew 25 □

Proverbs 16:18

Pride goeth before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall.

Biblical Insight

While no one knows the future in such a way as to predict precise events, wisdom enables a person to see trends and to forecast general developments. For example, when someone is proud, it is certain that one day that person will be destroyed. It is not possible to predict on which day or how the destruction will occur, but the destruction itself is sure. Those who are haughty will eventually fall. The pattern has been repeated throughout human history. How many celebrities, rich people, and famous stars have died with their integrity intact? On the contrary, how many have died in shame, humiliation, despair, or ruin?

Daily Devotion

Possibility fuels the potential for a better future, whereas doubt robs tomorrow of its potential. If you do not believe something is possible, you may find you are correct. But only a prideful heart would attempt to foretell the future without seeking God and the knowledge of His Word. After all, only God knows the future.

James urges us, “Come now, you who say, ‘Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a city, spend a year there, buy and sell, and make a profit’; whereas you do not know what will happen tomorrow. ...Instead, you ought to say, ‘If the Lord wills, we shall live and do this or that’” (James 4:13-15, NJKV).

In humility and hope, we trust in God’s will for the future instead of our own. After a season of suffering, it can be challenging to see a brighter future. We tend to believe tomorrow will be just like yesterday. But what does it take for us to hope again? It takes courage to see what God sees. Today, let us reach out to Jesus Christ in hope and embrace the future that he has for us instead of the future we fear.

Reflection and Prayer

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

DAY 4

Bible Reading Plan

Leviticus 11 ☐ 12 ☐ 13 ☐ | Matthew 26 ☐

Proverbs 16:19

Better it is to be of an humble spirit with the lowly, than to divide the spoil with the proud.

Biblical Insight

We hear of people being “well off” or of someone being “better off” than another. This proverb puts such comparisons in perspective. The humble person who associates with common people is better off than the person who associates with the proud, even if that companionship provides economic profit. The day will come when the superiority of the former position will be evident to all.

Daily Devotion

Celebrity is the contemporary plague of North American culture. Now anyone can be an influencer with a few simple steps:

1. Select your niche.
2. Optimize your social media profiles.
3. Understand your audience.
4. Create and post relevant content.
5. Be regular and consistent.
6. Engage with your audience.
7. Let brands know you're open to collaborations.

Open an account. Build followers. Gain influence. Make money. Satisfy the lust to be known.

The rise of social media influencers and those trying to influence reveal the lust for celebrity. If we're not careful, though, the toxicity of fame can infect expectations in the church as well. What motivates acts of service in your life? Is it the desire to be known? Or is it a desire to hear “well done” from your Master?

The wisdom of Scripture rings as clear today as it did then: “Better to be of a humble spirit with the lowly than to divide the spoil with the proud” (Proverbs 16:19, NKJV). You may gain followers and money being an influencer. Still, the humble will discover the joy of service in the house of the Father.

Reflection and Prayer

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

DAY 5

Leviticus 14 □ 15 □ 16 □ 17 □ 18 □ 19 □

James 4:6-10

⁶ But he giveth more grace. Wherefore he saith, God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble.

⁷ Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.

⁸ Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you. Cleanse your hands, ye sinners; and purify your hearts, ye double minded.

⁹ Be afflicted, and mourn, and weep: let your laughter be turned to mourning, and your joy to heaviness.

¹⁰ Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and he shall lift you up.

Biblical Insight

God extends grace to those who humble themselves, but He resists the proud. James 4:6 and I Peter 5:5 include a quotation from Proverbs 3:34. The greatest hindrance to being useful to God is pride; the greatest aid to being useful to Him is humility. To be humble is to be completely dependent on God; to be proud is to declare independence from Him.

The grace of God is the free, gracious influence of God at work in the believer's life. The classic definition of grace is "the unmerited favor of God." For additional insight on the role of grace in the believer's life see Ephesians 2:8, I Corinthians 15:10, Ephesians 3:7, II Peter 3:18, and Galatians 2:21.

Daily Devotion

The global phenomenon of superhero films has generated billions in revenue. But superheroes are fictional myths. They're not real. Yes, they're fictional, of course, but did you ever notice anything else? Superheroes wear masks. They put on a different identity to be super. Even Superman takes off his glasses to "hide" his identity. One can only be super when one is not his or her true self.

Paul offers a different view. After Christ told him, "My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness," Paul said, "I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me" (II Corinthians 12:9, NKJV). Paul realized hiding his weaknesses was the real weakness. Paul decided to be painfully transparent, to show that "the excellence of the power may be of God and not of us" (II Corinthians 4:7, NJKV).

Authentic Christian living takes the mask off and for transparency before others so they see the grace of God's favor and power shining through an ordinary clay vessel just like them. Superheroes aren't real. Take off the mask and live real today.

Reflection and Prayer

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

Lesson Title: Worshiping the One True God

Scripture Focus: Genesis 11:4

The Lesson in Context

The apostle Paul said the church would be in front, piloting the way to a new creation, as the old creation groans, waiting for the sons of God (Romans 8:19). He said the examples of the Old Testament were written for the church, “upon whom the ends of the world are come” (I Corinthians 10:11). Notice he did not say the church had come to the ends of the world; rather, the *ends* had come to the church.

But what *ends* was Paul talking about? He was referring to the *eschaton*, or age in which the Holy Ghost rules—the age of peace. In other words, in the eschaton, the enmity between races will end. Wars will cease. There will be a fullness of life and peace. The people will be skilled in the art of goodness and forget the art of war. This age, Paul insisted, is what has come to the church—the future. The church does not have to wait for the future; the future has already come to the church. The reason the church is always out ahead of the world is because the future—through the gifts of the Spirit—literally reaches back into the present and equips the church with power the world will only know in the age to come.

Knowing God has purposed for our end to be glorious, we will choose to live our lives as offerings of praise and worship to the one true God. He alone sits on the throne. He alone is ultimately in control of the affairs of this world.

Group Discussion

1. Why do you think some people get caught up in the pursuit of “making a name” for themselves?
2. In what ways do you see the spirit of Babel alive in our world today?
3. Why is pride often so destructive to the one who is prideful and to others around this person?
4. In what way have you seen pride surface in your own life?
5. Have you ever been warned or become aware of something in prayer before it ever happened? Explain.

My Prayer for the Upcoming Week

How do you want to be different because of what you have experienced today?

2.1

WHAT GOD SAYS IS TRUE

LESSON BIG IDEA

I will have faith in God and believe what He says is true.

TRUTH ABOUT GOD

God wants us to trust His plan.



FOCUS VERSES: Luke 1:18–20

¹⁸ And Zacharias said unto the angel, Whereby shall I know this? for I am an old man, and my wife well stricken in years.

¹⁹ And the angel answering said unto him, I am Gabriel, that stand in the presence of God; and am sent to speak unto thee, and to shew thee these glad tidings.

²⁰ And, behold, thou shalt be dumb, and not able to speak, until the day that these things shall be performed, because thou believest not my words, which shall be fulfilled in their season.

LESSON TEXT: Luke 1:5–20, 57–64

BIBLICAL OVERVIEW

Lesson Text: Luke 1:5–20, 57–64

Following the complex, refined style of the prologue (Luke 1:1–4), verse 5 settles down into a more relaxed storytelling mode reminiscent of Old Testament narrative. Luke was eager to show that his account was in direct continuity with the grand saga of God's deeds conveyed by the Jewish Scriptures. Jesus' coming was no random accident, but entailed a direct fulfillment of God's ongoing purposes. (See Luke 24:25–27, 44–47.) Luke began his story by placing it in the historical context of the Judean king, Herod the Great. He coordinated Jesus' infancy account with that of His relative, John the Baptist, who was born of priestly Jewish parents of the tribe of Levi.

While among ancient cultures barrenness was considered shameful as well as a financial liability, it is a motif commonly found in the Old Testament. A struggle with infertility challenged such well-known couples as Abraham and Sarah (Genesis 11:30), Isaac and Rebekah (Genesis 25:21), Jacob and Rachel (Genesis 29:31; 30:1), Samson's parents (Judges 13:2–3), and Elkanah and Hannah (1 Samuel 1:2, 5–6). In addition, Zacharias and Elisabeth were well beyond their childbearing years.

Luke's Gospel begins and ends at the Temple (Luke 24:53). As an elderly priest carrying out his appointed term of Temple service (verse 8), Zacharias had been selected by lot to officiate in incense burning (verse 9).

This special child (John) had come to restore and advance the great prophetic tradition of Israel's past by calling God's people to repentance (verse 16), paving the way for the advent of the Messiah. The angel's description of John recalled the persona and role of Elijah (verse 17). The closing book of the Old Testament prophesied that Elijah would return to turn the hearts of fathers and children towards each other once again (Malachi 4:5–6).

LUKE'S GOSPEL BEGINS AND ENDS
AT THE TEMPLE.

DAY 1

Leviticus 20 □ 21 □ 22 □ 23 □ | Matthew 27 □

Luke 1:5-6

⁵ There was in the days of Herod, the king of Judæa, a certain priest named Zacharias, of the course of Abia: and his wife was of the daughters of Aaron, and her name was Elisabeth.

⁶ And they were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless.

Biblical Insight

Because of the number of priests available to serve, and since there were twenty-four courses (i.e., divisions), each priest could serve only twice per year. (See I Chronicles 24:7-18.) The number of priests included in each division and the variety of ministries to be performed meant each priest would be selected only once during his lifetime to burn incense (Logos Bible Software).

Zacharias and his wife, Elisabeth, were righteous and blameless. This does not mean they were without sin. The sin problem is universal (Romans 3:23). It means they dealt with their sins as commanded by the Law of Moses with its sacrificial system.

Daily Devotion

Richard Montañez showed up to work every day at Frito Lay and washed the floors. Being a custodian was known as a thankless role, but he remained faithful. One day the Frito-Lay CEO sent out a video urging employees to take ownership of Frito-Lay's success, so Montañez called the CEO directly to share an idea. He had no idea he was breaching communication protocol; he was embracing the CEO's initiative.

In his neighborhood, street vendors made Mexican grilled corn with lime and chili. Montañez had an idea for a Cheeto with chili powder on them. Impressed, the CEO gave him two weeks to present his vision to the company executives. Montañez pitched his idea of the Flamin' Hot Cheeto, and his life changed forever. The Flamin' Hot Cheeto became an all-time best-seller, and Montañez now serves in an executive position.

Breakthroughs often happen in the mundane process of faithfulness. Like Montañez, Zacharias faithfully fulfilled his priestly duty, and his steadfast devotion led to a miraculous encounter that changed his life. Remain faithful in the small moments. We never know what day could change our lives forever.

Reflection and Prayer

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

DAY 2

Bible Reading Plan

Leviticus 24 □ 25 □ 26 □ 27 □ | Matthew 28 □

Luke 1:7-11

⁷ And they had no child, because that Elisabeth was barren, and they both were now well stricken in years.

⁸ And it came to pass, that while he executed the priest's office before God in the order of his course,

⁹ according to the custom of the priest's office, his lot was to burn incense when he went into the temple of the Lord.

¹⁰ And the whole multitude of the people were praying without at the time of incense.

¹¹ And there appeared unto him an angel of the Lord standing on the right side of the altar of incense.

Biblical Insight

On at least four occasions, Scripture identifies key persons in God's plan as "stricken" or "well stricken" in years. These people include Abraham and Sarah (Genesis 18:11; 24:1), Joshua (Joshua 13:1; 23:1), David (I Kings 1:1), and Zacharias and Elisabeth (Luke 1:7, 18). Usefulness to God includes, but is not limited to, those who are young.

Another frequent identification of women who have key roles in God's plan is that they are barren. These include Sarai (Genesis 11:30), Rebekah (Genesis 25:21), Rachel (Genesis 29:31), Manoah's wife (Judges 13:2-3), and Elisabeth (Luke 1:7, 36).

Like Mary's virginity, these insights reveal that "with God nothing shall be impossible" (Luke 1:37).

Daily Devotion

The pastor of a small-town church felt impressed to preach on baptism in the name of Jesus. He had several people in mind as he preached, but no one responded as he had hoped. After service, he had an out-of-town business trip to attend, so he started his journey. But, when he is was about an hour away, he received a call.

"Pastor," Sunny said, "Grandma wants to be baptized!"

"Wonderful," the pastor exclaimed, "I'll meet you at the church!"

Sis. Wynter, or Grandma, as everyone affectionally called her, was the last person on the pastor's mind. Originally from Jamaica, Grandma Wynter moved to Texas to live with her granddaughter and family. She prayed diligently and was a dynamic, Spirit-filled woman of faith. The pastor had no idea she had never been baptized in the name of Jesus. But now, at eighty-one years old, Sis. Wynter took on the precious name of Jesus in baptism. God's plan never expires. God fulfills his promises to everyone who believes. So today, dust off the promises of God and dare to believe again. It is never too late for a miracle.

Reflection and Prayer

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

DAY 3

Bible Reading Plan

Numbers 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ | Mark 1 ☐

Luke 1:12-15

¹² And when Zacharias saw him, he was troubled, and fear fell upon him.

¹³ But the angel said unto him, Fear not, Zacharias: for thy prayer is heard; and thy wife Elisabeth shall bear thee a son, and thou shalt call his name John.

¹⁴ And thou shalt have joy and gladness; and many shall rejoice at his birth.

¹⁵ For he shall be great in the sight of the Lord, and shall drink neither wine nor strong drink; and he shall be filled with the Holy Ghost, even from his mother's womb.

Biblical Insight

We may wonder why a priest like Zacharias would react with fear to the appearance of an angel. But this may be more understandable if we remember this was the only time in his service as a priest that he was privileged with the very responsible task of burning incense. Zacharias had never stood in this precise place before, doing this specific thing, and apparently he had never before been visited by an angel while in the Temple.

The angel's good news was that Zacharias's prayer had been heard. Zacharias must have been praying a long time for a son, and the answer indicated his son would be a special person in God's plan. John would be filled with the Holy Ghost even before he was born.

Daily Devotion

Have you ever seen an angel? Angels do not look like chubby babies floating in the clouds with cute little wings. Angels serve as mighty warring spirits to protect the heirs of salvation. Like Zacharias, we would likely respond in fear in the presence of Gabriel as well. Our natural fear-response to the unknown is to fight, freeze in place, or run. And when the threat holds supernatural powers, we run faster! However, Zachariah's response remains puzzling. The fear we understand. But how could someone lack faith in such a sacred moment?

Zechariah's doubt in the middle of this miraculous moment reflects the destructive nature of misplaced faith. People who doubt often have *faith* in the wrong thing. Belief in the impossibility holds more sway than faith in the power of God, even when an angel stands before them.

Gabriel silenced the doubt by silencing Zechariah. Perhaps we should do the same. Maybe we should take a voluntary vow of silence the next time our doubts question the power of God. God specializes in the impossible. If it were possible, we would do it. Today, silence your doubts and watch God work.

Reflection and Prayer

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

DAY 4

Bible Reading Plan

Numbers 4 ☐ 5 ☐ 6 ☐ | Mark 2 ☐

Luke 1:16–20

¹⁶ And many of the children of Israel shall he turn to the Lord their God.

¹⁷ And he shall go before him in the spirit and power of Elias, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just; to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.

¹⁸ And Zacharias said unto the angel, Whereby shall I know this? for I am an old man, and my wife well stricken in years.

¹⁹ And the angel answering said unto him, I am Gabriel, that stand in the presence of God; and am sent to speak unto thee, and to shew thee these glad tidings.

²⁰ And, behold, thou shalt be dumb, and not able to speak, until the day that these things shall be performed, because thou believest not my words, which shall be fulfilled in their season.

Biblical Insight

John would turn many of the children of Israel “to the Lord their God.” This news, together with the angel’s next words (“he shall go before him in the spirit and power of Elias” and “to make ready a people prepared for the Lord”) forms a powerful declaration of the deity of Jesus Christ. Jesus is the one before whom John went. He is the one to whom many of the children of Israel would be turned. He is the one for whom a people would be prepared.

Daily Devotion

You may have heard of preppers in the news. Preppers go to great lengths to prepare for impending calamities. The calamities range from low-level crisis events like power-outages to apocalyptic-extinction events. When the 2020 COVID pandemic hit the world, more people started paying attention to this phenomenon. Suddenly prepping did not seem so far-fetched.

Academic research by Bradley Garrett explored the world of preppers by living in an underground bunker community for three years, and he concluded, “the prepper ideology, faith in adaptation has supplanted hope of mitigation” (*Doomsday Preppers and the Architecture of Dread*, Geoforum). In other words, preppers have little hope of making a change in the world, but they have a nice bunker.

John may be the original prepper, but he prepared differently. John did not assume a defensive posture. John boldly called people to repentance. John prepared people with the hope of change.

Today, God’s people prepare differently. We do not hunker down in fear and silence. We shine brighter and preach louder than ever before. We prepare the world for the coming of the Lord: the ultimate hope that will change everything once and for all.

Reflection and Prayer

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

DAY 5

Bible Reading Plan

Numbers 7 ☐ 8 ☐ 9 ☐ | Mark 3 ☐

Luke 1:57-64

⁵⁷ Now Elisabeth's full time came that she should be delivered; and she brought forth a son.

⁵⁸ And her neighbours and her cousins heard how the Lord had shewed great mercy upon her; and they rejoiced with her.

⁵⁹ And it came to pass, that on the eighth day they came to circumcise the child; and they called him Zacharias, after the name of his father.

⁶⁰ And his mother answered and said, Not so; but he shall be called John.

⁶¹ And they said unto her, There is none of thy kindred that is called by this name.

⁶² And they made signs to his father, how he would have him called.

⁶³ And he asked for a writing table, and wrote, saying, His name is John. And they marvelled all.

⁶⁴ And his mouth was opened immediately, and his tongue loosed, and he spake, and praised God.

Biblical Insight

Zacharias's fear and failure to believe upon seeing Gabriel meant he would not be able to speak until his son's birth (Luke 1:18-20). When his parents brought John to be circumcised, there was an attempt to name him after his father. Elisabeth refused, saying, "He shall be called John." The name John means "Jehovah is gracious." This may have been the name specified by Gabriel to point out how gracious God was to answer Zacharias's prayer for a son. Traditionally, sons were named after their fathers or grandfathers, but no one in the family bore this name. Rather than to move ahead with Elisabeth's direction, a writing tablet was brought to Zacharias to see what the baby should be named. He wrote, "His name is John." Those present marvelled, and immediately Zacharias could speak.

Daily Devotion

Imagine the best basketball player in the world challenges you to a dunking contest. The basketball player wows the crowd with his otherworldly jumping abilities. Then you try to jump and dunk the basketball but barely touch the bottom of the basketball net. It would be a humorous and embarrassing scenario. Now imagine the same scenario, but this time, instead of a dunking contest, the challenge is to see who can touch the sun. It's ridiculous to even think about it. No matter how high the basketball player jumps, or you jump, both of you are still over ninety million miles from the sun.

God's perspective puts everything in its place. When we could not reach Him by our efforts, He came to us. And the very name of the forerunner of Jesus (Yahweh-Savior) would be called John (Yahweh-Gracious). Grace would prepare the way for salvation. Grace still prepares the way for salvation today: "For by grace you have been saved through faith. (Ephesians 2:8, NKJV). So let's cancel the jumping contests and stand in awe of the Son.

Reflection and Prayer

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

Lesson Title: What God Says Is True

Scripture Focus: Luke 1:18-20

The Lesson in Context

Now that we have been redeemed by His blood, we cannot simply make peace with the way things are in our world. We have been called out of that kind of darkness into a marvelous light. We do not conform to the world. Our faith might not seem to work in theory, but it works in practice. We look at a cross and insist it is the throne of God. We look at the crown of thorns and call it a crown of glory. Like our Lord, we never take the world at face value. We shake our fists at the spiritual desert and demand it rain. We look at the houses of prostitutes, the broken, the addicts, and insist they are to be houses of the redeemed. We look out on whole continents in the grip of Satan and declare them won for Christ.

To all of life's heartaches, it might be tempting to say, "That's just the way it is." But if you listen closely, you will hear another "it." For on a dark, skull-shaped hill many years ago, the earth shook, Christ died, and His disciples heard Him say, "It is finished."

Group Discussion

1. In what ways did John "prepare the way" for the Lord to come?
2. Has God made a promise that seems impossible to you?
3. Why do you think God likes to change the status quo?
4. Why do we sometimes struggle to take God at His word?
5. How would you describe God's love to someone who has never experienced God?

My Prayer for the Upcoming Week

How do you want to be different because of what you have experienced today?

2.2

FOR HIS PURPOSE

LESSON BIG IDEA

I will commit my life to God so He can use me for His purpose.

TRUTH ABOUT GOD

God uses committed people to fulfill His purpose in the world.



FOCUS VERSE: Luke 1:38

And Mary said, Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word. And the angel departed from her.

LESSON TEXT: Luke 1:26-38, 46-55

BIBLICAL OVERVIEW

Lesson Text: Luke 1:26–38, 46–55

Introducing the story of Jesus' conception, Luke interwove parallel accounts of John and Jesus, comparing and contrasting these two figures. The setting transitions from focusing on (1) John's father, a married, elderly male priest from the tribe of Levi serving at the Temple in Jerusalem, to (2) Jesus' mother, a young, peasant-class virgin residing in an insignificant village in Galilee (verse 27). Mary and Joseph were descendants of David, a member of the tribe of Judah. While both John and Jesus would be considered great (Luke 1:15, 32), Jesus' unique identity as "the Son of God" (Luke 1:35) would far overshadow John's lesser status as a prophet.

As with Zacharias (Luke 1:13), Gabriel instructed Mary prior to her son's birth on what name to give Him. Jesus (*Iesous*; meaning "Jehovah is salvation") is a name especially relevant to Luke's Gospel, which narrates God's ongoing acts of salvation.

Describing this great child's exalted, regal status (Luke 1:32; compare Luke 1:15), Gabriel announced that from His birth Mary's son was in fact "Son of the Highest" (Genesis 14:18–22; Numbers 24:16; Psalm 7:17; II Samuel 22:14; Daniel 4:24; Luke 1:76; 6:35; 8:28; Acts 7:48; 16:17), an expression equivalent to "Son of God" (Luke 1:35). This messianic figure would ascend upon and restore the throne of the fallen Davidic dynasty. Unstable, fleeting secular empires are soon destroyed (Daniel 2:36–45), but His magnificent kingdom would last forever (Daniel 2:44; 4:3; 6:26; 7:14).

Gabriel revealed to Mary an aspect of the mystery of the Incarnation: Jesus' miraculous conception would take place as the Holy Spirit's power overshadowed her (compare Luke 1:15; 9:34). The resulting figure—who was both fully God and man—would thus be referred to as "the Son of God" (Luke 1:32; 3:38; 4:3, 9, 41; 8:28; 22:70; Acts 3:13, 26; 8:37; 9:20; 13:33).

These twin birth miracles fall beyond the range of human comprehension and ingenuity, demonstrating God's ability to perform anything is absolutely unlimited. (See also Matthew 19:26; Mark 10:27.)

By means of a song of praise known as the Magnificat (Luke 1:46–55), Mary extolled the amazing God who had choreographed this marvelous chain of events. Mary's Song finds parallels in Deborah's Song (Judges 5:1–31), Hannah's Song (I Samuel 2:1–10), as well as various psalms (e.g., 33; 47; 113; 135; 136).

Mary, from humble origins (Luke 1:48), expressed the common Lukan theme of reversal: God brings down the rich and arrogant, while raising up the poor and meek (Luke 3:5; 10:15; 14:7–11; 18:9–14).

GOD'S ABILITY TO PERFORM ANYTHING IS ABSOLUTELY UNLIMITED.

DAY 1

Bible Reading Plan

Numbers 10 11 12 13 | Mark 4

Luke 1:26–28

²⁶ And in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God unto a city of Galilee, named Nazareth,

²⁷ to a virgin espoused to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David; and the virgin's name was Mary.

²⁸ And the angel came in unto her, and said, Hail, thou that art highly favoured, the Lord is with thee: blessed art thou among women.

Biblical Insight

Mary was espoused to Joseph. Both were descendants of king David, Joseph through Solomon (Matthew 1:7), and Mary through Nathan (Luke 3:31). Matthew's genealogy takes Jesus back only to Abraham (Matthew 1:1). Matthew, a Jewish author writing to a Jewish audience, had no messianic concern before Abraham. Luke, a Gentile author writing to a Gentile audience, traced Jesus' genealogy all the way back to Adam (Luke 3:38). Whereas Matthew identified Joseph's father as Jacob, Luke said Joseph's father was Heli. It is important to note that Luke says Jesus "was supposed" to be the son of Joseph. From Abraham to David, both agree. The difference begins after David. Matthew 1:11 lists Jechonias, also known as Coniah, who was such a wicked king that none of his descendants would ever sit on David's throne (Jeremiah 22:28–38).

If Jesus had descended biologically from David through Solomon, He would have been disqualified from sitting on David's throne. The prophecies required the Messiah to sit on the throne of David (Isaiah 9:7), however. This problem is overcome by Mary's genealogy. Jewish genealogies did not typically list immediate descent through one's mother, but the father. The best way to understand Luke's record is that Heli was Mary's father, and Joseph's father-in-law.

Daily Devotion

The "begats" section of Bible genealogy is where many New Year's resolutions go to die. Each January, we start reading chapters and checking boxes, but we know we are getting closer to that long list of names that tell us who was whose dad. We tend to warn new people about the begats as if to say, "Lock the doors, and drive through fast. If you make it out alive, join us in Ezra for more adventure." But the begats matter to God because they tell us our history and His story. As we will learn, Jesus descended from the tribe of Judah and the line of David. That matters because Moses prophesied the Messiah would be from the tribe of Judah (Genesis 49:10), and Isaiah prophesied He would come from the line of David (Isaiah 9:7).

The Jews cared if Jesus qualified to be the Messiah. That is one reason God cared to build the begats. That is one reason we should care to read them. Jesus fit the qualifications as Judah's Lion and David's son. But that is just the beginning. As we will soon see, our Jesus truly is our Messiah.

Reflection and Prayer

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

DAY 2

Bible Reading Plan

Numbers 14 □ 15 □ 16 □ 17 □ | Mark 5 □

Luke 1:29–31

²⁹ And when she saw him, she was troubled at his saying, and cast in her mind what manner of salutation this should be.

³⁰ And the angel said unto her, Fear not, Mary: for thou hast found favour with God.

³¹ And, behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shalt call his name JESUS.

Biblical Insight

Mary could not imagine what Gabriel meant by his greeting. Gabriel sensed her confusion and said, “Fear not, Mary: for thou hast found favour with God.” It was not an unusual angelic greeting. Gabriel also said to Zacharias, “Fear not, Zacharias: for thy prayer is heard” (Luke 1:13). To the shepherds abiding in the field, the angel said, “Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people” (Luke 2:10). To Paul, an angel said, “Fear not, Paul, thou must be brought before Caesar: and, lo, God hath given thee all them that sail with thee” (Acts 27:24).

The frequency with which angels address people by their names is interesting. (See Daniel 9:22.) Because angels are God’s ministers, He shares with them the personal information they need to deliver His messages (Hebrews 1:7).

Daily Devotion

We love to hear our name at certain places: “Bumblehoffer, party of four, your table is ready.” At other places, we do not: “The court calls the State of New Jersey vs. Bruce Bumblehoffer.” Dale Carnegie said, “There is no sweeter sound to one’s ear than the sound of his name.”

For a maître d’ to know our name means we are about to eat. For a judge to know our name means we are about to sweat. But for God to know our name means we are about to hear from Heaven. That must be how Mary felt. She lived in the one flashing yellow lantern town of Nazareth. Her family and her fiancée knew her name, but no one from Herod’s fortress or Caesar’s castle did. Yet God did. And God sent His angel Gabriel to Mary and called Mary by her name.

That tells us what it told Mary—God knows where we are and who we are. And if we will listen, we may also hear His sweet voice call us by name.

Reflection and Prayer

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

DAY 3

Bible Reading Plan

Numbers 18 ☐ 19 ☐ 20 ☐ | Mark 6 ☐ 7 ☐

Luke 1:32-33

³² He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest: and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David:

³³ and he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end.

Biblical Insight

In addition to identifying Mary's son as JESUS, which means "Jehovah will save" or "Jehovah-Savior," and as "the Son of the Highest" (i.e., the Son of God), Gabriel further connected to her baby an important messianic prophecy. He did so with three key terms: (1) the throne of David, (2) house of Jacob, and (3) kingdom. We could almost think Gabriel had read the Davidic covenant just before his visit with Mary: "I will set up thy seed after thee, which shall proceed out of thy bowels, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build an house for my name, and I will stablish the throne of his kingdom for ever" (II Samuel 7:12-13).

Daily Devotion

Every parent wants their baby to grow up to make a difference in the world. Maybe our baby will cure cancer. Maybe our baby will end world hunger. Maybe our baby will introduce Baskin Robbins' thirty-second flavor and make all the world a happier place. Maybe our baby will be a missionary and take the gospel around the world.

Imagine how Mary felt when she unwrapped Gabriel's baby shower gift. The angel prophesied that Jesus would not just be her Son; He would also be her Savior. If she thought nine months was a long time to wait before meeting Him, just think how long her ancestors had waited. For thousands of years, they prayed each day for God to send the Messiah. And each day, they waited. He did not come in their day, but thanks to the faithfulness and virtue of a virgin teenage girl named Mary, He was about to.

What promises from God are you waiting on in your life? God always comes through on His promises. Await His timing with faith.

Reflection and Prayer

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

DAY 4

Bible Reading Plan

Numbers 21 □ 22 □ 23 □ 24 □ 25 □ | Mark 8 □

Luke 1:34–38

³⁴ Then said Mary unto the angel, How shall this be, seeing I know not a man?

³⁵ And the angel answered and said unto her, The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God.

³⁶ And, behold, thy cousin Elisabeth, she hath also conceived a son in her old age: and this is the sixth month with her, who was called barren.

³⁷ For with God nothing shall be impossible.

³⁸ And Mary said, Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word. And the angel departed from her.

Biblical Insight

Some people struggle with the idea of a virgin birth. How is this possible? The attempt to figure this concept out has resulted in faulty views of Jesus' identity. These notions usually fall into one of two errors: (1) a denial of Jesus' full and genuine humanity; (2) a denial of his deity. Mary knew she was a virgin, so she had her own question: "How shall this be, seeing I know not a man?" Gabriel's answer should remove all questions: "For with God nothing shall be impossible." As mysterious as it may be, this miracle means Jesus is fully God and fully man. (See I Timothy 3:16.)

Daily Devotion

You may have heard it. "You look just like your mom!" Or "You're the spittin' image of your dad." That last expression does not seem to be much of a compliment. Who wants to look like anything spittin'? We often look like our parents. We even act like them sometimes. If you do not believe it, just think back to the things you vowed you would never say when you became a parent: "Because I said so. I'll give you something to cry about. I don't care who started it—I'll finish it."

We get our genes from our parents. Jesus did too. But His dad was not this strong, steady carpenter named Joseph; His dad was God Himself. Jesus was Mary's son; that made Him human. And He was God's Son; that made Him divine.

When we look at Jesus' life, we see both parents. Jesus slept in a storm; then He calmed it. Jesus' stomach growled; then He fed twenty thousand with a value meal. Jesus is fully man and fully God. As man, He can identify with us. As God, He can save us.

Reflection and Prayer

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

DAY 5

Bible Reading Plan

Numbers 26 27 28 29 30

Luke 1:46-55

⁴⁶ And Mary said, My soul doth magnify the Lord,

⁴⁷ and my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour.

⁴⁸ For he hath regarded the low estate of his handmaiden: for, behold, from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed.

⁴⁹ For he that is mighty hath done to me great things; and holy is his name.

⁵⁰ And his mercy is on them that fear him from generation to generation.

⁵¹ He hath shewed strength with his arm; he hath scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts.

⁵² He hath put down the mighty from their seats, and exalted them of low degree.

⁵³ He hath filled the hungry with good things; and the rich he hath sent empty away.

⁵⁴ He hath holpen his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy;

⁵⁵ as he spake to our fathers, to Abraham, and to his seed for ever.

Biblical Insight

Elisabeth's (Luke 1:42-45) and Mary's words upon their meeting resonate with many Old Testament texts. The encounter of these two special women gathers up and helps us understand messianic prophecies we may otherwise have missed. The ministries of John and Jesus were both anticipated by the Hebrew prophets, and their mothers were uniquely chosen to play their role in bringing the greatest redemptive event to pass. Elisabeth recognized the baby in Mary's womb as her Lord, and Mary's role is anticipated as early as Genesis 3:15.

Daily Devotion

Luke 1 is the BOGO (buy one get one) deal for miraculous birth. The angel Gabriel appeared to the virtuous, virgin teenage girl named Mary to announce she was going to have a baby before Mary was fully married. And she was still virtuous because she was still a virgin. Gabriel also appeared to an aged, faithful priest named Zacharias and announced to him that his wife was going to have a baby. She was virtuous as well, but she had been married for decades without a baby.

Luke 1 is also the BOGO deal for fulfilling prophecy. Isaiah prophesied a forerunner would come before the Messiah and pave the way for Him. That was Zachariah's and Elizabeth's son, John. Of course, Genesis 3 prophesied that a Messiah would come. And of course, that was Mary's son, Jesus. It seemed impossible to both women that either one of them would give birth, but Gabriel assured Mary and assuaged her fears when he read the back of God's business card: "For with God, nothing shall be impossible" (Luke 1:37).

If God can do the impossible, and since He did so to become flesh and save us, we can trust Him for whatever we need in our lives.

Reflection and Prayer

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

Lesson Title: For His Purpose

Scripture Focus: Luke 1:38

The Lesson in Context

Choosing to commit to God's purpose is not a one-time event. In the same way, learning to love others is not a one-time event, but a lifetime of loving, learning, experiencing, and choosing to love and learn again. The prophet Jeremiah is a good example of someone who was chosen for a specific purpose but did not always like where that purpose took him. He had to choose again and again to submit to God's purpose.

Every believer has a purpose in God's kingdom. Each one of us is called to be involved in sharing Jesus. What that looks like and how God uses you depends on His call, His purpose, and your response. Today is the day to believe God and commit to Him. If you have already committed, then today is a day to remember His purpose and rejoice as you walk in that purpose. If you are not walking in God's purpose, then make the decision to listen to God as He speaks to you today. You have value and purpose in God's plan. Your identity can be found in Him, and you can trust Him with your future.

Group Discussion

1. How would you think and respond if an angel appeared and spoke to you?
2. Why is it important for us to listen to God's voice, His direction for our lives, and the leading of His Spirit?
3. Have you ever been in a situation where you were at a loss for words?
4. Is our human need for control so strong that when God is in control we automatically doubt? Explain.
5. Can you think of a time when you committed something to God and He gave you confirmation? How did that make you feel? Did it have an impact on a later decision you had to make in your commitment to God? Explain.

My Prayer for the Upcoming Week

How do you want to be different because of what you have experienced today?

2.3

IT WILL COME TO PASS

LESSON BIG IDEA

I will faithfully wait for God's Word to come to pass.

TRUTH ABOUT GOD

God's Word always comes true.



FOCUS VERSES: Luke 2:25-26

²⁵ And, behold, there was a man in Jerusalem, whose name was Simeon; and the same man was just and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel: and the Holy Ghost was upon him.

²⁶ And it was revealed unto him by the Holy Ghost, that he should not see death, before he had seen the Lord's Christ.

LESSON TEXT: Luke 2:21-40

BIBLICAL OVERVIEW

Lesson Text: Luke 2:21-40

As noted in Galatians 4:4, “But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law.”

Luke noted three times that the actions of Jesus’ parents were carried out in obedience to and fulfillment of the Mosaic Law: (1) Mary followed the prescribed period of postnatal ritual purification (Luke 2:22; Leviticus 12:1-4); (2) as the family’s firstborn male offspring, Jesus was presented to the Lord (Exodus 13:2, 12, 15) in Jerusalem (Luke 2:23); and (3) his parents offered the appropriate sacrifice (Leviticus 12:6-8).

While the family was in Jerusalem, the Spirit directed Simeon (meaning “he has heard”) into the Temple to see the young Messiah. The Spirit promised that prior to his death Simeon would witness for himself this long-anticipated figure who was “the consolation [or comfort] of Israel,” a concept that figures prominently in the Book of Isaiah (40:1; 49:13; 51:3; 57:18; 61:2; 66:13).

Simeon declared that the Messiah was sent to save “all people” (Luke 2:31), Gentiles as well as Jews (Luke 2:32).

After blessing Jesus’ parents, Simeon prophesied to Mary. His prophecy foreshadowed the hostility and conflict that her Messianic son would precipitate. First, Jesus’ ministry would divide the nation of Israel into those who would fall and those who would rise (Luke 2:34). Second, His ministry would serve as an unpopular sign (Luke 2:34) designed to disclose the innermost “thoughts of many hearts” (Luke 2:35). In the process, Mary’s “own soul” would be pierced (Luke 2:35), probably a reference to the struggles and division that would occur within her own heart and among Jesus’ family members. (See also Matthew 10:34-37; Mark 3:31-35; John 2:3-4; 7:1-5; 19:25-27; Acts 2:37.)

Like Simeon, the prophetess Anna also encountered Jesus at the Temple. If Anna had married around age fourteen (not uncommon in that culture), became widowed seven years into her marriage (Luke 2:36), and lived in the state of widowhood for about eighty-four years (Luke 2:37), she would have been of an extremely advanced age (around 105) at the time of this episode.

After returning to Nazareth (Luke 2:39), Jesus grew both physically and spiritually and was endowed with divine wisdom (Luke 2:40). (Compare Luke 1:80; 2:52.)

SIMEON DECLARED THAT THE MESSIAH
WAS SENT TO SAVE “ALL PEOPLE.”

DAY 1

Bible Reading Plan

Numbers 31 ☐ 32 ☐ 33 ☐ | Mark 9 ☐

Luke 2:21

And when eight days were accomplished for the circumcising of the child, his name was called JESUS, which was so named of the angel before he was conceived in the womb.

Biblical Insight

As Joseph had been instructed in a dream and Mary informed by the angel Gabriel, Mary's baby was named JESUS at the time he was circumcised (Matthew 1:21; Luke 1:31; Luke 2:21). In keeping with what is sometimes called "name theology," it was essential for the Messiah's name to reveal His identity. The English Jesus is the transliteration of the Greek Iesous, the transliteration into Greek of the Hebrew Yeshua. This name means "Jehovah will save" or "Jehovah-Savior." This makes it readily apparent why the angel in Joseph's dream said, "Thou shalt call his name JESUS: for he shall save his people from their sins" (Matthew 1:21). This divinely given name identifies Mary's baby as Jehovah (i.e., Yahweh), the Savior.

Daily Devotion

Nine months is a long time to keep a secret. So is five months. But for couples looking to surprise themselves and their friends, that's how long somebody has to keep their secret a secret. The popularity of gender reveal parties reflects the excitement of the big question: is the baby a boy or a girl? These parties require the parents to wait until the day of the party to see blue paint or pink paint. Blue powder or pink powder. Blue smoke or pink smoke. Finally, after waiting a few months, Mom, Dad, and all their Facebook friends now know whether this bouncing bundle of joy is a boy or a girl.

Imagine keeping a secret for over four thousand years. That's how long God kept His covenant name to His people a secret. All throughout history, He revealed Himself as God, the Almighty, and the I AM. But He unwrapped the revelation to a teenage girl when Gabriel announced her baby would be called Jesus. He would be called Jesus because He—this Jesus—would save His people from their sins.

That revealed name remains our refuge today. No matter the situation we face today, we can call on His name to encounter Him and experience His power.

Reflection and Prayer

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

DAY 2

Bible Reading Plan

Numbers 34 ☐ 35 ☐ 36 ☐ | Mark 10 ☐

Luke 2:22-24

²² And when the days of her purification according to the law of Moses were accomplished, they brought him to Jerusalem, to present him to the Lord;

²³ (as it is written in the law of the Lord, Every male that openeth the womb shall be called holy to the Lord;)

²⁴ and to offer a sacrifice according to that which is said in the law of the Lord, A pair of turtledoves, or two young pigeons.

Biblical Insight

Some of Jesus' final words to His disciples were, "All things must be fulfilled, which were written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the psalms, concerning me" (Luke 24:44). The Law of Moses was still in effect when Jesus was born. (See Galatians 4:4.) Luke noted that the events surrounding Jesus' circumcision were done according to the Law (Luke 2:21-24). Of course there were countless other baby boys before the birth of Jesus whose infant experiences were accomplished according to the Law. But Jesus was unique. He fulfilled the Law (Matthew 5:17), and with Him, the Law came to an end (Romans 10:4).

Daily Devotion

Some sights are just unsightly. A dentist drinking Mountain Dew. A cardiologist choking back a bacon triple cheeseburger. A lawyer breaking the law. When we think of the experts, we think *surely they know better*. They don't write the rules, but they do know them better than most, and they know the consequences of breaking the rules. That's why it's unusual to see them break them.

Mary and Joseph brought baby Jesus to the Temple on the eighth day to have Him circumcised according to the Law. Of course they would, but whether they realized it or not, Jesus wrote the Law they were following. If He wanted, He could have skirted the Law because He wrote it. But because He is holy, He kept the Law and fulfilled it. But when He fulfilled it, He completed it. And when He completed it, the Law came to an end as the day of the gospel began to dawn.

Because Jesus is holy, we are called to be holy. The call to holiness is not about keeping rules but about pursuing Jesus and ridding our lives of anything that would separate us from Him. As we respond to His love in our life and naturally draw close to Him, we'll naturally separate from things in the world around us that are contrary to God.

Reflection and Prayer

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

DAY 3

Bible Reading Plan

Deuteronomy 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ | Mark 11 ☐

Luke 2:25–32

²⁵ And, behold, there was a man in Jerusalem, whose name was Simeon; and the same man was just and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel: and the Holy Ghost was upon him.

²⁶ And it was revealed unto him by the Holy Ghost, that he should not see death, before he had seen the Lord's Christ.

²⁷ And he came by the Spirit into the temple: and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him after the custom of the law,

²⁸ then took he him up in his arms, and blessed God, and said,

²⁹ Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word:

³⁰ for mine eyes have seen thy salvation,

³¹ which thou hast prepared before the face of all people;

³² a light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of thy people Israel.

Biblical Insight

The Holy Spirit filled a major role in preparing first-century people of faith to receive the Messiah, Jesus. The Spirit revealed to Simeon, a just and devout man who was eagerly awaiting the fulfillment of specific prophecies from Isaiah about the consolation (i.e., comfort) of Israel, that he would not die until he had seen the Messiah. (See Isaiah 40:1; 49:13; 51:3; 57:18; 61:2; 66:13.) The Spirit led Simeon into the Temple at the precise moment Joseph and Mary brought Jesus for circumcision. As he took the baby Jesus into his arms, Simeon acknowledged, "Mine eyes have seen thy salvation." Simeon understood the meaning of the baby's name.

Daily Devotion

Gramma Marj was a marvel. She was ninety-one years old, and her family knew her hours were numbered. She asked her granddaughter to help gather some of her personal effects. The granddaughter took her time, hoping to keep her grandmother around a little longer. It seemed to work. Gramma Marj held on. The news then came that her son was coming from Texas. They told him to get there fast. Gramma Marj heard the news but knew he would not get there until the next day. Did she have another day? She was unresponsive all that day. But the next morning when he came into the room, she opened her eyes. Not long after he left, she breathed her last breath.

She was waiting for something, for someone. Maybe Simeon was, too. He was waiting for the Messiah, and that wonderful day, Mary carried Him into the Temple to introduce Him to Simeon and to the world. After a lifetime of waiting, Simeon finally saw the one he had been waiting for.

We too are waiting to see Jesus when He returns for His bride. With the same anticipation as Simeon, we take hope from Scripture's prophecies of His return. Soon our Savior will come. We must be ready to meet Him.

Reflection and Prayer

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

DAY 4

Bible Reading Plan

Deuteronomy 5 6 7 8 9 10

Luke 2:33-35

³³ And Joseph and his mother marvelled at those things which were spoken of him.

³⁴ And Simeon blessed them, and said unto Mary his mother, Behold, this child is set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel; and for a sign which shall be spoken against;

³⁵ (yea, a sword shall pierce through thy own soul also,) that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed.

Biblical Insight

Even though Joseph and Mary had already experienced angelic revelation about Jesus' identity and future, Simeon's words advanced their understanding further. They marvelled, and Simeon offered even more clarity about Jesus' future. Although He was the Savior, many in Israel would fall, while others would "rise again." These terms describe the spiritual condition both of those who would reject and those who would believe on Jesus. Jesus would be a sign of deliverance, but there would be those who would resist Him. Mary would experience emotional trauma in her soul even as Jesus would be physically pierced.

Daily Devotion

All parents know their children are going to fall down and scrape their knee or fall off a bike and scrape their elbow. Some parents live paralyzed by fear that their fearless child is going to break an arm or leg. We all want to know our children will be safe from all harm, but we know better. We know they will get hurt. We know others will hurt them. We even know they will hurt others.

Mary was a first-time mom. Jesus was not going to become a master carpenter or fisherman; He was the Messiah. What would that look like? What would His future hold? Simeon's words had to pierce Mary's heart that day when he prophesied Jesus would cause some to rise and some to fall. Suddenly Simeon's heart grew heavy when he told Mary a sword would pierce her own soul. Somehow Simeon knew, and we would too, that Jesus' life would change her life, his life, and all our lives.

How has knowing Jesus changed you? Is your heart still open to the wonder of seeing Him and allowing Him to bring transformation?

Reflection and Prayer

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

DAY 5

Bible Reading Plan

Deuteronomy 11 ☐ 12 ☐ 13 ☐ | Mark 12 ☐ 13 ☐

Luke 2:36–40

³⁶ And there was one Anna, a prophetess, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Aser: she was of a great age, and had lived with an husband seven years from her virginity;

³⁷ and she was a widow of about fourscore and four years, which departed not from the temple, but served God with fastings and prayers night and day.

³⁸ And she coming in that instant gave thanks likewise unto the Lord, and spake of him to all them that looked for redemption in Jerusalem.

³⁹ And when they had performed all things according to the law of the Lord, they returned into Galilee, to their own city Nazareth.

⁴⁰ And the child grew, and waxed strong in spirit, filled with wisdom: and the grace of God was upon him.

Biblical Insight

As the Temple drama unfolded that day, another person had a significant revelatory role to play. Anna, an elderly prophetess who devoted herself to serving God with fastings and prayers night and day, entered at that instant. When she saw the baby Jesus, she “spake of him to all them that looked for redemption in Jerusalem.” Redemption and salvation are synonymous terms, and Anna’s words were prophetic. Those who looked for redemption would find it in Jesus. After fulfilling all the law required of newborn baby boys, Joseph and Mary returned with Jesus to Nazareth. As He grew, Jesus developed spiritual strength and wisdom as the grace of God rested upon Him. (See also Luke 2:52.)

Daily Devotion

Time flies. Time crawls. It all depends on what is happening. When you are on vacation, time seems to speed by. When you are waiting for your name to be called at the DMV, time seems to crawl by. But what does it feel like when you are waiting for rescue? What if you hear a noise in the middle of the night and you know it’s not just the dog? Someone is in your house. You call 9-1-1 and wait for the sirens.

The shortest average response time for a high priority 9-1-1 call is still five minutes. Those three hundred seconds can feel like hours. The Jews had been waiting for rescue for thousands of years. Entire generations had lived and died, waiting for the Messiah to rescue and redeem them. They couldn’t see a life beyond Roman occupation and Roman taxes. But everything changed the day Mary brought Jesus to the Temple. After thousands of years of waiting for rescue, the wait was over. Jesus the Messiah had come.

Because Jesus has come, you can have hope today for whatever you face. Think about the reality that He is here—with you in your victories, your tragedies, and all the moments in between. How do you make time each day to recognize God’s presence?

Reflection and Prayer

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

Lesson Title: It Will Come to Pass

Scripture Focus: Luke 2:25–26

The Lesson in Context

Just like Anna, each of us can faithfully wait for God's Word to come to pass. Anna had experienced pain and loss at a young age, but instead of allowing this trauma to distance her from God, she chose to draw closer to Him. Anna chose to follow God's plan and faithfully respond to His call. We can do the same. We can refuse to allow the pain, loss, and disappointments of life to distance us from God. We can ground ourselves in God's Word, listen for His voice, and be led by His Spirit. Drawing closer to God will increase our faith and create an intimacy that will call us to wait on Him. Faithfully waiting on God will not be a chore. It will be born out of a relationship of trust and a place of peace, knowing that the one we love will do what He has promised.

Group Discussion

1. How does Jesus being presented in the Temple parallel the practice of dedicating children?
2. What kind of sacrifices should we bring to the house of the Lord?
3. How does God speak to you most often?
4. Why is it difficult to cling to God's promises if we do not know Scripture?
5. What does it mean to faithfully wait for God's Word to come to pass?

My Prayer for the Upcoming Week

How do you want to be different because of what you have experienced today?

2.4

A PART OF GOD'S PLAN

LESSON BIG IDEA

I want to be part of God's plan.

TRUTH ABOUT GOD

God always has a plan.



FOCUS VERSES: Luke 3:3-4

³ And he came into all the country about Jordan, preaching the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins;

⁴ As it is written in the book of the words of Esaias the prophet, saying, The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.

LESSON TEXT: Luke 3:1-22

BIBLICAL OVERVIEW

Lesson Text: Luke 3:1-22

Luke located John the Baptist's ministry in world history by listing the political reigns of seven rulers, beginning with the emperor Tiberius Caesar, who succeeded his stepfather, Augustus (Luke 2:1). Pilate later played a pivotal role in Jesus' execution (Luke 23:1-25). Herod Antipas, one of Herod the Great's sons (Luke 1:5), governed Galilee. Annas and his son-in-law, Caiaphas, presided over the Jewish segment of Jesus' trial (Matthew 26:3, 57; John 11:49-52; 18:12-28; Acts 4:6).

John preached "the baptism of repentance for the remission [or, forgiveness] of sins" (Luke 1:77). This message fulfilled a key prophetic oracle (Isaiah 40:3-5). Such preparation of the heart would facilitate God's work of "salvation" (verse 6). These Jews were to show signs of transformed hearts. Merely claiming descent from Abraham would mean nothing on judgment day. (See also John 8:39-40.)

The ax of God's wrath poised to chop down fruitless trees was a metaphor, by which John urged his audience to prepare for judgment. The people responded to John's message by asking, "What shall we do then?" (Luke 3:12, 14). John's reply was simple: take care of those in need. (See also Luke 10:25-37.) John admonished the publicans (tax collectors), notorious for deceit and corruption, to deal honestly and fairly. (See also Luke 5:30; 7:29, 34; 15:1; 18:9-14; 19:2-10.) He instructed the soldiers to avoid extorting people through violent and fraudulent means and to cease complaining about their salaries.

John underscored his subordinate, provisional role: he baptized merely "with water." A greater one would offer a superior baptism and (whereas John only warned of coming judgment) was Himself the Judge. The depiction of the final judgment as a threshing floor during the harvest season (Luke 3:17) would provoke John's audience to search their hearts. The fan separated grain, which would be stored, from useless chaff, which would be discarded and burned.

Following Jesus' baptism, while He prayed, the Spirit visibly came down in the manner in which a dove gracefully flies. This sign signified Jesus' anointing. A heavenly voice validated John's testimony about Jesus (Luke 3:16-17), identifying Him as "my beloved Son" and endorsing His status and faithful conduct ("in thee I am well pleased").

A HEAVENLY VOICE VALIDATED JOHN'S
TESTIMONY ABOUT JESUS.

DAY 1

Deuteronomy 14 □ 15 □ 16 □ 17 □ 18 □ 19 □

Luke 3:1-3

¹Now in the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Cæsar, Pontius Pilate being governor of Judæa, and Herod being tetrarch of Galilee, and his brother Philip tetrarch of Ituræa and of the region of Trachonitis, and Lysanias the tetrarch of Abilene,

²Annas and Caiaphas being the high priests, the word of God came unto John the son of Zacharias in the wilderness.

³And he came into all the country about Jordan, preaching the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins.

Biblical Insight

The first two verses of Luke 3 bristle with the names of significant government and religious leaders. But the word of God came to none of them. Instead, God's word came to a man in the wilderness, John, the son of Zacharias, better known as John the Baptist. John preached the necessity of repentance and baptism for the remission of sins. In Luke 3:3 and Acts 2:38, the Greek phrase translated "for the remission of sins" is precisely the same.

Daily Devotion

At the start of the year, each U.S. citizen can be a witness to one of the greatest moments in the United States democracy. It is the night when the President of the United States walks into the House Chamber to deliver the State of the Union address. On that night, citizens hear a review of the last year and the President's plan for the new year.

But one of the interesting traditions surrounding the State of the Union is the introduction. The Sergeant at Arms of the House of Representatives walks in just before the President and calls for the speaker of the house's attention. He then announces, without a microphone, "Mr./Mrs. Speaker, the President of the United States." Maybe he practices his line leading up to that night.

Although his role is valuable, he understands his role is not to give the speech; it is to introduce the one who will. That was John the Baptist's role. He understood it well, and he did it well. He baptized with water until he finally had the honor of introducing Jesus, the one who would baptize with the Holy Spirit and fire.

What purpose does God have for your life? Are you willing to serve, even if not in the spotlight?

Reflection and Prayer

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

DAY 2

Deuteronomy 20 □ 21 □ 22 □ 23 □ 24 □ 25 □ | Mark 14 □

Bible Reading Plan**Luke 3:4-6**

⁴ As it is written in the book of the words of Esaias the prophet, saying, The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.

⁵ Every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill shall be brought low; and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough ways shall be made smooth;

⁶ and all flesh shall see the salvation of God.

Biblical Insight

John's ministry fulfilled Isaiah's prophecy: "The voice of him that crieth in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the LORD, Make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Every valley shall be exalted, And every mountain and hill shall be made low: And the crooked shall be made straight, And the rough places plain: And the glory of the LORD shall be revealed, And all flesh shall see it together: For the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it"(Isaiah 40:3-5).

The one for whom John prepared the way was the LORD (Jehovah, or Yahweh, in the Hebrew text). He was, of course, Jesus. In seeing Jesus, first-century believers saw "the salvation of God." The name Jesus means "Jehovah-Savior" or, being fully translated, "He will save" or "He is salvation."

Daily Devotion

Jesus wasn't the first person named Jesus. We know that because Jesus was a popular name in His day. In fact, Jesus was a popular name throughout the Bible. We know about the Joshua who wrote the Book of Joshua, and Zechariah and Haggai both wrote about a high priest named Joshua. That was the Old Testament version of the New Testament name Jesus. In Acts 13, we also meet a man whose dad was named Jesus, but not our Jesus. Jesus was a popular name, possibly because it means "Jehovah-Savior."

Everyone who heard the name of Jesus heard a hurting nation's heart's cry: "Jehovah, save us." But when Jesus Christ was born and named, He wasn't just named Jesus because Mary and Joseph liked the name. He was named Jesus because He was Jehovah coming to save us. Every time someone called His name—whether they realized it or not—they were calling for Jehovah to come and save them. Little did they know, He was already there. And little did they know He was about to do what He came to do.

Scripture instructs us to do everything in the name of Jesus (Colossians 3:17). What need do you have today? Speak the name of Jesus over it in prayer.

Reflection and Prayer

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

DAY 3

Bible Reading Plan

Deuteronomy 26 □ 27 □ 28 □ 29 □ 30 □ | Mark 15 □

Luke 3:7-9, 16-17

⁷ Then said he to the multitude that came forth to be baptized of him, O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come?

⁸ Bring forth therefore fruits worthy of repentance, and begin not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to our father: for I say unto you, That God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham.

⁹ And now also the axe is laid unto the root of the trees: every tree therefore which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire.

¹⁶ John answered, saying unto them all, I indeed baptize you with water; but one mightier than I cometh, the latchet of whose shoes I am not worthy to unloose: he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost and with fire:

¹⁷ whose fan is in his hand, and he will thoroughly purge his floor, and will gather the wheat into his garner; but the chaff he will burn with fire unquenchable.

Biblical Insight

All four Gospels agree Jesus would baptize with the Holy Spirit. Matthew and Luke also refer to a baptism of fire. John identified the unbelievers as vipers and trees that do not bear good fruit and are cut down and thrown into fire. Chaff is a negative image in Scripture, and John warned the chaff would be burned up with unquenchable fire. In Mark and John's books, no unbelievers are in view and there are no references to trees with bad fruit or chaff. The Greek text in Matthew and Luke requires the baptisms with the Holy Spirit and fire to be different experiences. Apparently, baptism with fire is a description of the judgment that will come upon those who reject Christ (II Thessalonians 1:8).

Daily Devotion

In 2016, two teenage boys were walking along the Chimney Tops Trail in the Smoky Mountain National Park. They were dropping lit matches along the ground from a box of matches that cost about one dollar. But the fire they caused killed fourteen people, destroyed 2,400 homes and businesses, and cost \$500 million. On many lots throughout the mountains, after the smoke cleared, only concrete foundations remained where whole houses used to stand. The young men didn't realize the power of fire mixed with wind. That week, eighty miles per hour winds picked up the flames and launched them like fireballs from one side of the mountain to the other.

John the Baptist preached that Jesus was going to baptize us with His Holy Spirit, and He was also going to baptize with fire. Fire that would destroy sin and wickedness and vindicate His people for their suffering at the hands of the wicked once and for all.

Are you filled with the Spirit? How long has it been since you were renewed in the Holy Ghost?

Reflection and Prayer

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

DAY 4

Bible Reading Plan

Deuteronomy 31 □ 32 □ 33 □ 34 □ | Mark 16 □

Luke 3:10-15

¹⁰ And the people asked him, saying, What shall we do then?

¹¹ He answereth and saith unto them, He that hath two coats, let him impart to him that hath none; and he that hath meat, let him do likewise.

¹² Then came also publicans to be baptized, and said unto him, Master, what shall we do?

¹³ And he said unto them, Exact no more than that which is appointed you.

¹⁴ And the soldiers likewise demanded of him, saying, And what shall we do? And he said unto them, Do violence to no man, neither accuse any falsely; and be content with your wages.

¹⁵ And as the people were in expectation, and all men mused in their hearts of John, whether he were the Christ, or not.

Biblical Insight

Those who heard John's message of repentance wanted to know how they should respond. In each case, John told them something to do: (1) share with those in need; (2) be honest in one's dealings; (3) forsake violence and false accusation, and practice contentment. Repentance is not accomplished by words alone; it requires behavioral change.

Daily Devotion

He was driving under the careless influence of alcohol when he saw the red and blue lights piercing the darkness around him. The officer knew he was driving drunk. Rather than impound his vehicle, the officer issued him a citation and allowed him to park his truck in a lot and come back for it when he was sober.

A couple hours later, he came back for his truck. He was still intoxicated, but he climbed in the driver's seat anyway, started it up, and drove away. That's when he saw the familiar red and blue lights behind him. The officer was stunned. This gentleman apologized for driving drunk, but when the police drove away, he drove drunk again. This time, the officer issued a second citation and impounded his truck.

Repentance is deeper than just "I'm sorry you caught me." Repentance demands a change in behavior. It did for this drunk driver. It did for those who asked John the Baptist what they should do. It does for us when we ask Jesus what we should do. The answer is the same for us as for them. We must repent. We must change.

Reflection and Prayer

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

DAY 5

Bible Reading Plan

Joshua 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ | Luke 1 ☐

Luke 3:18-22

¹⁸ And many other things in his exhortation preached he unto the people.

¹⁹ But Herod the tetrarch, being reprov'd by him for Herodias his brother Philip's wife, and for all the evils which Herod had done,

²⁰ added yet this above all, that he shut up John in prison.

²¹ Now when all the people were baptized, it came to pass, that Jesus also being baptized, and praying, the heaven was opened,

²² and the Holy Ghost descended in a bodily shape like a dove upon him, and a voice came from heaven, which said, Thou art my beloved Son; in thee I am well pleased.

Biblical Insight

John's preaching was not only to the multitudes. He rebuked Herod for taking his brother Philip's wife. Rather than repent, Herod imprisoned John.

Meanwhile, Jesus continued His ministry. As He prayed after His baptism, the Holy Spirit descended upon Him. A voice from Heaven said, "Thou art my beloved Son; in thee I am well pleased." Similarly, at the transfiguration of Jesus, a voice from a cloud said, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him" (Matthew 17:5). These heavenly affirmations of Jesus are rooted in Psalm 2:7, which is quoted directly in Acts 13:33; Hebrews 1:5; 5:5 and alluded to in John 1:14, 18; 3:16, 18; I John 4:9.

Daily Devotion

John Emerich Edward Dalberg-Acton made an impact on most of us, even if we don't know it. He's best known in history as Lord Acton, and he made the famous statement, "Power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely. Great men are almost always bad men." Herod was one such great and bad man. He exercised remarkable power over the Jews in his day, but he was intrigued by this locust-eating, camel-hair-wearing preacher named John.

But when John rebuked Herod for marrying his own brother's wife, Herod was enraged. And maybe even a little embarrassed. But rather than repent, Herod threw John into prison where he eventually ordered him to be beheaded. Meanwhile, Jesus was increasing in popularity and John was decreasing. Imprisonment does that to people. Few stay around when their leader is behind bars. But God was in control, and He was bringing His kingdom of repentance and righteousness to the world.

Have you ever suffered for God? Have you ever been in a life situation that felt like a prison? Just as John had to trust Jesus was in control despite his circumstances, we too must recognize Jesus is sovereign.

Reflection and Prayer

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

Lesson Title: A Part of God's Plan

Scripture Focus: Luke 3:3-4

The Lesson in Context

Like John the Baptist, our message may seem fierce. We preach repentance and the need for a new birth. That can be a hard pill for people to swallow. The gospel is unflattering because it essentially resists all human attempts to find a solution within ourselves. Perhaps it is most insulting to human pride because it is a free gift of God. The gospel essentially says, "You are so impoverished and broken that none of your own efforts could ever earn you salvation. The only way you could ever be saved is if salvation is granted to you as a gift from above." Even if the gospel does not flatter us but starts with ground zero, would we not rather be a part of a plan that works?

Group Discussion

1. What does conviction feel like?
2. What might this look like in our own lives if we were to follow John's pattern of preparing the way for others to believe in Jesus?
3. Why was it important that Jesus was baptized?
4. Why do you think some churches avoid using the word sin anymore?
5. How can we best share God's Word with others?

My Prayer for the Upcoming Week

How do you want to be different because of what you have experienced today?

3.1

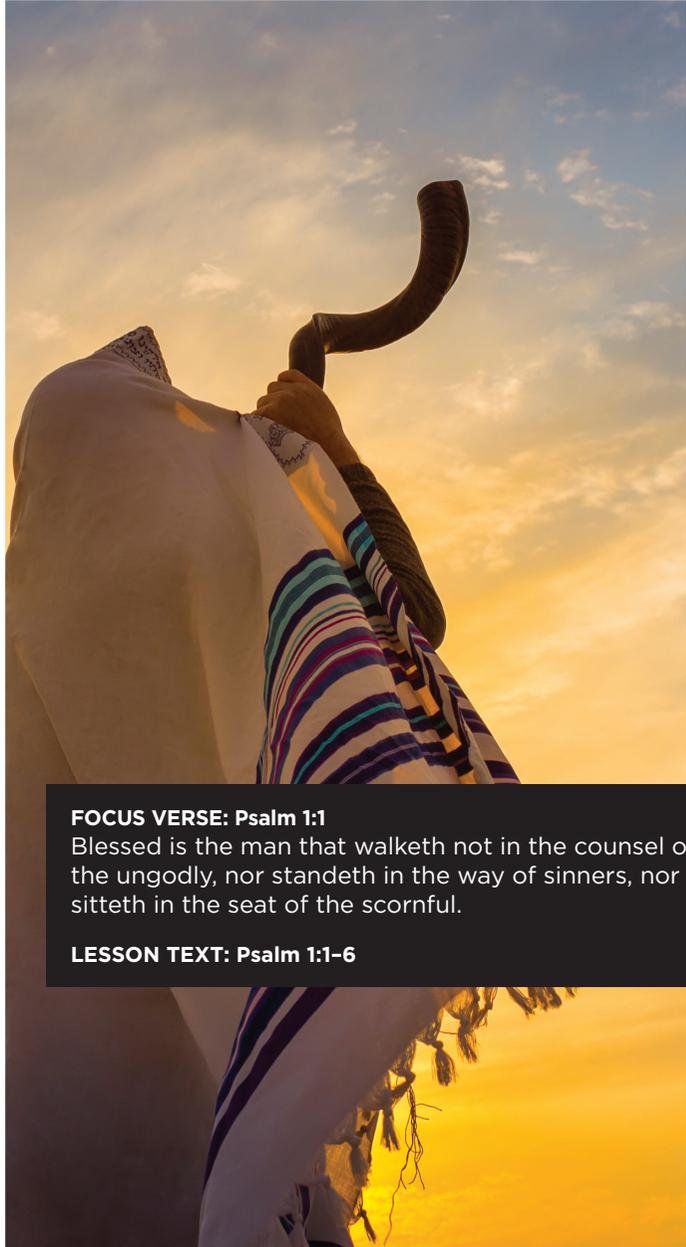
WALKING IN RIGHTEOUSNESS

LESSON BIG IDEA

I will walk in
righteousness.

TRUTH ABOUT GOD

God blesses
those who walk
righteously.



FOCUS VERSE: Psalm 1:1

Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful.

LESSON TEXT: Psalm 1:1-6

BIBLICAL OVERVIEW

Lesson Text: Psalm 1:1-6

The placement of Psalm 1 makes it an obvious introduction to the entire Psalter (a term for the entire collection of psalms reflecting its musical nature). It pronounces a blessing on “the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful” (Psalm 1:1), implying that walking in the counsel to be found in the Book of Psalms is the source of blessing.

Psalm 1 is known as a Torah, or law psalm, because it describes the blessed man as one who delights “in the law of the LORD” and who meditates “in His law . . . day and night” (Psalm 1:2). The word *torah* means instruction, and it is used with a variety of meanings. Here, it is apparently not a reference to the Law of Moses, but to the psalms themselves.

Psalm 1, a Torah psalm, is connected conceptually with Psalm 2, a royal, messianic psalm. This pattern recurs in the Psalter. Psalm 19, another Torah psalm (see Psalm 19:7-8), is connected with Psalms 20-21, royal, messianic psalms (see Psalm 20:6). Psalm 119, a Torah psalm (see Psalm 119:1 [the word *law* appears in Psalm 119 twenty-five times]), is connected to the section of psalms known as Songs of Ascents (Psalms 120-134), with their royal, messianic focus (see Psalm 132:10-18). For the Torah psalms to be attached to royal, messianic psalms in this way follows an ancient method of interpretation by attachment. In other words, to attach the messianic psalm to the Torah psalm serves to provide interpretation for the Torah psalm. The concept of law must be interpreted in connection with the concept of the Messiah.

Psalm 1 begins by pronouncing a blessing upon the person who delights in the law (*torah*, “instruction,” a reference here to Scripture) of the LORD (Psalm 1:2); Psalm 2 ends by pronouncing a blessing on all who put their trust in the Son, the Messiah (Psalm 2:12). The idea presented here is that meditation upon the Scripture leads to trust in the Messiah.

MEDITATION UPON THE SCRIPTURE
LEADS TO TRUST IN THE MESSIAH.

DAY 1

Joshua 4 □ 5 □ 6 □ 7 □ 8 □ 9 □ | Luke 2 □

Psalm 1:1

Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful.

Biblical Insight

The “counsel of the ungodly...the way of sinners...the seat of the scornful” (Psalm 1:1) is a series of terms further described in Psalm 2:1 as plotting “a vain thing.” The “counsel of the ungodly” is seen in Psalm 2:2 as “the rulers take counsel together, against the LORD, and against His anointed [the Messiah].” It is ungodly counsel that leads kings and rulers to say, “Let us break their bands asunder, and cast away their cords from us” (Psalm 2:3).

Daily Devotion

Good, godly counsel is like a glass of ice cold lemonade on a hot, summer day. But wrong counsel is like a glass of lukewarm mud-puddle water on a sticky, rainy day. That’s what a family found out after they planted their garden of hot peppers. Once they pulled them, they tried to think of a way to dry them out. They asked their Amish friend who had a “green thumb” and blooming garden to prove it. She suggested they put their peppers in their microwave. They did.

Within seconds, their kitchen filled with fumes. They fanned the air, but it didn’t help. They ran out of their house coughing and gagging. When they were safe from those sickening fumes, they stopped to ask themselves. “Why did we take advice on using a microwave from someone who doesn’t even use electric appliances?”

The psalmist is clear: be careful whose counsel you heed. Heed godly counsel; shun ungodly counsel. The voices or sources that influence your life must align with God and His Word.

Reflection and Prayer

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

DAY 2

Bible Reading Plan

Joshua 10 ☐ 11 ☐ 12 ☐ 13 ☐ | Luke 3 ☐

Psalm 1:2

But his delight is in the law of the Lord; and in his law doth he meditate day and night.

Biblical Insight

Psalm 1:2 contrasts with Psalm 2:1. The same Hebrew word translated *meditate* in Psalm 1:2 is translated *imagine* in Psalm 2:1. The blessed man is the one who delights in Scripture, meditating on it day and night. The heathen meditate on a vain thing, a thing contextually identified as an attempt to overthrow the LORD and His Messiah (Psalm 2:2). The Hebrew word translated *anointed* is *Mashiyach*, from which comes the Greek transliteration Messiah and the English transliteration Messiah.

Daily Devotion

Bart's dad called him into the room to break the news: pancreatic cancer. The doctor had just diagnosed him. Although his dad, Arthur, had been cruel and abusive for years, he was still his dad. Bart was only a freshman in high school, but he spent those remaining years his dad had left taking care of him. And Arthur wrestled with his own mortality.

Bart began to see a change in his dad. He was kinder. He was reading the Bible and asking Bart what the Scriptures meant. Even at night, Bart could hear his dad praying for him and his older brother. This man was the dad he wished he had earlier, but thankfully he had him now. In Bart's own words, his dad became "the godliest man I've ever known."

Five years after the diagnosis, Arthur died. While standing next to Bart at Arthur's graveside, Bart's grandmother said, "I can only imagine what Bub is seeing right now." Those simple words from an insightful grandmother fueled the inspiration for Bart Millard to meditate and write the lyrics to "I Can Only Imagine" in ten minutes on a tour bus.

All of us will one day face our eternal destination. The choices we make now, the things we meditate on, and how we respond to God's Word will shape that destination.

Reflection and Prayer

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

DAY 3

Bible Reading Plan

Joshua 14 □ 15 □ 16 □ 17 □ 18 □ | Luke 4 □

Psalm 1:3

And he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season; his leaf also shall not wither; and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper.

Biblical Insight

The person who rejects the ungodly counsel that encourages people to cast off loyalty to the LORD and who instead delights and meditates in the Scripture will—in contrast to the fate of those who rebel—“be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season; his leaf also shall not wither” (Psalm 1:3). The wise man is like a healthy, fruitful, enduring tree. The man who follows ungodly counsel is like chaff. The wind will drive him away and he will perish. (See Psalm 1:6; 2:12.)

Daily Devotion

Tree versus chaff. It’s not really a contest. The tree has roots that spread out as far as the tree is tall. If a tree is twenty feet tall, its roots may spread as far as twenty feet in all directions. But chaff has nothing. Nobody hangs a tire swing from chaff. Nobody climbs up chaff to build a chaff house for the kids to play in. Birds don’t even build nests in chaff. But they do in trees. Squirrels settle down to make their squirrel home in trees. No farmer harvests chaff for a snack, but they pick fruit from trees all day to feed their families and ours.

Trees laugh at the wind; chaff is driven by it. That’s the night and day difference we see in Psalm 1 between someone who heeds the godly counsel of the Word of God versus someone who heeds ungodly counsel. Those who read and heed the Word of God are like trees that put down roots and bear fruit. The next time you wonder which voice you should hear and heed, ask yourself if you would rather laugh at the wind or be helplessly driven by it.

Reflection and Prayer

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

DAY 4

Bible Reading Plan

Joshua 19 ☐ 20 ☐ 21 ☐ 22 ☐ | Luke 5 ☐

Psalm 1:4-5

⁴The ungodly are not so: but are like the chaff which the wind driveth away.

⁵Therefore the ungodly shall not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous.

Biblical Insight

Psalm 1 declares of the ungodly that they are “like the chaff which the wind driveth away. Therefore the ungodly shall not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous . . . but the way of the ungodly shall perish” (Psalm 1:4-6). According to Psalm 2, this happens because “He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh: The LORD shall have them in derision. Then shall he speak unto them in his wrath, and vex them in his sore displeasure” (Psalm 2:4-5). The Messiah will “break them [the nations that follow ungodly counsel] with a rod of iron ... [and] dash them in pieces like a potter’s vessel” (Psalm 2:9). The Son will be angry with those who do not kiss Him—as an act of respect and homage—and they will “perish from the way, when his wrath is kindled but a little” (Psalm 2:12).

Daily Devotion

Psalm 2 takes the camera behind the scenes to give us an unexpected, otherwise unseen glimpse into the nature of God. God laughs? He did create the platypus and the porcupine. He has to laugh at something. But in this psalm, God laughs at people who think they have the last laugh. He laughs at the wicked who think they get away with their wickedness.

But God is not all grins and smiles. He is also holy. He may laugh at the thought that they know better than Him, but there will be a day when God will bare His arm and show His wrath. We don’t usually like this picture of God. We prefer a picture of a soft Savior with gentle hands, but this soft Savior also braided a whip and drove out the money hungry from His Temple. When God needs to be gentle, He will be gentle. When He needs to be firm, He will be firm. And when He needs to be both, as only He can be, He will be both.

How do you view God? Do you recognize His holiness and His justice? Do you know Him also as our loving Father? Make a fresh commitment to revere all aspects of who He is.

Reflection and Prayer

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

DAY 5

Bible Reading Plan

Joshua 23 ☐ 24 ☐ | Luke 6 ☐ 7 ☐

Psalm 1:6

For the Lord knoweth the way of the righteous: but the way of the ungodly shall perish.

Biblical Insight

The response of the LORD to those who follow ungodly counsel is to laugh and hold them in derision (Psalm 2:4). In wrath, He will speak to them and distress them. The distressing proclamation the LORD makes to those who seek to rebel is this: “Yet have I set my king upon my holy hill of Zion” (Psalm 2:6). In their desire to cast off the authority of the LORD and His Messiah, the people are plotting “a vain thing” (Psalm 2:1). It is vain because God has set His King, the Messiah, on Zion. The plotting of the ungodly will do nothing to change that. He will not neglect the covenant He made with David. (See II Samuel 7:8-17; Psalm 89:34-37.)

Daily Devotion

People are professional promise makers. We make hundreds of promises but only keep a handful. As we get older, we get more skeptical, even jaded, when someone makes us a promise. Perhaps you were promised, “I’ll pay you back next week,” but never saw the person again. Maybe friends vowed, “The next time we come to town, we’ll call and get together.” Yet the next time never came.

We may grow more jaded over time because we understand a promise made is not always a promise kept. But God keeps His promises. Even when His people break theirs, He keeps His.

The psalmist David must have smiled as he wrote the second psalm. As he remembered the promise his God made to him, he knew his God, the covenant keeper, would surely keep His promise.

What promises has God given you? You can trust Him. Take time to thank Him in faith for their fulfillment.

Reflection and Prayer

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

Lesson Title: Walking in Righteousness

Scripture Focus: Psalm 1:1

The Lesson in Context

Everyone has a defining moment. For James, there were certain individual actions that could measure a person's whole character. We might think of these individual actions as samples, samples that reveal what lies in the core of our identity. We might refer to this as the "royal law" theory. The royal law, James said, is loving our neighbor as ourselves. If we break this law and, say, welcome a rich man who can bless us, but we keep at arm's length a poor man who cannot, we have broken every conceivable law. Conversely, if we welcome both, we have upheld the whole law. James taught that our true attitude toward Jesus is revealed in how we treat those who can neither bless us nor hurt us.

To demonstrate how this principle might manifest itself in our daily lives: consider your emails. If you take great care in how you write to someone who is in a position to help you, give you a job, give you a promotion, or give you accolades, but you take relatively little care with how you write a subordinate, you are subtly breaking the royal law. This one act is a sample representing the whole of your character—the defining moment, the defining act.

Group Discussion

1. Who or what do you think of when you think of the word blessed?
2. How does the "way of sinners" differ from the "way of the righteous"?
3. Why is receiving the right counsel so important?
4. How can someone meditate on the Word of God day and night?
5. How does someone "walk in righteousness"?

My Prayer for the Upcoming Week

How do you want to be different because of what you have experienced today?

3.2

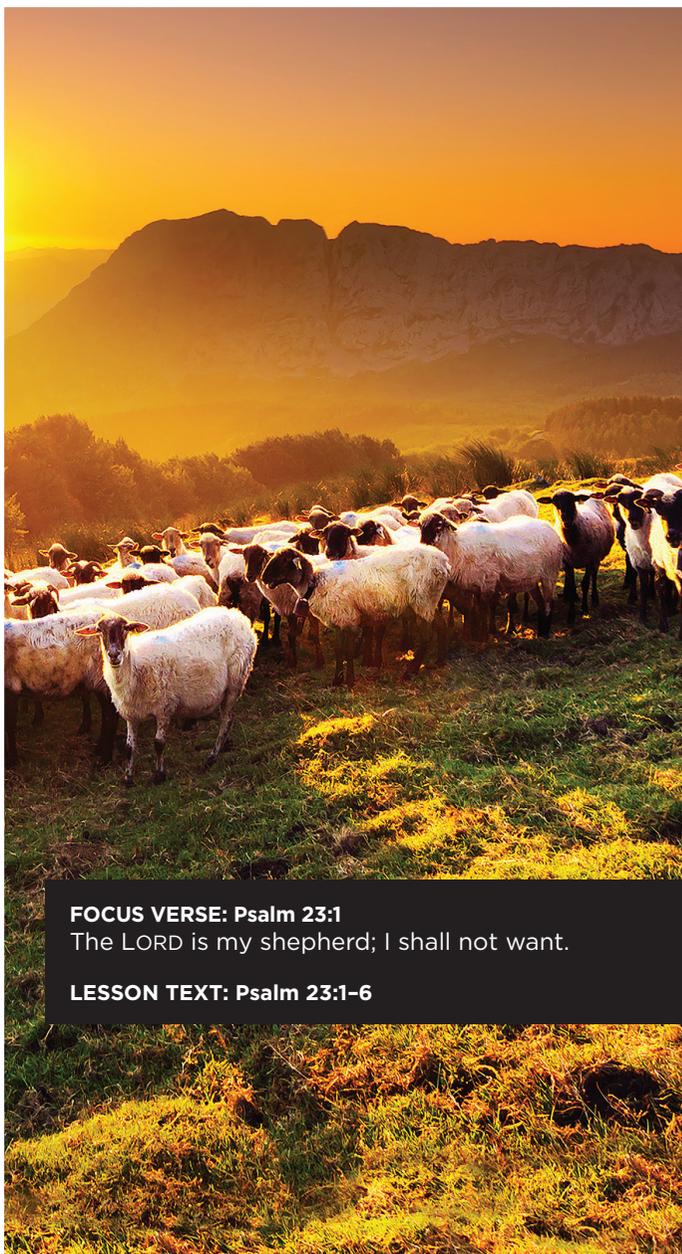
OUR SHEPHERD

LESSON BIG IDEA

I will follow the Lord and enjoy His protection and provision.

TRUTH ABOUT GOD

The Lord is my Shepherd.



FOCUS VERSE: Psalm 23:1
The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.

LESSON TEXT: Psalm 23:1-6

BIBLICAL OVERVIEW

Lesson Text: Psalm 23:1-6

The words of Psalm 23 give great comfort to believers who experience painful and difficult circumstances in life. As it is placed in the psalter, following Psalm 22 with its content focused on the death of the Messiah and preceding Psalm 24 with its “King of Glory” content, Psalm 23 can be read as a reference to the Messiah’s hope as he walked “through the valley of the shadow of death” (Psalm 23:4). Believers today can certainly avail themselves of that same hope, for the LORD was our shepherd, supplying all that we need (Psalm 23:1).

For the sake of His name (for His reputation), the LORD restores our soul. Also for the sake of His reputation, the LORD leads us in paths of righteousness, or right paths (Psalm 23:3). Even in the midst of extreme hardship, threat, and suffering, we need not fear, for the LORD comforts us.

Having passed through the valley of the shadow of death and having experienced the restoration of our soul (life), we will testify that goodness and mercy will follow us all the days of our lives (verse 6). The word translated follow (radaph) means pursue or chase. Goodness and mercy will not be passive in relation to the believer; our lives will be characterized by the presence of these virtues.

Scripture frequently characterizes Jesus as a shepherd. (See Isaiah 40:11, Matthew 18:11-14, John 10:11, and I Peter 5:4.) In John’s vision, he declared that the Lamb in the midst of the throne will feed the great multitude no man can number and will lead them to “living fountains of waters” (Revelation 7:9, 17). Our shepherd leads us now beside still waters (Psalm 23:2), and He will give us rest in the age to come.

GOODNESS AND MERCY WILL NOT BE
PASSIVE IN RELATION TO THE BELIEVER.



DAY 1

Bible Reading Plan

Judges 1 2 3 4 5

Psalm 23:1-2

¹ The LORD *is* my shepherd; I shall not want.

² He maketh me to lie down in green pastures; he leadeth me beside the still waters.

Biblical Insight

The word translated want in verse 1 refers to lack. One lacks nothing with the LORD as one's shepherd. Continuing the metaphor of the shepherd-sheep relationship, this reference means the shepherd provides appropriate and healthy food, like green pastures. To say that the sheep is made to "lie down" means that he has eaten his fill, since sheep stand to eat. Sheep are frightened by rapidly running waters and will not drink from them; thus, the shepherd leads him beside still waters (Psalm 23:2).

Daily Devotion

In his book, *A Shepherd Looks at Psalm 23*, Phillip Keller told a story about a time he was in the field with his sheep. A friend came from the city to visit him and brought along her tiny Pekingese pup. Her pup only weighed about twelve pounds; the sheep weighed around one hundred fifty pounds. But when the Pekingese pup sprang from the car, the sheep stampeded across the field.

Sheep will not rest when they feel endangered. They will not repose when they are hungry. Even a fifteen pound pup can cause them to bolt from their bed of green grass and lead a low-speed chase across the field. David understood this trait about sheep because he spent many days of his life watching them. He also understood this principle about God because He had spent much time resting in Him. Our God causes us to rest. When we are with our Shepherd, we need not fear hunger or danger. Thanks to Psalm 23:1, David's story can be ours: the Lord is my Shepherd; I shall not want.

Reflection and Prayer

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

DAY 2

Bible Reading Plan

Judges 6 ☐ 7 ☐ 8 ☐ 9 ☐ | Luke 8 ☐

Psalm 23:3

He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake.

Biblical Insight

For the sake of His name (for His reputation), the Lord restores the Messiah's soul (compare to Psalm 22:20, 29 [the Hebrew *nephesh*, *soul* or *life* appears in both verses as well as here in Psalm 23:3]). Also for the sake of His reputation, the LORD leads the Messiah in paths of righteousness, or right paths (Psalm 23:3). The idea that the LORD does this for the sake of His reputation is tied with His promise to David that He would raise up the Messiah as David's descendant to sit on David's throne. (See II Samuel 7:12-16; Psalm 132:10-11; Acts 2:30-32; Revelation 22:16.) Had the soul (*nephesh*, or *life*) of the Messiah not been restored, it would have meant that the LORD had not kept His promise to David and it would have reflected negatively on His character.

Daily Devotion

It's nearly impossible to get lost on a bike path, but he did it. One Saturday morning, LJ was riding a fifty-mile missions ride. The first thirty miles were great. He felt good. He was pumping the pedals, listening to music. After those thirty, he felt like he could go seventy. But it was time to stop for a break. He fueled up with bananas and granola. The guide gave him directions to get back on the bike path and meet up with the rest of the group.

He huffed and puffed to the fifty-mile marker. There should have been a picnic aplenty, but there was no one. Just a sign marking the end of the trail and green grass on both sides. That's when he realized he took the wrong trail after the break and ended up thirty miles away from the group. Lesson learned: don't fall behind the group.

As we follow Jesus, He leads us. We don't know where to go, but He does. All we need to do is follow the One who leads us, and we'll have what and whom we need.

Reflection and Prayer

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

DAY 3

Bible Reading Plan

Judges 10 □ 11 □ 12 □ 13 □ 14 □ | Luke 9 □

Psalm 23:4

Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou *art* with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.

Biblical Insight

The Messiah's experience on the Cross is described as "the valley of the shadow of death" (Psalm 23:4). Even in the midst of this experience, the Messiah would fear no evil for the LORD was with Him, comforting Him with His rod and staff. In the shepherd-sheep relationship, the rod and staff represent the shepherd's presence, protection, and guidance.

Daily Devotion

For the first three verses of Psalm 23, the sheep talk about the shepherd. When they are sunning themselves on lush, green pastures and sipping at still waters, they talk about their shepherd: "My shepherd is good. You should meet my shepherd. My shepherd's the best shepherd." They buy their shepherd the "World's Best Shepherd" coffee mug. But in verse 4, everything changes.

Put yourself in the sheep's wool. The once-gentle breeze grows into an uncontrollable gale. And we find ourselves miles away from green pastures and still waters as we march through the heartless heart of the valley. And the sheep's speech changes. When we walk through the valley of the shadow of death under the howls of the wolves and the sting of the rain, we fix our eyes on the one leading us, and we talk—not about our shepherd but to Him.

It is possible nothing brings us closer to God than the valley. If you are walking through the valley, talk to the Shepherd. You may find He is closer in the valley than you thought.

Reflection and Prayer

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

DAY 4

Bible Reading Plan

Judges 15 ☐ 16 ☐ 17 ☐ 18 ☐ 19 ☐ | Luke 10 ☐

Psalm 23:5

Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over.

Biblical Insight

In the presence of His enemies—a reference to His experience on the cross (Psalm 22:7–8, 11–13, 16–18, 20–21)—the LORD prepares a table for the Messiah, anoints His head with oil, and causes His cup to run over (Psalm 23:5). The table is a symbol of provision and blessing, as is the overflowing cup (see Psalm 16:5). The statement “Thou anointest my head with oil” refers to the Messiah as the Anointed One, although a different Hebrew word (*dashan*) is translated *anoint* than is ordinarily used in connection with royal anointing. The same word is translated *prosperous* (NKJV) or *fat* (KJV) in Psalm 22:29, perhaps providing a verbal link between the two psalms. *Dashan* does have to do with generous anointing with oil, so in this context it is appropriate to apply it to the Messiah.

Daily Devotion

There are some strange places to eat. The Modern Toilet in Taiwan features bowls shaped like toilet bowls. Fortezza in Italy allows you to eat your one square meal a day served by actual inmates and accompanied with plastic cutlery. Or you can enjoy steak and ribs with twenty-one other people at a table suspended by a crane—nothing between you and the ground except a lot of faith in a crane and a few cables.

But this one is the strangest of all, even stranger than the Modern Toilet. David testified that our Shepherd prepares a table before us in the presence of our enemies. Typically, we enjoy our meals with family and friends. We would never think of spreading out a picnic blanket to enjoy our turkey and swiss on the front lines of the battle, but thanks to our Shepherd, we can.

Even if your enemy is snarling at you, *bon appetit*. Eat up right in front of him. Our Shepherd is with us, and our enemy cannot hurt us.

Reflection and Prayer

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

DAY 5

Bible Reading Plan

Judges 20 □ 21 □ | Luke 11 □

Psalm 23:6

Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the LORD for ever.

Biblical Insight

To translate the Hebrew *yashab* as *dwell* is to follow the Septuagint, Syriac, Targum, and Vulgate. The Hebrew text reads “I will return to the house of the LORD,” which looks forward to the return of the Messiah, the anointed one, to the Temple. This messianic image is seen elsewhere in the Old Testament. (See Zechariah 9:8-9; Malachi 3:1.) In the most immediate context, this imagery prepares the reader for Psalm 24, wherein the King of Glory, the Messiah, enters the “everlasting doors” into His holy place on the hill of the LORD. (See Psalm 24:3, 7, 9.)

The Messiah will dwell in the house of the LORD forever, further signifying that Psalm 23 does not have its ultimate fulfillment in David.

Daily Devotion

Buffet protocol and etiquette can be complicated. Sometimes servers pick up plates and glasses before guests are finished. If you have ever come back from washing your hands or answering a phone call to find an empty table, you know the feeling of, What just happened?

Some buffets worked out a card system. If you are leaving, simply place the card face down to read, “All done.” If you are staying, place the card face up to read, “Still enjoying.” That simple card tells the server to leave your plate alone because you are coming back.

The last verse of the twenty-third psalm is the card that tells the world that the God of the house of God is coming back. David prophesied that the Lord would return to His house and He would dwell there forever. There will be a day when Jesus comes back to Earth to set up His kingdom. And what a day that will be. We must prepare ourselves for that time.

Reflection and Prayer

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

Lesson Title: Our Shepherd

Scripture Focus: Psalm 23:1

The Lesson in Context

There is one important distinction between the metaphor of the physical shepherd and our heavenly Shepherd. In the livestock industry, shepherds do not give their animals any choice of whether to stay with the flock. Those sheep have no choice in the matter; they must do whatever the shepherd says. However, God, as our loving and Good Shepherd, recognizes we are humans and not farm animals. He has given each of us free will to humbly submit to His status as the Good Shepherd. He will not force us to stay with the herd. He will continually pursue us, but He will never forcefully coerce us. Instead, He cries out to us, beckoning us to join His flock. He is always ready with a loving embrace.

Those who are already in the flock can participate in God's mission to find and restore the lost sheep of this world. Probably all of us know some lost sheep, wandering about with no shepherd, no guidance, and no direction. When we encounter these persons, let us be bold to testify of the provision and protection we have found in Christ. Let us allow our anointing and blessings to shine through us for all the world to see. Let us use the goodness and mercy God has given us to bless others. Let us guide this hurting world to the Shepherd who is faithfully guiding us.

Group Discussion

1. What are some ways God shows you He cares for you daily?
2. Oftentimes we think of God's blessings in terms of what He has given to us, but what about what God has kept us from? What are some of the things we may not have experienced because of God's protection?
3. What are some things God has provided for you in the past? How do these testimonies give you confidence in His ability to provide for you in the future?
4. Can you count all of God's blessings in your life? Have you ever tried? Perhaps a good exercise in the coming days would be to sit down and write out as many of God's blessings as you can recall.
5. What are some of the ways we can constantly, purposefully, and intentionally "dwell" in God's presence? In between church services, how can we experience God on a daily basis?

My Prayer for the Upcoming Week

How do you want to be different because of what you have experienced today?

3.3

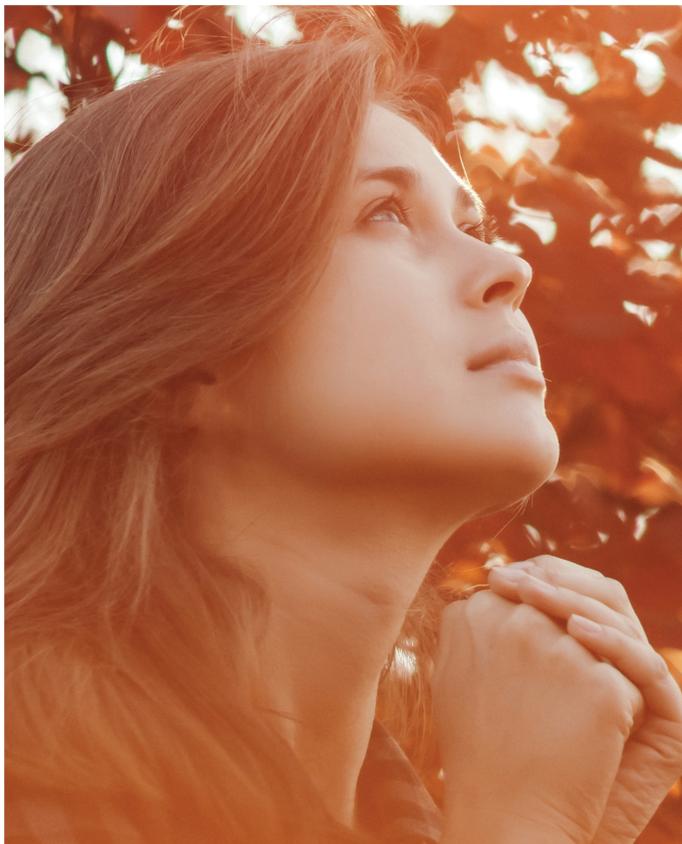
A CLEAN HEART

LESSON BIG IDEA

I will repent when I sin.

TRUTH ABOUT GOD

God will forgive us when we repent.



FOCUS VERSES: Psalm 51:1-3

¹Have mercy upon me, O God, according to thy lovingkindness: according unto the multitude of thy tender mercies blot out my transgressions.

²Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin.

³For I acknowledge my transgressions: and my sin is ever before me.

LESSON TEXT: Psalm 51:1-19

BIBLICAL OVERVIEW

Lesson Text: Psalm 51:1-19

The superscription identifies this psalm as a “Psalm of David, when Nathan the prophet came unto him, after he had gone in to Bathsheba.” (See II Samuel 11; 12:1-15.) The psalm provides the details of David’s confession, which the account in II Samuel 12:13 limits to the words, “I have sinned against the LORD.” Following David’s confession, Nathan said to him, “The LORD also hath put away thy sin; thou shalt not die. Howbeit, because by this deed thou hast given great occasion to the enemies of the LORD to blaspheme, the child also that is born unto thee shall surely die” (II Samuel 12:13-14). Although the eternal consequences of David’s sin were removed, temporal consequences remained. The death of the son born of the adultery committed by David and Bathsheba would demonstrate to the “enemies of the LORD” the severe consequences of sin.

The superscript addressed to the chief Musician is important to note because it indicates the public nature of David’s confession. In *Handbook on the Psalms and Wisdom Literature*, Jeremy Painter points out, “The chief musician would have had this hymn sung by the priesthood at a public gathering... It shows God’s people what true confession and penitence looks like.” David made no effort to minimize or excuse his sin. Instead, he was forthright and radical in his contrition.

David cried out for mercy, taking full responsibility for his sin (Psalm 51:1). He appealed to God’s lovingkindness (*chesed*) and to the multitude of His “tender mercies” (Psalm 51:2). His prayer is that his transgressions might be blotted out (Psalm 51:1). Even in conjunction with the giving of the Law to Moses, the LORD assured Moses that the forgiveness of iniquity and transgression is based upon His mercy. (See Exodus 34:6-7.) Scripture bears out that God indeed extended His unfailing love to David and restored his soul. His story illustrates the infinite measure of God’s lovingkindness and restoration.

DAVID CRIED OUT FOR MERCY, TAKING
FULL RESPONSIBILITY FOR HIS SIN.

DAY 1

Bible Reading Plan
Ruth 1 2 3 4

Psalm 51:1-3

¹ Have mercy upon me, O God, according to thy lovingkindness: according unto the multitude of thy tender mercies blot out my transgressions.

² Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin.

³ For I acknowledge my transgressions: and my sin is ever before me.

Biblical Insight

There is no need to attempt to distinguish between *transgressions* (Psalm 51:1, 3), “iniquity” (verse 2), and *sin* (Psalm 51:2). The psalm is poetry, and biblical poetry often uses a variety of words for literary reasons. In this case, each word contributes to the idea that sin is serious business. The more words employed, the greater the emphasis.

David prayed to be washed thoroughly from his iniquity and cleansed from his sin (Psalm 51:2). He acknowledged his transgressions, but was unable to escape from the fact of his sin.

Daily Devotion

Understanding the authority of a king in ancient Israel reveals the real nature of David’s sin. King David issued decrees according to his pleasure, and people responded obediently to his commands. So when he sent for Bathsheba, no one could have objected, not even Bathsheba. David did not have an elicit mutual affair with Bathsheba. David’s brute rule forced her to comply regardless of consent.

The end of Nathan’s parable reveals the heartbreaking story. “There were two men in one city, one rich and the other poor. The rich man...took the poor man’s lamb and prepared it for the man who had come to him” (1 Samuel 12:1, 5, NKJV). David took Bathsheba from Uriah, and she had no choice in the matter.

The reality of David’s sin makes his prayer in Psalm 51 that much more astounding. David knew the depth of his sin but understood God’s “lovingkindness” and “tender mercy” were more extraordinary still. Let David’s prayer encourage you today. There is no sin too great for the lovingkindness and tender mercies of our God.

Reflection and Prayer

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

DAY 2

Bible Reading Plan

I Samuel 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ | Luke 12 ☐

Psalm 51:4

Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight: that thou mightest be justified when thou speakest, and be clear when thou judgest.

Biblical Insight

We may wound another person and in that sense sin against that person, but it is God who defines right and wrong, determining the definition of sin. Thus, at the end, sin is against God. Paul quoted from the Septuagint translation of this verse in Romans 3:4, providing a link between Psalm 51 and the New Covenant.

Daily Devotion

One night Sam and his friends headed out to his Dad's ranch. As the night drew on, they started getting bored. Sam was driving his Dad's Dodge dually pickup truck, and, on a whim, they started driving around the trails on the property. But the dirt-trails were for all-terrain-vehicles, not a half-ton truck. As they turned around one of the corners, Sam heard a loud crack, and the Dodge dually skidded to a stop. A tree scrapped down the whole side of his Dad's truck, crushing the side-rear mirror and destroying the fender well.

Sam slept by the fire that night. He made his way home early the next morning and told his Mom what happened. Sam's Dad was a strong disciplinarian, so they didn't know what to expect. She went to wake him up. Sam's Dad walked out to his truck and said, "Well, son, that's going to cost us a \$500 insurance deductible. Be careful next time." And Sam's Dad paid the bill.

We've all wrecked the truck: "for all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23). But our Heavenly Father paid for the damages. Today, live in the sweet freedom of the Father's forgiveness.

Reflection and Prayer

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

DAY 3

I Samuel 4 5 6 7 8 9 **Psalm 51:5**

Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me.

Biblical Insight

This verse is often quoted as evidence of the universal sinfulness of humankind. The universal impact of the Fall is declared in many texts. (See, e.g., Romans 5:12–21; Ephesians 2:1–3.) But that may not be the point here. The general teaching of Scripture does not view conception or childbirth as sinful. (See Psalm 127:3; 139:13–14; Matthew 18:3.) David’s reference here may be to an event in his ancestry that, according to the Law of Moses, disqualified him for entry into the congregation of the Lord. David was the tenth generation from the incestuous relationship between Judah and his daughter-in-law Tamar. (See Genesis 38 and Ruth 4:17–22.) The law declared that descendants of such relationships were prohibited from entering the assembly of the Lord to the tenth generation. (See Deuteronomy 23:2.)

Daily Devotion

God would allow judgment of iniquity to persist for generations (Exodus 34:6–7). The severe generational punishment underscored the reprehensible nature of sinful actions. The purpose was to dissuade humanity from sin, but in selfishness, they persisted. Eventually, generations would be led into captivity to Babylon for the sins of previous generations.

Today, we experience the new mercies of God each morning. The blood of Jesus Christ has set us free from the law of sin and death. And even under the old covenant law, generational judgment was not universal: “Fathers shall not be put to death because of their children, nor shall children be put to death because of their fathers. Each one shall be put to death for his own sin” (Deuteronomy 24:16, NKJV).

At the same time, the severe consequences of sin persist throughout generations. Parents’ actions can create a culture of sinful acceptance in the family, which could lead to tragic outcomes that last for generations. Bitterness, deception, gossip, immorality, covetousness, and greed create a toxic culture cultivating detestable works of unrighteousness. Today, decide what kind of legacy you want to leave your descendants. Create a culture of righteousness in your family.

Reflection and Prayer

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

DAY 4

Bible Reading Plan

I Samuel 10 ☐ 11 ☐ 12 ☐ | Luke 13 ☐

Psalm 51:6–12

⁶ Behold, thou desirest truth in the inward parts: and in the hidden part thou shalt make me to know wisdom.

⁷ Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean: wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.

⁸ Make me to hear joy and gladness; that the bones which thou hast broken may rejoice.

⁹ Hide thy face from my sins, and blot out all mine iniquities.

¹⁰ Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me.

¹¹ Cast me not away from thy presence; and take not thy holy spirit from me.

¹² Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation; and uphold me with thy free spirit.

Biblical Insight

God is concerned with the inner man, and cleansing from sin results in the restoration of joy and gladness. David used this metaphor to describe the consequences of his sin as having his bones broken by God. But these “broken bones” will “rejoice.” That is, they will be fully healed. They will be strong again.

Rather than casting about for external causes for his sin, David recognized the problem was internal; it was, so to speak, a heart problem. He needed a clean heart and “a right spirit” (verse 10). These blessings can come only from God. Forgiveness restores joy. In the poetry of verse 11, the Holy Spirit is identified as the presence of God. Although David had sinned grievously, he valued the presence of God—the Holy Spirit—more than sin’s pleasure.

Daily Devotion

The COVID-19 pandemic has given us a new perspective on masks. Masks generally serve the purpose of hiding the identity of people with evil intentions or ulterior motives. But now we realize masks also keep us from causing harm to others. It is healthy and safe to protect others from a potentially life-threatening airborne virus, of course. Spiritually, though, when we attempt to hide behind a mask to protect others from our hurt, we do not allow God to heal the pain inside. Despite our best efforts to protect others, hurt people still end up hurting people.

David’s psalm urges us to allow God to heal us from the inside out: “You desire truth in the inward parts, and in the hidden part You will make me to know wisdom . . . Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me.” (Psalm 51:6, 10, NKJV).

Wearing a mask is more comfortable than open-heart surgery. But we only find true healing and restoration in transparency before God. Today, allow Him to minister to the “hidden parts.” Take off the mask and let your scars give others hope that they too can be healed.

Reflection and Prayer

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

DAY 5

Bible Reading Plan

I Samuel 13 ☐ 14 ☐ | Luke 14 ☐

Psalm 51:13–19

¹³ Then will I teach transgressors thy ways; and sinners shall be converted unto thee.

¹⁴ Deliver me from bloodguiltiness, O God, thou God of my salvation: and my tongue shall sing aloud of thy righteousness.

¹⁵ O Lord, open thou my lips; and my mouth shall shew forth thy praise.

¹⁶ For thou desirest not sacrifice; else would I give it: thou delightest not in burnt offering.

¹⁷ The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise.

¹⁸ Do good in thy good pleasure unto Zion: build thou the walls of Jerusalem.

¹⁹ Then shalt thou be pleased with the sacrifices of righteousness, with burnt offering and whole burnt offering: then shall they offer bullocks upon thine altar.

Biblical Insight

David wants to be forgiven and restored to fellowship with God. He also commits to teach God's ways to other sinners so that they too would be converted (Psalm 51:13).

In that he ordered the innocent Uriah's death (II Samuel 11:14–25), David carried bloodguiltiness. David understood that deliverance from guilt results in the ability to sing of God's righteousness (Psalm 51:14). When guilt is removed, the proper response is to praise the Lord (Psalm 51:15). David's keen insight into New Covenant realities may be seen in his awareness that God does not desire animal sacrifices or delight in burnt offerings (Psalm 51:16). The kinds of sacrifices God desires are brokenness and contrition (Psalm 51:17).

Daily Devotion

Healed people want to help people. The question is, though, are we creating enough space for God to care for our soul? We live in a digital culture moving at a blistering pace. The social-cultural norm in a digital age is twenty-four-hour access. People express concern if we are not readily accessible and immediately respond to every text, call, email, and social media direct message. Add to that the empathy fatigue we experience from the bombardment of traumatic news events continually filling our social media feeds. We're tired and don't seem to have time for our souls to rest.

In the middle of all of this, remember, God wants to comfort you: "Blessed be . . . the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort those who are in any trouble, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God" (II Corinthians 1:3–4, NKJV). The more we create space for our Comforter to minister to us, the more capacity we have to comfort others. So pause today. Take time for your soul with God. Let Him heal you so that you can help others.

Reflection and Prayer

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

Lesson Title: A Clean Heart

Scripture Focus: Psalm 51:1-3

The Lesson in Context

To describe sin, some have used the metaphor of archers shooting arrows at a target. One might miss the bullseye by only a couple inches, and another might miss by several feet. However, the result is the same: the target has been missed, and the archer has failed the assignment. Similarly, any sin can cause us to miss the target and can separate us from God.

Fortunately, no matter our sin, we boldly can bring all sin to Jesus Christ, the one who paid the price for all of them. The Old Covenant did make distinctions between sins, and the priests offered different sacrifices for different sins. However, when Christ died for our sins, He “offered one sacrifice for sins for ever” (Hebrews 10:12); the work was completed. Now we can come boldly before Him, repent, and receive forgiveness for our sins.

Group Discussion

1. What steps do you take to prevent yourself from being in tempting situations? When you are tempted, how do you escape?
2. Have you ever used Psalm 51 as a model prayer to guide you in repentance? Why or why not? What are some elements of this psalm that you can incorporate into your prayer life?
3. When God delivered you from sin and filled you with His Holy Spirit, what were some positive things God put into your life in place of your former sin? Explain.
4. Think back on the first time you remember repenting. What words would you use to describe that experience? If you have been in the church a long time, think about your prayers of repentance recently. How have your prayers changed?
5. If you have already experienced the power of repentance, what are some things God has restored in your life? Are there things you thought you had lost that He gave back?

My Prayer for the Upcoming Week

How do you want to be different because of what you have experienced today?

3.4

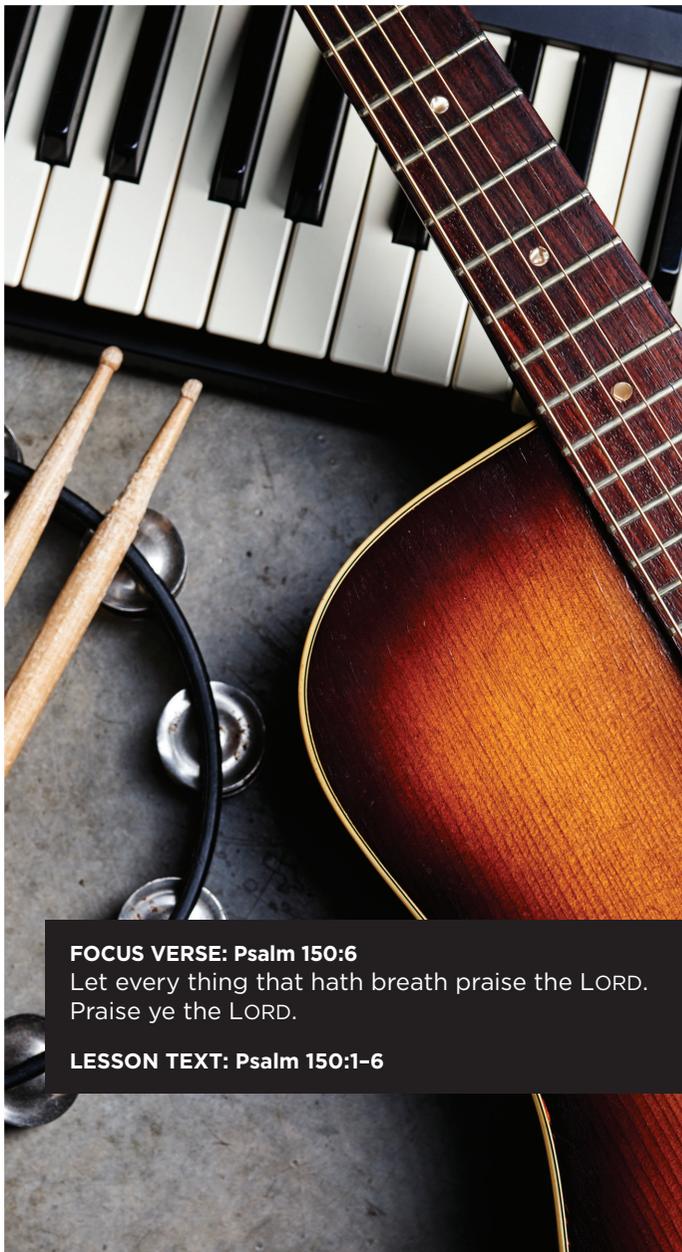
CREATED TO WORSHIP

LESSON BIG IDEA

I will praise the Lord.

TRUTH ABOUT GOD

God designed creation to worship Him.



FOCUS VERSE: Psalm 150:6

Let every thing that hath breath praise the LORD.
Praise ye the LORD.

LESSON TEXT: Psalm 150:1-6

BIBLICAL OVERVIEW

Lesson Text: Psalm 150:1-6

The Book of Psalms is intentionally structured in a self-interpretive way. The first evidence of this organization is that it is traditionally divided into five books. Many English translations show this by printing “Book One” above Psalm 1 and identifying Book One as Psalms 1-41. Then above Psalm 42, “Book Two” appears, classifying Book Two as Psalms 42-72. Then above Psalm 73 appears “Book Three,” categorizing Book Three as Psalms 73-89. Above Psalm 90 appears “Book Four, Psalms 90-106.” “Book Five, Psalms 107-150” marks off the final book within the Psalter.

One reason for these divisions is apparently the similarity of the text at the end of each “book.” Book One ends with “Blessed be the LORD God of Israel from everlasting, and to everlasting. Amen and Amen” (Psalm 41:13). The similarity between this and Psalm 72:18-19 is apparent, with Psalm 72:20 providing an obvious end of the section. Psalm 89:52 also ends with “Amen, and Amen.” Psalm 106 concludes with “Amen. Praise ye the LORD.” Psalm 150 needs no amen, for it is obviously the end of the entire book.

Psalms 1-2 serve together as the introduction of the Psalter, introducing themes that continue throughout the book. A major theme is that the person who delights in and meditates on Scripture and who trusts in the Son will be blessed (Psalm 1:1-2; 2:7, 12). These practices will produce a life of abundant praise, as seen in Psalm 150.

Psalm 150 concludes a section of five psalms commonly identified as the Hallelujah Chorus because they bring the psalter to a glorious conclusion. Each of these psalms, beginning with Psalm 146 begins and ends with “Praise ye the LORD.” This is the translation of the Hebrew word commonly transliterated *Hallelujah*. Hallelujah is a command, a second person plural imperative. It is not technically praise itself; it is a command to praise. Common use throughout the history of Christianity has, however, contextually redefined *hallelujah* as a word of praise. The *jah* ending of the word is transliterated from *Yah*, an abbreviation of Yahweh, or Jehovah. (See Psalm 68:4.)

HALLELUJAH
IS A COMMAND TO PRAISE.

DAY 1

Bible Reading Plan

I Samuel 15 16 17 18

Psalm 150:1-2

¹ Praise ye the Lord. Praise God in his sanctuary: praise him in the firmament of his power.

² Praise him for his mighty acts: praise him according to his excellent greatness.

Biblical Insight

The final psalm brings to a glorious conclusion the result of following the counsel of Psalms 1-2. Those who have not walked in the counsel of the ungodly, nor stood in the way of sinners, nor sat in the seat of the scornful, but who have put their trust in the Son are brought to a place of unbridled praise. They praise the LORD in His sanctuary and in the firmament of His power. The firmament refers to the vault of the heavens. The poetic form of the psalms suggests that the heavens are His sanctuary.

Psalm 150:1 tells us who we are to praise. He is the LORD (Yahweh, sometimes spelled Jehovah) God (*El*). Psalm 150 says why we should praise Him. His mighty acts are described in the Psalms. They are evidence of His excellent greatness.

Daily Devotion

Do you recall the mighty acts of God in your life? The psalmist calls us to remember. When we forget the past provisions of God, we risk losing faith in His future promises.

The first generation of Israelites delivered from Egypt knew this truth all too well. They forgot the mighty acts of God at the Red Sea and the miraculous provisions of manna in the wilderness. As a result, their faith failed in the Promised Land, and they died in the desert.

God never says, "You can't." He commands us not to sin, of course, but He never expresses that His people cannot fulfill His will. God knows we are able when we trust in Him.

So what is God asking you to believe? Has God put something hard to believe in your heart? Maybe He wants you to start a ministry, reach out to a co-worker, mend a relationship, or pray for healing. Can you heal? Can you save? No, but God can. Today, join the psalmist and take a praise break for the mighty acts that he has done and the mighty acts that are coming soon.

Reflection and Prayer

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

DAY 2

Bible Reading Plan

I Samuel 19 ☐ 20 ☐ 21 ☐ | Luke 15 ☐

Psalm 150:3

Praise him with the sound of the trumpet: praise him with the psaltery and harp.

Biblical Insight

The final psalm in the Hallelujah Chorus takes the exuberant praise of Psalm 149 to even greater heights. Verses 3-5 tell us how to praise the LORD God. We are to use trumpets, lutes (*nebel*, translated *Psaltery*), and lyres (*chinnor*, translated *harp*).

Daily Devotion

According to biblical research by Yelena Kolyada in *A Compendium of Musical Instruments and Instrumental Terminology in the Bible*, the people of God created the biblical shofar to "praise God with their loud blasts" (Psalm 150:3). The shofar made the triumphant sound of the trumpet. People considered the instrument a sacred symbol of the voice of God, so the sound echoed the divine in their ears (Leviticus 23:24; Numbers 29:1). The sound of the shofar also assembled the community of God's people (Numbers 10:2-7). The trumpet's sacred sound acted as a sign of mediation between God and His people (Numbers 10:9, 10).

When we join the psalmist in heavenly exultation and praise God with the thunderous volume, we evoke the same response of victory today. God's voice reverberates through the praise of His people. There is a time for contemplation, but there is also a time to turn up our praise volume. Today, lift loud praise to God and declare His sovereign victory in your life.

Reflection and Prayer

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

DAY 3

Bible Reading Plan

I Samuel 22 □ 23 □ 24 □ | Luke 16 □

Psalm 150:4

Praise him with the timbrel and dance: praise him with stringed instruments and organs.

Biblical Insight

It seems there is no limit to the musical instruments to be employed in praising the LORD. In addition to those specified in the previous and following verses, tamborines (*toph*, translated *timbrel*), various stringed instruments, and organs should be included in this grand orchestra of praise. The music should be accompanied by dances of praise.

Daily Devotion

Music in ancient times was communal. According to biblical research by Yelena Kolyada, musical instruments accompanied "ritual processions, temple services, court ceremonies, religious feasts, and secular festivals . . . in military campaigns, in greeting a victorious company, and in grandiose secular celebrations, such as the ritual of the anointing of kings, for family celebrations, and funerals" (*A Compendium of Musical Instruments and Instrumental Terminology in the Bible*). The praise envisioned here reflects the communal nature of music.

The psalmist calls for the community of God's people to join the sound. You can feel the psalmist building toward a crescendo like a great orchestra conductor, and, like the strings bound together in harmony, the people of God unite to create a symphony of praise.

Many outsiders have attended Pentecostal services and made remarks about the tangible presence of God in our midst. Could it be that the power of our praise is the unity of our holiness? The praise of our lips reflects consecrated hearts in unison with the will of the King.

Today, prepare your heart for corporate worship like a first-chair violinist in an orchestra.

Reflection and Prayer

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

DAY 4

Bible Reading Plan

I Samuel 25 26 27 28 29

Psalm 150:5

Praise him upon the loud cymbals: praise him upon the high sounding cymbals.

Biblical Insight

Imagine the crashing sounds of loud, high sounding cymbals. Even these are included in the acceptable ways to praise God. And there is no indication the instruments listed in Psalm 150 exhaust the possibilities of praise. Paul, who no doubt had the Book of Psalms in mind, said the church should worship with psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs (Colossians 3:16; Ephesians 5:19).

Daily Devotion

What is the difference between the praise of “clashing cymbals” in Psalm 150:5 and the noise of “a clanging cymbal” in I Corinthians 13:1?

Critics of diverse praise expressions often focus on the style or volume of worship and contend the music displeases God. However, the psalmist shows just how loud praise can get. High volume praise does not displease God. The real difference between noise and praise to God is love.

The praise of Israel became noise because their heart was not in it (Isaiah 29:13). God chastised such people, “Take away from Me the noise of your songs, for I will not hear the melody of your stringed instruments” (Amos 5:23, NKJV). God has always cared more about the heart of the worshiper than the style or decibels of worship.

Today, “let us continually offer the sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of our lips” (Hebrews 13:15, NKJV). The roots of our hearts produce the fruit of our lips. Holy worship grows from the roots of a relationship with Jesus Christ. God loves the high-sounding praise from a heart consecrated to Him.

Reflection and Prayer

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

DAY 5

Bible Reading Plan

I Samuel 30 □ 31 □ | Luke 17 □

Psalm 150:6

Let every thing that hath breath praise the Lord. Praise ye the Lord.

Biblical Insight

The only requirement given to be part of this celebration is to be breathing. The Book of Psalms, which began with concerns about the possible influence of the wicked (Psalm 1) and their threat against the LORD and His Messiah (Psalm 2), ends with a resounding note of praise in celebration of His victory over His enemies.

Daily Devotion

The culmination of Psalm 150 calls all people to praise. The psalmist's call would take on new meaning as scholars would translate Scripture into different languages. Cultures worldwide would introduce creative expressions of praise into the psalm and testify to the beautiful diversity found in worship.

Praise Him with bamboo flute in China. Praise Him woodwind instruments of Asia. Praise Him with the sitar in India. Praise Him with the dance in Africa. "In whatever language these sublime, impressive and expressive lines [of Psalm 150] are recited, they convey a central theme of the Bible, the heartfelt worship of God" (Yelena Kolyada, *A Compendium of Musical Instruments and Instrumental Terminology in the Bible*).

The breath of the Creator unites the diverse expressions of heartfelt praise here on earth. And one day, we will praise the King of kings in unison around the throne of God (Psalm 86:9; Revelation 15:4). We can only wonder whether Psalm 150 will be the first song we sing.



Reflection and Prayer

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

Lesson Title: Created to Worship

Scripture Focus: Psalm 150:6

The Lesson in Context

“Praise ye the Lord” is not just a verbal command. It is the unspoken command of the soul. It is what people will *hear* from your life whenever they think of you. Like the Kiowa grandfather, speaking with his whole life of the majesty of his people and compelling his grandson to walk away blazing with a desire to tell others of this majesty, so does the Apostolic, having in concert a life lived in praise of God, teach others of the glory of God and compel them in a thousand ways: “Let everything that has breath praise the Lord.”

Group Discussion

1. What is the most beautiful place you have ever been? What made it so striking and significant to you?
2. In what ways do we worship God every day?
3. What is a mighty act God has performed in your life?
4. What is one of your favorite worship songs? Why is it a favorite of yours?
5. What are some things people worship in our world? Why do you consider it worship?

My Prayer for the Upcoming Week

How do you want to be different because of what you have experienced today?

SERIES 1: THE REVELATION OF GOD

This series, “The Revelation of God,” will look at four different accounts in Scripture that reveal who God is. As we look at the I AM speaking from the burning bush, the power of God revealed on Mount Sinai, Jesus’ conversation with the Jews about being “before Abraham,” and the vision of the one sitting on the throne in Revelation, encourage your group to see the revealed majesty and power of God throughout Scripture. That revelation of God will guide their pursuit of Him and their growth as disciples of Jesus Christ.

SERIES 2: STANDING ON THE PROMISES OF GOD

This series, “Standing on the Promises of God,” will cover events in the lives of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Through the examples of these Old Testament patriarchs, we will see the importance of clinging to the promises of God. From Abraham being called to leave his homeland to the birth of Isaac, from Jacob deceiving Esau to his wrestling match with an angel, these narratives reveal the steadfast nature of God’s promises. To see God’s promises come to pass in our lives, we must do as the patriarchs did: stand on the promises of God.

SERIES 3: FOLLOWING JESUS

This series, entitled “Following Jesus,” will look at the early portion of Jesus’ ministry. From His temptation in the wilderness to His prophetic reading of Isaiah in the synagogue, from choosing His twelve disciples to His life-changing teachings, we learn what it means to not only believe in Jesus, but to follow Him wholeheartedly. This series will seek to call all who will listen to follow Jesus.

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