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“For we are God’s fellow workers. You are God’s Field.”

2 Corinthians 3:9

When Paul wrote these words to a divided church in Corinth, he reminded them of the apostles’ identity, as well as theirs. The apostles were God’s fellow workers, and the church was the field of God called to be cultivated. In much the same way, Young Meadows is really God’s meadow, one that we pray will be continually cultivated.

At Young Meadows, we believe the means of that cultivation is found in our mission statement, as believers are engaged in discipleship in worship, community, and mission. We’ve summarized our mission through the phrase: Rooted, Gathered, and Scattered. We believe the cultivation of the church comes as believers are more **rooted** in the word of God and work of Christ, as they are **gathered** together in true community, and as they are **scattered** around the city and world in mission.

It is the prayer of Young Meadows’ leadership, as God’s fellow workers, that the next three years “plowing” through the whole story of Scripture (in Sunday sermons and these weekly times of personal devotion) might lead to a cultivation in the lives of our members, as well as the surrounding community. May your personal times of devotion through this guide further feed and fertilize your soul, so that being “*rooted and built up in Him,*” (Colossians 2:7) you might walk in Him.

Your Fellow Worker,
Jay Joye

A CHRONOLOGICAL JOURNEY THROUGH THE BIBLE

Several years ago, Young Meadows made a shift in our children's Sunday School curriculum and began using "The Gospel Story for Kids." Our desire was to expose our children to the overarching story of Scripture that progressed through four major "chapters": Creation, Fall, Redemption and Restoration. We fell in love with the curriculum as our children were taught to see the Bible, not as individual and disparate stories, but of one story, "the one true story of the whole world" with one grand hero, Jesus Christ, at its center. Our goal was that every child attending children's Sunday School classes would work through the Bible twice between Kindergarten and 6th grade. Our hope was that knowing the broad overview of the Scripture, as well as seeing Christ at the center, would lay the foundation for a lifetime pursuit of following their Savior.

Within the last two months we decided that it was time for our adults to have the same purposeful exposure to that overarching story of the Bible. We sensed that it was a perfect way to encourage personal discipleship. After all, "what is good for the goose is good for the gander." For the very same reasons, our prayer for Young Meadows is that congregants would join us on a journey through the Scriptures throughout the next three years. Our current plan is to cover the Old Testament during Sunday sermons over the next year and a half. Following those 78 sermons, we will shift to the New Testament for the next year and a half.

In addition to Sunday sermons, the leadership wanted to encourage daily times of personal devotion, as we journey through the Bible's arc together. These devotions will help to supplement and reinforce the messages heard on Sunday. There are two options for devotional reading. The first option is this guide that you hold in your hand. It is intended to be used by teenagers and adults during their personal times of devotion, as verses are assigned which will provide context and application. The second form is a devotional book that supplements our children's curriculum, which occurs in

two units: Long Story Short (Old Testament) and Old Story New (New Testament). Both devotional options are structured similarly. Days one through four will include a section of scripture to read along with a brief devotional thought. Day three, each week, connects that week's study to Jesus and the gospel. The focus of the Bible is Jesus. The fifth day each week, we will look at a passage from the Psalms or from one of the prophets to discover how the passage points forward to Jesus. In addition, there will be some training offered throughout the year on how to actually have a personal time of devotion through your scripture reading.

In the end, our vision is to see our church grow in its understanding of the whole story of Scripture and Christ's place (as well as ours) in it. Our prayer is that as we hear sermons during Sunday services, process those same messages during small group, continue to engage with accompanying scripture in our daily personal times of devotion, engage weekly in conversation with friends, or perhaps share regularly in times of family worship, that we will be more transformed- as we behold the glory of the Lord and are transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. (2 Corinthians 3:18)

"Then he said to them, 'These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled.'"
Luke 24:44 (ESV)

All scripture references are English Standard Version unless otherwise stated.

Acknowledgements

Special thanks to Harps Crossing in Fayetteville, Georgia. The pastors and leaders of this church granted permission to Young Meadows to use and adapt this devotional geared to teens and adults. We hope to continue updating their devotional over the years, making revisions and even deeper connections to the hero of this great story of the redemption of the whole world. We intend to take full advantage of sermon discussion questions as well as small group discussion areas to further flesh out many of the texts included in this devotional.

Harps Crossing has led their church through the whole Bible twice since its inception, and continues to encourage their congregation to use this devotional to supplement Sunday's sermon.

PLANTED

in God's Word

PRAY FOR ILLUMINATION

- Incline my heart to your testimonies. (Ps 119:36)
- Open my eyes to see wonders in your word (Ps 119:18)
- Unite my heart to fear your name (Ps. 86:11)
- Satisfy me with your steadfast love. (Ps. 90:14)

LOOK AT THE TEXT

- What's the authors big idea?
- What things jump out at you from the passage?
- Are there words or phrases that are repeated?

ASK QUESTIONS OF THE TEXT

- What do certain words/images mean
- How should the text be understood in its context?
- How does this passage point to the person, nature, or work of Christ?

GNAW ON THE TEXT

Choose two or three most important insights or verses from your reading:

- **Adoration:** How does this lead me to adore God and His attributes?
- **Confession:** How does this lead me to confess to God? What wrong thoughts, feelings, and behavior happen in me when this is forgotten? How is this sin being caused by faith in something else?
- **Thanksgiving:** How can I thank Christ for being the ultimate answer to this sin?
- **Supplication:** What does this lead me to ask God for?

TAKE-AWAY FROM THE TEXT

- Sin to avoid.
- Promise to claim.
- Example to follow.
- Command to obey.
- Knowledge of God or self.

EXPERIENCE GOD

Jonathan Edwards said, "There is a difference between believing that God is holy and gracious, and having a new sense on the heart of the loveliness and beauty of that holiness and grace. Like there is a difference between having a rational belief that honey is sweet, and having the actual experience of its sweetness."

DECIDE WITH WHOM TO SHARE

WEEK 27 GOD PROTECTS BABY MOSES

The last half of Genesis 50 is a transition to Exodus. Joseph brought his family, including his father, Israel (Jacob), to Egypt. The words given to Abraham that his descendants would be enslaved and mistreated (see Genesis 15:13) in a foreign land had become a reality. God was in the mix sovereignly accomplishing His plan. God would now raise up a deliverer for the descendants of Abraham, the Israelites. Like Moses, Jesus was born and as a baby his life was threatened by a political leader. Like Moses, Jesus would be a deliverer. God is once again seen as the one moving history toward His planned outcome. Enjoy the continuing movement of God to deliver His people.

Day 1- Read Genesis 50:15-26

All of the sons of Israel have relocated to Egypt. Their father, Israel, is dead and Joseph's brothers are scared that he will get back at them for mistreating him and selling him to the traders that brought him to Egypt. The brothers did not know that Joseph had already forgiven them. Forgiveness is a two-way street; it must be given and it must be received. Joseph had treated his brothers kindly and had obviously forgiven them. However, they remained fearful.

When the brothers approached Joseph, they told him that their father had asked that he forgive them. They did not ask for his forgiveness but told him that their father wanted him to forgive them. Joseph had already forgiven them and now he tells them that God had a bigger plan. Joseph tells them that although they intended to bring harm to him, God had plans to use what they had done for good. God was using it to save many lives and it was already happening.

There is so much for us to learn here. First of all, we must trust that God will use even the difficult things in our lives, those times when people intentionally seek to hurt us, for His purpose. Be

confident that God is still in control. Do what He wants and leave the rest to Him. Second, we learn that we should forgive before being asked to forgive and we must also forgive even if forgiveness is never requested. We have been forgiven and therefore we should forgive others. Joseph had already closed this chapter in his life and was now moving on to do what he needed to do. Not forgiving others can lock you up and prevent you from being able to fully carry on.

Have you forgiven those who have wronged you? Have you received forgiveness that has been given? Thank God for His forgiveness and His ability to use all things to accomplish His purposes.

Day 2- Read Exodus 1

We now move into the book of Exodus. The title of the book in the Greek translation is Exodus and means “A going out.” In Hebrew the title is “These are the names” which is the first phrase in the book. Clearly Exodus picks up where Genesis leaves off. It continues the narrative that had already begun. It continues to trace the history of man, but more specifically, the history of Israel and God’s dealing with them.

The new nation of Israel has been in Egypt now for more than 300 years. A new king in Egypt, called Pharaoh, comes to rule. He does not know anything about Joseph, his family or his history. Pharaoh saw the Israelites, also called Hebrews, as a growing threat. The Israelites were multiplying at an alarming rate and Pharaoh did not like it. He decided to put an end to the rapid growth so he began to treat the people of Israel “ruthlessly.” He put great burdens on them hoping to slow their growth. Instead, the Hebrew people grew all the more. He had another plan—to kill all of the baby boys as soon as they were born. However, the Hebrew midwives would not kill the babies. They told Pharaoh that the women were strong and babies were born before they got there. The midwives

chose to obey God and ignore the demand of Pharaoh to kill the babies. God honored their obedience.

No matter what Pharaoh did, the people thrived because God had promised that anyone who cursed His people would be cursed and anyone who blessed them would be blessed (see Genesis 12:3). Pharaoh then decided to have all of the baby boys thrown into the Nile River.

In biblical history, God always raised up one that would come along to rescue His people. God is faithful. He made a promise to always be with His people. God is about to truly show Himself great! Thank God for His presence and His faithfulness!

Day 3 CONNECT TO JESUS- Read Matthew 2:7-18

In 1883, a volcano erupted in Krakatoa so violently that scientists note that the echoing sound circulated the globe nearly five times! I have no clue how scientists could calculate that information, but it boggles the mind how one event could send such ripples throughout the world. As we read in Matthew 2, we find a similar echo from another “earth shattering” event. The account of Jesus’ birth seems to echo so many of the details of Moses’ birth.

First, we find the people of God being oppressed. In Exodus 2, Israel is suffering in the land of Egypt under the rod of Pharaoh, while Israel in Matthew 2 is suffering in their homeland under the reign of Rome. In both accounts, leaders are trying to destroy the future of Israel to maintain their power. Pharaoh ordered the killing in Egypt as seen in Exodus 2:9: ***the people of Israel are too many and too mighty for us.*** Herod ordered the slaughter after the wise men had learned where Jesus was to be born. In Exodus, Pharaoh orders all male infants to be murdered upon delivery, whereas in Matthew, Herod declares that any male under the age of 2 is to be killed. In both accounts, there is a miraculous deliverance, in Exodus as Pharaoh’s daughter plucks Moses from the Nile, and in Matthew as an angel appears to Joseph and warns

him to flee to Egypt. It is no wonder that Matthew would have quoted Hosea 11:1 when he writes, “*out of Egypt I have called my son.*”

The echoes were intentional. For just as Moses would deliver the people of Israel from the bondage of Egypt’s slavery, so too Jesus, as a greater Moses, would deliver the people of Israel from the bondage of a greater slavery. They were ultimately enslaved not under Roman rule, but under the rule of sin and death. Christ’s coming as a greater Moses ultimately delivers us, a new Israel, to walk in freedom and newness of life. How are you failing to live and reflect the new freedom offered to you through Jesus Christ?

Day 4- Read Acts 7:2-22

Stephen, a deacon in the first century church, had an opportunity to give an explanation to some Jewish religious leaders about who Jesus was. The Jewish leaders were critical of Christians. They believed that Jesus was destroying their Jewish faith system.

Stephen, in his speech, tells the religious leaders about where their faith came from and that Jesus was not only part of it but the focus. He begins all the way back with Abraham and traces the biblical history up to Moses. He was showing that Moses was part of a bigger plan that pointed to Jesus. Stephen says that the table was set, so to speak, for Moses to come and deliver the people from bondage in Egypt. Stephen says, “*At that time Moses was born*” (**Acts 7:20**). The timing was perfect. It was right at the time that God had determined. His people, Israel, were in slavery in Egypt and had been for more than 300 years. He was now ready for them to be delivered or, at least, to begin the process.

Stephen was taking advantage of an opportunity of attacks made on him, not to defend himself or lash out, but to tell the truth about Jesus! He took full advantage of that opportunity to help the

Jewish leaders to see Jesus in the context of their own history. Stephen was helping the religious leaders connect the dots.

Be prepared to share with people, within their context of life, who Jesus is. The goal is to help them know Him. Remember, Jesus is not an afterthought! He is a person in history and at the same time beyond history. He is the One who wrote history before history began and then fulfilled it!

Give thanks to God for His plan of history and that He made it known to us. Be prepared to share it!

Day 5- Read Isaiah 7:10-14

On Friday we usually look at a prophecy or a Psalm about Jesus. Many times prophecy have both an immediate fulfillment and a further out fulfillment. Such was the case here. There would be a woman, a virgin, who would marry and have a child and before He was old enough to know good and evil the alliance between Israel and Aram would be broken. There was also a far-out fulfillment which was understood by Matthew (see Matthew 1:23) to be fulfilled in Jesus. So there was a close-in fulfillment and a far-away fulfillment. "God sent Isaiah the prophet to encourage King Ahaz that the alliance of two enemies would not succeed against him. Isaiah tells Ahaz to ask for a sign. However, revealing false piety, Ahaz says that he will not ask for a sign. This answer sounded pious but something in the way he said it showed he did not believe Isaiah. Perhaps he did not want to believe Isaiah, who had been prophesying about the eventual destruction of Judah if her people did not return to the Lord."¹

There were two things in this prophecy about Jesus. First, it says that He would be born of a virgin. Mary was unmarried and had not yet "*known a man.*" That means she had never been sexually intimate. Second, it tells us that Jesus would be called Immanuel.

¹ The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures by Dallas Seminary Faculty

Immanuel is a name that means “*God with us.*” Matthew quotes this passage in Matthew 1:23, applying it to Jesus. Jesus is the one born of a virgin and who is “*God with us.*” He was not an ordinary man. He was miraculously conceived by the Holy Spirit and He was the physical presence of God in the world.

God gave King Ahaz a prophecy to strengthen his faith. It may not have done anything for his faith but it sure does for mine!

WEEK 28 GOD CALLS MOSES

God's call is for all believers! If you are following Jesus you have heard God's call and have responded to His drawing. We are all called to follow God and seek Him with all we have. This week we will see the calling of Moses, another person that God used in His plan. We should be like Moses and seek to be used by God as a part of His plan.

Day 1- Read Exodus 2:11-25 and Acts 7:23-29

This is not the first time we see a murder in the Bible; we saw Cain murder Abel back in the beginning of Genesis. In today's reading Moses sought to take things into his own hands and sought to save his people from the harsh and bad conditions they suffered under the Egyptians. While what Moses wanted and sought to do was right, I am not so sure the way he dealt with it was right. We don't know when, but obviously Moses somehow realizes that he is not an Egyptian and that he belongs to the Hebrew people. We would have to admit he had it pretty nice; he was living in the Pharaoh's palace and, most likely, had all he wanted, but he couldn't stand that his people were being mistreated.

While Moses' choice to kill the Egyptian may not have been the best choice, his intention to free and help his people was. After all, they (Israelites) were slaves and Moses was seeking to help them. But instead of them looking to him for help they shared the news of the killing and it made it all the way to Pharaoh. When Pharaoh got word of the killing, he wanted to kill Moses, so Moses fled.

We will read later this week that God had a plan to free the people and Moses is heavily involved in that plan, but now it would be God's way. Like Moses, we often take things into our own hands. Even though our intent and meaning might be right, the way we go about it may not be the best. Today, as you see things that are against God's heart and desire, ask the Lord to help you respond how He would, not necessarily the way you might respond "in the

flesh.” Ask God to give you His heart and mind and to see things the way He sees them. John McArthur says, “True faith accepts the Lord’s plan.” Today, let’s accept the plan of God, whatever that might be.

Day 2- Read Exodus 3

From Acts 7, verses 23 and 30, we know that there were 40 years between the time Moses killed the Egyptian and the time he met God in the burning bush. As we saw in our study yesterday,

Moses had the desire and wanted to help free his people but probably didn’t go about it the right way.

We see from today’s scripture that God visits Moses and tells him that he will be used to deliver his people. Although 40 years ago Moses was all about helping his people, and although he wants to help them now, he begins to make excuses. Maybe excuses like “how can I do it” and “what if the Israelites say this or say that?” The difference between now and 40 years ago is that Moses is instructed by God and given the words of God that He will deliver His people under Moses’ direction (vs 16 and 17). While Moses’ desire was to help his people 40 years prior, this was now God’s plan and was being played out God’s way.

God had appointed Moses for this time. It was what God had planned for him to do. God often has ways in which He wants to carry out His plans and purposes through us; we just need to be willing to listen, hear, and follow Him. One of the best ways to do this is exactly what you are doing right now, reading and studying God’s Word. God often reveals Himself through His Word and through prayer. What might God be leading you to do at this time and in this place? How does God want you to lead your family, co-workers, church, and your friends?

Lord, make us willing and ready; however You may want to use us. He just might be raising you up for this time and this place and

for His purpose. We should be saying “God here I am. How do You want to use me?”

Day 3 CONNECT TO JESUS- Read Hebrews 11:23-29

Post-vacation blues is real. Upon your return from vacation, you find yourself dreaming of a life of never-ending vacation. Can you imagine if your dream came true? Now imagine! What if the Lord, having granted you a never ending vacation, appeared to you after many years and said, “I want you to leave it all behind.” I want you to leave the lap of luxury and I want you to go to the knees of need. I want you to put down succulence and take up suffering, exchange your free time for furrowed brows, set aside glitz and glamor for groaning. In Exodus 2:24, we find that “***God heard their groaning and God remembered His covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. God saw the people of Israel- and God knew.***” Hearing the groaning of His children God is moved with compassion to act, and He calls Moses. He calls Moses, who has grown up in the lap of luxury, receiving the finest education, and enjoying all the benefits of Egyptian culture. He calls that Moses to leave it all and to lead a “rag-tag” group of Israelites out of the clutches of a superpower and into a promised land hundreds of miles away. What a calling!

Yet, how much more of a calling for Jesus Christ. For, He too, like Moses, was called by God to leave it all and to lead another “rag tag” group of Israelites into a promised land. Moses’ abandoning of his Egyptian lifestyle was hard, much like leaving vacation, but can you imagine how much more difficult for Jesus Christ? For He left the glories of Heaven where all of the heavenly host embodied praise to Him, and He came into a land where very little respect was given. He left a place where all the host of Heaven understood His privileged position as the Son of God, only to come to a land where He was known simply as the son of a carpenter from Nazareth. He left the infinite to come to the finite.

Is it any wonder that the writer of Hebrews would say that Moses considered “*the reproach of Christ greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt?*” Moses, pointing us to Jesus, would willingly lay aside luxury, embracing a greater wealth and purpose. He would bear reproach for the sake of God’s people, pointing us ultimately to Christ’s bearing reproach for the sake of God’s people. Christ bore that reproach, acting as if His people were of greater wealth than even Heaven itself. Don’t you see what a treasure you are? Don’t you see what He’s left for you? What might He be calling you to in response? What might He be calling you to leave in response?

Day 4- Read Exodus 4:1-17

At forty years old Moses was ready to help and free his people from bondage and slavery. Now, at eighty years old, he is not so sure; he is not so confident. In today’s verses we see Moses as a big “excuse maker.” Every time God tells Moses that he is the person to help free his people, he has an excuse or reason why it won’t work. In fact, Moses argues and makes one last excuse. In verse 14, the Bible tells us that the Lord’s anger burned against Moses; in essence, the Lord was fed up with his excuses.

Unfortunately, we all make excuses when God speaks to us and instructs us to do something. Go somewhere, reach out to someone, give something away, or maybe befriend someone. Sometimes, we immediately obey, but at other times, we might make excuses and either do it later or not do it at all. You may have heard the statement that delayed obedience is disobedience.

Moses was in disobedience to the Lord because instead of going as soon as the Lord told him to go, he just made excuses. As we will see later, he did finally obey the Lord but it would have been best to simply take the Lord at His word and head to Egypt as soon as the Lord told Him to go.

Moses was a great man of faith, as we learned from yesterday's devotion, but he often struggled with sin and not listening to God, just like we do. Today, let us be sensitive to God's voice. May we hear what He has to say, and when He speaks to our heart, may our answer be, "Yes, Lord." Let us not make excuses, argue with the Lord, or tell Him why we can't, but let us say, "Speak Lord, your servant is listening." When He speaks, we need to be ready and willing to obey!

Day 5- Read Isaiah 8:11-15

The religious leaders of Israel that were supposedly God-fearing people didn't recognize God in human form. The King was among them in the man of Jesus and yet they didn't acknowledge Him; in fact, they put Him to death. When Jesus came to earth, He spoke truth and told the leaders to follow God's laws instead of the man-made laws. Of course, they didn't like this. Isn't it interesting that the ones who were supposed to be seeking and following God didn't see Him when He was right in front of them?

Verse 14 tells us that God can be a sanctuary, but in verse 15 we see that He can be a stumbling block. How can this be? It all has to do with how we see God and Jesus. "If the things of God be an offense to us, they will undo us. The apostle quotes this to all who persisted in unbelief of the gospel of Christ, **1 Peter 2:8**. *"The preaching of the cross is foolishness in their esteem; his doctrines and precepts offend them."*²

However, if we view and know Him as our Father, our comforter, and our redeemer, then He is our sanctuary, a place of rest. Is

Jesus a stumbling block to you or is He your resting place? To those who seek to be good on their own and not trust in Jesus, He can be a stumbling block. But to those who know that goodness

² Matthew Henry Concise Bible Commentary

and hope can only be found in the person of Jesus, He is their sanctuary.

Today, I hope you rest in Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith!

WEEK 29 MOSES CONFRONTS PHARAOH

God had prepared and called Moses for a certain task—to deliver and lead the Israelites out of bondage and slavery in Egypt. Do you remember how they got there? It was by no fault of their own. Joseph had been sold by his brothers to traders who took him to Egypt and sold him to a man named Potiphar. God gave Joseph the ability to interpret the dreams of Pharaoh and, as a result, he was elevated to a high position in Egypt. Joseph administered a savings plan during a time of great harvests and then a distribution plan during the times of famine. His father and brothers came to Egypt for food and they finally moved to Egypt. Now, after more than 300 years, there are many people that make up the people of Israel. This week we will learn about the hardened heart of Pharaoh and his refusal to obey the command of God from Moses.

Day 1- Read Exodus 4:18-23, 27-30 and Chapter 5

Moses' brother Aaron chose to go with him on the trip to Egypt to lead the people out of slavery. He became the spokesman for Moses. Aaron announced to the people that Moses had been sent by God to deliver them from their captors. He showed them the miraculous signs that God had provided for them. At first the people believed, were thankful, and worshipped.

Moses and Aaron then went to Pharaoh requesting that they be allowed to take the people into the wilderness to have a feast and to worship. The initial request was for a feast celebration, rather than a total departure. Pharaoh immediately refused and accused Moses and Aaron of keeping the people from their work. I guess Moses was expecting Pharaoh to simply say, "Go." However, what he said was "No," and made the people's work even harder. Not only did they have to continue making bricks but now they had to go and find their own straw to be used in the brick making. The people who were overseeing the work became even harsher.

The Israelites complained to Pharaoh about the increased workload and Pharaoh told them it was because of Moses and Aaron. The people then complained to Moses. Their belief and celebration had turned into complaining. At first the enslaved Israelites were thankful that Moses was there to deliver them but when things got harder, they wavered in their faith, grumbling and complaining.

This was a pattern for the Israelites in the Old Testament. They would trust and follow God and then get discouraged, complain, and become disobedient.

What do you do when you face unexpected roadblocks in your life? Do you get discouraged and complain? We have a long record of this pattern in the Old Testament. We can learn a very valuable lesson, if we will. When things get harder than expected, trust God anyway! Difficulty does not necessarily mean you are going the wrong way. Trust God to finish what He started.

Ask God to provide the grace for you to stay the course even when the course becomes difficult.

Day 2- Read Exodus 5:22-6:1

I have been right where Moses was! I have often done what I thought God wanted but it didn't work out the way I wanted or expected. And, like Moses, I whined to God, "Why did you do this?" Moses was disappointed because he was following God's instructions. He went to Pharaoh, asked him to let the people go into the wilderness and worship and make sacrifices. I guess Moses was again expecting Pharaoh to say, "Go." However, instead his answer was again, "No!" Pharaoh then made the people's work even harder.

We have to remember a few things. First of all, with God, time is not a big deal. He is not on a time schedule. We have a tendency to think that if things do not happen at a certain time then it may not be God's will. Second, we think that we know what God wants to

accomplish and how He wants to accomplish it. His thoughts and ours are certainly not the same! God has plans we could never understand. He has ways of accomplishing His plans that include much more than we could ever understand.

“For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the Lord.” Isaiah 55:8

God encouraged Moses in response to his prayer. God told him that He (God) would lead the people out of bondage and that He (God) would do certain things to Pharaoh. God was going to show Himself great so that the people would know that God was great and powerful!

Our part is to trust God even in the most difficult of situations! How many times do people give up because things get difficult? Ask God to enable you to trust Him when things do not appear to be working out. God is faithful and He will finish what He starts.

Day 3 CONNECT TO JESUS- Read Exodus 6:1-6 and Ephesians 1:7

The promise of redemption declared here in Exodus 6, repeated throughout the scriptures, is often repeated Sunday after Sunday in churches, but it is rarely defined. During the Liberian Revolution, Helene Cooper recounts the time of redemption when her house was broken into by soldiers. The soldiers took a young Helene and her sister down to the basement with the intent of committing all manner of egregious acts. As the men were preparing to commit these atrocities, the basement door flung upon, as the girls' mother entered demanding that the soldiers release her daughters. In return, the mother said that they could take her and do with her as they pleased. The men agreed to the terms. Helen and her sister were released. Helen and her sister were redeemed.

By its very definition, to redeem is to buy back. Kinsmen were called to buy back their closest kin, and the expense fell upon them. It involved an exchange, sometimes of money, sometimes of their very life. That's the very thing we find here in Exodus 6:6 as God declares: ***I am the LORD, and I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians, and I will deliver you from slavery and I will redeem you.*** I will exchange your position. You will go from being slaves in the house of Egypt, to being children of the house of God. I will pay the price for that exchange. The responsibility will fall on me to accomplish it. As we flip over to Ephesians 1:7, in the most beautiful description of the blessings flowing to the children of God, we find the word redemption used yet again. ***"In Him, we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace."*** We hear of God's great wealth, the riches of His grace, to pay the price for our redemption. But we also hear the currency by which it comes. The exchange that is offered is not money to purchase us from the slave block. The currency that is exchanged for our souls and our sins is none other than the blood of Jesus Christ, in whom we have forgiveness of sins. Now, we, like Israel, belong to Him. And belonging to Him, we too are called to pursue redemption. To What or to whom might the Lord be calling you to pursue redemption? What will it cost you?

Day 4- Read Exodus 7:8-13

Moses spent the first forty years of his life in Egypt being raised as Pharaoh's daughter's son. After fleeing to Midian, he spent another forty years there. He then encountered God in the burning bush and returned to Egypt to be the deliverer of God's people from bondage at the age of eighty.

When he had his second encounter with Pharaoh, he discovered that God had hardened the heart of Pharaoh. In reality, God predicted that Pharaoh, in his resistance to God, would harden his own heart. Several times in Exodus we read that Pharaoh hardened his heart (Exodus 8:15, 19, 32). God knew of his resistance and

used it to accomplish His purposes. As a result of Pharaoh's resistance, God said that, "*The Egyptians shall know that I am the Lord.*" **Exodus 7:5**

In today's passage we see that when Aaron throws down his rod to show God's power the Egyptian magicians do the same.

Aaron's rod became a serpent and the magician's rods also turned into serpents. However, Aaron's rod swallowed up the magician's rods. What Aaron did with his rod was from the power of God. What the Egyptian magicians did was trickery. God showed His superiority by causing Aaron's rod to swallow the Egyptian's rods. God's power overcame! Even after the display of God's power over the Egyptian magicians, Pharaoh's heart continued to harden.

Ask God to soften your heart so that you will be submissive to His plan and will.

Day 5- First Read Isaiah 9:2, 6-7

The prophet Isaiah said that there would be one who would come and bring light to people walking in darkness. In Matthew 4:15-16 this prophecy is applied to Jesus. In John 8:12 Jesus says that He is the light of the world. Jesus is the light that Isaiah was talking about. Also, in Isaiah 9 there is one described who would be man and God at the same time. It says that He would be "*Mighty God.*" Only Jesus fits this description. He was born of a woman, not just any woman, but one who was a virgin. Jesus was born as a baby just like everyone else yet He was not conceived by a man, but by the Holy Spirit. He was fully God and fully man. As man He died in our place to take our punishment. Since He was fully God, He lived a sinless life and therefore defeated death and the grave when He was raised from the dead.

There are several other names for Jesus in Isaiah 9. One of those describes the result of His activity as Light and Mighty God. As a result of what He accomplished as the God-Man He would also be

the "*Prince of Peace*." Since He provides light for living and walking safely through life and since He died for us, taking away sin's penalty, He brings peace. As "*Prince of Peace*," He rules in our hearts and will ultimately rule with peace. He will take away all competing forces. The opposite of peace is conflict. When Jesus rules, He settles for us the issue of competing forces. You can have only one boss or master. All others hold a distant second place. Think of it this way; when Jesus is Lord of your life many of the decisions you struggle with are already made. I often encounter people who are in a struggle and they say, "I just don't know what to do." That is not really the struggle. As followers of Jesus they know what to do. The real problem is are they going to follow Him or their own fleshly desires? Jesus brings peace, but to experience it fully you need to follow Him.

Seek FIRST His kingdom!

Week 30 GOD SENDS PLAGUES AGAINST EGYPT

It must have been a crazy time to have lived during the plagues that take place in this week's reading! God could have simply made Pharaoh let the people go from the beginning, but in His plan, this isn't what happened. Rather, He used plagues and difficult times to teach and draw the people to Himself. Pharaoh was evil and did not fear God; God even used this for His glory. God's plan, even when hard to see, is always best.

Day 1- Read Exodus 7:14-24

Can you imagine standing there and seeing the whole Nile River turn to blood? The Nile is approximately 4,200 miles long and 2 miles wide. This whole body of water was turned to blood and the people had to look elsewhere for drinking water. Incredible!

But I wonder what must have been going through Moses' and Aaron's minds. Exodus 7:3 and 7:22 says that they already knew that Pharaoh's heart would be hardened again and that Pharaoh would not listen to them, but they obeyed the Lord and followed His commands anyway. That must have been disheartening! To follow the Lord, doing what He says in hopes of freeing your people, and yet knowing all the while that Pharaoh's heart would still be hard and he wouldn't let the people go! However, Moses and Aaron followed the Lord. While I am sure it didn't totally make sense to them, they trusted His plan.

I want to be like that! I want to follow the Lord when it makes sense and when it doesn't, when things are going great and when things are falling apart. I want to trust the Lord even when I don't feel like it. Trusting God is not an emotion or something that just happens by chance; it is an intentional choice to trust and follow God. Even when it seems like there is no hope or even when it's difficult, we know that we can trust Him. Isaiah 40 tells us to trust

and hope in the Lord, not people, things, or even friends or family, but to choose to trust Jesus. What do you choose?

Today, let's CHOOSE to trust God and to put our hope in Him and Him alone!

Day 2- Read Exodus 9

God takes care of His people; He always has and He always will. As we have learned in previous devotions, this doesn't mean that His people won't face hard times or that life will go as planned. Rather, it means we can trust God to take care of us no matter what we go through.

The Israelites found themselves in the middle of some pretty crazy plagues. From gnats and flies to boils and hail, it must have been quite a sight to see. However, notice in Exodus 9:4 and 9:26 that God made a distinction between the Egyptians and God's chosen people, the Israelites. In verse 4 it says that no animals of the Israelites would die and in verse 7 that fact is confirmed. Again in verse 26 we read that Goshen, where the Israelites lived, was the only place in Egypt that it did not hail. In both of these instances God was caring for His people. At the same time I believe it was a reminder for them that in all of the plagues He was still in control. He was still calling the shots, even when Pharaoh's heart was hardened.

We may look at what's going on in our lives, the lives of our family and friends, or even the life of our country and world, and things seem to be falling apart. However, there are ways in which we see God working and God doing what only He can do. These times often remind us that, no matter what is going on in our lives or around us, God is still ultimately in control. As the song says, "He's got the whole world in His hands." We need to trust His plan and His heart, knowing He cares for us.

Place at the Lord's feet whatever may be going on with you and trust that He has that very thing in His hands.

Day 3 CONNECT TO JESUS- Read Exodus 7-10 and 1 Corinthians 8:4-6

Polemic: a strong verbal or written attack on someone or something. In some ways, Martin Luther's 95 Theses was a polemic. It was a strong written attack against the abuses of the Roman Catholic Church. When we approach the 10 plagues against Egypt, we rarely see them in all their fullness. In the same way that Luther attacked the false worship of the Catholic Church, so the plagues were, not a verbal, nor a written, but a physical attack on the gods of Egypt.

The Egyptian god Hapi was the god of the Nile, and the Nile was considered the source of Egypt's life! So when God turned the water of the Nile into blood, He was declaring that life was only to be found in Him. The Egyptian God Hekat, the goddess of fertility, was symbolized with the face of a frog. So when the land of Egypt was overrun with frogs, God was declaring that only He was in control of all things. The Egyptian god, Osiris, was the god of grain, but not even he had the power to overcome the power of Yahweh, as the hail battered the grain. God, through these plagues was polemically proclaiming His power over all false gods, as He notes in Exodus 12:12: ***on all the gods of Egypt, I will execute judgments.***

Paul, several centuries later, would write to a Corinthian culture with its own pantheon of gods. The new Egypt, Rome, lauded their own gods, with Caesar himself as deity. Yet, Paul would declare ***"there is no God but one...there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist."*** The perfect image of God, Jesus Christ, is the one through whom all life has its beginning and all life has its meaning. He is the polemic against all the abuses of the idols and gods of our

culture. In what areas of your life do you need His Lordship to extend?

Day 4- Read Exodus 10:3-20

We have begun to see a pattern here with Pharaoh! Once a plague is impacting him and his people, he tells Moses that he has sinned against the Lord. In **verse 17** he speaks to Moses and says, *“Now forgive my sin once more and pray to the Lord your God to take this deadly plague away from me.”* Had Pharaoh really recognized his sin and turned from it? No. Basically, all he wanted was the plague to be taken away. This was true with this plague and all the others. We have all been like Pharaoh, including myself! We might get into a bad situation, be experiencing tough times or heartache brought on by our own poor choice(s), and we acknowledge it before God and ask for forgiveness. But our real desire is for whatever we are experiencing to stop. Sometimes, we are not really concerned with seeking God and repenting, but we want to get out of the mess we are in. Often, once we get out of the mess, we go right back to our selfish ways of not acknowledging God anymore. At least not until the next tough time begins.

God wants all of us all of the time. He is not satisfied with some of us all of the time or with all of us some of the time; He wants us to be "all in." He wants us to realize that our goal and heart's desire in life should be to live in a love relationship with Him. To do that, we can't continue in sin any longer. Paul made that clear in Romans, chapters 7 and 8. God wants all of us, all of our hearts, our minds, our souls, and our strengths. And when we fall short of that He wants us to acknowledge it and come back to seek Him.

Today, let our prayer be, “Lord I want to follow You all the days of my life. The good days and the bad days, the happy and the sad days. I want to follow You both when I am in turmoil and when I am flourishing!”

Day 5- Read Deuteronomy 18:15-19 and Acts 3:18-23

We have already seen that Jesus is all over the Old Testament!

Today we see another glimpse of that. God used Moses to lead the people out of Egypt as a part of His plan. As we see in

Deuteronomy today, Moses understood that God's plan also included Jesus. It is mentioned in Acts that who the prophet Moses was talking about is Jesus. Of course we know that Jesus wasn't just a prophet as some would have us believe; He was the Son of God, the Savior of the world.

Jesus was also a prophet in that He spoke the words of God. He prophesied His own death and resurrection. Jesus was here on earth to tell us the very words of God. He was here to live, to die, and to be raised again. He was here to save us from our sins and to show us how to live and take the Gospel to the world. We are to follow Him, we are to seek Him. One of the greatest ways we can do this is through reading His Word, just as you have done today. Just think! We have the "rest of the story," as Paul Harvey would say, and it's all true. Moses, Peter, Paul, and Abraham didn't have the Bible as we have it today. Sure, they had the words of God but they didn't have the 66 books wrapped into one book that connects the dots from the beginning of time until the new earth. We do. We have it right in God's Word, the Bible. Isn't that incredible? May we treasure the Word of God, it is one of the greatest treasures in the world.

Perhaps you have seen a video of brothers and sisters in other countries receiving their very own Bibles for the first time. They cherish them and are so thankful for God's Word. They treat them

like they are the best gift they have ever received and they are often crying tears of joy. I want to treat God's Word like that.

Thank God for His Word!

WEEK 31 THE LAST PLAGUE AND THE FIRST PASSOVER

God had brought nine plagues upon Pharaoh and all of Egypt. The goal was two-fold; first, to convince Pharaoh to let the people leave from Egypt and second, to show God's greatness. There was one remaining plague, and the Jews still celebrate it today. Christians also celebrate it today, but in a very different way. The tenth plague was the plague of the death of the firstborn. By way of reminder, here is a list of the first nine plagues:

1. The Plague of Water Turned to Blood
2. The Plague of Frogs
3. The Plague of Lice
4. The Plague of Flies
5. The Plague of the Livestock
6. The Plague of Boils
7. The Plague of Hail
8. The Plague of Locusts
9. The Plague of Darkness

Day 1- First Read Exodus 11

God told Moses there would be one last plague and then

Pharaoh would send the people away. How far would you have to go before reaching the end of yourself so that you would seek God and His mercy? The land of Egypt had been ruined by the previous nine plagues. There was little left as far as food sources. The people were crying out for relief. But when Moses announced the

coming of the tenth and last plague, Pharaoh's heart was once again hardened. He refused to let the people go. God told Moses that now Pharaoh would finally let the Israelites go. The grip of sin can be stubborn and relentless. We see that Pharaoh was unmoved, even by the devastation that had come to the people and the land of Egypt. With the last plague he would be touched; his own firstborn son would die.

We can hear God, either through His Word or through His Spirit. By ignoring His voice and continuing in our own way of disobedience we allow our hearts to become hardened. A hardened heart is like a callous that forms on your hand. It continues to get harder and harder and it becomes less and less sensitive to touch. Eventually, hands like these are hard and insensitive. For some workers, calloused hands are protective and enable them to do their work. But for others, like surgeons, calloused hands would be a negative thing for their work. When it comes to relating to God, a hardened heart keeps us from walking with Him and experiencing His blessings and benefits. In this last plague there would again be a distinction between God's people, and the Egyptians. God was going to provide a way for the Israelites to be protected; this points to Jesus. Only Jesus can break sin's hold. The only hope of breaking the stronghold of sin is found in Jesus.

Ask God to enable you to keep your heart soft and sensitive to His Word.

Day 2- Read Exodus 12:1-30

The first eleven chapters of Exodus are about Moses, the deliverer. Chapters 12-14 are about the deliverance of Israel. Chapter 12 is a high point in Exodus. The events in chapter 12 mark the beginning of the Jewish religious calendar.

"Here we see the establishment of the Feast of Passover. The Feast of the Passover was instituted as a memorial to Israel's deliverance from Egypt and their adoption as Jehovah's nation. The Passover is

a festival that laid the foundation of the nation Israel's birth into a new relationship with God."³

Death was going to be the rule for all in Egypt. The tenth plague was the plague of death for the firstborn of animals and people—Egyptians and Israelites. There would be death in every home. However, God provided a way to make a distinction between the two. For the Israelites who trusted God and were obedient there would be a substitute death. God instructed the Israelites to take a lamb that was perfect—without blemish—that was less than a year old. They were to kill it in the evening on the designated day and put the blood of the lamb on the outside doorposts as a sign that the death of the lamb was their substitute. At midnight the angel of death would come to put to death the firstborn of every household. If the angel saw the blood of the lamb on the doorpost it would pass over that house and no further death would come to the household. The name Passover was given to this special observance and was to be a reminder of God's provision through the blood of the Passover lamb.

All over Egypt in the homes of the Egyptians there was loud crying because death had come to their home. Among the Israelites all was quiet. We will see in tomorrow's passage that the Passover Lamb, here in Exodus, points forward to the true Passover Lamb, Jesus. Give thanks to God for the wonderful blood of Jesus, our Passover Lamb.

Day 3 CONNECT TO JESUS- Read Exodus 11-12 and I Corinthians 5:7

Recent studies have shown that “first born kids are poised for success.” They statistically have higher IQs, are more cautious and dutiful, often earn higher salaries, are more likely to run companies effectively, or even establish their own. Firstborn seem to be a privileged birth position today. Not much has changed. For back

³ Thru The Bible with J. Vernon McGee

in the ancient near east, the firstborn was privileged as well. More importantly, the firstborn belonged to God. Exodus 13:2 notes: ***Consecrate to me all the firstborn. Whatever is the first to open the womb among the people of Israel, both of man and of beast, is mine.***”

On the first Passover, God made good on his command that the firstborn belonged to Him. In fact, on that night, He demanded the life of all of the firstborn of both “***man and beast.***” The only way to avoid the reckoning was to make a payment. The only way to avoid sacrificing the life of the firstborn was to substitute the life of another. Indeed, that is the very practice carried out In Exodus 12. Lambs and goat are slaughtered in order to pay the price for the firstborn. God is exacting the payment of the firstborn from both Jew and Egyptian, yet the Jews distinguish themselves by substituting the life of a lamb and goat for the sake of their own.

Is it any wonder that Paul would refer to Christ as our Passover lamb as he notes in 1 Corinthians 5:7: ***Cleanse out the old leaven that you may be a new lump.*** Christ has been offered as the payment for the people who belong to God. In response to Christ’s sacrifice the people of God are to act distinctly among the world around them. What would it look like, as the new Israel, to act distinctly now that the Passover lamb has been slain?

Day 4- Read Exodus 12:30-42

It’s hard to imagine being in slavery. The Israelites had spent around 400 years in this situation, apparently with each year becoming more oppressive. That’s more than 15 generations. The people had lived for all of those generations with a culture of slavery. Now, through God’s provision they were about to be set free! The words of Martin Luther King Jr. ring true for the people, “Free at last, free at last, thank God Almighty we are free at last.”

At this time there were 600,000 men. Counting women and children there could have been as many as 2 million people departing Egypt. What an incredible number of people. After Jacob's arrival in Egypt along with his family there were seventy. Now there were around 2 million. God blessed the people and they multiplied as God had promised Abraham and now they were a great nation!

Everything happened just as God had said. The people gave them resources—gold, silver, and clothing. Pharaoh sent them out.

God is the God of all, including all of history. He accomplishes His purposes and even tells ahead of time what He is going to do and how He is going to do it. We are blessed to see God's incredible track record of prophecy, promise, and fulfillment. We live in a wonderful time when we still have prophecy and promises of God waiting to be fulfilled.

Thank God for His faithfulness and for delivering the Israelites from slavery.

Day 5- Read Psalm 45:1-6

Today we look at a Psalm which points to Jesus as the Messiah. In Hebrews 1:8-9 this Psalm is quoted and helps to label Psalm 45 as a Messianic Psalm. This Psalm is a word of encouragement as it speaks of a coming King, Jesus, who would ride as a victorious King and warrior.

This is what is pictured in **Revelation 19:11-13**:

“Then I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse! The one sitting on it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he judges and makes war. His eyes are like a flame of fire, and on his head are many diadems, and he has a name written that no one knows but himself. He is clothed in a robe dipped in[a] blood, and the name by which he is called is The Word of God.”

The things we see in this Psalm ring true of Jesus. His reign will be with truth and righteousness. He will rule over His enemies and all people will bow before Him. He accomplished this victory at the cross where He defeated the enemy of God and man, Satan. His throne will last forever. His reign will be without end. There is only one King whose reign will never end and that is Jesus.

The Israelites, throughout their history, have been plagued by their enemies. It all started with the Egyptians and has continued through history. This Psalm would bring a fresh word of hope to a suffering people. It also reminds us that God has a plan to defeat the enemy of God and man and then have that King rule forever with truth and righteousness.

Give thanks for the eternal rule and reign of King Jesus!

WEEK 32 GOD PARTS THE RED SEA

The Israelites had already seen the One True God do some pretty amazing things as He was preparing them to be freed from slavery, the last being the Passover. However, this week we will continue to see what only God can do. With their backs against the army and the Red Sea in front of them, God did some great things!

Day 1- Read Exodus 13:1-16

It's important to see what the Lord is doing now and what He will do in the future, but it's also important to see what He has already done. Today's passage makes sure that those that come after the Exodus will know how and why the Lord delivered the Israelites from the Egyptians and Pharaoh's rule, because their God is great.

The Lord wanted the generations that would follow to remember what He had done and to worship Him. Thousands of years later we read about it and it is still celebrated. Leaven, in scripture, represents sin (Luke 12:1 and 1 Corinthians 5:8). Of course, we cannot be without sin; the only way that can happen is through Jesus.

Scripture tells us that without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins. Of course, the Passover is connected to Christ as we see the last supper with the disciples. We also celebrate communion in what God has done for us as we eat the bread and drink the cup. Jesus was and is the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world (John 1:29). Today death is not passed over us by putting blood above our doorposts. Rather, we have eternal life and escape spiritual death by trusting in the blood and death of Jesus, which was foreshadowed in this passage. Notice the last supper (Passover) in Matthew 26 was celebrated on the First day of Unleavened Bread. Unleavened bread (Matzah) means "without sin."

Matthew 26:26-29 says *"Now as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and after blessing it broke it and gave it to the disciples, and said, "Take, eat; this is my body." And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, saying, "Drink of it, all of you, for this is my blood of the[a] covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. I tell you I will not drink again of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom."* Jesus is our Passover, we will be passed over (be given life with Jesus) during the time of God's judgment, if we have received God's free gift of salvation.

Take some time today to thank God for His elaborate plan. If you have accepted His blood, His gift of salvation, thank Him. If you haven't, receive it today, for everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.

Day 2- Read Exodus 14:1-7

I wonder what Moses must have thought when the Lord told him that Pharaoh and his army were going to come after them again. I can imagine his emotions were quite crazy. However, we know he obeyed and turned back to camp when instructed by the Lord, as the end of **verse 4** said, *"The Israelites did this."*

God was setting up the opportunity to show off. Verse 4 tells us that He will get the glory and the Egyptians will know that He is the Lord. Now we might think, "Isn't enough, enough?" Haven't the Israelites been through enough already? However, the Lord had a plan to show them He was the Lord and to continue showing that He deserved the glory.

Have you ever had enough? Have you ever said I just can't do it anymore? We will see tomorrow how the Israelites responded, but what is your response when you are pushed to the limit? Sometimes we might feel like it is being piled on but we know that God is right by our side. As one song says, "Never once did we ever walk alone." Sometimes when we face difficulty or what

seems like a never-ending heap of trouble and distress, God is taking time to fashion us into His image. At the same time, He is waiting to show off and show us that He is the Lord. We see this happen in the book of Job. In fact, as I have shared before, I struggled for a time with anxiety and it was not fun. Looking back, I wouldn't have asked to go through it. However, standing on the other side, I learned so much and can now say that I am thankful for what God did in my life during that time. While it's often difficult turning those tough times around, when we have come through them God has shaped, molded, and taught us things we would never have learned otherwise.

Take whatever you may be going through today and give it to the Lord. Lay it before Him. While you might feel that you can't take anymore and you just want to turn back and go to Egypt, wait, trust, and know that God is in control.

Day 3 CONNECT TO JESUS- Read John 14:6-7

As we consider how the Israelites must have felt as they prepared to leave Egypt, I can't help but wonder if there was a part of them that wanted to stay, a result of a Stockholm Syndrome of sorts. As Exodus 12:14 reminds us, they were slaves to the Egyptians, but even the predictability of oppression might have been more comfort than the unknown and potential for death in the wilderness that they were entering. However, they set out in obedient faith.

Over one million Israelites left Egypt, led by a cloud during the day and a pillar of fire by night. It was a consistent reminder of Who they were following and trusting. As they approached the Red Sea, the Egyptians begin to pursue the Israelites. I can't imagine being at the back of a million people only to turn around and see your captors pursuing you! Now they were trapped, with the Egyptian army behind them and the Red Sea blocking any hope of escape. Then the Angel of the Lord, in the cloud, moved behind them. A barrier was formed that the Egyptians could not get through, one of many aspects of God's protection for the Israelites.

Moses remained in front of them and with merely an outstretched hand and faith in their God to keep walking, the Israelites were then surrounded on all sides: Moses leading them ahead, the Angel of the Lord behind them, and a wall of water on their left and right - a reminder of the power and protection of a mighty God. God literally kept them on a one-way path out of slavery to freedom through the Red Sea.

In our sin and complete depravity, we stand just as the Israelites stood: pursued by the enemy with no way out. God directs our path of deliverance through Jesus. In John 14:6, Jesus says, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." He is our Deliverer. Our salvation is completely dependent on God working on our behalf⁴, and at the same time, we must walk forward in faith and obedience just as the Israelites did through the Red Sea.

What paths are you walking on that you think are leading to salvation? Where are you hesitating to do what the Lord is commanding? Spend some time confessing paths that you are on that lead you away from God.

Day 4- Read Exodus 14:10-31

These verses contain so much! Remember how God had walked with the Israelites and saved them through all the plagues? It was obvious that God was on their side and fighting for them. Yet when the Egyptians came back after them, they got angry and sarcastic as they asked Moses, "*Was it because there were no graves in Egypt that you brought us to the desert to die?*" (**Verse 11**) How quickly they had forgotten and now turned their back on

⁴ Gospel Transformation Study Bible

God and Moses saying they would have been better staying in Egypt, stuck in slavery.

Isn't it good to know that God often does things in spite of our lack of faith? God knew that the Israelites were now questioning Moses, which was in essence questioning God. Unfortunately, this is a theme we will see continue. They had forgotten what God had done. But soon they would remember. As the chapter ends, we see that they put their trust in the Lord.

We are often like the Israelites. We see God work, we see Him move, we see what only He can do, and then with our back against the wall and a sea in front of us, we begin to question, mock, or get angry with God. I wonder if the Israelites had forgotten what God had done. Have we? Take some time to write down how you have seen God work in the past, doing what only He can do, and thank Him for it; then rest in Him. Don't try to fix things, but rest in Him.

A key verse in all of scripture is **Exodus 14:14**, "*the Lord will fight for you; you only need to be still.*" Literally it means to put all of who you are into trusting and following God and He will fight for you! That's what the Israelites needed to do, trust God, and He would fight for them, which He did.

Day 5- Read Psalm 45:6-9

This passage is talking about none other than Jesus. We also find these verses in Hebrews 1:8-9 which, in fact, confirms this is speaking of Jesus. **Verse 6** says, "*Your throne, O God, will last for ever and ever.*" Isn't it incredible to know that if we have called on the name of Jesus, we too, will be with him? 2 Timothy 2 tells us that we will reign with Him. What a promise! We can look forward to spending eternity with God for ever and ever. If you want to get a little better picture of what this might be like, read the book *Heaven*, by Randy Alcorn.

These verses also tell us He will reign with righteousness and that He loves righteousness and hates wickedness. The Son of God is perfectly righteous and hates everything that is not. As Christians we are followers of Christ. In fact, the word disciple means to be a follower or learner, so as Disciples of Christ we are following Jesus. Are you? Do you seek righteousness and hate evil? Is your heart that of Jesus? 1 John 1 tells us that if we claim to have fellowship or be a follower of Jesus, then we are to follow the light (Jesus), we are to follow righteousness. While we might stumble and fall we are to acknowledge our sin, repent, and follow God. Remember that we were told in Genesis 6, that the people's minds were on evil all the time, meaning they were totally opposite of what God's heart was and is. May it be said of us that our hearts and minds are always on Jesus, always on righteousness, and when we veer to the left or right, may we jump back on the path, the path of Jesus.

Ask God today to direct your thoughts, words, attitudes, and actions so they are always on Him.

WEEK 33 GOD PROVIDES FOOD AND WATER FOR ISRAEL

Do you think you can squeeze water out of a rock? If you are wondering, go find a rock and give it a try. You can't do it no matter how long and hard you try. This week we will see God's miraculous provision for His people as they journey.

Day 1- Read Exodus 16:1-8

And the complaining begins. Just one month, a mere thirty days after an incredible and miraculous delivery out of slavery, the people begin to whine about being hungry. I've been hungry before, like "I missed-a-meal hungry." I'm not sure how hungry they were, but it was enough for them to complain to Moses and

Aaron. They were longing to be back in Egypt in slavery, as long as they had food to eat. This was not the first case of complaining. At Marah they also complained because they didn't have water to drink and what they did have was bitter. God provided fresh water when He instructed Moses to throw a tree into the water. God told them that He had been their healer. When they came to Elim He provided for them twelve wells and seventy palm trees.

Their complaining could have been dealt with in a different way. Paul says "*To do everything without complaining and arguing.*" **Philippians 2:14** He also tells us to not be anxious but to pray and make our request known to God (Philippians 4:6.) Why complain? Why whine? The people of God, the Israelites, had seen God's miracles. They had experienced His care and seen Him work miracles. They had seen the plagues and the parting of the Red Sea. He told them at Marah when He gave them water that He was the God who healed them (Exodus 15:27). Here we find one of the Hebrew names of God "Jehovah Rapha." God says, "*I am Jehovah Rapha.*" This means "God is healing."

What about you? How do you do in light of the blessings of God? Do you complain? Instead of complaining, tell Him what you need. The people complained to Moses. Instead of asking Moses to pray and ask God to provide, they complained. Why don't we complain less and pray more?

Day 2- Read Exodus 16:9-35

The Israelites had forgotten about God's provision and complained against Moses. In today's passage God miraculously provides once again for their needs. First of all, He sends quail for meat. At evening the quail would fly into their camp. Second, in the morning they went out to find that after the dew had dried there was something left on the ground. They were curious and asked, "What is it?" And that became its name—"what is it" or manna. Moses told them that God had sent it along with the quail to provide for their needs. God had told them to gather just enough for each person each day and no more. They had just what they needed. Some people tried to gather extra and store it up. The extra spoiled and caused worms and smelled bad.

God also provided a time of rest for the people. He granted them instructions to gather twice as much food on the day before the Sabbath, Friday, so that on the Sabbath they could rest. He wanted them to know that He intended for His people to have a day of rest. He built it in from day 1 (and days 1-6). God created all things in six days and then rested on the seventh so that the people would know they needed a day of rest and He later strictly instructed them to observe the Sabbath Day.

God provided what they needed, even though they complained. God is gracious and kind beyond our ability to understand. He gave them what they asked for and needed.

What do you need from God? Have you asked? Ask for what you need and thank Him for His provisions.

Day 3 CONNECT TO JESUS-John 6:31-40

At the beginning of the Corona virus quarantine, many items in stores were hard to find: toilet paper, cleaning wipes, and hand sanitizer. As the quarantine has gone on, many have warned there could be a food shortage due to illness among workers in meat packing plants and other food production facilities. For most of us, the idea that we would not be able to go to our local grocery store and buy the food we need is beyond comprehension. We have never truly gone hungry or had no means of obtaining sustenance. This week as we have looked at God providing food for the Israelites, I wonder if the story has become so familiar that we forget the impact of what happened.

Here we have an entire nation of people camping in a wilderness. Now, I don't know about you but when I hear wilderness I am thinking dry, brown, tumbleweed strewn land. Imagine looking around and as far as your eyes can see and there are no grocery stores, no 7-11's, no corn fields and no dairy farms. Not only did the people not have food, they had no crops in the ground to look forward to harvesting food. I feel desperate when there is nothing in the refrigerator I want to eat, but I have never experienced the desperation of having no possibility for food. Amid this desperation, God provided miraculously for His people by sending them manna. Manna is translated "what is it?" because God sent the people something they had never experienced before to sustain them each day. Can you imagine how they felt to wake up each morning and see food for their families on the ground? Can you imagine what it was like to go to bed each night and wonder if GOD would provide again tomorrow so that your children could eat?

In today's reading we see that Jesus calls Himself the Bread of Life. He is the totally unexpected, never-before-experienced God-man who comes to give us life, eternally. Jesus says that whoever comes to Him will never hunger or thirst again. He is the all-satisfying Savior who perfectly meets all the requirements of the law so that we can live with Him forever. I don't know if I will ever fast for several days again, but I do know that fasting periodically pushes me to recognize that as my body longs for food my spirit needs Jesus even more. Try fasting something today. Maybe it's not removing all food, maybe it's just removing from your diet or your daily routine something you love. Allow your hunger for that thing to drive you to Jesus, asking Him to be the one that truly sustains you.

Day 4- First Read Exodus 17:1-7

How much of our complaining and anxious nature could be eliminated if we would simply trust God? Once again, the people gripe and complain against Moses because they are thirsty. They even wanted to stone Moses. Once again, they failed to remember that God was daily providing manna out of nothing and, once again, we see the enduring love of God. Instead of punishing the people, He told Moses to strike the rock and He provided water for them.

Have you ever thought that our struggles, needs, and appetites are good things? We will not always have everything we want and need right when we need it. In fact, God uses and even causes us to hunger and thirst so that we will ask Him to provide. Notice I said ask Him, not complain and whine. Look at **Deuteronomy 8:3**:

"And he humbled you and let you hunger and fed you with manna, which you did not know, nor did your fathers know, that he might

make you know that man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by every word[a] that comes from the mouth of the Lord."

Food and water are not all we need. God shows us that we need Him. Now look at **I Corinthians 10:4**:

"and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank from the spiritual Rock that followed them, and the Rock was Christ."

There it is again. We see Jesus in the Old Testament. Paul says that the rock the water came from was Jesus. Moses struck the rock. God had Jesus, our Rock, also struck for us. He alone provides everything we need, even when we do not immediately know our own needs.

Give thanks to God for providing all we need!

Day 5- Read Psalm 72:1-2 and 2 Timothy 4:8

As we have already seen, the entire Bible is ultimately about Jesus. The more you read and study the Bible, the more you will see Him. The passage in Psalm 72 was written by Solomon, who was a king and very wise. He amazed the world in which he lived with his wealth and his wisdom. He asked God for wisdom to rule as a wise king and God answered his prayer.

However, Jesus would be the King and Judge of righteousness. He was righteous because He never sinned and He was both completely God and man. He was also righteous, because He came from God and was returning to God. When He comes and establishes His eternal Kingdom on the new Heaven and new earth, He will rule and judge with righteousness. All who have surrendered to Jesus as Savior and Lord and recognized His Kingship will receive from Him the crown of righteousness. Here is what one of my favorite commentaries says about the crown of righteousness:

“A crown of righteousness” is, I believe, the reward for a righteous life, and Paul will receive that. “Unto all them also that love his appearing” does not refer to doctrine you hold regarding His appearing. You may be a premillennialist, a postmillennialist, or an amillennialist. I have news for you: there’s no reward for holding any one of those views. The question is: Do you love His appearing? To love His appearing means that you will have to love Him. Oh, my friend, do you have a close relationship with Him? Have you ever told Him that you love Him? (I have a notion that Paul told the Lord every day that he loved Him, because he had hated and persecuted Him before.) There is a crown for those who love His appearing. I would like to have that crown. I believe it will shine brighter than all the others.”⁵

I, like Paul, anticipate that crown. I look forward to His appearing because I am His and He is mine. How about you?

⁵ Thru The Bible with J. Vernon McGee

WEEK 34 GOD GIVES MOSES THE TEN COMMANDMENTS

Boundaries for children are good, and boundaries can also be good for adults. Boundaries keep us safe, keep us out of trouble, and can save us from a ton of heartache. God's boundaries, or commandments, provide protection for us which helps us keep our eyes on God while showing us what sin is.

Day 1- Read Exodus 19

God is holy and we are not. He is righteous and we are wicked. He is perfect and we are imperfect. It is important that we understand this. It's not just that some people are bad and others are good. Isaiah 64 tells us that our righteousness is like filthy rags. Webster defines filthy as foul or of putrid matter. Our sins are as filthy, nasty rags. Think about that for a minute. We, on our own, have nothing to offer God and until we realize this, we will never see our need for Jesus. Since God is holy and we are not, God cannot and will not be associated with us. There is no sin in heaven. Therefore, as sinners, we are doomed unless we know Jesus. Jesus is our only hope. Since God can't be associated with sin, we can't be in His presence without the blood of Jesus.

Moses took this seriously and so did God. He warned the people not to come up the mountain. In fact, verse 23 says the Lord was putting limits around the mountain and setting it apart as holy.

God wanted to ensure that the people knew what the limits were.

Aren't you thankful for Jesus? Scripture tells us we can now boldly approach the throne of God through Jesus Christ. Without the shedding of Jesus' blood, there is no forgiveness of sins meaning we can't know God and we won't spend eternity with Him in heaven.

Thank God for Jesus. Thank Him for being righteous and holy while at the same time being a just God.

Day 2- Read Exodus 20:1-21

In today's passage, God speaks to Moses and gives him the Ten Commandments. Much has been said about the Ten Commandments over the years, but the truth is they are from God and were given to the Israelites. Scripture tells us that the commandments (the Law) were given so that we might know what sin is and point us to Jesus.

Can you imagine being one of the Israelites and experiencing what they had experienced? Our response might have been the same. Reality is, the people were given commandments and many of them had already broken them! The commandments they were given that hadn't already been broken, they knew they wouldn't be able to keep. This is why we need Jesus.

Look at verse 20. After hearing the commandments, the people sought to follow them and did what they could to not break them. As believers, we might keep or follow God's commandments because we know the consequences of breaking even one will be great. The law was made to draw us to God and for us to seek Him to help us. As we grow in our walk, our focus should shift to pleasing and honoring God and not so much just keeping commandments. As we come to know God more and seek Him, His law is placed in our heart and our focus will be on Him. By seeking to honor and please Him, we are following or obeying His commandments with the focus being on Him rather than the commandments. The more we know Him, the more we follow Him, and the more we do what His heart desires. May we have the heart of Jesus and may His words be written on our hearts!

Day 3 CONNECT TO JESUS- Read Galatians 3:23-24

When I was a little girl learning the Ten Commandments, I really believed that I could make a pretty good run at not breaking any of them. As I grew older, I came to realize that not only could I not keep the commandments in their outward form (thou shalt not bear false witness...) I definitely could not keep the spirit of the commandments from my heart (thou shalt have no other gods before me). Truly, for a perfectionist like me the law had become a prison. Each night I would go to bed and try to work my way out of that prison by scrupulously confessing my sin in hopes that I would now be right with God. As I grew in my understanding of what Jesus really did for me on the cross-He not only died to pay the penalty for my sin, He also gave me His perfect record-I was finally able to understand that the law could be as precious to me as it was to the psalmists (Psalm 119:97-104). Indeed, not only has God's law become help to restrain my sinful heart (curb) and helps me know how to please the Father (guide), it also becomes a way that I can see my own sinful heart and Jesus' righteousness more clearly (mirror).

One of things that helps me flesh this out is the Westminster Larger Catechism. Now, for those of you who have read it, you are probably thinking, "talk about prison, when I read all the "duties required" and the "sins forbidden" in there I wish someone would lock me away to never see that text again!" However, if we go to the WLC with a view to seeing Christ more clearly, I think it becomes a precious meditation on who Jesus is and what He did for us.

In keeping the 9th commandment perfectly for you and me, Jesus consistently and perfectly performed, “the preserving and promoting of truth between man and man, and the good name of our neighbor, as well as our own; appearing and standing for the truth; and from the heart, sincerely, freely, clearly, and fully, speaking the truth, and only the truth, in matters of judgment and justice, and in all other things: Whatsoever; a charitable esteem of our neighbors; loving, desiring, and rejoicing in their good name; sorrowing for, and covering of their infirmities; freely acknowledging of their gifts and graces, defending their innocency; a ready receiving of a good report, and unwillingness to admit of an evil report, concerning them; discouraging talebearers, flatterers, and slanderers; love and care of our own good name, and defending it when need requires; keeping of lawful promises; studying and practicing of: Whatsoever things are true, honest, lovely, and of good report⁶.”

And here is the REAL kicker: on the cross, Jesus, the Truth incarnate, became the worst liar, slanderer, flatterer, deceiver so that you and I might be deemed righteous truth-tellers by God (2 Cor 5:21).

Day 4- Read Exodus 20:22-23

We are all tempted in different ways! Some of us are tempted or enticed in ways others are not and vice versa. The enemy wants to do everything he can to keep us from following God. God knew how the Israelites would be tempted, so much so that He gave them the first two commandments again in today’s passage. Read

⁶ Westminster Larger Catechism, Question 144

Exodus 20:2-3 again. It is very similar to today's passage, just more concise.

Robert Robinson wrote these words in 1758: "O to grace how great a debtor daily I'm constrained to be! Let Thy goodness, like a fetter, bind my wandering heart to Thee. Prone to wander, Lord, I feel it, prone to leave the God I love; here's my heart, O take and seal it, seal it for Thy courts above."

The words to this song express our desire to sin. We know we are often prone to wander and to walk away from God. We know walking away is wrong and in the end, it will not benefit us. It will only hurt our relationship with God. When we worship anything other than God, be it real idols (as in Moses' time) fame, money, relationships, our job, etc., then, we are walking away from God. Selfishness and pride are at the bottom of every sin, trying to satisfy ourselves and get what we want, when, truly, the only thing that can satisfy is God Himself.

What areas of sin and weaknesses seek to pull you away from the Lord? Lay those before the Lord today and seek Him. We don't overcome our sin by seeking not to do it, but rather by keeping our eyes on God and seeking Him. Seek Him today!

Day 5- Read Jeremiah 31:31-34 and Luke 22:19-20

We read about covenants all throughout the Old Testament. The first time we see a covenant is in Genesis 9 when God makes the promise never to flood the earth again. Later, we see the covenant God made to Abram in Genesis 15:18-21. We also see in Genesis God made a covenant with Abram that He would give his descendants the land of Canaan and Abram would be the father of many nations.

Today, we read about the Old Covenant and the New Covenant. It's important that we know and understand the Old Covenant, which we read about a few weeks back, so that we can grasp the

New Covenant. The New Covenant is speaking of Jesus! In this passage, Jesus is telling His disciples that His blood will be poured out for them.

By the grace of God, we all can be part of the New Covenant by placing our faith in Jesus. Placing our faith in Jesus is the only way for our sins to be taken away and it gives us the hope of heaven, which is great! This also also means we have the hope of an eternal relationship with God Himself, we get to live with God forever, and we will get to see those that went before us and those that will go after us. Oftentimes, we think of salvation in regards to what we are saved from. We are saved from hell, the enemy, death, and destruction, but salvation is also what we have been saved to! We have been saved to a relationship with the creator of the universe. This life is here today and gone tomorrow, but God has given us this life to “practice” worshiping Him as we will be doing in Heaven. We will know Him and it will be very much like it was before Adam and Eve sinned. We will walk with God and there will be no pain, sin, death, or destruction. For God will have won, once and for all, and if we are on God’s team, we will have won too. Do you know God through His Son Jesus? If not, ask Him to take your sins away and seek to follow Him. If you do, thank Him for Jesus and continue practicing His presence.

WEEK 35 THE TABERNACLE

The Israelites were instructed to build a tabernacle. The tabernacle was a tent that represented the dwelling of God among the Israelites. It is a “connecting the dots” thing when you think about the words of John. In **John 1:14** John writes, “*And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us.*” The word here for dwelt is the word for tabernacle. However, as much as the tabernacle reminded the people of His presence, there was a veil that separated the special room in the tabernacle, called the Holy of Holies. It was where the Ark of the Covenant was kept. Once a year, the High Priest, would enter with a blood sacrifice for the sins of the people. God wanted all of the people to know, not just Israel, but all of the surrounding nations that Israel’s God was not a false god and that He lived among His people.

Day 1- Read Exodus 25:1-9

God gave Moses a rather lengthy list of materials to be used for building the tabernacle. Remember, God wanted the Israelites to know that He was with them. He often made His presence known to them through a cloud, fire, and smoke. There were no other gods. People in the places around them had false gods, represented by the idols that were made by men. God told the people that there was not to be any representative image of Him that they would worship.

The instruction to Moses was to speak to the Israelites and tell them to bring these items as offerings for building the tabernacle. Where would they get things like gold, silver, and bronze? After all, they had been slaves in Egypt. Remember when they were getting ready to leave Egypt? God told them to ask for gold, silver, and other valuable items from the Egyptians. God made the Egyptians favorably disposed toward the Israelites and the Egyptians gave them what they asked for. God prepares us in advance for what we will need and even what He will ask of us!

Not only did God give a list of the materials for the people to bring to build the tabernacle, He also showed Moses the pattern for the building of the tabernacle. Was there a literal tabernacle in heaven? Apparently there was. You see the same wording in Hebrews 8:5 and in Hebrews 9:23-24. The people were obviously excited about the Tabernacle because in Exodus 36:6-7, Moses had to tell the people to stop bringing offerings because they had more than enough— "*too much!*"

Thank God for the blessings of His presence among us!

Day 2- Read Exodus 26

The tabernacle was a very large tent-like structure which could easily be taken down and moved. It would be the place where Moses would meet with God to receive instructions for the people. It was the place of sacrifice and prayer. It was also central to the national life of the Israelites. The tabernacle reminded the people of God's presence with them.

The tabernacle was 45 feet long and 15 feet wide and high. It had four coverings. The first covering that could be seen from the inside was linen with cherubim embroidered in gold, blue, and purple thread. Next was a layer of material made of black goat's hair, then a layer of ram's hide dyed red and, on top, badger skin. Inside there were two rooms, the Holy Place and then a 10 by 10 room called the Holy of Holies. Inside the Holy of Holies was a chest called the Ark of the Covenant. The chest was 27 inches by 45 inches and was 27 inches high. The stone tablets containing the Ten Commandments, a jar of manna, and Aaron's rod that had budded were placed inside the Ark. The top of the Ark was something called the Mercy Seat. It was here that the High Priest would sprinkle blood from a sacrifice each year to atone or cover the sins of the people. This was the place from which God would speak with Moses to give instructions to the people.

When Jesus was crucified, the veil in the temple separating the Holy of Holies was torn apart from top to bottom. The death of Jesus on the cross bought for all people access into the presence of God. His blood became the covering for our sin. No longer was it necessary for a man, the High Priest, to go into the Holy of Holies to speak to God and make atonement for sin. Jesus' crucifixion bought our access. We can now freely enter because He is our sacrifice, our High Priest, and God's continuing presence!

Connect the dots, they all points to Jesus!

Day 3 CONNECT TO JESUS- Read Exodus 27:1-8 and Hebrews 10:4-10

Obsolescence: the purposeful implementation of various strategies designed to get a customer to buy another very similar product by making the older one useless, undesirable, or non-functional within a set period of time. You may not make sense of that definition, but you recognize the reality, if you've ever uttered the phrase, "they just don't make them like they used to." Many items today, like appliances and electronics, are created intentionally to wear out so that they are useless and must be replaced.

In much the same way, God designed the tabernacle and its furniture. It was never intended to be a permanent fixture in the economy of believers, despite serving a central role for so long. The bronze altar, for example, was a "man-sized grill" measuring 7.5 x 7.5 ft, that served as the final resting place for thousands of sacrifices throughout the year. In fact, the Talmud, a Jewish religious text, notes that on one day nearly 1.2 million animals were sacrificed resulting in such a volume of blood that the priests waded up to their knees in it.

The sacrifices had to continue because the sinning of man continued.

However, Hebrews 10:13-14 notes: *when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand*

of God, waiting from that time until his enemies should be made a footstool for his feet. For by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified. Hebrews 10 affirms a beautiful reality. That even things that without many parts can be rendered obsolete. By Christ's sacrifice, he has rendered obsolete not only the need for the bronze altar, but also the need for any other offering to be made. All of our attempts to cleanse ourselves have been rendered obsolete, as he *had perfected for all time those who are being sanctified.* Christ's sacrifice will never be rendered obsolete, but will be our sustaining grace in this life, and the world to come for all eternity.

Day 4- Read Exodus 28:1-30

All of the furnishings in and around the tabernacle had significant meaning, but the clothing and items the priests wore also had significance. In connecting the dots, we need to be reminded that we are priests. That is right! As believers, we are a kingdom of priests. There is a New Testament doctrine called the priesthood of every believer. This means that as believers, we are all full-time servants of God. We do not need anyone other than Jesus to stand before God on our behalf. However, it goes further. The priests had special clothing and items to wear when they served. On each shoulder of the ephod, a vest-like garment, was attached an onyx stone. On each onyx stone was engraved six names of the tribes of Israel for a total of twelve. There was also a breastplate to be worn which had twelve jewels, each having the name of one of the twelve tribes engraved on it. The names of the twelve tribes would remind the priest that the tribes were important to God and should be important to him, also.

I believe the location of the names worn was also important. The names on the shoulder would remind the priest that he carried the needs and concerns of the people on his shoulders and was to bring those people and their needs to God in prayer. The names on the

breastplate worn over the heart would be a reminder to keep the people in his heart.

There are some applications for priests today—all believers. First we are to be interceding for others. One part of a priest's responsibility was to stand before God on behalf of others. We should bear people on our shoulders before God. As Jesus, our Great High Priest, is ever interceding (Hebrews 7:25), we too should be interceding, praying for others. The breastplate with the names over his heart reminded him that he also stood before people on behalf of God. The hope was to point people to God and His Word. As priests, we have both of these opportunities; we stand before God on behalf of others and we stand before others on behalf of God as His representatives. Ask God for the grace to be an effective priest.

Day 5- Read Psalm 72:4-8

We have already looked at a portion of this Psalm. It is a Psalm that speaks of Jesus in advance. The first part talks about Jesus being King of righteousness. The scripture for today speaks of Jesus being King of peace. A king rules and reigns which results in certain experiences. In the future, eternal earthly reign of Jesus as King, there will be peace—total, complete, eternal peace. It will be a peace that will last forever (“*Until the moon is no more*”) and will be everywhere (“*from sea to sea*”). I am looking forward to that!

In the meantime, and often it really is mean-time, Jesus rules and reigns in the hearts and minds of His people. Of course, we must wait for the complete peace which will come when His eternal Kingdom is established, but for now, we have the peace which He brings.

Look at the words of Jesus:

"Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid." **John 14:27**

Just a few days ago, I was really having a tough time dealing with some things and finding myself desperate for peace. I searched the Bible for some help and I wrote many passages down in my journal. Here is one of those passages:

"And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body; and be thankful." **Colossians 3:15**

Make it a regular experience to be reminded that Jesus is even now our King of peace. Wait, abide and continue in His presence and His peace will guard you.

WEEK 36 THE GOLDEN CALF

Just nine chapters ago, we saw the Lord give Moses and the Israelites the Ten Commandments and then we saw the first two reiterated. This week, we will see that “knowing” and “doing” are two separate things. The Israelites clearly understood the Lord’s commands, but they chose to follow what they wanted to do.

Day 1- Read Exodus 29:1-21, 35-37

We have already seen that God is a God of details and we see this again in these verses. He gave specific instructions for Aaron and his sons and they followed them carefully.

Notice that there was a sin offering and in **verse 36** we see, *“Sacrifice a bull each day as a sin offering to make atonement.”* This was a constant reminder of their sin and God’s desire for holiness, but they were not holy. The blood of the animals was meant to cover their sins so they could serve in God’s presence. The only person who can take our sins away is Jesus. When Jesus died, was buried, and rose again as payment for our sins, He covered all of our sins, every one of them. That’s why we no longer make sacrifices as followers of Christ. Jesus’ blood was more than enough. We need no sacrifice other than Jesus himself. No matter what we have done, Jesus’ blood can cover it. When we trust Jesus and what He has done for us, we are saved and forgiven. If God has forgiven us, we need to forgive ourselves. C.S. Lewis says, “If God forgives us we must forgive ourselves otherwise it’s like setting up ourselves as a higher tribunal than Him.”⁷

Remember the thief on the cross dying next to Jesus? Apparently, he had done something really bad since he was being crucified (Luke 23:41). He realized that Jesus was the Son of God and that his only hope was Jesus. He asked Jesus to remember him when

⁷ Long Story Short, Marty Machowski, pg. 183

He came into the Kingdom. Jesus told him, *“Truly I say to you, today you will be with me in paradise.”* **Luke 23:43**

No matter what we have done, Jesus’ blood is enough and it will always be enough. Rest today in His mercy and grace thanking Him that He is the ultimate sacrifice.

Day 2- Read Exodus 32:1-8

How long was Moses up on the mountain? Maybe he was dead. Maybe he forgot. Maybe Moses was just taking his time. Whatever the reason, the people saw that Moses was taking too long to come down after the commandments had been passed to him. They even said they were not sure what had happened to him. So what did they do? They made idols (gods).

They didn’t just make gods and worship them, they even said in verse 4 that these gods brought them up out of Egypt! What? The God who had allowed them to escape Egypt, parted the Red Sea, given them manna, and provided for them in every way was now being substituted with man-made gods. They had totally forgotten the one true God; they had forgotten or really ignored His commandments and now they were doing their own thing! This is so hard to believe. How dare they!

How could they do something like this? Do WE do something like this? Yes, us! It’s so easy to read this account and question the Israelites, when, unfortunately, we have so many similarities. Do we know God’s commands? Do we know God? Do we know what God asks of us? Do we always follow? Unfortunately, we don’t. We, like the Israelites, often go our own way. When God is too “slow,” when we want our way, or when we just don’t want to listen, we go our own way and make other things or people our god(s).

Today, let us realize that we can be very fickle as believers, but, thankfully, God isn’t. He is faithful; we can trust Him and follow

Him. Let us see that the One who has brought us to where we are, has brought us out of sin and into the light. Let us acknowledge that He is the only God and He is all that we need. We need no other.

Day 3 CONNECT TO JESUS- Read Exodus 32:9-14 and Colossians 1:15-20

Some have said that it is the most vibrant worship service in all of the Scriptures. People were so moved that they were compelled to sing and to dance. The only problem as Exodus 32:18-19 records, it was worship of a golden calf.

The people of God along with Aaron had fashioned Yahweh into an image of a calf. Some commentators have noted that the calf was most likely a nod back to the Egyptian **bull** god Apis. God had no sooner delivered the people of Israel from Egypt, and they had returned to Egypt in their own hearts by fashioning Yahweh's image after an Egyptian god. The problem was not only their worshipping in light of Egypt, but that they sought to reduce Yahweh as idols often do by referring to only one attribute. As the bull calf symbolized power and later fertility, the Israelites were summarizing their view of God in a way that did damage to their glory.

Is it any wonder that Paul would later say of Jesus, ***He is the image of the invisible God.*** In order to fully capture Yahweh, a symbol would be needed that was far more dynamic than one attribute. In Christ's coming we have the perfect image, the one that displays the manifold attributes of God's glory, manifesting not only His power, but also His compassion, not only His holiness, but His tenderness, not only His justice, but His mercy. Take time today to recount the many attributes that Christ displays, in being the image of the invisible God.

Day 4- Read Exodus 32:15-35

Waiting on God can sometimes be difficult. We know the best thing to do is to wait and let the Lord reveal Himself to us. Sometimes, though, we get impatient and take things into our own hands. The Israelites were, in essence, waiting for Moses' direction, but he took too long and they were not sure what happened to him so they took things into their own hands.

Did you catch verse 20 of this passage? Go back and read it. Can you imagine that? I believe Moses was angry and he was seeking to get the people to understand that if this is what they really wanted, they could have it. He made them drink it. Most likely, the people knew, their disobedience was not worth it. This case is true with all of God's people. When we go our own way and seek to do our own thing, no matter what we may gain, good or bad, it is not God's plan and it always leads in the way of destruction. Yet it doesn't always seem this way. In fact, if we are disobeying God, we don't gain anything but disobedience and following the way of the enemy is never good.

Can you imagine what Moses must have thought and felt when coming off the mountain? He had just had an encounter with God and was given the Ten Commandments and now he had to deal with this! Not only was it the people, but his right hand man, Aaron, his brother, was the one contributing to following the ways of the enemy. To make matters worse, Aaron says in verse 24 that he just threw gold in the fire and out came a calf. Really?

When we seek to take matters into our own hands, instead of placing them in God's hands, it's never good. It may seem good from what we see, or others may see it as good, but God sees and calls it disobedience. May we always seek God, wait on Him, and not become impatient. Today seek, pray, and ask the Lord to help you trust and wait on Him rather than taking matters into your own hands!

Day 5- Read Isaiah 53:12

Isaiah is a book rich in prophecy and this verse, in particular, is very clear about the prophecy of Jesus. This verse says so much:

1) *He poured His life unto death* - meaning He died for the sins of the world and it's His desire that every person come to repentance. The word in the NIV is "poured" which implies He willingly gave it and He gave it all. He didn't have to. After all, He is God. He died for us, so we wouldn't have to die and so we could know Him, not just know about Him.

2) *He was numbered with the transgressors* - Jesus was literally considered by many to be a sinner because He spoke prophecy and spoke of who He was, God's Son. Many didn't believe Him and said He was a liar and a blasphemer. As we find in Scripture, He took great ridicule, but remained silent for you and for me.

3) *He bore the sin of many* - When Jesus died, He literally died for the sins of all. Can you imagine the weight of the sins of the world? He died for murder, lies, hate, lust, bitterness, jealousy, etc. This might help us get a better picture of why Jesus' death was so grueling. It wasn't just physical, it was so much more.

4) *He made intercession for the transgressors* (and still does) - When Jesus died for our sins, He was interceding between God and sinners. Scripture tells us that even now He is at the right hand of God interceding for you and me. We have an advocate, Jesus Christ! He is standing in our place, much like Moses was seeking to stand in the place of the people. Jesus stood in our place!

Thank the Lord for Jesus. Take some time today to thank Jesus for who He is and what He has done!

WEEK 37 GOD HAS MERCY ON ISRAEL

Since the people left Egypt, God had been traveling with them. They knew He was there because He gave them a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night. With the tabernacle, they had another reminder of His presence. On several occasions, God called the people “stiff-necked.” This meant that they were stubborn and would not be obedient to Him. Last week, we looked at the biblical historical account of the golden calf. Idolatry is a very ugly and devastating sin because it is the sin of trying to make a substitute for God. This week we read Moses interceded as a mediator of the people before God and God gave them a fresh new beginning. As they continued their journey, God continued to travel with them.

Day 1- Read Exodus 33:1-11

There are many sad words in the Bible and this passage is really sad. God told Moses that the people were to continue on their journey to the Promised Land, but He would not go with them. He would send His angel ahead of them. He would not go with them because He might rise up because of their stubbornness and destroy them. He would send His angel ahead to drive out the people from the land. When the people heard this, they were upset. This time they took off their jewelry, not to build an idol but, as a sign of sorrow and repentance.

Moses moved the special tent he used to meet with God away from the people so he could cry out to God on their behalf. When Moses would meet with the Lord, the people would stand far off and watch. They knew God was meeting with him because the cloud that traveled with them would hover at the tent door. The people were obviously anticipating hearing from God and hoping that He would turn from removing His presence from them.

The scripture says God met with Moses “*Face to face.*” However, based on the context that follows, this would probably mean the

Angel of the Lord or a pre-incarnate appearance of Jesus met with Moses. Jesus said, "*Whoever has seen me has seen the Father*"

John 14:9. We do not have to worry about those sad words. Jesus promised that He would be with us until the end of the age (Matthew 28:19). He gave us His Holy Spirit as a deposit (Ephesians 1:14). We are blessed to have the security that nothing in all of creation can separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus (Romans 8:37-39).

Thank God for His continuous presence. He is always with you. Acknowledge and enjoy His presence.

Day 2- Read Exodus 33:12-23

Moses stood in the gap for the people. He was their mediator. He met with God on their behalf and he stood before the people and spoke for God on His behalf. Moses interceded for the people after the golden calf debacle. God told the people that they could continue on their journey, but He was withdrawing His presence from them. Moses said that God's presence with them showed God was the real and true God and He was their God. Moses cried out to God saying that they would not go without Him and he pleaded for God's grace, reminding Him the people were His people. As a result of Moses' intercession, God told Moses He would go with them on their journey.

Many of us, including myself, have longed to see God. This is what Moses asked of God. He asked to see God's face. God told Moses he could not see the face of God and live. God told him He would show him His glory so He put Moses in a safe place in a rock and hid him there with His hand. As God passed by before Moses, God covered Moses with His hand and allowed Moses to "*See My back.*" This is a very gracious and tender picture where God is dealing with Moses as a loving father deals with his child.

Neither Moses, nor any other person, for that matter, can see the face of God and live. However, we can see the glory of God.

Remember Jesus said that to see Him is to see the Father! God reveals Himself so we can see His glory. The glory of God is His shining. To see God's shining is to see His impact. Moses was allowed to see God's back. I believe Moses was able to see where God had been! To know that God creates, saves, and transforms is to know and then see, or recognize, His handiwork. Seeing my children and grandchildren when they were born, was seeing the glory of God. Seeing God work in a person's life through salvation, the new birth, is to see God's glory.

There is coming a day when we will see the fullness of God revealed in the resurrected and glorified Jesus. Open your eyes and look and see where God has been. His glory is all around.

Day 3 CONNECT TO JESUS- Read Hebrews 12:18-24

Hebrews tells us the New Covenant is superior in every way to the Old. It is not that the first failed, but the first was the prelude or the preface to the New. The preface of a book introduces and gives a hint of what is to come in the pages that follow. The Old Testament and the Old Covenant were a preface for what was coming in the New. Mount Sinai represents the Old Covenant and Mount Zion represents the New Covenant. Moses was the mediator between Israel and God. His mediation was temporary and brought temporary pardon for guilt. However, in today's passage, there is a greater, in fact, the greatest mediator, Jesus.

But the ministry Jesus has received is as superior to theirs as the covenant of which he is mediator is superior to the old one, and it is founded on better promises. Hebrews 8:6 (NIV)

Through Jesus, we can draw near with confidence. When Moses went up on Mt. Sinai to receive the law, the people were prohibited from even coming near the mountain. The picture of Mt. Zion is a picture of the New Jerusalem and the New Heaven and Earth. We do not fear, but anticipate God's blessings and salvation because of Jesus. Verse 24 says that Jesus is the Mediator of the New

Covenant. Moses was the mediator who stood for the people and sought God's forgiveness for their stubbornness. Jesus is the Mediator between us and God to save, or deliver us, and reunite us to God. In Christ, we do not fear losing the presence of the Lord for He has promised it and sealed us with His own Holy Spirit. (Eph. 1:13-14)

It's a peculiar passage to bring up the blood of Abel. But in doing so, the writer is showing Abel and Jesus were both wrongfully killed. Where Abel's blood called out for justice and brought the vengeance of the Lord, Jesus's blood bearing the injustice of treatment at the hands of sinful men to satisfy the wrath of God that we might have forgiveness of our sins and now be made righteous.

Pray with expectancy today, knowing in Christ you can approach the throne of grace with boldness to ask for God's grace and help today. In all your pain and struggles today, know in Christ Your Father hears you. Know that Jesus as our perfect mediator and now intercessor never stops interceding on your behalf today.

Day 4- Read Exodus 34

God is the God of second chances (and third, fourth, fifth and so on). Moses went back up on Mt. Sinai to meet with God again, and once again, God gave him the law and two new stone tablets. God told Moses that He is the Lord God and He is all about goodness, forgiveness, and mercy, but at the same time the God of justice. Moses, once again, asked God to pardon the people for their stubbornness.

I am thankful that God is a God of mercy and grace and He seeks to forgive and give new beginnings. While up on the mountain, in addition to giving the law again, God reminded them not to have false gods or idols and to keep the Sabbath. God also reminded Moses that the firstborn belonged to Him, but could be redeemed with a lamb. The lamb was sacrificed for the firstborn as a

substitute. This was looking ahead to Jesus, God's firstborn and only begotten Son, who was sacrificed for us. Moses came down off the mountain with two new stone tablets with the Ten Commandments engraved on them. This was for the people, God's forgiveness and His offer of a new beginning.

God was, is, and always will be the God of new beginnings. He is the God of justice, but also forgiveness. He offers to all who will repent and come to Him on His terms, through His Mediator, Jesus, a new beginning. We are graciously reminded that all who are in Christ are new creatures. (2 Corinthians 5:17).

Then He who was seated on the throne said, "Behold, I am making all things new." Also He said, "Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true" Revelation 21:5

Thank God for new beginnings and that His mercies are new every morning.

Day 5- Read Psalm 16:8-10 and Acts 2:25-31

Can you imagine reading this Psalm without the benefit of the New Testament? Who would live and die, but not stay dead? I have said it several times already; we have a wonderful perspective from which to read and study the Bible. The Psalmist speaks of one who would live a glorious life and die, but not stay dead. In Acts 2, Peter is preaching and says that this Psalm was speaking about Jesus. In these verses, we see the life of Christ (Psalm 16:8). We also see the death of Christ (Psalm 16:9). In verse 10, we have the resurrection and in verse 11, the ascension to the right hand of God. Perhaps without the preaching of Peter and the words of Paul in Acts 13:34-39, we might not have known of whom this Psalm was speaking of. The best commentary on the Bible is the Bible itself!

It is an incredible thing to read the Old Testament and the New and connect the dots. The Old Testament predicts and anticipates Jesus. The New Testament reveals what the Old had concealed.

As I continue to travel this journey through the Old Testament, my faith is being bolstered. What is happening with you? Be reminded that Romans 10:17 says that faith comes from hearing the Word of God. Tell someone today what has been happening to your faith. I have been in church all my life (67 years), but since we have been on this journey, my faith has grown incredibly!

Join me in thanking God for growing our faith!

WEEK 38 THE PEOPLE OF ISRAEL COMPLAIN

It's been said that the people who often complain the most are Christians! It seems to have been similar in the Old Testament. Those that were following the Lord often had things to complain to the Lord about. From not wanting the food they had to eat to wishing they could be back in Egypt, even thinking Moses had brought them out of Egypt to die, they were always complaining! We will see this week that the Lord is not in favor of complaining.

Day 1- Read Numbers 10:11-13 and 10:33-11:3

We pick up the account of the Israelites today in Numbers. When the cloud lifted in Numbers 10:11-12, it meant that the Israelites had to take down their tents and pack up everything as they traveled with everything they had. When the cloud lifted, they would travel and when it came to rest, they would stop as they were headed towards Canaan, the land that the Lord had promised them. (You can read more about this in Exodus 9:15-23.) God had brought the Israelites through many difficulties, including deliverance from bondage and the parting of the Red Sea. Now God was leading them in their next step and it says in verse 33 that the ark of the Lord went before them, meaning the Lord was preparing the way and He was going before them.

In the next verses, we find the Israelites complaining about their hardships. We are not sure what the hardships were, but we can assume they were just upset from having to move, although they were moving under the Lord's leadership and He was with them. Maybe they were tired of traveling for three days and were worn out. Whatever the reason, they were complaining. God had brought them this far but all they did was complain.

This hits a little too close to home for most of us! Unfortunately, followers of Christ are often the ones who complain the most. Why is that?

We have been given a relationship with God through Jesus Christ; we have hope in this life and hope in our next life with Jesus. We have been promised that there will be difficult times, so it shouldn't be a surprise to us, but we have also been promised God will be right with us like He was with the Israelites, and yet, we complain. As David Ring used to say, we "bellyache."

What did God do when they started to complain? He sent them a warning sign; He sent fire that burned some of the outskirts of the camp. It was as if God was saying, "I hear you, but you have Me, you have all you need, you have nothing to complain about." Today, might we realize that while we can share with God our difficult times and how we need Him, we have so much to be grateful for. Most importantly, we can know Him. While everything else may fall apart, He never will. May we learn to say, "It is well with my soul," because we know God. He is the maker of the heavens and the earth, the stars and the moon, the water and the dry land. He is God and He is all powerful! Seek Him today.

Day 2- Read Numbers 11:4-17

Verse 4 speaks of "the rabble." What is "the rabble?" Most likely it was Egyptians who had left Egypt and possibly even intermarried with some of the Israelites. They were not true, authentic Israelites. These people began wanting food other than what they had and as they complained, other Israelites joined in with them. They were lusting for food. John Butler says, "Lust was the cause of this particular complaining by the Israelites. Lusting does not bring contentment; it only fosters discontent. We will never be content when we allow our lives to be governed by our fleshly lusts."⁸ What the Lord had given them was more than sufficient for what they needed. It was enough! However, when we seek to go after things on our own, rather than receiving what God has provided,

⁸ Bible Biography Series– Moses: The Emancipator of Israel

we are seeking to gain contentment where it can't be found. We will only find satisfaction in a relationship with God!

Not only did they want meat, but they began reminiscing about what they had in Egypt. They were, in essence, wishing they were back in Egypt with the food they had there. They had forgotten they were in bondage at that time and were seeking to be delivered from that bondage. Their desire for “temporary” satisfaction was outweighing true satisfaction in God.

The Israelites had again forgotten what the Lord had done and how far He had brought them. As believers, we sometimes do this. Take a minute to see where the Lord has brought you. Can you see how He has worked in your life? May we never forget where the Lord has brought us. If He has saved us, this is a miracle in itself. Then He works in our lives and grows us into what He wants us to be. May we not desire or lust for things we know are not of God. May God be our portion, everything we need, and may we find that only He can fill us. Nothing that we can want or gain on our own will do that. Thank Jesus that He gives us what we need and we can depend on Him.

Day 3 CONNECT TO JESUS- Read Numbers 11:24-29 and Acts 2:14-18

It's interesting to note that Numbers 11 highlights “the people complained in the hearing of the LORD about their misfortunes,” but Moses, frustrated by how difficult God's people have been actually *goes to God* and prays *to God*. Moses wasn't just complaining about what he didn't have, but rather he was recognizing his own limitations. He saw his own finiteness and the difficulty to carry the burdens of being God's servant. So, in humility he goes to God for help and God hears him.

God provided seventy elders to help carry the load and they began to prophesy! Joshua wanted to stop them, but Moses told him that he wished all were prophets and that the Lord would put His Spirit on all of them. God connects these leaders now with the ministry of Moses by God's Spirit causing them to prophesy. Moses isn't threatened. Rather, he wants to see more of the Spirit unleashed!

In Acts 2, God gives His Holy Spirit at Pentecost, not temporarily, but to live in His people. The Spirit comes in Acts 2 like "a mighty rushing wind" and "divided tongues as of fire appeared to them." The apostles began to speak in other languages "as the Spirit gave them utterance." It was so amazing those watching thought surely the men must be drunk. But instead, the men were the product of the Old Testament prophecy of Joel 2:28-32, that God's Spirit has been poured on His people. The Spirit comes to make us different from the inside out with power.

Christian, YOU have this same Holy Spirit today that is guiding you, shaping you, molding you more into the image of Christ and that bears witness to you moment by moment of the truth of God. He promises that you won't lose the Spirit but that instead you've been "sealed" with it (Eph. 1:13-14). Are you seeking to listen to the Spirit today? Are you seeking to be led by the Spirit? Or do try to do things without God's help, resting in your own strength, your own intellect and reason?

Pray that God make "the eyes of your hearts enlightened"...to "what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe." Pray Paul's prayer in Ephesians 1:15-23 for yourself, your friends and our church. As you do, seek to trust the Spirit's work in your life as you walk in the Spirit (Galatians 5) *with* other believers. That's how we really walk in the Spirit, together with our brothers and sisters in Christ.

Day 4- Read Numbers 11:31-34

We understand from verse 34 that not all of the people died because not all of them craved other food. So, while some died because of their craving for meat other than what God had provided, those that didn't crave other meat lived.

Covetousness and greed, wanting what you don't have and wanting more of what you have, can be deadly! Those that wanted the food they didn't have and lusted after it (verses 4-5) found that it cost them their lives. They had food that the Lord had provided, but decided it wasn't enough and they wanted another kind of food. But the food isn't the focus here. They wanted more than what God had provided. There was a point in which the "rabble" and later, other Israelites, began salivating for what they didn't have.

Throughout their complaining and whining, God gave them what they wanted or what they thought they wanted and in the end, it cost them their lives. There are many things we think we want, but desiring anything other than God or the things that God provides is wrong. The Israelites had forgotten again what God had done for them and they were whining about how bad they had it.

I believe the Israelites that didn't "*crave other food*" (v. 34) realized just how serious God was. They quickly recognized they needed to leave their needs and desires to God and trust Him, specifically not whining and complaining. When we seek to fill our lives with things other than what God has provided in Himself, we are being disobedient. Today, let us be thankful for where God has brought us and be content with what He has given us. We can depend on Him to know what is best.

Day 5- First Read Malachi 4:1-3

Here in the Old Testament, it speaks of the coming of the Lord. Even before Jesus is on earth, we see His coming in Malachi.

Notice the comparison in verses 1 and 2. For those that are arrogant, meaning they follow their own ways and they have not trusted in God, it will be an awful day. They will be punished and they will be turned to stubble. There will be nothing left of them! This lets us know that God takes very seriously those that don't follow Him and those that are evil. We all have the choice to follow Jesus, to obey and trust Him. For those that choose not to follow Him, this passage is very clear about the end results. The best they will ever experience will be here on earth.

However, for those that trust in Jesus, for those who find their hope in Him and are His disciples, they will be free. They will live forever; they will know Jesus and be worshiping Him always. For them, the best isn't on this earth, it's what is to come. However, while on this earth, we seek to love and follow Jesus.

Matthew Henry says of this passage, "Here is a reference to the first and to the second coming of Christ: God has fixed the day of both. Those who do wickedly, who do not fear God's anger, shall feel it. It is certainly to be applied to the Day of Judgment, when Christ shall be revealed in flaming fire; to execute judgment on the proud, and all that do wickedly. In both, Christ is a rejoicing Light to those who serve him faithfully. By the Sun of Righteousness we understand Jesus Christ. Through him believers are justified and sanctified, and so are brought to see light. His influences render the sinner holy, joyful, and fruitful. It is applicable to the graces and comforts of the Holy Spirit, brought into the souls of men. Christ gave the Spirit to those who are his, to shine in their hearts, and to be a Comforter to them, a Sun and a Shield."⁹

Jesus is the one who has given us His righteousness! Not only has He taken our sin away but He has made us white as snow, through the blood of Christ. God, through Jesus, has freed us and we are no longer in bondage to sin. We are free in Christ. Alleluia! Take

⁹ Matthew Henry Concise Bible Commentary

some time and thank God for this! If you don't know Him, He wants to be your Savior and your God!

WEEK 39 MIRIAM'S LEPROSY

One of the things we see time and time again in the Bible is that God seeks to display His glory through people—willing vessels that open their lives up for God to work through. In all these cases, it is not about the person, but about God who is working in and through the person to show His glory. Moses was a humble servant of the Lord. Other people became envious of Moses and sought to undermine his leadership and authority. However, it backfired.

Day 1- Read Numbers 12:1-2

How often is there conflict in our churches, homes, and families? What is the source of such griping and complaining? It seems to be a bad case of pride which presents itself as jealousy and envy. Envy is wanting something someone else has. It may be a thing or a position. It says, “I deserve this more than you and I should have it.” In these verses, we see this was coming from a very unlikely source—Moses’ older sister and brother, Miriam and Aaron. Can you imagine that? This is a family feud. The “reason” for the attack, or so Miriam said, was because Moses’ second wife was an Ethiopian woman, but verse two really tells the story. They were saying, “Who does Moses think he is?” They were envious!

I wonder how many churches, men, and women have gotten off course because of jealousy and envy? I wonder how many churches have split and homes broken because of pride? What about you? Is there envy and jealousy in your life? As you look around the church or look at your family and neighbors, are you holding on to envy? In Philippians 4, Paul spoke about being content. If you are content with where you are and where God has you, then you can say, “This is where I am and it is where God has me.” This is liberating! Thank God for your circumstances and serve Him right where you are! Ask God to enable you to be faithful in the place He has you.

Day 2- Read Numbers 12:3-10

James 4:6 says, “*God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.*” Yesterday, we saw the pride of Miriam and Aaron that resulted in envy. Today, we see that Moses was the most “*humble man on the face of the earth.*” **Numbers 12:3** What an incredible contrast! Miriam and Aaron were proudly saying, “We deserve what Moses has.” Moses was humbly saying, “I am only doing what God has given me to do.” This task of leading the people was not Moses’ idea; it came from the Lord. Moses did not apply or lobby for the job. God, in His grace, called Moses to this task.

God met with the three siblings. God reminded the three of them that He spoke with Moses face to face. He did not deal with Moses like a prophet, through dreams and visions, but He met with and spoke to Moses. God was making it clear to Miriam and Aaron, with Moses listening, that Moses was in this role by God’s determination. In His anger, God caused Miriam to have leprosy. God punished Miriam because in her pride, she envied and undermined a humble man. Since God defended Moses, he did not have to defend himself.

I am very thankful that I do not get sick every time I complain, everytime I am envious, or every time I am prideful. You can always look around and find someone who has it better than you. Don’t live life too horizontally! Seek to spend more time looking up to God and living vertically. Living vertically equips you to live horizontally. Ask God to enable you to have the grace to simply do His will without pride or envy.

Day 3 CONNECT TO JESUS- Read Philippians 2:1-11

Moses was an amazing leader. God says that Moses was the most humble man on the face of the earth at the time the book of Numbers was written. Humility is thinking of others as more important than yourself. Moses was always thinking of the people he was called to lead. He was caring for and providing for them.

Moses was a type of Christ. A type represents a resemblance between something present and something in the future. Moses was humble, but Jesus is the full expression of humility. Moses thought of others and acted on their behalf as mediator. Jesus gave up Himself, His rights, and His glory as the Son of God. He became a man, He died on the cross, and He took our punishment. This is what we see in today's passage. Jesus became our substitute and died in our place for our sins. He made Himself nothing and gave up His privileged position to become a humble servant and die for us.

The opposite of humility is pride. Pride is seeking our way and our recognition at the expense of all others. The first four verses of this passage tell us not to seek our own way and advancement but to be united in mind with others and to have the same mind as Christ. A mind governed by humility, seeking the best of and for other people.

What are areas of your life where they are more defined by pride than humility? Seeking your own instead of the good of others? How have you seen even a tendency to want to be right at the sake of not considering others?

Think about Jesus and His self-sacrifice. Ask God for the grace to have the same mind that Jesus had. Consider others and what they need. Jesus first lived vertically and then horizontally. Ask some friends to help you spot pride in your life and how to walk in humility, trusting God's Holy Spirit to shape you in it.

Day 4- Read Numbers 12:11-16

Aaron and leprous Miriam were on one side and God who judged Miriam was on the other, which left Moses in the middle. Moses was the man who acted as mediator. Aaron cried out to Moses to ask God for mercy for Miriam and Moses interceded and God

healed her. Miriam had to stay outside of the camp for seven days, probably because she was considered unclean from the leprosy.

A huge aspect of humility is to live and operate without being vindictive. Vindictive means to be spiteful, bitter, to act in such a way as to hurt someone because of something they have done. Remember, humility says, “I am only doing what God wants me to do.” Moses served God and others entirely because of God’s call on his life. When things did not go his way or the people opposed him, he refused to become vindictive. He was in tune with God’s will and plan.

Moses maintained his integrity through this, but what do you suppose Miriam learned from her experience? I hope that the extreme judgment of God on Miriam woke her up. Certainly she would really give serious thought before complaining again.

If you have a tendency to complain, ask God for grace to stop complaining. If you have been mistreated by someone, practice humility and do as the English Poet Alexander Pope said—forgive. He wrote, “To err is human; to forgive, divine.”

Day 5- First Read Haggai 2:20-23

We have previously talked about how important people mentioned in the Old Testament are; too often we read over people who appear to be insignificant. Don’t miss what God may be revealing in the details. Zerubbabel was the leader of the people who returned from exile. He was a leader, perhaps a King or, at least, considered governor. He was a descendant of King David. In this passage in Haggai we get a hint of things to come. God told Haggai, the prophet, to give encouraging words to the people and then a word of encouragement to Zerubbabel. The people under Zerubbabel’s leadership were rebuilding the temple. There were attacks from the outside and attacks from the inside. Zerubbabel was a blue collar king. He did not deal from a throne or wear a crown. He went to work. When God sent the message to King

Zerubbabel, He called him “*my servant.*” But God called him something else; He called him “*a signet ring.*”

A signet ring was a ring worn by a king that represented his authority. The king would use the ring to mark a document with his signature. When the king sent out a message, hot wax was used to drip on the rolled up document to seal it and the king would press the image of his ring in the wax. It was his official signature. God tells Zerubbabel that he was God’s authority like a signet ring. Zerubbabel was a descendant of King David and in the line of Jesus. God was encouraging him to stay on the course because the Messiah would come through his family! What a word of encouragement. You cannot give up, grow weary, or quit because you play a necessary role in God’s plan.

WEEK 40 ISRAEL SPIES OUT THE LAND

Day 1- Read Numbers 13:1-3, 17-33

It wasn't called the Promised Land just by chance. It was the Promised Land because the Lord had promised Abraham and all of those after him that the land would be theirs. Caleb knew this; he remembered the promise and knew it was from God. The verse saying, "we can surely do it" may initially look like Caleb is saying we, by ourselves, can do this. However, we know Caleb trusted and followed God and we will see this in the weeks to come. He wasn't depending on his own efforts, but trusting the Lord. As a spy, he had seen what the other spies had seen, but his view was different; he had God's vantage point, he trusted Him.

We must trust God and His Word. We can either listen to the opinions of man or we can follow the Truth of God. Scripture tells us that He is the way, the truth, and the life! When we put our hope and everything we are in Him, we will not be disappointed. However, when we put our hope in our own power and what we can do, we will either be let down in the end, or we will be like the rest of the spies in verses 4-15 and cower down in defeat before we even begin.

The enemy wants us defeated. One thing the enemy loves is a defeated believer. Do you know a defeated believer? Are you one? Do you walk all day in defeat? Are you one who can never seem to put all your hope in Christ? **Isaiah 40:31** says, *"But they who wait on the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles; they shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint."* As we live in the presence of the Lord and walk with Him, we don't have to cower down and live in defeat or fear. Scripture gives us many promises of who we are in Christ and what God's plans are for us. We are children of the One True King!

May we live like it and move forward with the truth of Jesus. I don't want to cower down in fear. Do you? We don't have to; we know the King of the universe and He has conquered fear! Lay your burdens, fears, anxieties, etc., on Him today and continue on. Don't listen to others when they say you can't or it won't work. If you are following God and His Word, move forward. Don't look back.

Day 2- Read Numbers 14:1-10

Here we go again. The Israelites are complaining and grumbling against God. This time, not only are they grumbling, but we see in verse 3 they are insinuating that the Lord is trying to kill them. Remember, they had been promised, through Abraham, the Promised Land would be theirs someday. This promise had been passed down to other leaders, including Moses. They were following God's plan for them, but when opposition came along and it looked like the odds were against them, they began questioning God and desiring to be back in Egypt in slavery!

This sounds bad, doesn't it? But wait, it gets worse. When Joshua and Caleb spoke up and told the people to continue and take the land that God was giving to them, the people wanted to stone them! These two men, who were following what God wanted, were now being turned against by their own people because they were choosing to trust God and not themselves. They held on to the words of God that had been given to Abraham and passed on to subsequent generations.

Unfortunately, you and I do this. Yes, you and I! When we have a word or promise from the Lord, either through His Word or through prayer, and we know it is true because it aligns with Scripture, we are to follow and trust God in that situation. However, during that trusting or following God, we often face "obstacles," those things which sometimes make it harder to follow God or trust His promises. Truth is, we are not promised an easy road as we follow Christ. Scripture tells us that in this world we

will have trouble, but to have hope because Christ has overcome the world! (John 16:33)

When we face difficulties, struggles, and hard times, the last thing we need to do is “run from God” or “place blame on God.” We need to trust God, the One who is in control, the One who holds the whole world in His hands. Ask God today to help you trust Him when it’s easy and when it’s hard, knowing that He has it all in His hands!

Day 3 CONNECT TO JESUS- Read Numbers 14:11-24

Here again, we see Moses as the mediator between the Israelites and God. He asks God to forgive them and reminds Him (as if God needed reminding) where He had brought them from and what He had done. God forgives them, as we see in verse 20. God is the God of love and grace, but also the God of justice. Moses saw their sin and problems and pleaded for them in their time of rebellion. We need to do this too. We need to plead for God to speak to and show mercy on those who are in rebellion to Him, but at the same time, do what it takes to get their attention and wake them up.

Our only hope of God’s mercy and grace is through Jesus Christ. Our works, nice words, service, and anything good that we think we have done, will not measure up. We are all guilty, but the grace of God covers our sin. We see though, as in the case of the Israelites, there are often consequences for sin.

If you have not called on Jesus to forgive you of your sins, seek Him now. If you have done this, thank Him for your salvation and that He is the mediator between us and God. We should also realize we don’t have to continue in sin; we don’t have to continue in disobedience. We died to sin and disobedience and if we continue to live in it like the Israelites, we will experience consequences. May we be like Caleb and follow Jesus with our whole hearts and have no regrets! Who are you following today?

Who are you seeking? Do you want the consequences of your sin or the blessings of following God? Seek Him!

Day 4 - Read Numbers 14:26-45

Sin is nasty; it destroys, kills, and keeps us apart from God. Scripture tells us that the devil's plan and desire is to kill, steal, and destroy. He was working on the Israelites, for sure. Their continuous disobedience got them where they were. The consequences for every male over 20, except Caleb and Joshua, were that they would not enter the Promised Land. Not only that, but they would die out in the land wandering. If that wasn't bad enough, verse 33 tells us that their children would suffer because of their parents' unfaithfulness. Here is proof that our choice to seek and follow anything but God not only hurts us, but all of those around us. It's said that, "Sin will take you farther than you want to go, keep you longer than you want to stay, and cost you more than you want to pay" (unknown). So true!

Recently, while driving on the interstate with my family, I heard Landon talking to his mom in a mean and nasty tone. After getting on to him I asked him, "Is that how we talk to our mom and is that what God wants us to do?" Getting no answer from him, I asked again and still I received no answer. After a third time with still no answer, I got off at the next exit to take care of some discipline. He knew what was going on; he knew he was about to be punished, so guess what? He finally answered my question. We see some similarities here; when the Israelites realized what their punishment was and that it sounded like it would be better to do what God said, they changed their minds. They were not necessarily sorry, but they knew what was going to happen. However, they had continued in sin and God had already told them their consequence.

Of course, they still went on and tried to do things their own way and were defeated because God was not with them. Once again,

they didn't listen to the Lord (through Moses) and they were attacked and beaten down.

Today, may we follow God. May we do what He shows us in His Word and what He reveals to us. May we not delay and may we not pass our disobedience on to our children and those who come behind us. May we seek to love Jesus always and lead others to love Him too, and may our actions show it!

Day 5- Read Zechariah 2:10-12

2 Peter 3:9 says, *“The Lord is not slow in keeping His promise, as some understand slowness. Instead he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.”*

It's God's desire that everyone come to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ and Zechariah confirms this. **Zechariah 2:11a** says, *“Many nations will be joined with the Lord.”* The Gospel isn't just for God's chosen people, the Israelites, but for anyone who would call on the name of the Lord. Isn't this wonderful?

The verses of scripture we read today also speak of Jesus. They don't use the name Jesus, but the very fact that *“Nations will be joined with the Lord”* is an indication that God will one day make a way for every tribe and nation to be saved by calling on the name of Jesus. **John 1:14** says *“The Word became flesh and made its dwelling among us.”* Jesus made earth His temporary dwelling so He could show us the way to make heaven our eternal dwelling, but it's not just for us. It's for all the nations: the red, yellow, black, and white. It's for those across the street and those across the ocean. I imagine heaven will be more diverse than we ever thought possible. Praise the Lord!

May we be an avenue in which Jesus is shown to others.

Revelation 7:9-10 says, *“After this I looked, and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and before the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm*

*branches in their hands. And they cried out in a loud voice:
'Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the
Lamb.'*”

Thank You, Lord, that I will be a part of that multitude! Who are we sharing Jesus with so that others will as well?

WEEK 41 MOSES DISOBEYS GOD

Some of the saddest words in the Bible are those uttered by God in Numbers 14:26-35 to Moses regarding the unbelief of the people for not obeying Him to go in and enter the land. For each of the forty days the spies continued to spy out the land, the people would wander in the wilderness for a year, which totaled forty years! Not only that, all the people over twenty years of age would die during the wandering. Consequences of rebellion and disobedience can be very impacting for many people. We read here that because of the negative report of ten of the twelve spies, millions would die. The only two people over twenty who would not die but would enter the land of promise were Joshua and Caleb. They were the two spies who encouraged the people to go in because God would give them victory. This week, there is another time of grumbling and complaining and Moses, the mediator, gets in the middle again. However, this time he loses control! We will look at Moses' anger and the consequences.

Day 1- Read Numbers 20:1-5

It appears that from a time perspective, about 38 years of wilderness wandering has brought us to this point because of rebellion and disobedience. The people have wandered for nearly 40 years and by this time, most of those people who were over 20 years of age at the time of rebellion had died, including Moses' sister Miriam.

“This section, from Numbers chapters 14 to 20, is the only section which deals with the forty years of wandering in the wilderness - and that's not very much. We have only a few incidents that took place during these forty years. Israel is out of God's will and there is little to tell. We can talk about Israel being God's chosen people, but they didn't amount to anything except when they were in God's will. And that is still true today. It is also true of you and me that we don't amount to anything when we are out of the will of

God. When you and I are not functioning in the body of believers, exercising the gift that He has given to us by

the power of the Holy Spirit, we are as unnecessary as a fifth leg on a cow. Actually, we get in the way.”¹⁰

This passage is what appears to be the seventh murmuring of the people. Again, they are complaining about not having water to drink. They are on the edge of the Promised Land that flows with much water, along with milk and honey, yet they are complaining rather than trusting. It is so important to keep your eyes focused on your destination, where you are going, more than on your current circumstances. Their longing was to go back to Egypt, back to their origination, rather than continue on to the destination. Every July 4th, I, along with other family members and 60,000 of my closest friends, embark on Peachtree Road to run the annual Peachtree Road Race. I can't tell you how many times along the way I have wanted to quit, to just go home and forget it. However, I have in mind the finish line and the coveted collector's t-shirt. I want to finish. When I get within eyesight of the finish line I am invigorated to really hit it hard one more time. The race is not about starting, but about finishing. They were too close to the finish line to quit now.

Be encouraged on your faith journey. When things become difficult, don't complain or murmur. Instead, pray! Keep your eyes on the finish line. This is the only way to make sense of the journey!

Day 2- Read Numbers 20:6-9

The people complained, but Moses and Aaron went to the door of the tabernacle and fell on their faces before the Lord. Which do you do? When trouble comes, do you complain or pray? Do you fret and agonize or do you seek the One who can do something?

¹⁰ Thru The Bible with J. Vernon McGee

On this occasion, there is nothing recorded that Moses or Aaron said. They simply fell before the Lord to seek His wisdom, presence, and provision. We do not know how long they were there, but God spoke to them and gave them the solution. God is able to solve our problems no matter what the circumstances are, provided we trust Him and do His will.

God instructs Moses and Aaron to take the rod, gather the people, and to speak to the rock in front of the people. This is different from the account in Exodus 17 where God told Moses to take the rod and strike the rock before the elders. The rod represented the power, presence, and authority of God. In today's passage, Moses was to gather all of the people and speak to the rock. There were many more people and the instructions were different. God provides for our needs and does so in different ways. On this occasion, God told Moses to speak to the rock. Why the difference? I have no idea. Some commentators suggest that since the rock was Jesus (1 Corinthians 10:4), He was only struck or crucified once for sin. Once again, I am not sure. All we know is that on this occasion, it was clear they were to take the rod, gather all the people, speak to the rock, and the rock would "*yield its water.*" We see in verse 9 that the first thing Moses did was to take the rod and go as God had told him. In all of our dealings with the Lord, starting and finishing in obedience is the whole deal. Not just starting, but starting and finishing in accordance with God's instructions.

As we will see in a few days, Moses started well, but all did not end well. Seek God and trust and obey—fully!

Day 3 CONNECT TO JESUS- Read Hebrews 4:14-16

Moses stood in between Israel and God as their mediator of God's covenant with His people and even as a priest for the people. But the task wore Moses down, it was more than any normal man can bear. And sure enough Moses would even fail and disobey God. In the end, Moses even needs a priest for himself for his own sin. The

limitations of Moses is now seen. Hebrews 4:14-16 shows that in Christ we have a greater Moses, a High priest who has been tempted in all things and yet without sin. Listen to that. Jesus is a personal God because he bore the human experience, fully God and fully man. He was tempted in all things. He faced temptations full force. Yet, He was faithful to the end, even to death on a Cross. Whereas the OT priests had to rest, had to sleep, had weaknesses and even were sinful men, Jesus is the perfect high priest who never stops making intercession for you, whose perfect sacrifice needs no additional sacrifices, who knows you and draws near to you today. Because He knows your weaknesses, He says “Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.”

Our earthly leaders fail us, as gifted as they might be. Moses, as amazing as he was failed still. Yet, Moses pointed to a greater surety in Jesus Christ, the eternal High Priest. Do you trust too much in earthly leaders? Do you look to those who God has put in your life to be what only Jesus can be?

Spend time talking to Jesus today as you meditate on the gift of Him as your great High Priest and all He has guaranteed for you in being able to approach a Holy King in prayer. Ask Him to help you not take this for granted, to trust Him more today.

Day 4- Read Numbers 20:10-13

It really seems that everyone has their breaking point. Moses was no exception. He was perhaps the greatest leader who ever lived, other than Jesus, but he was human and we see today he reached his breaking point. There's no excuse, but for about forty years he led a very difficult group of people on what should have been an eleven day journey! The reason it took forty years was because of the rebellion and disobedience of the people.

Moses received his instructions from God. He and Aaron were to take the rod, gather the people, and then SPEAK to the rock. He

did it all, but then lost his cool and exploded. Instead of speaking to the rock, he lashed out at the people, calling them “rebels” and even taking credit for getting the water from the rock and then, in a rage, he hit the rock twice with the rod. It worked! Water gushed out from the rock. The people got what they needed. For a pragmatist, this was good—it worked! This was not the end of the story. Sure, it worked. God is the One who worked. He honored the intercession and provided what the people needed. However, God was not pleased because He was dishonored before the people.

God will not share His glory with another (Isaiah 42:8). Moses and Aaron did not obey God and they did not give Him glory and credit before the people. The problem was that they dishonored God. Their testimony, or the testimony of God working in and through them, was lost. They squandered an opportunity to give God glory for what He alone could do.

Arrogance, anger, and frustration can take its toll. God’s testimony can be hijacked when His people lose control and fail to keep in mind all we do in God’s name is for His glory alone. Moses forfeited his opportunity to enter the Promised Land! “How unfair of God,” you may say. However, God is serious about His name! In fact, the third commandment is about not taking the name of the Lord in vain.

In all things, exalt God’s name, giving Him praise and glory!

DAY 5- Read Malachi 3:1

This passage in Malachi was prophesied about 500 BC. So we make a 900 year jump from where we have been to see this prophecy about Jesus that was made some 500 years before His birth.

The prophecy regards two messengers. The first is obviously about John the Baptist. This verse in Malachi is applied to John the

Baptist by Jesus in Matthew 11:9-10. Malachi is saying John the Baptist would be God's messenger to prepare the way for His coming. John the Baptist came preparing the way for Jesus' first coming as a baby born of a virgin. Jesus would preach, live, die, and, ultimately save.

"This passage speaks of another who would appear suddenly. It is speaking about Jesus when He comes again at the conclusion of history as we know it. Then He will come as "the Messenger of the covenant." In the first coming, He comes to save; in the second, He comes to judge. Malachi says that He is coming to make good the covenant God made with Israel! The people asked at the end of Malachi 2, "Where is the God of justice?" In Malachi 3:1, God answers their question. He says He is coming to save and then He is coming to judge and uphold the covenant He made with Israel.

Therefore, this is God's answer to the people of Israel: God will send Him first as a Savior because He is gracious and He wants to save. But that doesn't end it all: He is coming again as the messenger of the covenant, that is, to execute justice and judgment on this earth.¹¹

God makes and keeps promises. Give thanks to Him for His faithfulness to us and to His people of old!

¹¹ Thru The Bible with J. Vernon McGee

WEEK 42 GOD HEALS ISRAEL WITH A BRONZE SNAKE

We know by now that the Israelites have the tendency to whine and complain, even after everything God has done for them! This week, we find them complaining yet again. This time though, the Lord punishes them. He then provides a way for them to overcome the punishment. Sometimes this happens in our own lives. We make choices and because of bad choices, we have consequences or punishment, but then God provides a way out if we will listen to Him.

Day 1- Read Numbers 21:1-3

You might remember back in Numbers 14, the Israelites disobeyed God, went their own way in battle, and were heavily defeated. However, today's passage is different. Instead of taking things into their own hands, the first thing they do is pray. When Edom, in the previous chapter, denies them permission to come their way, they find another way to continue the journey. On their way to Atharim a few of the Israelites were captured. They asked God to deliver the enemy into their hands and they destroyed the cities. This time they did it the right way. They sought God.

We have all made decisions on our own and then halfway down the road realized it was the wrong decision and we decide that now is the time to pray. Tim Keller reminds us, "to fail to pray is not to merely break some religious rule-it is failure to treat God as God."

Let us seek God through prayer in all that we do. May we follow His plan with every small and big decision. We can learn a lot by reading Scripture, but we also understand details of His plans through prayer. Before ever making a decision, follow the Holy Spirit's leading through the Word and through prayer. Pray without ceasing and pray about all matters of life. When you are prayed up, you are ready. Seek Him and His will today.

Day 2- Read Numbers 21:4-6

Not long after God delivered the Israelites from Arad, they began complaining again. They were upset about the food they were eating so they began to whine. This time God punished them by sending venomous snakes. When they realized what they had done, they went to Moses. (Remember, he was a mediator between them and God.) They told Moses they had sinned. God provided a way out by putting a snake on a pole and, if they looked at the snake, they would live. God provided deliverance.

Notice, however, that the Israelites always seemed to go back to complaining. They complained it would be better if they were back in Egypt, they complained about the food, and they complained about the conditions. Basically, they complained about everything. Even after they had seen God work in numerous ways, they still complained and had difficulty trusting God.

Sound familiar? Does this sound like us as Christians? We have seen God do great things. We have seen Him save us, provide for us, love us, and be faithful, yet we complain. Unfortunately, I have found some of the most complaining people to be Christians, myself included. This should not be! God has given us so much more than we deserve, yet we complain or even keep going back to a sin (such as complaining) that we can't seem to overcome. Ask God today to help you find peace, joy, and contentment in Him. Ask Him to help you overcome a complaining spirit, negative attitude, bitterness, or hatred. Romans 8:37 tells us we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. God has conquered it all; through Him, we are more than conquerors in whatever may come our way.

Day 3 CONNECT TO JESUS- Read Numbers 21:7-9 and John 3:9-15

We have seen so many ways that the Old and New Testament work hand in hand. Today, the passage we read in the New Testament is

an account with which many may already be familiar. Our reading today stops at verse 15, but we know what verse 16 says.

When the Israelites were out in the wilderness whining and complaining, they faced consequences. They were going to be bitten by snakes and killed. However, if they looked at the snake that Moses had made and put on a pole (following God's instructions), they would live. Verse 7 of Numbers 21 says the people realized they had sinned and they were wrong. If they would look at the snake, they would live, but if they didn't they would die! What was the one condition they had to carry out in order to live? "Look!" Look and live.

John compares the account of Moses and the Israelites to Jesus. Jesus says that just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert so the Son of man (Jesus) must be lifted up, meaning He must die on the cross for our sins. Christ's death had not yet happened, but it was soon to come. Verse 15 of John 3 says that everyone who believes in Him (Jesus) may have eternal life. Just as the Israelites looked at the snake and lived, if we acknowledge our sinfulness, believing Jesus is the only One that can take it away, and trust in Him, then we will be saved. We will be given eternal life! Have you put your faith in Jesus? Did you look and live? If you have, are you following Jesus? Are you seeking to know Him more and more every day? If so, tell the truth to others!

Day 4- Read Numbers 21:10-20

Today we see a different attitude in the Israelites than we did in our first devotion this week. Their attitude went from complaining to rejoicing and singing as the Lord had provided them water! God was always their provider; they just didn't acknowledge it very often. The Lord had provided for them and they were thankful.

What are you thankful for? What has the Lord provided for you? How have you seen Him work? Let Him know. Sing praises to His name. Thank Him. Maybe even take some time to write out the

ways you have seen the Lord provide for you; this might help remind you of His faithfulness and just how great He is.

Paul tells us in Philippians 4:5 to “*Rejoice in the Lord always.*” In other words, in everything in our life we are to rejoice in the Lord! This doesn’t necessarily mean we have to like what is going on in our lives or even be happy about it, but, because we know that the Lord cares about and loves His children, we can rejoice in Him and we can trust in Him. It’s easy to rejoice in the Lord when things are going well. For example, when the Lord provided water for the Israelites. However, remember just a few days back when there was no water or food and they were complaining? According to Scripture we are to rejoice even then; we are to trust and throw ourselves on God. Job was a picture of this. I think we would all agree that there was nothing to be happy about when Job lost all of his family, his wealth, and even his health. However, at the end of the book, we see that Job realized that God was in control. While he might not understand or be able to make sense of it all, Job knew he could trust God. God was the One who made the stars, the ocean, and the entire world.

Take some time today to thank God for the ways He has provided for you. Take some time to seek and ask God to help you wait on Him through the good and bad times.

Day 5- Read Malachi 3:2-3

Jesus, Jesus, Jesus! He is everywhere from the beginning of time till now and He will always be. Today we see Him again in this Old Testament passage. The word “purify” is used in verse 3 of this passage. One way to refine gold is to take the gold through extreme heat of temperatures over 1000 degrees. In this process the impurities are done away with and only the gold, itself, remains.

This is exactly what God has done and continues to do for us! He was pierced for our impurities (sin). He did away with them for good! When we place our faith in Him and what He has done, we

have the gift of eternal life and a relationship with Him. Nothing can take this away, as we see in Romans. Even after we enter into a relationship with Him, He desires for us to continue to be like Him. While living in a sinful world, we will continue to struggle with the temptation to do things that are not of God. Sometimes God will allow us to go through struggles, difficulties, and hard times, so He can refine us. This is so He can teach us, love on us, and even “burn up”, figuratively speaking, those things in our life that we hold in such high esteem (more than Christ). God wants our hearts to be pure and holy. In fact, we often sing about it in “Refiner’s Fire” written by Brian Doerksen:

Purify my heart
Let me be as gold and precious silver
Purify my heart
Let me be as gold, pure gold
Refiner’s fire
My heart’s one desire
Is to be holy
Set apart for You, Lord
I choose to be holy
Set apart for You, my Master
Ready to do Your will
Purify my heart
Cleanse me from within
And make me holy
Purify my heart
Cleanse me from my sin
Deep within

God has already washed away our impurities so we can know Him and spend eternity with Him. As we continue to live our lives, He wants to constantly refine us to be more and more like Him. How is God refining you right now? It’s not always a fun process, but in the end, it is rewarding and much needed. God, refine me!

WEEK 43 RAHAB'S HELP

As I write this our country is still “social distancing” in order to prevent the spread of the Corona virus. Before this year we had never heard the term “social distancing” but I am betting that even young children know and understand that term today. Why? The unprecedented spread of a brand new virus has caused government officials around the world to create social distancing guidelines in order to remind people that the only way to slow the spread of this virus is to remain at a distance from one another. How did this new term become household language in such a short time? We heard it repeated in ad campaigns, memes, press conferences and news briefs. We repeat what is important to us and when something is repeated again and again it gets our attention. As we read through Joshua, pay attention to what God is repeating to Joshua.

Day 1-Read Joshua 1

Israel spent forty years wandering in the desert until every last person who had rebelled against God was dead, even Moses. By that time, the children had grown up and when God gave his command to Joshua, they were ready and filled with faith to take their Promised Land. The good news is that God promised to go with them and give them every inch of ground they walked on.

From Marty Machowski: “Can you imagine playing in a baseball game and the Lord told you that every time you stepped up to bat you would hit a home run? That would definitely be exciting. But what if you then realized you had to face the world’s fastest pitcher who was throwing 100-mile an hour fastballs? That would definitely be scary. Even though God said he would give you a home run, you would still have to swing the bat. You would need to be strong and courageous and stand at the plate and swing.”¹²

¹² Illustration by Marty Machowski, Long Story Short

God repeated his command to Joshua and to Israel again and again. “Be strong and courageous.” Isn’t it interesting that God did not command Joshua to be strong and courageous in order to fight but “that you may observe to do according to all the law which Moses, My servant, commanded you.” He was telling Joshua he needed to be strong and courageous in order to obey! But He didn’t expect Joshua to find that courage in himself. God reminded Joshua that he could be strong and courageous because He would be with him, not leave him, (vs 5) and because He would be true to His promises (vs 6). The basis for our obedience is never found within ourselves; it is only found in the character and promises of God secured for our good in Jesus. Not many of us will face a 100-mile an hour fastball today, but we are all called to trust in the work of Christ and follow Him in obedience. Ask God what He is asking of you today then make a plan for how you will obey.

Day 2-Read Joshua 2:1-9

The account of the spies in Jericho has all the excitement of a good spy movie. There is a manhunt, a beautiful woman, sneaky tricks, and quick escapes. Joshua sent two spies into Jericho and they came to the house of a prostitute, Rahab. The king of Jericho came looking for the spies but Rahab risked her life to hide them so the king could not capture them.

Although Rahab was a Canaanite, she had heard of the God of Israel and she feared Him, enough that she was willing to risk her life to hide His people. Rahab showed courage and resourcefulness in protecting the spies from discovery. God called her act an act of faith, and for it she is remembered in the Hebrews Hall of Faith. Hebrews 11:31 says, “By faith, Rahab the prostitute did not perish with those who were disobedient, because she had given a friendly welcome to the spies.”

When I hear this story I have often thought of it from the perspective of Rahab. I am amazed that she would risk so much

based on hearsay about a God of a very tiny group of wilderness wanderers. Today I found myself thinking about the story from the perspective of the spies. I am sure that although they were courageous they were also afraid of being caught. How amazed they must have been to find that God would work through a heathen prostitute using deceptive means to carry out His promises to them. Throughout redemptive history God continues to use unexpected people in unexpected ways to carry out the "Great Rescue Mission"¹³ of His people. Take a minute to thank God for the fact that He saves and uses a wretch like Rahab, and like you.

Day 3-CONNECT TO JESUS-Read Matthew 1:1-6

Yesterday, we saw that God honored Rahab's faith in spite of the fact that she was a heathen prostitute who lied to protect the spies. Truly, "the Lord sees not as man sees; man looks on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart" (1 Samuel 16:7). But God had even more in mind for Rahab. In today's passage we see that Rahab was one of five women who are listed in Jesus' genealogy. Rahab married Salmon, son of a prince of the tribe of Judah (Numbers 7:12) and became the great, great grandmother of David, king of Israel. From this line Jesus was born.

I am sure that Bible scholars have many astute observations about the genealogy of Jesus. I see two things that bring me great comfort and great challenge. First, even from before His birth, Jesus truly did enter into our human experience. The Word truly became flesh and dwelt among us even to the point of having flawed and sinful parents and grandparents. How amazing that the all-powerful God was willing to become a vulnerable baby and place himself in the hands of a broken, fallible family. Second, Ephesians 2 tells us that Jesus "has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility..." As we can see with Rahab, God was grafting Gentiles into His royal line long before Jesus was born. He had begun the process of joining

¹³ Term used by Sally Lloyd Jones in Jesus Story

Jew and Gentile all the way back to women like Rahab and Ruth. And He did that so that He could “reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross and thereby killing the hostility...In Him you are also being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit” (Ephesians 2:16, 22).

As I write this two terrible things are devastating our country: the COVID pandemic and deep racial strife. Isn't it a comfort to know that in Christ we can have hope that although we cannot meet together as the local church we are united in Him by His Spirit, and that by that same Spirit we are united as brothers and sisters no matter the color of our skin? Furthermore, we receive the challenge that just as Christ came and to live in our neighborhood (John 1: MSG), we too must incarnate His love as we navigate the uncertainties of new threats and the anxiety and grief of long-standing hostilities.

How can you make the reality of the unity of the spirit in the heavenlies become a reality on earth today in YOUR neighborhood?

Day 4-Joshua 2:8-24

The biggest question I have when I read today's passage is this-how does a woman, a prostitute, in the pagan land of Jericho understand the truth that “the Lord your God, he is God in the heavens above and on the earth beneath?” Some scholars try to sanitize Rahab's profession by saying that she wasn't really a prostitute; she was simply a priestess in the temple of their gods. I had to laugh when I read that because which one is harder to believe- that God would call a prostitute to Himself or that a pagan high priestess would have knowledge and understanding of the One, True God. Both are hard for us to believe!

But this is our God. He calls those who He is pleased to call whether it be a ragtag group of desert wanderers, a pagan

prostitute, or you and me. When Paul contemplated this grafting of the Gentiles he broke into spontaneous worship. “O, the depths of the riches of both the wisdom and knowledge of God. How unsearchable are your judgments and your ways past finding out. ‘For who has known the mind of the Lord, and who has become His counselor or who has first given to Him and it shall be repaid to him?’ For of Him, and through Him, and to Him are all things. To Him be glory forever and ever” (Romans 11:33-36). How much more should we, the grafted ones, break into praise along with Rahab and Paul that we have the privilege of being grafted into the family of God?

Here are two great doxologies: one spoken by a pagan prostitute whose entire family is saved because of her faith in the God of Israel and another spoken by a murderer turned evangelist who was deeply moved by the great mystery and beauty of God’s plan for His family. I believe that each one had an encounter with the depths of their own depravity and with the greatness of who God is. Take some time today to contemplate the sinfulness of your own heart and the awesomeness of your God; then lift up your own doxology, a prayer of praise to Him.

Day 5-Isaiah 41:8-14

Many years ago I was going into surgery and I realized that I could take nothing with me. I wanted so desperately to have something in my hand to comfort me and remind me that God was with me. About that time I came upon an article by John Piper on Isaiah 41:10 which he calls the Five Finger Promise. In this verse, God calls Israel and all of His children not to fear because: 1) I am with you, 2) I am your God, 3) I will strengthen you, 4) I will help you, 5) I will hold you up with my righteous right hand. I would recite those promises over and over again in the anxious moments leading up to surgery, ticking them off on each finger. And I had all I needed to remind me-my hand! Later, I would teach the children in our church these promises and I would encourage them

to curl each finger into their palm as they said the promises so that when they were done they could punch fear in the face!!

I am sure that the people of Israel who were in captivity by the Assyrians were grateful for these promises that God was still with them. But this passage is not just a promise it is also a prophecy. Verse 14 tells us that God is our helper and that our Redeemer is the Holy One of Israel. The Hebrew people looked forward to the fulfillment of this promise of a Redeemer, but we know that this prophecy has come true in the person of Jesus Christ. Our faith in Christ is what makes us descendants of Abraham and grafts us into the family of God (Gal 3:7; Rom 4:16). Therefore, all the promises made to the people of Israel are also made for us!

Where are you going or what are you facing that you need to take your hand with you and recall these Five Finger Promises? Remember that these promises are true for you because of the work of Christ your Redeemer who bought you back from sin and darkness. He promises that He is with you, He is your God, He will strengthen you, He will help you, and He will hold you in His righteous right hand.

Week 44 JERICHO FALLS

Joshua sent the two spies into the land of Canaan, the land God had promised them. The spies came back with the report, “Truly, the Lord has given all the land into our hands. And also all the inhabitants of the land melt away because of us” (Joshua 2:24). This generation learned from the sin of their fathers and they were ready to follow God and take the land he had given to them.

Day 1-Joshua 3

Joshua led the people of Israel to the banks of the Jordan River. It was the harvest season and the river was high, often overflowing, but it had to be crossed to gain entrance to the promised land. While they camped there I am sure they were remembering the stories told by their fathers and grandfathers of how God caused them to cross the Red Sea on dry land to escape the Egyptians who were pursuing them. Can you imagine how excited they were? Joshua told the people to consecrate themselves because the Lord would do wonders among them. When it was time to move, God told the priests bearing the Ark of the Covenant to dip their feet in the river. The water stopped flowing and “rose up in a heap” so that the people could cross over.

Have you ever had a “do over” with God? It might be as simple as waking up and choosing not to complain like you did yesterday. Or it might be as dramatic as reconciling a relationship that has been estranged for years because of your own sin and brokenness. God in His grace gives us so many opportunities to repent and do it over again. When I think of these Israelites consecrating themselves to enter the land of Canaan, I believe they realized that they were getting a do over. Their parents chose to shrink back in fear of the giants of the land and because of that lack of trust in God they had to wander in the wilderness until they all passed away. Now they, the children, are about to enter that same land

with those same giants but they are choosing to trust God and His provision and protection to give them the land.

And look what God did. As they move forward in faith and not fear, God takes them to the banks of a mighty body of water and performs the same miracle for them that their fathers and grandfathers experienced. He shows them that He is the God over all creation who can stop the flow of a raging river. I wonder how many times I have missed my “do overs” and the resulting view of God’s power because I am unwilling to recognize and repent of my sin or because I am paralyzed by my fears. Let’s ask the Holy Spirit to make us aware of those times when our mighty God is asking us to repent of our sin and unbelief and move forward, to have the “do over” by faith in His mighty power.

Day 2- Joshua 4:1-5:1

One of my daughters loves to look at old pictures and talk about the memories they bring to her mind. She can spend hours looking at photo albums and laughing about stories of her childhood. In the age of digital photos these photo albums serve as physical reminders of the story of our family. Today in our reading God commands the people of Israel to build an altar of remembrance out of twelve stones from the Jordan River. This was to serve as a reminder of the faithfulness and power of God in allowing them to cross the Jordan on dry ground.

The nation of Israel is on the brink of war with an entire region, why would God think it is so important to stop and stack twelve stones on top of each other at this exact moment? I can see three reasons in the text. First, as each of these twelve men find, carry, and place these heavy stones on the shores of the Jordan River, the entire nation of Israel has an opportunity to reflect on the immensity of what God had just done for them. He suspended the natural order of the created world so that they could be delivered safely to the other side. Next, Joshua tells them to place these

stones on the banks of the river so that when their children ask why the stones are there they can tell their children the story of the deliverance of God. Finally, they were to build this altar so that, “all the peoples of the earth may know that the hand of the LORD is mighty, that you may fear the LORD your God forever.”

Do you have any stones of remembrance to the faithfulness of God in your life? Maybe they are actual objects that remind you of a time when you really understood and saw the character and power of God show up in your life. Maybe you keep these altars in your mind and you revisit them as a way to encourage your heart in times of sadness or trouble. If you haven't found a way to mark God's faithfulness, I would encourage you to find some objects, start a journal, or record some videos. Find ways to tell yourself, your children, and the world the stories of God's goodness to you.

Day 3- Joshua 5

The people of Israel have made it to the Promised Land. When you are waiting and waiting, anticipating a much needed vacation or trip, what is the first thing you do when you get to there? Kick off your shoes, unpack your bags, have a celebratory meal? I am guessing you don't undergo minor (ok, to some of you major) surgery and spend days, or even weeks, recovering from that surgery? Yet, that is what the men of Israel did when God asked them to renew their covenant with Him after he delivered them across the Jordan River. The Israelites passed several important milestones after they crossed into the Promised Land. First, the men who had not been circumcised in the wilderness were circumcised. Then, they celebrated the first Passover in their new land to remember the deliverance from Egypt. This Passover marked the last time the Lord provided manna for the people because they could now eat of the produce of the land He had given them.

When we look at these events we observe an important sequence we see all through Scripture. God asks the people of Israel to obey Him but not before He shows them who He is and what He has done for them. In this case, God delivers the Israelites across the Jordan River. And then He asks all the males to be circumcised. He did something similar for their parents when He first delivered them from the Egyptians and then told them to obey Him through the Ten Commandments. This pattern is called the indicative-imperative pattern and it shows us something so important about God: He is the primary initiator in love towards us and we are the responders to His great acts of love through obedience.

Tim Keller observes, “Religion says, ‘If I obey, then God will love and accept me.’ The Gospel says, ‘I’m loved and accepted, therefore I wish to obey.’” So often, I am tempted to believe that my obedience, my rightness, is what earns me favor with God. But Scripture shows us over and over again that God grants us His love and blessing and favor time and time again BEFORE He shows us how to respond in obedience. We can even see this pattern in the New Testament. For example, Paul uses the first half of the book of Ephesians to tell us of the blessings of being in Christ before he shows us how to live to please God. We also see the pattern in specific verses like Colossians 3:12, “Put on then, as God’s chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience...” The verse is saying, “You are God’s chosen one, now here is how you should respond to that beautiful truth.”

If you are tempted to believe it is your work that earns you favor with God, stop and repent and ask the Lord to remind you again that He calls us, justifies us, and sanctifies us on the basis of Christ’s work, not your own. Then ask Him what it looks like for you to respond to His love in obedience today.

Day 4-Read Joshua 6

From Marty Machowski¹⁴: “As Israel approached the great walls of Jericho, the watchmen would have called out, ‘Here come the Israelites. They have crossed the Jordan and they are marching upon our great city.’ With that, all the people of Jericho would prepare for battle. But, instead of attacking Jericho, Israel only marched around their city. Imagine the confusion inside the city as the watchmen reported that Israel wasn’t attacking. The people inside the city heard the trumpets of Israel sound, then stop. The Bible doesn’t tell us what the people inside the city were thinking, but by the seventh day of this some in Jericho may have laughed, ‘Do they think they are going to destroy our great walls with their trumpets?’ But when the walls came tumbling down, the people of Jericho were not laughing anymore. By defeating Jericho this way, everyone in Israel would know that their victory came by God’s power, not the strength of their army.”

Truly God provided for Israel in a completely unexpected way. While all of this was going on, Rahab and her family were huddled in her home hoping God would provide for them also. Just as the spies instructed she gathered her family and hoped against hope that a scarlet cord in her window would save them from destruction. And it did!! She and her family were not killed and were brought into the people of Israel.

This week we talked about building those stones of remembrance to the faithfulness of God. One story my family likes to tell is when ****Today add to your remembrances those times when God made provision for you in unexpected ways.

Day 5-Zephaniah 3:14-20

If you attend Young Meadows, today’s passage is a familiar one. We hear verse 17 each week as Jay pronounces our benediction,

¹⁴ Marty Machowski, Long Story Short p295

the good word/blessing we receive before we go out to fulfill God's mission. Let's look a little more closely at the context of this passage.

From Marty Machowski: "Anytime our punishment is taken away it is time for rejoicing. Let's say that (you get) stopped by a policeman for speeding. At first, everyone in the car would be sad. But if the policeman decided to give (you) a warning instead of a ticket, everyone in the car would rejoice. In today's Bible passage, Zephaniah is calling Israel to rejoice and celebrate because the Lord has taken away the judgments against them. Zephaniah tells them that they never have to fear again because the King of Israel is with them. When Zephaniah tells Israel that God has cleared away their enemies, he is referring to battles like the one at Jericho; but he is also pointing forward to a day when Jesus would clear away our greatest enemies: sin, death, and the judgment of God."

Isn't it amazing to see Jesus as our great champion, a strong warrior who fights our battles. What I also love about this passage is that verse 17 reminds us that this warrior is also gently singing His love over you. Pause and picture this in your mind. I like to think of a Russell Crowe-type warrior from the movie *Gladiator* who, although dirty and weary from battle, has a tender expression of delight on his face as he sings a song he has written only for me. The picture of God this passage evokes in my mind brings me great comfort in times when I feel rejection or shame. How can I shrink back from what other think of me when the God of the universe tenderly sings of His great love to me? And He has demonstrated that love in the person and work of Christ!

Ed Welch teaches that the Bible gives us a visual theology. Throughout Scripture, God gives us pictures through narratives, parables, and metaphors to help convey deep truths to our hearts. I think God does that because He knows when my emotions are running high I am not able to access that part of my brain that has

memorized a verse or a theological truth. However, I can access a picture. If I have taken the time to meditate on God's word and infuse that picture with the deep truths I find there, then the picture can convey the truth when words fail me. Take a few minutes today to meditate on Zephaniah 3:17 really developing in technicolor detail the picture of the Tender Warrior who battles for you and delights in you.

WEEK 45-ISRAEL AND AI

Joshua and the people of Israel continue to move into the Promised Land to claim all that God has in store for them.

DAY 1-Joshua 7:1-12

Can you think of something that can bring you both comfort and pain? The first thing that comes to my mind is fire. On a cold, damp southern winter day nothing brings me more comfort than a room warmed and brightened by a roaring fire. In contrast, this year we have watched helplessly as fire destroys great portions of land in California and Australia taking lives and consuming homes in its path. Today, we are going to look at how the character of God can also bring us both comfort and pain.

Joshua and the people of Israel have turned their attention to the next city in Canaan, Ai, after the stunning defeat of Jericho. Joshua sent men ahead to spy out the country. They came back and encouraged Joshua, “Do not let all the people go up, but let about two or three thousand men go up and attack Ai. Do not weary all the people there, for the people of Ai are few.” So, that is what Joshua did. Imagine their surprise when they find themselves fleeing in fear from the men of Ai.

Joshua and the elders tore their clothes and fell on their faces before God to ask Him why they had suffered this defeat. The Lord reminded Joshua that He had commanded them to not to take any of the gold, silver, iron, or bronze from the people of Jericho but to turn it over to the treasury. One man, Achan, defied God and took some of the plunder for himself. God knew of Achan’s sin and allowed the Israelites to lose the battle of Ai.

One helpful question to ask ourselves when we read Scripture is, “What can I learn about God in this passage?” Achan and Joshua and all the people of Israel were reminded in a painful way that

nothing can be hidden from God. He is the all knowing, all-powerful God. Now sometimes, these aspects of God's character bring me great comfort as I rest in the knowledge that He knows all of my hardships and is powerful to save me from them. However, if I am honest, God's knowledge and power are often scary when I realize that He also knows all of my sinful actions and has the power to destroy me for my sin.

So, what do I do with a story like the one we read today? Do I read it and rejoice that God knows all and has power over all things? Or do I skim over it and try to forget that He knows all my sin and has the power to destroy me? To ignore any aspect of the character of God diminishes my view of who He is. The only way that I can truly look at the comforting yet scary character of God is to realize that because of Jesus, God's character is applied to me as **only good all the time**. God is not sitting up in heaven ready to zap me for violating His commands. Rather, when He sees me He sees Jesus' righteousness therefore, His knowledge and power are only applied to me for my good for all eternity.

Today, read Psalm 103 and thank God for all the good He has done for you and for the ways that His character is applied to you as only good all the time because of Jesus.

Day 2-Joshua 7:13-26

Today's story is a hard one for us to read. Achan fought in the battle of Jericho. God commanded the Israelites to completely destroy the city of Jericho and not to take any of the spoils for themselves. God warned them that Jericho's goods were accursed and taking them would bring destruction on the nation of Israel. Achan stole a robe and gold and silver and hid these things in his tent. We saw yesterday the Israelites lost the next battle with Ai even though they outnumbered them. The Lord revealed that it

was Achan's sin that caused the defeat of Israel. Therefore, his entire family was put to death.

The application of this passage for our lives is easy to see: don't hide your sin. Confess it to God and others and repent quickly because your actions affect not only you and your family but the entire family of God. However, we are trying to pause and insert one more step before we jump to application. We need to ask the question, what is God revealing about Himself and His ways in this passage? First, we see a clear line to the concept of the one for the many. In this case it is not one man's righteousness that is attributed to the many; it is his sin. When Achan sinned and hid it, the whole nation was punished with being defeated by Ai. Second, we see God in His holiness and omniscience. God cannot overlook the sin of Achan because He is utterly pure, set apart, and unable to tolerate sin, and He sees all and knows all.

Out of this knowledge, do we jump to the application of confession and repentance? I think we do, but because we have paused to remember this is God's story, we have a richer understanding of repentance. Why would God require us to confess a sin He already knows about? I believe it is because confession is good for US! By hiding his sin, Achan was denying both of these essential aspects of who God is: He is all-knowing (omniscient) and He cannot tolerate sin (holy). Instead, Achan chose to hide his sin, thinking he could place himself above the knowledge and holiness of God. Confessing our sin reminds us we are people who live under the authority of an all-knowing, holy God. It restores us to a right understanding of who we are and who He is.

Spend some time considering what you need to confess to God and/or others today. Then allow Psalm 51 to guide you in a time of confession and repentance.

Day 3-Joshua 8:30-35

Marty Machowski writes¹⁵: “Tomorrow we will read how Israel attacked Ai again and won. But we skipped over the battle today because our connection to Jesus comes after the battle. When the fight was over and Israel had won, Joshua built an altar to the Lord with uncut stones. That meant he used only stones he found and didn’t shape them with chisels into blocks. Once he had carefully stacked the stones to make an altar, he sacrificed a peace offering to God. The animal sacrificed as a peace offering pointed forward to a day when Jesus would die for our sins and take away our punishment so we would have peace with God.”

Colossians 1:19-20 says, “For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.” Jesus made peace with God possible for us by His work on the cross. For the Hebrew people, peace was shalom. Shalom is far more than just quiet and calm. Shalom is wholeness or completeness. Our relationship with God was fractured by sin and cut off from fellowship. Jesus came to reconcile us to God, to make us whole people in a restored relationship with our Father. In Christ, we stand before the Father complete, nothing lacking.

This week as we look at the destruction sin brought to the people of Israel and to our own lives we might be tempted to despair. Take some time to thank the Lord that because of Christ we are reconciled to God in perfect peace. Then ask the Lord how you can participate in bringing peace, shalom peace, of wholeness and restoration to the relationships and circumstances in your sphere.

Day 4-Joshua 8:1-29

From Marty Machowski¹⁶: “If you have ever been caught in a sudden storm without an umbrella, you know that there is no way to stay dry unless you run for cover. But if you are in the middle of

¹⁵ Marty Machowski, Long Story Short p 301

¹⁶ Marty Machowski, Long Story Short p 302

a field with nowhere to go, there is no protection for you and you get soaked. That's kind of what happened to the people of Ai. All of Ai was lured out into the open wilderness beyond the protection of the city walls. After setting the city on fire, the men of Israel attacked from all sides, and the army of Ai had nowhere to run. Israel defeated Ai with the Lord's help. God allowed the first attack on Ai to fail because Achan had stolen the devoted things. But this time God was with Israel in battle, and no army can defeat Israel with God on their side."

God continues to show Israel and us that He is our Sovereign, ruling and reigning over all the events on this earth. And that He is powerful, able to defeat any enemy. Truly, "if God is for us, who can be against us?" (Rom 8:31). Hebrews reminds us that, "we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who have faith and reserve their souls" (Hebrews 10:39). Where are you tempted to shrink back today? Confess those places of unbelief to God, then meditate on His great power through Psalm 116.

Day 5-Jeremiah 33:14-15

In our reading today we encounter one of the more obscure references to Jesus. He is the Branch of Jesse. We know that He is the King who established for all eternity the throne of David, his great, great great, etc. grandfather. We know that Jesus is the one who will bring justice and righteousness to the earth. This idea caused me to ask two questions of the text: What else is prophesied about this Branch? Where in the New Testament do we see it confirmed that this Branch is indeed Jesus?

First, I looked for any other references to the Branch in the Old Testament. You can do this through a Bible study website like biblehub.com or biblegateway.com. In the concordance, I found several other references to the Branch: Jeremiah 23:5, Isaiah 4:2, Isaiah 11:1-5, Zechariah 3:8, and Zechariah 6:12-13. Take some time today to read the beautiful picture of Christ that emerges just

from studying this one title. Maybe even take a few moments to make a list of the characteristics of the Branch of Jesse.

Next, I began to search the cross references on the website to see if there were any New Testament references. I couldn't find any New Testament verses so I did an internet search on the "Branch of David." I read a blog on a site called "Israel Bible Center" about the Branch of David. This site refers to Matthew 2:2 which says that Jesus and His family would come from the town of Nazareth in order to fulfill the prophecy of the prophets. The problem, however, is that no clear prophecy mentions Jesus coming from Nazareth. The author, Dr, Noel Rabinowitz refers to Isaiah 11:1 which uses the word "netzer" meaning "branch." He writes, "But what does "Nazareth" or "Nazarene" have to with נֶצֶר (netzer) – "the branch"? Although the name seems so familiar to us, "Nazareth" should actually be spelled "Natzaret." The English spelling is a transliteration of the Greek word Ναζαρέτ (nazaret), which is itself a transliteration of the Hebrew word נֶצֶרֶת (natzeret). The Greek alphabet does not have a letter which would correspond to Hebrew letter צ – Tzadeh and uses the letter called Zeta – ζ or "z", instead."¹⁷

Rabinowitz informs us that after the exile, some of the Hebrew people established the town and named it "Natzaret" because God preserved the "branch," the royal line of the Messiah. Matthew recognized that Jesus is the "Natzaret," the branch, the Messiah from the royal line of David.

I loved seeing how just by using a few simple tools readily available on my computer I could answer the questions I had from our Bible reading today. Maybe you spend a few minutes on one of the two sites I recommended so that the next time you have questions you are ready to jump in and do some research.

¹⁷ From Israel Bible Weekly, Neil Rabinowitz,
<https://weekly.israelbiblecenter.com/a-branch-from-david/>

Week 46: GOD CALLS GIDEON

This week we skip over the rest of the conquest of Canaan and the death of Joshua and we jump into the time of the Judges.

When God gave the Israelites the Promised Land, He asked them to do one thing: “But of the cities of the people which the Lord your God gives you as an inheritance, you shall let nothing that breathes remain alive, but you shall utterly destroy them...lest they teach you to do according to all their abominations which they have done for their gods, and you sin against the Lord your God.” Deuteronomy 20:16-18

Israel did not obey God’s command and as a result, they were frequently drawn into the pagan culture and idolatry in Canaan. That sin caused spiritual and moral decline and God responded by allowing neighboring nations to defeat Israel and take them captive. Under this oppressive rule, Israel would cry out to God for deliverance and God would send leaders (judges) to save them. Unfortunately, as soon as these judges died, the people would forget God and repeat the cycle again.

Day 1-Judges 6:1-10

The Israelites have fallen into sin again. They did not learn their lesson through the oppression of other nations and the deliverance from God through Othniel, Ehud, Shamgar, Deborah and Barak. So, the Lord allowed the Midianites to attack them and take their crops and animals. The Midianites were a nomadic tribe so they did not take the people of Israel captive. However, each time the Israelites would replant and rebuild their flocks, the Midianites along with the Amalekites would once again plunder all of Israel’s possessions. They oppressed the Israelites by continually impoverishing them. When the people of Israel cried out to the Lord for help, He sent a prophet to speak to remind them that they did not obey His voice.

I would like to say that I am different from the people of Israel, that in times of peace or ease, I stay close to God and honor His ways. However, I find that I, too, stray from the Lord when things are easy and I come running back to Him the minute things get hard. I wish this was not the pattern of my life, but I am grateful that God uses trials and suffering to call me back to Himself. CS Lewis observed, “Pain insists upon being attended to. God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our consciences, but shouts in our pains. It is His megaphone to rouse a deaf world.”

Scripture assures us that, as believers, our trials are not a punishment for our sin because that punishment was poured out on Jesus at the cross (Romans 4:25). God does discipline those He loves (Hebrews 12:6). However, not all of our trials are a result of our sin. Some trials are just the result of life in a fallen and sinful world. We can know for sure that God promises all of our suffering is working to draw us to Himself and to make us more like His Son, Jesus.

How has suffering drawn you back to God? How has it shaped you to better reflect Jesus to others? A few weeks ago, we talked about building altars of remembrance. Take some time today to build some altars of the places where God allowed hardship to draw you close and make you more like Him.

Day 2-Judges 6:11-16

One of the reasons I love the book of Judges is the theme of God using the weak, the lowly, the unexpected. Such is the case with Gideon. When God’s angel came to Gideon he was threshing wheat inside of a winepress so that the Midianites would not see him and take his harvest. Even Gideon was aware that he came from the weakest clan and of his clan he was the least of all. But God was not choosing Gideon because he was strong or brave or powerful. He chose Gideon to display His power through him.

God promised Gideon He would be with him and He would defeat the Midianites for him and for Israel.

God delights in using those who feel weak and inadequate. He called Abraham who repeatedly lied because he was afraid of a foreign king's displeasure (Genesis 12 and 20). He called Moses to confront Pharaoh even though he stuttered and begged God to find someone else (Exodus 3-4). He called Jereimiah who admitted, "I do not know how to speak" (Jer 1:6). He called twelve men to follow Him who were deemed by others as being inadequate due to occupation, education, or status.

Although I know God uses our weaknesses even more than our strengths I still resist embracing my limitations. In my twelve year struggle with chronic pain the hardest thing for me to do was admit that I couldn't do something. I wanted others to see me as capable and dependable. Yet, God continues to remind us, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." So that we may respond to His great grace as Paul did, "Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me. For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong" (2 Cor 12: 9-10). Praise God for your weaknesses, limitations, and inadequacies today and let them push you to greater dependence on Him.

Day 3-Judges 6:17-24

Although the Lord promised to deliver the Midianites into Gideon's hand, Gideon was not convinced that God was really speaking to him. He asked God for a sign to confirm that God was really talking to him. Gideon took God an offering of food and God consumed that offering with fire. At that point, Gideon realized with shock and fear that it was God who was speaking to

him. God comforts Gideon and asks Gideon to build an altar to “the Lord is Peace.”

So often I think of peace as a quiet day by the ocean, warmed by the sun and relaxed by the crashing of the waves, free from conflict or difficulties. Ann Voskamp reminds us, “peace isn’t a place you have to find or make, or get to...peace is a person... God’s purposes are not so much for us to understand His plans; His plan is for us to understand who He is. And He is our Peace.” When I can grasp the idea that Peace is a Person, everything changes. I pursue peace not by pursuing a change in my circumstances but by pursuing Christ. I experience peace not by experiencing quiet and calm but by experiencing God in His word, in prayer, and in fellowship with others.

What is truly disturbing your peace today? Is it the conflict in your family, the pain in your body, the difficulty in your job? Or is your peace disturbed because you have looked for peace in places and not in the Person of Jesus Christ?

Day 4-Judges 6:25-40

God commanded Gideon to tear down the altar to the false god, Baal. Gideon was still afraid, but he did the job, at night so no one would see him. The men of the town were angry but Gideon’s father turned them away by challenging them to let Baal take his revenge if indeed he was real. Now Gideon had to lead the Israelites to fight the Midianites, the Amalekites, and the people of the east. Gideon once again asks God for a sign that He is truly with him. He lays out a fleece of wool asking God to make it first dry and then wet.

It’s easy to laugh at Gideon’s anxieties from the safe distance of knowing the end of the story. I imagine if we take more than just a minute or two we can look back at our own anxieties and see how silly they were in the light of the outcome. But what do we do

with the anxieties we are facing here and now, the ones that loom large and dark as we lie awake in the middle of the night?

Let's ask our question; what is God revealing about Himself and His ways in this story with Gideon. What comes to my mind is that God is showing Himself to be patient and gentle with Gideon. He patiently allows Gideon to come to Him with his fears and anxieties and He gently meets Gideon's requests for assurance of His love for Gideon. God continues to entreat us to come to Him with our anxieties. Look at 1 Peter 5:7. God calls us to cast our cares on Him. Like the net that Peter would have thrown on the water to capture fish, we can become entangled in our own worries and cares or we can go to the Father and throw the net of our anxieties on Him. He calls us to entangle Him in our cares! Why would He do that? The rest of the verse says it is because He cares for us! Because He is a patient and gentle God. Spend a few moments casting your cares on Him today and thanking Him for being entangled by what worries you.

Day 5-Jeremiah 33:16

From Marty Machowski¹⁸: Last week we learned that this part of Jeremiah's prophecy talked about Jesus as the righteous Branch. In today's reading Jeremiah says Jesus is our Righteousness. Remember, righteousness is goodness. That is important because as sinners we have lost our goodness or righteousness, and it is the very thing we need to be able to go to heaven and live with God.

This is why Jeremiah's prophecy is good news. God is promising He will give us, His people, who are sinner His righteousness so we can go to heaven. Now we know from reading the story of Jesus that the way God gave us His righteousness was by sending Jesus to live a perfect life on the earth in our place. Then Jesus traded with us. He took our sins and gave us His perfect life, His spotless record.

¹⁸ Marty Machowski, Long Story Short p 310

In Christ, God pours out His goodness on us. Jen Wilkins writes, “Not only is God infinitely good, but He is immutably good, unchangingly good. His goodness undergoes no increase or decline, nor does it waver. In Him there is no darkness at all, nor has there ever been, nor will there ever be. He is good and He does good. There is no better version of Him to come, no progress from good to better to best for Him. God’s goodness is His utter benevolence, the complete absence of malice. God does not, cannot, and need not improve with age. He is as good as He ever has been or will ever be. Perfectly good. Utterly good.”¹⁹”

And because God has poured out that goodness on us in Christ, we should be people who persist in doing good to others, generously and without expectation of repayment. How can you show the world the goodness of God today by doing good to those around you?

¹⁹ Jen Wilkin, In His Image, p 47

WEEK 47 GIDEON'S VICTORY

Day 1-Judges 7:1-8

From Marty Machowski: “When the Bible mentions tens of thousands of people, it can be hard to imagine how many people that is. To make it easier to understand, think about it this way. When Gideon called the men of Israel to fight so many men answered his call that you could have filled a whole baseball stadium with them. With such a large army, the Israelites would think they had won the battle by their own strength, without God’s help. But God wanted them to know He was the One who brought the victory in the battle. So He told Gideon to send most of them home. That way, all Israel would know that their victory came because of God’s strength, not because of the size of their army.”

Our God delights in doing the unexpected, in showing His power and goodness to us when we don’t see a way forward. In my own life, I have seen God provide for our company when it seemed like we could not go on. Yet, even though we have seen God work in amazing ways when we face the next trial we are tempted to doubt Him again. Like us, the Israelites would forget God searching for deliverance from other things, but God would call them back through prophets like Isaiah. “Woe to those who go down to Egypt for help and rely on horses, who trust in chariots because they are many and in horsemen because they are very strong, but do not look to the Holy One of Israel or consult the LORD!” Are horses or chariots evil? No, in ancient times they were a sign of wealth and power. Like David, we must remind ourselves, “some trust in chariots, and some in horses, but we trust in the name of the Lord our God (Psalm 20:7).” Spend some time today confessing those “horses and chariots” you place your trust in and ask the Lord to help you place your trust fully in Him.

Day 2- Judges 7: 9-15

From Marty Machowski: “Now, it is easy to say you are going to defeat a whole army with only 300 men, but imagine what Gideon thought when he saw how large the Midianite army was. There were so many soldiers that it looked like a swarm of locusts—way too many soldiers to even count. Gideon was probably thinking that he needed all the men God sent home. Even though God called him and had answered Gideon’s prayer about the fleece, Gideon still did not trust God. But instead of leaving Gideon, God helped his weak faith again. God sent him to spy on the enemy and hear what they were saying. God was already planning to defeat the enemy, and He knew how to encourage Gideon for the fight. After hearing the fearful soldiers talk, Gideon finally realized God would help him.” When Gideon received this confirmation from the Lord, he worshipped God and went back to the camp to rally his soldiers.

The first two times, God used some extraordinary means to reveal Himself to Gideon, but this time He used the ordinary means of a dream and an overheard conversation to put fear in the hearts of the Midianites and courage in the hearts of the Israelites.

When I am facing difficult circumstances, I am often looking for God to act in miraculous ways, but most often, He reveals His faithfulness to us through ordinary means. George Muller started some of the first orphanages in England, caring for over 10,000 orphans in his lifetime. What makes this even more amazing is that Muller was convicted that he would never ask for money for the orphans and he never went into debt. He simply went to the Lord in prayer and asked Him for the provision he needed. In one famous incident, Muller and the orphans were sitting at the breakfast table thanking God for their food when there was none in the house. As they finished praying the baker knocked on the door with enough bread for everyone, and the milkman donated all the milk in his cart because it broke down in front of the orphanage. God has given us a great cloud of witnesses who have experienced His faithful provision firsthand. When you find yourself

discouraged and weak in your faith, pick up a Christina biography and re-member yourself with the awe of God’s work on behalf of His people. (One of my favorite resources of Christian biography is John Piper’s biographical sermons on his website desiringgod.org.)

Day 3-Judges 8:22-35

From Marty Machowski²⁰: “Not long after the battle, Gideon fell into sin. Although Gideon told the people that God should be their king, Gideon asked the people to bring him an offering of gold. Gideon also took many wives, like the pagan kings of his day would do. Gideon made a golden ephod (a vest-like jacket or breastplate) from the gold that the people gave him and he put it up in his own city for everyone to see. Now the priests of Israel were the ones God said should wear a golden ephod to show their special position. So Gideon's ephod confused and distracted the people from their worship of God. Instead of paying attention to God, they all came to look at Gideon's ephod.”

The ephod was used by the priests to seek guidance from God. Throughout Gideon’s story we see God give grace to Gideon by giving him guidance when he was afraid. Now we see Gideon become ensnared by the idea of guidance as he glorifies the ephod instead of the God who gave him that guidance. How often do we take God’s gracious gifts and turn them into another opportunity for our hearts to idolize something other than Him? Like Gideon, we take His good gifts like children, jobs, friendships, and more and begin to treat them as ultimate gifts by placing our trust in them to provide security, identity, or belonging.

But thanks be to God! There is another Gideon who, although He had every good gift at His disposal, gave up those gifts to enter into our world as a man. When He was tempted by Satan in the wilderness to regain His rights (“if you are the Son of

²⁰ Marty Machowski, Long Story Short p 315

God”...Matthew 4:1-11), Jesus did not yield to the temptation. He remained sinless so that He could be the spotless sacrifice for our sins and give us His perfect record before God. Take some time today to read of Jesus’ temptation in the wilderness (Matthew 4), thanking Jesus for His sacrifice for us and confessing those gifts from God you have grown to worship instead of Him.

Day 4-Judges 7:15-25

My husband doesn’t travel often overnight, but on the occasion that he does I am always surprised at how the noises of my house are magnified when I am alone. I hear the ice maker fill up or the air conditioner kick on and I am in fight or flight mode. And let’s don’t even talk about what happens if the dog starts to bark and run outside. I feel real sympathy for the Midianites who heard Gideon’s men break their jars and sound their trumpets in the middle of the night. I can understand the panic which caused them to fight one another until Gideon and the army of only 300 Israelite men defeated them.

So often people say, “God won’t give you more than you can handle.” But is that true? God certainly gave Gideon more than he could handle. He asked Gideon to overcome his own fears and insecurities, to tear down the altars of foreign gods among his own people, and to take only 300 men into battle against an entire nation. All of this was more than Gideon could handle, without God. God gives us more than we can handle “to make us rely not on ourselves but on God who raised the dead” (2 Corinthians 1:9). We need to embrace a new idea, “God won’t give you more than you can handle WITHOUT HIM!”

What has God put before you today that seems overwhelming or even impossible? Is it your failing marriage, your wayward child, a scary diagnosis, your dwindling bank account? Just as He was with Gideon, our God is with you. Take a few minutes to read Psalm 121 and write it out as a prayer about your personal

struggle. Then ask the Lord to open your eyes to the unexpected ways that He is sending His help your way today.

Day 5-Jeremiah 3:17

From Marty Machowski²¹: “In today’s verse, God promised Israel through Jeremiah that they would always have a king on the throne of David. Hundreds of years later, the people of Jesus’ day remembered what Jeremiah said. They knew that Jesus was born in the family line of David, and they saw that he was a great teacher and had power to perform miracles. That is why some of them wanted to make Jesus their king. But they didn’t realize that Jesus had a different plan. They were right to think of Jesus as the king Jeremiah talked about, but Jesus didn’t come to sit on a throne here on earth. Jesus came to defeat sin and death, and then to sit on a throne in heaven where He would rule over God’s people forever, just as Jeremiah said would happen.”

Jesus is the King whether we acknowledge Him as King or not. As King, He has the rightful authority over your life. Since the Garden of Eden, Satan has been tempting God’s people to question God’s right to rule in our lives:

- First, Satan seduced Eve to doubt God with a simple question “*Did God actually say, ‘You shall not eat of any tree in the garden?’*” **How has Satan tempted you to doubt God’s Word?**
- Second, Satan minimized the consequences of sin. He assured Eve, “*You will not surely die.*” **How has Satan tempted you to believe the consequences of sin would be marginal or nonexistent?**
- Third, Satan impugned God’s motive. “*God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.*” **How has Satan**

²¹ Marty Machowski, Long Story Short p 318

tempted you to believe God was withholding something good from you or not protecting you?

- Finally, Satan appealed to Eve's autonomy, "*You will be like God.*" **How has Satan tempted you to be your own ruler, leading you to believe you can trust yourself better than you can trust God?**²²

Jesus is the rightful King of our world and of your heart. Confess the ways you are tempted to believe Satan's lies which undermine God's rule in your life. Then worship the King with a praise song or hymn that celebrates His rule over all the earth.

²² Adapted from Beginnings by Brenda Payne and Alex Kocher

WEEK 48 GOD GIVES SAMSON STRENGTH

When we read the book of Judges, we see a familiar cycle repeats throughout the book---God's people are in distress; God sends a leader or a judge to deliver them; the people obey for a season and then fall into their old sin patterns; God disciplines them; and the cycle begins again. The story of Samson begins the same. **Judges 13:1** opens with the familiar refrain, "*And the people of Israel again did what was evil in the sight of the LORD, so the LORD gave them into the hand of the Philistines for forty years.*" In this week's reading, we see that even before the Israelites cry out for a judge, God is preparing one. In the story of Samson, we see the flaws of God's people--both then and now--but we also see hints of the perfect Judge and Savior to come.

Day 1-Read Judges 13:1-5

The story of Samson opens as God appears as an angel of the Lord to the wife of a man named Manoah. This woman cannot have children. But God promises her that she will have a son, and that this son will begin to save Israel from the Philistines. We see that God has already begun to act to save His people. Samson is the only judge that was chosen by God before he was born or even conceived. The angel then tells the woman she must not drink wine or strong drink or eat any unclean food or cut the baby's hair because the baby is to be a Nazarite from the womb. We can read more about what the Nazarite vow entails in **Numbers 6**.

If you've been reading with us, this scene may seem a bit familiar. God often worked through a child whose conception and birth seemed impossible in order to fulfill His promise to His people. God gave a promised son Isaac to Abram and Sarai when they were advanced in years (**Genesis 17: 15-19**). God opened Isaac's wife Rebekah's womb and gave her Jacob and Esau (**Genesis 25: 21**). God gave Jacob's barren wife Rachel a son in Joseph (**Genesis 30: 22-24**). The prophet Samuel was born to a barren Hannah (1

Samuel 1: 1-20). John the Baptist was born to aged and childless parents Elizabeth and Zechariah (**Luke 1: 5-24**), who are also instructed that their son will not drink because he too has been given an important assignment from the womb.

Culturally, women's value to their family and society came from their ability to bear children, specifically sons. Consequently, there was--and often still is--much shame and disappointment associated with infertility. Samson's birth demonstrated God's mercy not only toward Israel, but also personally toward Samson's mother. God took her shame and disappointment of barrenness and replaced it with honor and joy. He did the same for Sarai, Rebekah, Rachel, Hannah and Elizabeth. However, all of this merely points us to Jesus' birth to a teenage virgin mother Mary--a birth which brought shame and scandal, so that he could bring the ultimate victory over shame, death, and sin. Samson and the others gained honor and glory in order to save God's people. Jesus gave up his honor and glory in order to save God's people. As we read Samson's story, we will see that Samson temporarily saves Israel from the Philistines. In verse 5, the angel tells Samson's mother that "he shall *begin* to save Israel from the hand of the Philistines." King David will complete the victory over the Philistines (**1 Samuel 16: 1-13**). But neither of these men could bring the ultimate victory over shame, death, and sin. Only Jesus could do that.

Day 2-Read Judges 13:6-18

Manoah and his wife demonstrate a strong faith in God and in His promise to them. We don't see in the passage any hesitation or questioning from them. When Sarai is told that she will have Isaac, she laughs (Genesis 18: 9-15). When Zechariah is told that Elizabeth will give birth to John the Baptist, he questions (Luke 1: 18-20). After hearing about the promise God made to his wife, Manoah asks God to send the messenger again; not because he doesn't believe his promise, but because he wants to ask for more

information. Manoah asks God to send the “man of God” again so that he will teach them what to do with the child. Who of us who are parents haven’t asked God the same--”what shall I do with this child?” The Lord grants Manoah’s request and the angel to return, but Manoah doesn’t understand that the “man of God” is an angel. Manoah asks the angel his questions of how to raise the child, but the angel only answers by repeating the instructions of following the Nazarite vows.

It’s so easy for us to approach God similarly. How often we just want God to show us the future or tell us how to handle a certain issue. How many times do we think, “I wish God would just write me a message in the sky so it would be clear what I should do here.” Manoah must have felt the same way. He even tried to bargain with the angel. He offered him food which the angel refused and suggested that Manoah offer the food as a burnt offering to the Lord. We often do the same--trying to bargain or barter with God in exchange for direction or answers. Finally, Manoah even asks the angel for his name so they could honor him, and the angel replies that his name is too wonderful to comprehend.

Manoah and his wife make the same mistake that we make so often, and God’s message for them is a message to us. We think we need rules, but we need to know God. We can become so wrapped up in getting the perfect plan together that we miss the Person of Christ. We can become so focused on right results that we miss the relationship that Christ died to give us. Christ doesn’t just give us marching orders and leave us to work the plan because God knows that we can’t fulfill it. God gave us the law so that we can see our true nature and our inability to measure up. Christ then came and fulfilled the law on our behalf so that we can be fully reconciled and have fellowship with God. He gives us something much better than a guidebook for living---He gives us Himself and that is what makes His name too wonderful to comprehend.

Day 3 CONNECT TO JESUS-Read Judges 13:19-25

In today's passage, we see Manoah take the goat and grain that he had planned to feed to the "man of God" but the Lord asks him to make it a burnt offering instead to the Lord, to the one who works wonders. Then as Manoah and his wife watched, God burned up the offering in a blaze of fire and the angel of the Lord went up in the flame of the altar. As soon as God burned up the offering, Manoah realized that it was God and not a man who had visited them, and he was afraid that they would die. Manoah seemed to understand enough of Israel's history to know that no one could see God's face and live (Exodus 33:20). But while Manoah panics, his wife remains calm and reassures him that if God had intended to kill them, He would not have accepted their sacrifices or promised them a son. Samson's birth is never in doubt because it was based on God's promise. Samson is born, fulfilling God's promise to Manoah and his wife and providing a deliverer from the Philistines for Israel.

Ordinarily, Jewish worshippers had to bring their sacrifices and offerings to the tabernacle temple in Shiloh, but since the "man of God" commanded Manoah to offer the burnt offering, a rock altar served as an unconventional but acceptable sacrifice. This points us toward another unconventional but perfectly acceptable sacrifice--the sacrifice of Christ Himself. When speaking of the incomplete nature of the sacrifices under the Mosaic law, **Hebrews 9: 9-14** remind us: *"According to this arrangement, gifts and sacrifices are offered that cannot perfect the conscience of the worshiper, but deal only with food and drink and various washings, regulations for the body imposed until the time of reformation. But when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things that have come, then through the greater and more perfect tent (not made with hands, that is, not of this creation) he entered once for all into the holy places, not by means of the blood of goats and calves but by means of his own blood, thus securing an eternal*

redemption. For if the blood of goats and bulls, and the sprinkling of defiled persons with the ashes of a heifer, sanctify for the purification of the flesh, how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience from dead works to serve the living God.” While God was working wonders in Manoah’s family and in Israel’s history, creating a deliverer for His people, He was pointing to the ultimate Deliverer to come through the sacrifice of Christ.

Day 4-Read Judges 14:1-9

Our story picks up years later, and Samson has not grown up into a godly young man.

He is proud and disrespectful to his parents. He is demanding when he speaks to them about

the young Philistine woman that he wants for his wife. He dismisses his parents’ warnings against taking a wife from the Philistines. We see that he is impulsive and willing to compromise what he knows is right in order to get what he wants now. As the story proceeds, we will continue to see Samson being controlled by his impulsive desire for pleasure, specifically sexual pleasure. In his compromise, he exemplifies what we see the people of Israel doing. Chapter 13 opened by reminding us of the cycle of the people of Israel doing “*what was evil in the sight of the Lord*”.

Now we hear Samson defend his choice of a Philistine wife because “she is right in my eyes” (**Judges 14:3**). We learn that he touches the dead body of a lion, which violates his vow as a Nazirite. We see that he throws a feast which likely would have included alcohol, also a violation of the Nazirite vow. And as we read on in the story, we will see other things that reveal Samson’s pride, his impulsiveness, his compulsion to seek pleasure, and his willingness to compromise his standards.

Throughout this cycle of judges, the Israelites have repeatedly cried out to the Lord for deliverance from their oppression, but this time we don't see that. In previous times, nations have oppressed them militarily or politically, but this time the Philistines seem to be ruling over them peacefully. The Israelites aren't begging God to rescue them this time because like Samson, they have compromised their identity for comfort. They have gradually assimilated into the Philistine culture, accepting the Philistine way of life and their idols. The Israelites are indistinguishable from those around them. In his book, *The Message of Judges*, Michael Wilcock says, "There is no such thing as harmonious coexistence between the church and the world, for where there is no conflict it is because the world has taken over." (p. 142) God delivered His people from the Philistines and from themselves, and he worked through Samson and in spite of Samson to do so. And there would be conflict.

But even Samson's sinful life can't stop God's plan to deliver his people from the Philistines. God is always faithful to us, even when we are not faithful to him. Samson's life demonstrates the frailty of earthly deliverers. Samson became foolishly distracted with the pleasures and desires of the world. He fell prey to the same things we fall prey to and are warned about in **1 John 2:15-17** "*Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world—the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride of life—is not from the Father but is from the world. And the world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever.*" But Jesus would be the Ultimate Deliverer because He faced the same temptations that Samson faced and that we face, yet Jesus did not fall into sin (**Hebrews 4:15**). He lived the perfect life that we can't live so that we could live abundantly and eternally with Him.

Day 5-Read Jeremiah 33:18 and Hebrews 7:23-25

Last week, we read that Jeremiah prophesied that Jesus would serve as king of Israel forever. The next verse in that passage, **Jeremiah 33:18** says that “*and the Levitical priests shall never lack a man in my presence to offer burnt offerings, to burn grain offerings, and to make sacrifices forever*”. God is promising that there will always be a priest to offer sacrifices for the people.

When God gave the Mosaic law, He said that whenever the people sinned and deserved to be punished, they should bring a lamb to the priest for him to kill. The priest would offer a sacrifice up to God to make a payment for their sin. The lamb would be killed in their place. Therefore, it was imperative for a priest to always be available, so that forgiveness of sin would also be available.

Hebrews 9:22 reminds us that “*Indeed, under the law almost everything is purified with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins.*” God isn’t promising that a man **from** the Levitical priests will serve forever, as the Levitical priests had served. He is promising that a man will serve **for** the Levitical priests in the order of Melchizedek (**Hebrews 5:6**) and that man comes in the person of Jesus Christ

The book of Hebrews compares Jesus to the Levitical priests, “*The former priests were many in number, because they were prevented by death from continuing in office, but he holds his priesthood permanently, because he continues forever. Consequently, he is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them.*” The Levitical priests served for a lifetime but that was still finite. Jesus serves forever, constantly praying for the sins of His people. Jesus not only became the permanent priest for all of us, but he also became the perfect sacrifice. Jesus is both the priest who offers up the sacrifice and the lamb who died in our place.

WEEK 49 SAMSON LOSES HIS STRENGTH

Chapter 15 of Judges reads like a modern movie--betrayal, revenge, and our protagonist remains true to his character of impulsive, pleasure-seeking, and prideful. Samson returns to visit his wife, at least what he thought was his wife. However, his would-be-father-in-law won't allow him to see his "wife" because he's already given her away to Samson's friend. He does this because he believes Samson is upset that she gave up his riddle to those men at their wedding feast. Samson is angry so he sets the Philistines vineyards on fire as the repayment. The Philistines are upset about this, so they burn his ex-wife and her father's household as well, to death. Samson breaks the hips and thighs of a bunch of them for their infraction. The Philistines then invade Judah looking for Samson and tell the men of Judah they came to bind Samson. The men of Judah ask Samson to turn himself in. Samson agrees as long as Judah doesn't attempt to kill him. The Philistines mean to kill him, but the Spirit of the Lord comes upon Samson, and he takes a jawbone of a donkey and kills a thousand men with it. By this time in the story Samson has performed great feats of strength. He has defeated the Philistines and now rules over Israel. But he has become very proud of his strength, and very confident in himself.

Day 1-Read Judges 16:4-14

The Philistines are tired of being ruled by Samson and they hate him, so the Philistines offer Delilah a huge amount of money if she will betray Samson. Three times Delilah asks Samson to tell her the secret of his strength. In lying to her each time, Samson is basically showing off. He likes talking about his own strength. Samson does not learn his lesson. Even though Delilah tricks him repeatedly and turns him over to the Philistines over and over again, Samson continues to stay and play the game because he considers himself invincible. Samson is risking not only his own safety, but the safety of all Israel. His pride causes him to behave

foolishly. Samson isn't trusting God to help him, but he is trusting in his own strength and power. God has given him that strength to save Israel, not to play games with Delilah. Pride always turns us into fools.

It's easy to look at Samson and see the foolishness of his pride, but it is so much harder to see it in ourselves. We were hardwired to seek glory, but not our own--God's. The whole world points to God's glory, but we so often become more enthralled in the creation than the Creator. Paul Tripp calls us "glory thieves". Nothing but God ever truly satisfies our hearts, but we continually chase after glory in all the wrong places--achievement, approval, comfort, control. Paul Tripp says, "We demand to be in the center of our world. We take credit for what only God could produce. We want to be sovereign. We want others to worship us. We establish our own kingdom and punish those who break our laws. We tell ourselves that we're entitled to what we don't deserve, and we complain when we don't get whatever it is that we want. It's a glory disaster...Jesus willingly came on a glory rescue mission, and because he did, there's hope for us. When we admit to our glory thievery and when we cry out for help for our dysfunction, we can finally be free from the never-satisfying quest for worldly glory and live forever in the light of the satisfying glory of God. (The Doctrine of Glory, www.paultripp.com)" Samson had glory dysfunction. We have glory dysfunction. God alone is ultimate in glory, and He alone deserves our glory.

Day 2-Read Judges 16:15-22

Samson is not only very proud, he also delights in women more than in the Lord. Ironically, God uses a woman to bring about his downfall. Samson craves Delilah's affection and attention and, as a result, behaves foolishly. Even when she keeps trying to tie him up, he never stops cooperating. After her first three betrayals, he stays with her several more days or even weeks. Finally, her

persistent questions wear him out. As a result of his foolishness, Samson is blinded and thrown in jail.

Samson and Delilah have a mutually destructive relationship. In his book The Four Loves, C. S. Lewis reminds us unless you have some experience of God's love that fulfills your deepest needs, you will use others to promote yourself or prove yourself. (p. 21) Samson and Delilah clearly use one another to get what they want, instead of serving one another in love. In spite of Samson's calling and vows, he is so consumed with himself that he has no room for a love for God. He has become so consumed with himself, that he appears to have forgotten the source of his strength or that God has given him this supernatural strength in order to deliver Israel, not to play games with Delilah. Even after his hair is gone, he says in verse 20, *"I'll go out as before"*. No matter how many times he has broken his vows, God has continued to give him strength so at some point Samson began to believe that the strength was his. No matter what he did or how he lived, Samson believes that he would not lose his strength. The most frightening verse in the passage is the end of verse 20: *"But he did not know that the Lord had left him."* Samson didn't know that the Lord had left him because Samson had been used by God, but he had thus far not been changed by God. What threatens to distract us so that if the Lord left us, we might not notice?

Day 3-CONNECT TO JESUS-Read Judges 16:23-31

As the Philistines gathered to celebrate their victory over Samson, and also their god Dagon's victory over the God of the Israelites, they brought Samson out to mock him and his God. In verse 26, we see the first record in Scripture of Samson calling upon the Lord. In his betrayal, blinding, and binding, Samson has been humbled. He remembers the Source of his strength was never his hair, but his God. He cries out to the Lord to remember him and strengthen him one last time so that he can enact revenge on the Philistines. In his last act, God strengthens him once more and

Samson brings down the house, killing himself and all of the Philistines inside. In Samson's death, God accomplishes his calling for Samson's life--delivering the Israelites from the hand of the Philistines.

In Samson's death, we see a shadow of Jesus. Jesus comes to bring the ultimate defeat to the enemy and deliverance for God's people. Like Samson, Jesus is betrayed by someone he loves for money, but unlike Samson, Jesus stands trial innocent of all charges. Like Samson, Jesus is turned over into the hands of his enemies. Unlike Samson, Jesus dies not to avenge the sins of his enemies, but to forgive the sins of his enemies. Samson comes as the temporary deliverer for Israel, but Jesus comes to deliver God's people from sin and death once and for all.

Day 4-Read Hebrews 11:32-12:3

Hebrews 11 is often referred to as the Faith Hall of Fame. When we read the story of Samson, he doesn't seem like a hero of the faith. In spite of God choosing Him to deliver Israel from the Philistines before he was even born, Samson proved time and time again that he was a puffed up, selfish pleasure-seeker. He used his God-given strength to show off and win the affection of women. He seemed to thumb his nose at most of his Nazarite vows. Yet Hebrews 11:32-33 tells us that Samson is listed among men who "through faith conquered kingdoms". Verses 39-40 tells us that the Old Testament heroes had only a preliminary glimpse of what God promised but by faith anticipated a future Messiah.

In Samson's life and death, we see that this imperfect deliverer is made righteous by the perfect Deliverer--Jesus. As we look back on what Jesus has done, Samson looked forward to what Jesus would do and he is defined now by that faith, and not by his failures. This gives us hope. Like Samson, we are not defined by our sin and our failures. Because Jesus comes and lives the life that

Samson could not live, and that we could not live. He comes and fulfills the law perfectly and dies the death that we deserve and rises again to defeat sin and death. Jesus becomes the Deliverer that we didn't ask for but that we so desperately need.

In what ways do you identify with Samson? Are there areas of your life where you have become content with your sin, like the Israelites? What is the thing for which you would sacrifice everything else for? Do you believe that because of the work of Christ, God characterizes your life as one of faith and not failure?

Day 5-Read Ezekial 34:20-24 and John 10:14-15

Long before Jesus was born, the prophet Ezekial foretold of a Deliverer who would come from the line of David. He described him as a Shepherd who would feed, guide, and protect God's people from harm.

From Marty Machowski: But Ezekial never mentioned who the shepherd was. It is not until Jesus explained that he was the Good Shepherd that Israel learned who Ezekiel was talking about. Jesus was the lone who laid down his life for God's sheep, the people of God. Jesus was the shepherd born into the family of David whom Ezekiel had prophesied about. If we trust in Jesus, we become a part of his flock too.²³

The story of Samson is encouraging because even when gifted with superhuman strength, Samson is still self-centered and prideful. So are we. But this Ezekial passage reminds us that Jesus comes not with superhuman strength but with superhuman gentleness--a restrained strength. Jesus comes not with selfishness, but with selflessness, He lays down His life for his sheep. In the end, Samson loses the power to save himself. Jesus willingly gives up the power to save Himself, making Him the better Deliverer.

²³ Marty Machowski, Long Story Short, p. 331

WEEK 50-RUTH

The account of Ruth takes place during the time of the Judges, around 1300 BC. This book is one of my favorites in all of the Bible. The beauty of God's detailed care for a bitter Jewish woman who lost everything and a young, Gentile widow encourages and comforts me.

Day 1-Ruth 1

Have you ever looked up the meaning of your name? It can be fun to discover what your name means and see if the meaning of your name influences or plays out in your life. In the Jewish culture names have meaning. Right here in Ruth 1, in the opening paragraph, we gain some interesting insight just from the names. If you were to translate the names in the first paragraph of this story, this is how it would read:

In the days when the judges ruled there was a famine in the land, and a man of the "House of Bread" in Judah went to sojourn in the country of "Who's Your Daddy," he and his wife and his two sons. The name of the man was "My God is King" and the name of his wife, "Pleasant," and the name of his two sons were "Weak" and "Frail." They were Ephrathites from the "House of Bread" in Judah. They went into the country of "Who's Your Daddy" and remained there. But "My God is King," the husband of "Pleasant", died, and she was left with her two sons. These took Moabite wives, the name of the one was "Back of the Neck" and the name of the other "Lovely Friend." They lived there about ten years, and both "Weak" and "Frail" died, so that the woman was left without her two sons and her husband.

Can you hear the tone of irony the author is taking? A man whose name is God is King is leaving the House of Bread in order to go

to a country named “Who's your Daddy?” presumably to find food. It seems the intent was only a quick journey to and from Moab, but that journey turned into a remaining and the remaining turned into living there for ten years. In those years both God is King and Frail and Weak died. After this introduction the author tells us that Naomi, “Pleasant,” decides to return from Moab. The Hebrew word “shub” used there can mean return or repent. Many commentators believe Naomi was repenting of their decision to leave for God’s people to find provision from foreign sources.

Naomi urged her daughters-in-law to return to their families. As she did she blessed them and asked the Lord to “deal kindly” or “hesed” them. This Hesed love is the hallmark of the love of God for His people. Throughout the Old Testament “hesed” is often translated loving-kindness. This love is a love that binds you and the object of your love no matter how that person responds. It is a stubborn love rooted in commitment and not just feelings. Ruth chooses not to leave Naomi. She binds herself to Naomi and Naomi’s God. Somewhere, somehow, maybe in Naomi herself, or in the stories she told of her people, Ruth understood the hesed love of Yahweh. She saw His stubborn commitment to lovingly care for them, and she pledged herself to Naomi and to her God.

Have you ever thought of God’s love as stubborn? I know my love for Him is like Elimelech’s, I run to other things to fulfill me at the first sign of trouble. Yet, God stubbornly pursues me even as I forsake Him. Isn’t it amazing to realize it is not my love for God but His love for me that keeps me close to Him? Take some time today to repent of the things you turn outside of the Lord to when things get hard and thank God for the ways He has held onto you when you have run from Him.

Day 2-Ruth 2

Have you ever thought about what makes our favorite stories so good? The most beloved stories are those that follow the pattern of

happy-sad-happy. Cinderella has a wonderful life until her mother dies and her wicked stepmother makes her life miserable. Until one night she meets the prince who is so captivated by her he searches his kingdom until he can find her and marry her.

Happy-Sad-Happy.

One of my favorite Bible studies on the book of Ruth is called A Loving Life. In it, Paul Miller talks about the shape of a gospel story which is not a straight line, but a J-curve. The J-curve of a gospel story is the pattern of life, death, and resurrection or happy-sad-VERY happy. Jesus lived a J-curve life, leaving the glories of heaven to die on the cross in our place and then rise again to eternal glory with the Father. All of this sounds wonderful when we are in the rising part of the J-curve, the upswing to new life. However, most of us have experienced the bottom of the J-curve, the dying. Ruth and Naomi are in this part of the story. Naomi has come back to her hometown, bitter and lonely. Ruth has followed Naomi to an uncertain future. All looks like death and dying. Paul Miller says he has learned several things in the j-curve:

1. “We don’t know how or when resurrection will come. It is God’s work, not ours.
2. We don’t even know what a resurrection will look like. We can’t demand the shape or timing of a resurrection.
3. Like Jesus, we must embrace the death that the Father has put in front of us. The path to resurrection is through dying, not fighting.
4. If we endure, resurrection always comes. God is alive!”²⁴

In Ruth 2:2, Ruth once again willingly chooses to die to herself and serve Naomi by going into the fields to gather what was left over from the harvest. She took the lowest place, even lower than the servants, in order to love Naomi. Just like Jesus, Ruth

²⁴ Paul Miller, A Loving Life, 70

followed the J-curve into death, trusting that God would bring the new life through resurrection.

Read Philippians 2:1-11. Paul is describing Jesus' pathway from life to death to new life. Jesus calls us to follow Him on this J-curve. "As we go downward into death, we are active: active in seeking humility, in taking the lower place, in mindless, hidden serving."²⁵ Are you willing to follow Jesus into the J-curve of death in order to experience the new life that is waiting for you? I know that I shrink back from the thought of dying to myself, dying feels like death. But I know that Jesus is there, having gone before us, and that even in the dying we will fellowship with Him.

Day 3-Ruth 3

One of our family's favorite plays is *Les Miserables* by Victor Hugo. I read the four-inch thick novel when I was in high school. And when our children were only about 8 and 10 years old, my husband walked them through the entire story with the live musical performance. At the time of its closing *Les Mis* was the second longest-running show in Broadway history. In addition to its Broadway success the French novel was also adapted into film several times. Why does our family and so many others love the story of *Les Mis*. I believe it is because it is such an epic story of redemption.

From the opening scenes Jean Valjean, an escaped prisoner, finds refuge in the home of a bishop and his sister. The sister is wary of this vagabond man, but the bishop welcomes Valjean to his home and his table. Jean Valjean steals the bishop's silver candlesticks and is caught by the police. The bishop tells the police he gave Valjean the candlesticks then he entreats Valjean to become an honest man because he says that with those candlesticks he has bought Valjesn's soul for God.

²⁵ Paul Miller, *A Loving Life*, 71

Redemption. Buying back. That is what Ruth chapters 3 and 4 are about. This idea of a “goel” or redeemer seems to be unique to the nation of Israel. A goel, “looks forward to Jesus, the personification of the law, who redeemed his people. As Jesus went around Israel healing the sick, caring for the poor, and including the outsider, he was being the goel that Israel never was.²⁶ Of the 50 usages of the word goel in the OT, 18 refer to God and 32 refer to our redeeming one another. “We have isolated the word redeemer to Jesus’ salvation of us. We correctly think of the spiritual meaning of redeemer, but we neglect the need for everyday redeeming that is crying out all around us. Our lives should reflect the redeeming life of Jesus.”²⁷ How can your life reflect the redeeming love of your Savior and Redeemer today?

Day 4-Ruth 4

From Marty Machowski: “Boaz was not the first person in line to redeem Naomi and marry Ruth. There was another man who was a closer relative who first had to refuse to redeem them before Boaz could marry Ruth. Boaz wanted to marry Ruth, so he reminded the other man that there would be a high cost to buy back their land and redeem them. He told him that if he didn’t want to spend so much money, Boaz would gladly redeem them instead. The other man quickly agreed to allow Boaz to redeem Naomi and Ruth. On the spot, Boaz announced that he would buy Naomi’s field and marry Ruth!”²⁸

Boaz redeemed Ruth, he bought her back from the shame of being a poor, childless widow in a foreign land. He gave her a roof over her head and a place in society. Boaz certainly prefigures Christ in his love for and redemption of Ruth. But some scholars say that it is not only Boaz but also Ruth who foreshadows the sacrificial

²⁶ Paul Miller, *A Loving Life*, 115

²⁷ Paul Miller, *A Loving Life*, 115

²⁸ Marty Machowski, *Long Story Short*, 336

love of Jesus. Ruth fully entered into Naomi's world, sacrificing all that she held dear to accompany and care for Naomi. Then, she served Naomi every morning in the fields gleaning wheat so they would have food. In this final chapter of the book of Ruth we see her sacrificing yet again by giving her son to Naomi.

In his book, *A Loving Life*, Paul Miller describes three levels of helping:

1. Donors love from a distance. They give to help someone else, at little risk.
2. Redeemers (Boaz) love from above. They give but also do *hesed* love. They bind themselves to the person they love, at greater risk.
3. Incarnation-redeemers (Ruth and Jesus) love from the inside. They give their lives at complete risk.²⁹

In sacrificing like this Ruth left a legacy of love. The legacy of this poor Moabite woman extended to her great-grandson, David the great king of Israel and eventually to Jesus, the Great King of all the world. Take some time today to consider how you can incarnate the love of your Redeemer and consider what your legacy of love will look like?

Day 5-Isaiah 54:5-7

From Marty Machowski: "In this passage, Isaiah compared God's people in their sin to a woman who needed a redeemer. He encouraged Israel by saying that the Holy One of Israel would be their redeemer. These words were written for us as well. God would send a redeemer for us, too. We know from reading the Bible that Jesus is the one Isaiah was talking about. Jesus was even called "the Holy One of God" during his ministry. So, long before Jesus was even born, Isaiah foretold a day when Jesus would come as the redeemer of God's people."³⁰

²⁹ Paul Miller, *A Loving Life*, 115

³⁰ Marty Machowski, *Long Story Short*, 337

Read John 6:66-69. Here, Peter reiterates that Jesus is the Holy One of Israel. This is a sad yet comforting passage. Many of His disciples are turning away from Jesus. I shudder to think that if I had lived in His time I might have been one turned away from my only hope of salvation. Jesus turns to the twelve and asks if they too will turn away. Peter, strong willed and earnest Peter, gives an answer that gives me great comfort. “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life, and we have believed, and have come to know, that you are the Holy One of God.” Why does this comfort me? I think it helps me to realize that Peter was acknowledging something that we all feel from time to time. Following Jesus is hard. Life is difficult and we don’t always understand why God would allow trials and tragedies into our lives. Sometimes we don't even understand what it's all about. I think Peter recognizes that sometimes nothing makes sense and the only thing that makes us hold on is that we have nowhere else to go. Only Jesus has words of life. Only Jesus is the Holy One of Israel, our Redeemer. When we don’t have answers, when we don’t have understanding, we have Jesus. And here is the comforting part-Jesus doesn’t rebuke Peter. He takes Peter’s quivering and halfhearted loyalty and he accepts him.

I hope that comforts you today. Do you believe that Jesus is the Holy One of Israel who redeemed you from your sins? If you do, you can follow Him and trust that He is for you even when you don’t understand His ways.

WEEK 51-GOD HEARS HANNAH'S PRAYERS

Day 1-1 Samuel 1: 1-11

Hannah is in deep distress. For years, she has been trying to have a child yet the Lord has closed her womb. Her shame is made worse because her husband's other wife regularly ridicules her for being barren. Brene Brown defines shame as "the intensely painful feeling or experience of believing that we are flawed and therefore unworthy of love and belonging – something we've experienced, done, or failed to do makes us unworthy of connection." You can see how Hannah was suffering from deep shame. It was so deep she was unable to connect to the husband who loved her in spite of her barrenness. Alone in her shame, Hannah cries out to God to act on her behalf.

What do you do with your shame? Shame intensifies in isolation, yet in our shame the last thing we want to do is risk relationships. I believe what we have to do first is cry out to the Lord just like Hannah did. Just like the Psalmist did: "For God alone, O my soul, wait in silence, for my hope is from Him. He only is my rock and my salvation, my fortress; I shall not be shaken. On God rests my salvation and my glory; my mighty rock, my refuge is God. Trust in Him at all times, O people; pour out your heart before Him; God is a refuge for us" (Psalm 62:5-8)

Are you struggling with shame today that makes you feel like you are flawed and unworthy of love? Run to the Father. Pour out your heart to Him today. As you find refuge in Him, allow Him to minister His deep love for you which is the antidote for your shame. Then, safe in Him, reach out to another believer and risk being known by them today by sharing your struggle.

Day 2-1 Samuel 1: 11-23

Have you ever asked the Lord for something so many times that you actually began to worry and fret about that thing instead of pray? So often, what begins as prayer, asking the Lord for help or provision, deteriorates into me “solving” a problem for the Lord. Just as quickly as I lay my request before Him, I snatch it back and begin to work on the problem again in my own strength.

In this passage we see Hannah’s great emotion in asking the Lord for a son. It was so great that Eli believed she was drunk. When Eli understood her distress and her prayer, he prayed for and encouraged her in the Lord. Hannah responded to the Lord in faith. She not only entrusted a future son to the Lord she also entrusted herself to the Lord by choosing to do the next things: eat, worship, and resume her duties as a wife.

So often we are guilty of functional atheism. We say that we believe God exists and He is who He says He is, but we live in a way that shows we do not believe it. Hannah doesn’t just say God is faithful to hear her and act on her behalf. She shows through her actions that God is faithful. If Hannah had continued to worry and fret as she talked to Eli, went to worship, and traveled home with her husband she would have displayed with her life that God is not to be trusted. Paul Tripp asks this soul piercing question: “This week, how many thoughts did you have, words did you speak, or decisions did you make that omitted the Lord from your process entirely?” Let’s challenge ourselves to not only say what we believe about God but actually live in such a way that we put the character of God on display.

Day 3- 1 Samuel 1:24-2:11

Have you ever wanted something so badly it was all you could think about? I remember one year for my birthday I wanted a

Barbie head. Weird, huh? The Barbie head sat on a table and you could style her hair and do her make-up. I thought it would be so fun to act like I was a cosmetologist making Barbie even more beautiful. When the big day came I did get the Barbie head for my birthday and my sister promptly melted her hair by using real curling iron. But that's a story for another illustration. For our point today, wouldn't it have been strange for me to get the gift I had been longing for and then turn around and give that gift right back to my parents? Yet, this is what we see Hannah doing. Hannah begs the Lord for a son and then she vows to give the son right back to the Lord to serve him in the temple. Why would Hannah do this?

As we saw yesterday, being barren was a great shame for a woman. Hannah believed that having a son would take away her shame. If God would bless her with a son and take away her shame, Hannah was willing to dedicate her son to the Lord for all of his days. Hannah does birth a son, Samuel, and she fulfills her vow by taking him to the tabernacle when he was weaned so that he could serve the Lord. Hannah then sings a beautiful song of praise to God. Her song reminds us so much of Mary's song when she found out she was going to be the mother of the Messiah (Luke 1:46-55). Hannah believed that having a son would take away her shame, but in reality it was Mary's son, Jesus, who came to bear the punishment and shame of her sin. Jesus was the Son who would serve the Lord all His days, but unlike Samuel, Jesus served God perfectly so that He could be the great High Priest who would constantly intercede for Hannah and for each of His children.

Think about Hannah's prayer pleading with God to remove her shame then read her prayer of praise. Compose your own prayer of praise to God for providing Jesus to save you from the penalty and shame of your sin.

Day 4-1 Samuel 2:12-21

Sometimes we experience something more vividly through contrasts. The sun seems to shine brighter the day after a severe thunderstorm. The flower stands more beautifully in a field of weeds and thistle. When I was a little girl learning to cook I was puzzled by the inclusion of salt in a chocolate chip cookie recipe until I learned that salt brings out the sweetness of the cookie.

In our passage today we begin to see a contrast. Eli had two sons who the Bible describes as worthless men. Chapter 1 tells us they were priests of the Lord, yet they treated the worship of God with contempt and profaned holy things. Through their bad behavior Hophni and Phinehas show us a contrast to the true High Priest who would come. The man of God who came to Eli prophesied that, “And this that shall come upon your two sons, Hophni and Phinehas, shall be the sign to you: both of them shall die on the same day. And I will raise up for myself a faithful priest, who shall do according to what is in my heart and in my mind” (1 Samuel 2:34-35a).

Read Hebrews 7: 25-28. “He is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them. For it was indeed fitting that we should have such a high priest, holy, innocent, unstained, separated from sinners, and exalted above the heavens. He has no need, like those high priests, to offer sacrifices daily, first for his own sins and then for those of the people, since he did this once for all when he offered up himself. For the law appoints men in their weakness as high priests, but the word of the oath, which came later than the law, appoints a Son who has been made perfect forever.”

Can you imagine what it was like for the people of Israel to see the men who should be mediating for them before God as they treated God and His tabernacle with disrespect and vulgarity? Yet, if we are honest we must admit that we too often treat the things of God

with disrespect and vulgarity. That is why we all need Jesus, the true High Priest, who lived a holy and perfect life. Because of His obedience to the Father He was able to offer himself as the perfect sacrifice for our sins. The Father accepted His sacrifice once and for all. Thank God today for our great High Priest.

Day 5- 1 Samuel 2:10 and Revelation 6:10

From Marty Machowski: The last part of Hannah's powerful prayer points forward to Jesus. Hannah spoke of an anointed King who will be used by God to judge the whole earth. That is exactly what God tells us Jesus will do on the Day of Judgment. On that day, Jesus will judge the secrets of all men's hearts (Romans 2:16). Hannah also called God's judge his King and his Anointed. Both of those also point to Jesus.

How do you feel when you think about Jesus as the Judge? Does that thought make you feel fearful and uncertain? In his excellent booklet, *The Freedom of Self-Forgetfulness*, Tim Keller encourages believers to remember that for us the courtroom drama is over. Although we are guilty, God our Judge has allowed Jesus to pay our penalty. He declared Jesus guilty in our place. The gavel has sounded with a resounding thud and we as believers are free to live forever with the Father. We no longer need to fear the penalty of death that we deserve because of our rebellion against God. He has provided a way for His wrath to be satisfied and our punishment to be paid. When the whole earth is judged in the Last Days we will be found righteous because our King and God's anointed atoned for our sins. Hannah's song of praise is the song of every believer through the ages and forevermore. Won't it be amazing to unite in praise of our King and Redeemer when He comes again!

I don't know what hardship you are facing today, but I do know that life in this fallen world means we will all struggle. Fix your

eyes on this unseen reality (2 Cor 4:16-18), the future joy that awaits us in Christ.

WEEK 52 GOD CALLS LITTLE SAMUEL

Day 1-1 Samuel, 2;2-7, 27-36

From Marty Machowski: “During the time when Samuel was a young boy serving the Lord, most of Israel was disobedient to God. Eli’s sons, Hophni and Phineahas, didn’t care about God and stole meat from the Lord’s sacrifices. The priests were permitted to have some of the meat for their families, but Eli’s sons were taking the best parts of the meat before the sacrifice was even offered up to God. That meant they were stealing what belonged to God. And Eli ate it too. Instead of punishing them on the spot, God was kind to Eli and his sons and first sent a prophet to warn them. The prophet told Eli that he was honoring his sons above God by eating the meat they were stealing.”³¹

Matthew Henry’s Concise Commentary has this to say about this passage; “Those who allow their children in any evil way, and do not use their authority to restrain and punish them, in effect honour them more than God. Let Eli’s example excite parents earnestly to strive against the beginnings of wickedness, and to train up their children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. In the midst of the sentence against the house of Eli, mercy is promised to Israel. God’s work shall never fall to the ground for want of hands to carry it on. Christ is that merciful and faithful High Priest, whom God raised up when the Levitical priesthood was thrown off, who in all things did his Father’s mind, and for whom God will build a sure house, build it on a rock, so that hell cannot prevail against it.”

Remember God’s holiness today. Then thank Him that although He is holy and we are disrespectful of His holiness just like Hophni and Phineas, we have a High Priest who pleads our case before the Father.

³¹ Marty Machowski, Long Story Short, 346

Day 2-1 Samuel 3:1-14

From Marty Machowski: “Even though it was rare in those days for God to speak through a prophet, God sent one to Eli. But after hearing the Lord’s warning, neither Eli nor his sons turned away from their sins. Eli didn’t remove his sons from serving as the Lords’ priests, which he should have done, and he said nothing about the meat they were stealing from God. So in our story today, the Lord called to young Samuel and gave him a second warning for Eli.”³²

Isn’t it interesting that when God was calling to Samuel, Eli realized what was going on and told Samuel to respond to God. What would have been different if Eli had said to God, “Speak, Lord, for your servant hears?” Instead Eli did not yield to the first message God had given him and the punishment that God told him was now going to come to pass.

God speaks to us today through His word. Yet, how often do we turn away from the Word of God and act as if we had not heard Him? James 1:23-25 says, “For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks intently at his natural face in a mirror. For he looks at himself and goes away and at once forgets what he was like. But the one who looks into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and perseveres, being no hearer who forgets but a doer who acts, he will be blessed in his doing.”

The God of the universe has revealed Himself to us in His Word. Spend some time today thanking Him for pursuing us through Christ and through giving us His Word. Then respond like Samuel, “Speak Lord for your servant hears.”

³² Marty Machowski, Long Story Short, 347

Day 3 1 Samuel 2:35-36 and Hebrews 7:20-25

From Marty Machowski: “The high priest in Israel was the man who offered sacrifices in the presence of God for the sins of the people. But we know from our story that Eli and His sons were not faithful priests. That means they were not careful to obey God. When God sent the prophets to warn Eli, he said he was going to raise up a faithful high priest. The message was about Jesus. Jesus is the faithful high priest God raised up to replace the sinful high priests of Israel. Did you notice the prophet said the faithful high priest would serve as a priest forever? Jesus is the only one who fits that description. All the other high priests were normal men who died. Jesus was a special high priest. He didn’t offer animals to cone sins-He gave His own life as an offering to God. Now Jesus lives in heaven and the nail marks in His hands speak of His sacrifice to God the Father in heaven forever.”³³

Spend some time today worshipping our Great High Priests with the words from the hymn Before the Throne of God Above, written by Charitie Lees Bancroft:

*Before the throne of God above, I have a strong and perfect plea
A great High Priest whose name is love, Who ever lives and pleads for
me*

*My name is graven on His hands, My name is written on His heart
I know that while in heav'n He stands, No tongue can bid me thence
depart*

*When Satan tempts me to despair, And tells me of the guilt within
Upward I look and see Him there, Who made an end of all my sin
Because the sinless Savior died, My sinful soul is counted free
For God the Just is satisfied, To look on Him and pardon me*

Behold Him there, the risen Lamb, My perfect, spotless Righteousness

³³ Marty Machowski, Long Story Short, 348

*The great unchangeable I AM, The King of glory and of grace
One with Himself, I cannot die, My soul is purchased by His blood
My life is hid with Christ on high, With Christ my Savior and my God*

Day 4- 1 Samuel 3:15-21

Samuel was in a tough place. God had spoken to Samuel his judgment upon Eli and his sons. When Eli asked Samuel what God told him, Samuel had to choose whether to tell Eli the truth. He did. God had been preparing Samuel for a unique role in the nation of Israel. Samuel was the last judge of Israel (1 Samuel 7:15-17), the first prophet (3:20) and he also served as a priest (7:9). In a time when the word of the Lord was rare, God chose Samuel to be the man who He would speak through to the people of Israel. In the NET, verse 19 says, “Samuel continued to grow, and the LORD was with him. None of his prophecies fell to the ground unfulfilled.”

After Adam and Eve sinned, the earth and all its people experienced separation from God and the effects of decay and death. Even so, God continued to pursue His people. In Genesis we see God calling the nation of Israel and establishing covenants with them where He is both the initiator and guarantor of those covenants. In Exodus, God delivers His people from the oppression of Egypt and dwells with them first as the pillars of cloud and fire and then in the tabernacle. Then God shows His people how to live in community with Him and with others through the Ten Commandments and the rest of the law. To atone for their sins, God gave them the sacrificial system and priests to carry out those sacrifices so when they failed they could repent and draw near to Him. Even though God continued to show Israel His goodness, they could not remain faithful to Him. So, He sent judges to deliver them from their enemies and to rule over them. Still, the people of Israel and even the priests who were set apart to serve Him turned away from God.

Now, God institutes the office of prophet. Here is a man who speaks God's word to them. He is one of them, someone they know. He does not carry out his office behind a curtain as the high priest does. He lives among them and tells them who God is, what God will do, and how they should respond to Him.

Many people believe that the God of the Old Testament is a wrath-filled, distant God. Yet time and time again, God, in the Old Testament, shows that He loves His people. He is pursuing relationships with His people by revealing Himself to them. When you go to a concert, does the best act come out first? Or is there an opener to get the crowd ready for the concert headliner, the main act, the marquis performer? I believe that God used all of these means to communicate with His people to showcase the beauty of His main act, Jesus. Hebrews says it this way, "Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world. He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power. After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high" (Hebrews 1:1-3).

Praise God that from this vantage point in the Grand Narrative, you get to see the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of God's nature in the recorded works of Jesus Christ and that one day you will be reunited with Him in His eternal reign.

Day 5-Psalm 94 and Acts 17:30-31

Yesterday, we looked at Samuel, the last judge, the first prophet, and a priest of Israel. Samuel prefigures Jesus the One who would perfectly fulfil all three offices of prophet, priest, and king. In today's reading we are reminded again that Jesus is our Judge (king) and priest. King Jesus will one day come to judge all people. But as Psalm 94 reminds us, He will not forget His people.

He tenderly cares for His people in the midst of trouble here on earth, but He also is interceding for us before the Father as the Great High Priest.

Several years ago our family hosted a young girl from the Ukraine as part of a ministry to those living in orphanages in that country. Sveta did not speak much English and it took her a long time to begin to trust us as a family. When the whole family would gather together she would stay on the edges, but gradually as the summer went on she became more and more comfortable with us, laughing and talking and petting our dog, Molly. About a week before she went back to Ukraine, my girls and I were in my bathroom doing their hair and getting ready for the day. The girls wanted Sveta to come in and see something, but Sveta held back. I realized that in all the months that she lived with us she had never come into my bathroom. It was a set apart space to her, the most private sanctuary in the house. Even with the prodding of my children, Sveta only stood in the doorway to the bathroom, looking in on us from the outside. It immediately struck me that this is how I live in relation to my heavenly Father. I am comfortable in His house, I will even relax and enjoy myself, but I am still reluctant to come into His presence in prayer and praise. His holiness still intimidates me. Even though I know that I stand righteous in Christ, I would rather hang back and let others know real intimacy with Him in secret places.

Psalms like this one can tempt us to want to hide and hang back from God. But don't miss the beauty of this Psalm. In verses like 18-19 we read of God's steadfast love that keeps us from harm. Quite a contrast to the God who will wipe out the wicked for their evil deeds (v 23). Remember that although the Lord will come as king to judge the whole earth, we, His people can take shelter in the stronghold of Jesus (v20) whose righteousness will cover us and keep us for all eternity. Then boldly go to Him because Jesus has cleared the way into the Holy of Holies. Draw near to God as He sits on a throne of grace ready to hear your requests.

