



CHRISTOPHANY

AN O.T. SERIES BY CROSSWALK CHURCH

CHRISTOPHANY

April 24 - June 25

We see the Old Testament in the light and filter of Jesus. To do anything less would be for us to forgo the hermeneutic that we were given while Jesus was here. He showed us that we cannot look back without looking through the cross at our history, both spiritual and historical. We are not unattached from our faith when it comes to studying the OLD Testament, in fact, it is just that study that finds Jesus firmly planted in its foundation. From the beginning sentences to the final exhortations of the prophets, we see a Jesus drenched and drowning work. There are no passages that don't assent, in some way, the coming messiah.

Since the fall of man, we begin to see the desire for salvation, for reconciliation, and for forgiveness that can only come in its entirety through the work of Jesus on the cross. The Old Testament shows us our need for Jesus. It does this by setting us in front of a mirror, or the law of God, which points out our unrighteousness. The apostle Paul wrote, "through the law comes knowledge of sin" (Romans 3:20). Once you see your sin and need of a Savior, you should look to Jesus as the one who died to pay the penalty for your sin. Paul wrote, "the law was our guardian until Christ came, in order that we might be justified by faith" (Galatians 3:24).

Another way that Jesus is exposed in the Old Testament is in the dozens of messianic prophecies that Jesus fulfills. We will illuminate these in the upcoming weeks.

As well, there are themes that lean us toward the story and foreshadowing of Jesus and his work. Themes such as the passover lamb, the exodus from Egypt, the Babylonian captivity, all of these give us hints and allegations of the coming Messiah.

These scriptures speak with one voice, even though at times it feels as if they are bifurcated in their understanding of God. They are not, rather, they are speaking to different people at different times with different revelations about Jesus. While the Old Testament speaks of a God that has not yet arrived, the New Testament speaks of the full revelation of God that we experience through Jesus. However, it is only in the totality of scripture we can best understand who Jesus is and the context to which he came.

We invite you to join us in this search for the epiphany of Jesus in the Old Testament. Thanks for joining, and we can't wait to see you in church!

Blessings,
Pastor Tim Gillespie and the Crosswalk Team

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WEEK 1

Day 1
Genesis 1:1-5

1 In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. 2 The earth was formless and empty, and darkness covered the deep waters. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the surface of the waters. 3 Then God said, "Let there be light," and there was light. 4 And God saw that the light was good. Then he separated the light from the darkness. 5 God called the light "day" and the darkness "night". And evening passed and morning came, marking the first day.

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"In the beginning. . ." It is with this phrase we begin to understand that Jesus was present in the beginning of creation. How do we know? John 1:1 mentions it, but we know that while the earth was formless and empty, the spirit was over the waters. Where the Spirit is, so is Jesus. And where Jesus is, so is the presence of God. We can't have one without the other. The Spirit gives witness to Jesus, whenever it is present. And Jesus cannot help but be the full revelation of God, at all times and in all circumstances. This is the perichoretic relationship they have with one another. They are so close to being one, yet still three distinct entities.

But then we see that God spoke, and creation listened. First, there was light. This was not sun and stars, rather illumination from the light that is God; Father, Son, Holy Spirit. There was no need for moons and stars, because of the deep and powerful light that sheds from the creator of the Universe. It is impossible for us to understand that kind of creative power. A power that speaks life into existence. We say that God created Ex Nihilo, or "out of nothing." However, perhaps it is better to say that

While the mechanics of creation will always be a mystery to us, we can see the overwhelming power and love that is expressed through this act of compassion. God saw it fit not to leave a desolate rock, but to inhabit that rock with the beginnings of life. Light from God is the beginning of understanding; we call this revelation. And this revelation always begins with light. We

even see this in the book of John as we transition from life to light in the metaphors that John uses for us to understand the revelation of God through the incarnation of Jesus.

Lastly, that delineation of time must have been something that was new for God. While perhaps he had made time markers before, these were pretty significant. He put them in place before the physics of the planets even existed, there was a demarcation of time. To be clear, God doesn't need that, but we do. We mark the passing of time because we are temporal, and not eternal, and it makes sense to us. Eternity is what is the mystery. However, for those who exist in the arc of time, makers are not so needed.

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What do you do to "mark time" in your life?
How can we reflect that light that comes from the power of God?
Have you ever read the Old Testament just looking for Jesus?

Day 2
Genesis 1:6-13

6 Then God said, "Let there be a space between the waters, to separate the waters of the heavens from the waters of the earth." 7 And that is what happened. God made this space to separate the waters of the earth from the waters of the heavens. 8 God called the space "sky."

And evening passed and morning came, marking the second day.

9 Then God said, "Let the waters beneath the sky flow together into one place, so dry ground may appear." And that is what happened. 10 God called the dry ground "land" and the waters "seas." And God saw that it was good. 11 Then God said, "Let the land sprout with vegetation—every sort of seed-bearing plant, and trees that grow seed-bearing fruit. These seeds will then produce the kinds of plants and trees from which they came." And that is what happened. 12 The land produced vegetation—all sorts of seed-bearing plants, and trees with seed-bearing fruit. Their seeds produced plants and trees of the same kind. And God saw that it was good.

13 And evening passed and morning came, marking the third day.

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God seems to be doing something here that is worth noting.

"God Made Space. . ."

Between the waters and land and the waters and air. God made space, he called it sky, but it is the space he created that I am interested in. What does space look like in your life? I think this is even a nod to the coming idea of the Sabbath. Space for us is important. Whether it is physical space to find ourselves outdoors, or if it is space in our lives to take a moment and pause, to reflect, refresh and renew. God seems to be a god of spaces, and he begins his creative endeavors by creating that space.

Then, he moves on to making the land and the sea as separate entities. Quickly after he makes seed bearing plants, and seed bearing fruit. This is important particularly because when we see

the tree of knowledge of Good and Evil in the Garden of Eden, we know it is not a seed-bearing plant, therefore of limited supply. But what we see here is a God who is willing to show us his abundance in what he creates for us. He is creating a place that seems to have a never-ending supply of life-giving and sustaining food for his creations to eat. IN this way, like the love that we have lavished on us by God through Jesus, it seems that his abundance will never end.

We have, however, squandered a great deal of that which we were to steward. We live in a world where we have often wasted away the good things that God has given to us. Our media is constantly reminding us that we are in dire need of regaining the idea that the creation of God is good, and therefore needs to be protected and cared for. In this first beginning moment of time, we see God giving in abundance, and we need to recognize that our duty is to steward that abundance we have been given.

Also, in this pericope we begin to see that God is finding good in his creation. He keeps declaring that what he has made is good. He changes pace a bit when he gets to the final day, but that's for another time. . .

Do you have a sense of God's abundance in your life?

Where do you find space in your life?

How can you live in both that abundance of God and in that space he creates in your life?

Day 3
Genesis 1:14-19

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14 Then God said, "Let lights appear in the sky to separate the day from the night. Let them be signs to mark the seasons, days, and years. 15 Let these lights in the sky shine down on the earth." And that is what happened. 16 God made two great lights—the larger one to govern the day, and the smaller one to govern the night. He also made the stars. 17 God set these lights in the sky to light the earth, 18 to govern the day and night, and to separate the light from the darkness. And God saw that it was good. 19 And evening passed and morning came, marking the fourth day.

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It is clear that God created a world that would meet us where we are. One that has time, one that has space, and one that has planets and moons and tides and the sun. Without these things, perhaps we would not have the appreciation for what has been created. There is a practicality that is given to us through the creation of all of these things. There is a way of explanation, through science, that allows us to understand the complexity of all creation. Without these explanations, we would simply continue to think that things were magic.

In fact, the use of the language of "greater light, and lesser light" or "larger and smaller" flew in the face of the pagan understanding of these luminaries as being worthy of worship. In the Hebrew text, we see they are put in their rightful place as creations, not as deities in their own right. In this way, there was a difference between the worship of the Hebrew faith and the pagan worship of the time.

Again, we see the temporal time setting, the markers of day and night, but now expanded into the seasons and years. This reminds us of our temporality and God's eternal nature. The heavenly planets are regarded as good as they now fill the empty skies. While there is still darkness, it does not govern the night, as the moon does that. Even the stars of the night remind us constantly of the goodness of God and his provision for his creations.

If nothing else, seeing those heavenly bodies in the sky should remind us of our smallness in the midst of the greatness and magnitude of God. While everything in creation should remind us of our place in the universe, there is a particular brevity and size we see in juxtaposition to the grandeur of the universe made by God. We are created and loved, but we are small in the face of the divine. And this is an okay reality to understand. It means we are recognizing the vastness of God, and we can recognize the transcendence of his character and his grace.

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When was the last time you stared at the moon? Did it still put you in awe?

When did you learn that the moon was a reflection of the sun?

Have you ever pondered the size and greatness of the universe? How does it make you feel?

Day 4
Genesis 1:20-24

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20 Then God said, "Let the waters swarm with fish and other life. Let the skies be filled with birds of every kind." 21 So God created great sea creatures and every living thing that scurries and swarms in the water, and every sort of bird—each producing offspring of the same kind. And God saw that it was good. 22 Then God blessed them, saying, "Be fruitful and multiply. Let the fish fill the seas, and let the birds multiply on the earth." 23 And evening passed and morning came, marking the fifth day.

24 Then God said, "Let the earth produce every sort of animal, each producing offspring of the same kind—livestock, small animals that scurry along the ground, and wild animals." And that is what happened.

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We see the continued abundance of God as the animals are created and asked to continue a partnership with God in creating an abundance of life in the seas and on the earth. By asking them to multiply so that the seas might teem with life, we are seeing the graciousness of God as he asks others to continue his creative work. He does this later on with Adam and Eve as well.

God has a tendency to want to partner with his creations in order to express and experience the abundance that he has always been all about. His character is a character of collaboration, which is amazing as it wouldn't have to be. God could do all of this himself, but he usually decides to bring us along for the journey. It is nothing more than an act of grace that allows for this to happen.

Are you an includer? I have a friend who will invite everyone in the room to lunch when he can. He just loves to include everyone that he can. Not everyone is like that. I find myself to be less like that than I wish I was. Luckily, we have a God who loves to bring everyone together and to allow them to be part of what he is doing. He has been like that from creation, and will continue to be like that in the new earth as well.

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Are you an includer?
How do you like to bring people along with you?
What is the best thing in which you were included?

Day 5
Genesis 1:25-31

25 God made all sorts of wild animals, livestock, and small animals, each able to produce offspring of the same kind. And God saw that it was good. 26 Then God said, "Let us make human beings in our image, to be like us. They will reign over the fish in the sea, the birds in the sky, the livestock, all the wild animals on the earth, and the small animals that scurry along the ground." 27 So God created human beings in his own image.

In the image of God he created them;
male and female he created them.

28 Then God blessed them and said, "Be fruitful and multiply. Fill the earth and govern it. Reign over the fish in the sea, the birds in the sky, and all the animals that scurry along the ground."

29 Then God said, "Look! I have given you every seed-bearing plant throughout the earth and all the fruit trees for your food. 30 And I have given every green plant as food for all the wild animals, the birds in the sky, and the small animals that scurry along the ground—everything that has life." And that is what happened. 31 Then God looked over all he had made, and he saw that it was very good! And evening passed and morning came, marking the sixth day.

Of all the things happening here, the most important, in my estimation, is the fact that God was interested in making us in his own image. This gives us a few things to understand: 1) There is an intrinsic value that was imbued into us in a way that wasn't given to all the other creations. 2) We are unique creations.

Thinking about the first statement, that we have some intrinsic value. In the ancient world, whether it was Greek mythology or Babylonian theology, there was often a sense of the animistic; in other words, we humans were just one of the many creatures that had relationship with the divine, and we were no greater or lesser than any other creatures. In the Genesis narrative we are imbued with the value of being made in the likeness and image of God. This means that we have some indelible things that we share with

God. The capacity to love beyond instinct; hope, and a sense of compassion that is expressed in our relationships with one another. These are just some of the things that connect us with the creator who made us and the son who was there at the beginning of time.

While mentioned above, the uniqueness of humanity is something that we should not take for granted. It has been posited that this imageness or likeness in which we were created sets us apart from any and all other creations in the entirety of the universe. We are not unique just to earth, but perhaps in all of the universe there has never been creations that were made in just the same way and for the same reason we were created. If this is the case, we are truly built in a unique and incredibly loved and cared for manner.

Do you feel like you are a unique creation? Why or why not?

How can you live in that image you were given?

What do you think it means to be made in the image of God? How does that make you think about your life?

Day 6
Genesis 2: 2-3

2 So the creation of the heavens and the earth and everything in them was completed. 2 On the seventh day God had finished his work of creation, so he rested from all his work. 3 And God blessed the seventh day and declared it holy, because it was the day when he rested from all his work of creation.

The second chapter of Genesis is another creation story. But while this is a different take on the story, it begins with the end of the creation week and a nod to the 7th day as a day that God did not declare his creation good, rather, he declared the day holy. Why did he declare the day holy, rather than good?

It seems that there is a specific purpose for this day. Rest. And while all the rest of the days were full of productivity and even consumption, this day was created for something specifically different than the others. This day was for belonging, for connection and for finding a space in time. The Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel calls it a “cathedral in time”, and that is appropriate nomenclature for this day. In it we are to lose our sense of progress and find our sense of peace and abundance. It is the day we stop striving and find time to have a relationship.

It is when we stop consuming, stop using, and begin to be at peace with what we have been given. We begin to understand the concept of “enough” and we can live in the graciousness and provision of God, even if just for a moment.

All the other days serve the Sabbath, rather than Sabbath simply being safe harbor from the rest of the week. We rest, but we rest in Christ, rather than simply rejuvenating ourselves from our work. Work is sacred as well, but Sabbath is Holy, and therefore blessed and a blessing.

How do you experience Sabbath?
Where do you find Jesus in the observance of the day?
How is Sabbath different, or special, from other days?

INTRODUCTION

The following is a guide to help facilitate discussion. Feel free to add or subtract or change questions to fit the conversation, and pray for the Spirit to lead in all things.

OPEN

Have you ever had to create something? Was it big or small? Simple or complex? What was that process like for you and how did it turn out?

HEAD

Read Genesis 1-2 together and share any wisdom, insights, or questions in response to the reading.

"In the beginning God created..." Our story begins with an always present and always active God. A God who is, was, and always will be. A God who is for us, not against us. Recognizing and knowing all of this, how is this origin story in Genesis 1 different from other explanations you've heard and how does that knowledge impact your daily decisions?

As we begin to see and trace the movements of Jesus throughout the Old Testament, take a look at John 1:1-3 and Hebrews 1:1-3, and compare these introductions with what we've seen here in Genesis. What do you notice? What role did Jesus play in creation?

Knowing Jesus' role in the creation of earth, what does the creation story teach us about the character of God? What does the description "image of God" mean for you and your life?

HEART

Isn't it beautiful to see that our Omnipotent (all powerful) God who "never sleeps nor slumbers" (Ps. 121:4) built REST into the rhythm of creation? As you think about your daily/weekly rhythms, how does rest and Sabbath fit into your life?

As you read and reflect on Gen.2, what do you find this story saying to us about the nature of men and women and their relationship to one another? What about their relationship with God? What relationship dynamic(s) do you see right from the beginning? Are those still present today?

HANDS

There are so many mysteries and complexities to God's creation. What do you find most interesting? Most confusing? If you've ever wondered or questioned the possibility of the Almighty's hand in creation (intelligent design) consider these facts about the human body:

"A heart that will beat some three billion times..."

Lungs that deliver breath through 1,500 miles of airways. All superbly orchestrated by billions of nerve cells and billions of miles of genetic information, in combinations that make each of us unique. One incredible human body...Every day it takes us on a miraculous journey, pushing the frontiers, meeting awesome challenges...defying the boundaries of human achievement."

-National Geographic, The Incredible Human Body

This week, strive to keep in mind how you were "fearfully and wonderfully made" by an extremely gracious and loving God!

LIVING WORDS for YOUR WEEK

"Christ is the visible image of the invisible God. He existed before God made anything at all and is supreme over all creation.

Christ is the one through whom God created everything in heaven and earth. He made the things we can see and the things we can't see—kings, kingdoms, rulers, and authorities. Everything has been created through him and for him. He existed before everything else began, and he holds all creation together."

-Colossians 1:15-17

Here we learn that words matter - they are exactly how God created the world and how he defines himself in Jesus. Some of the most powerful stories of Jesus involve the power of his words. Jesus always uses his words to build life. In the same way, we are called to speak life. If Jesus has spoken life into us then we are called to speak life as well. We are called to point people to Jesus so that they can also experience the true life that comes from him.

INTRODUCTION

The following is a guide to help facilitate discussion. Feel free to add or subtract or change questions to fit the conversation, and pray for the Spirit to lead in all things.

OPEN

Words carry meaning, and meaning carries power. Words can either build us up or tear us down. Think about a time where you were affected by someone's words (either positively or negatively).

LIVING WORDS for YOUR WEEK

"The Word gave life to everything that was created, and his life brought light to everyone. The light shines in the darkness and the darkness can never extinguish it." John 1:4-5

HEAD

In these two portions of scripture we see some similarities. Both of these portions of scripture begin with "In the Beginning". This statement right away makes us think of creation. John writes in a way that connects Jesus to creation, which effectively creates a picture of Jesus as an eternal being. He isn't just a man but he is also God. In Genesis God speaks and through his words the world is created. In the same way, Jesus is called the word. If God spoke in Genesis and life began, what do you think it means that Jesus is the word? (think about what the word did in Genesis).

HEART

There are times in our lives when we are unsure where we stand with God. The uncertainty often feels like fear and anxiety - the question of whether God is pleased with us or angry with us is overwhelming. What we learn in these two portions of scripture is that Jesus brings life. In the same way that God's words in Genesis bring life so does Jesus. Jesus brings life both to our physical lives, which is salvation, but also to our soul. When we pursue after Jesus we learn what it means to truly live. When we follow Jesus we are effectively brought to life.

INTRODUCTION

The following questions are a guide to help families with children understand God and discover His love through- out the series. You may think of other ideas that fit the needs of your family.

Read John 1:1-3 and choose a portion of Genesis 1-2 to read together with your family. You may choose to read a section each day. As you read through the creation story in Genesis and the texts in John, think about some of these things with your family:

Who was present during Creation?

What was created each day? What is your favorite part of the creation story?

What was special about the seventh day of creation?

This image shows a full page of white paper with horizontal blue or grey ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page, providing a template for handwriting practice or general writing. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the page.

WEEK 2

Day 8
Genesis 8:1-2
Genesis 18: 1-2

18 The Lord appeared again to Abraham near the oak grove belonging to Mamre. One day Abraham was sitting at the entrance to his tent during the hottest part of the day. 2 He looked up and noticed three men standing nearby. When he saw them, he ran to meet them and welcomed them, bowing low to the ground.

“The Lord Appeared. . .” This is the beginning of the theophany (the physical manifestation of God in the world) that we see in this pericope. In this chapter we see the ongoing dialogue between the human characters, Abraham and Sarah, and God. It is the last time in the story of Abraham that the word “appeared” is used, and it takes place in a grove of trees, with three men that were standing nearby.

I have a question for you: Have you ever had a theophany? A time where God showed up in your life? While a theophany is seen as a physical manifestation of the presence of God, can you identify a time where you just knew the presence of God was there and available to you? I know this is sort of miracle-y, and maybe a little supernatural. But we are people that believe that God still moves, speaks, and shows up, so it is not off brand to ask this question.

It is possible you won't have a great answer to this question. Not everyone has that sort of experience in their lives, and many are not even open to it. As people of faith, we should probably be keeping our eyes open for the times when God might show up in our lives, and for when we can partner with him in the work that he has for us. However, sometimes, he is very hard to see.

For Abraham and Sarah, it was pretty clear. The theophany they would experience took shape in their home, through their hospitality, and with a willingness to recognize God working in their lives. Abraham is the perfect host, and he and Sarah prepare the meal for the guests. You can

see that as he bows to the ground he is giving them the greeting they deserve, not as emissaries of heaven, but as guests in his home.

Do you welcome guests into your home? How often?

How do you treat them?

Where have you had a theophany in your life?

Day 9
Genesis 18: 3-5

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3 "My lord," he said, "if it pleases you, stop here for a while. 4 Rest in the shade of this tree while water is brought to wash your feet. 5 And since you've honored your servant with this visit, let me prepare some food to refresh you before you continue on your journey."

"All right," they said. "Do as you have said."

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Abraham respectfully speaks to one of the three men, who perhaps stood out in a way the other two did not. "Lord" is the phrase that is used, and it is in the singular. Abraham seems to be very honoring to these men. This is something that has been a cultural reality since time began in that area of the world. Showing a hospitable nature to travelers has always been part of the middle-eastern culture. He used the word "please" many times in the original Hebrew writing.

Why would hospitality be so important? From a practical standpoint, allowing people to come into your tents would give you the opportunity to hear any news from around the area. As well, you can show off how God has taken care of you and your family. You might not be attacked if you were able to give guests a warm welcome. And, it is simply a nice thing to do.

We have lost some neighborliness in our culture. It has become harder and harder for us to allow people into our homes, and even into our lives. Matthew 25:40-45 tells us that we are to care for the least of these, as if we were caring for Jesus himself. This is the ethos we see exhibited in Abraham. And this is the ethos that we have been called to each and everyday of our lives.

Abraham seemed to know that something special was happening in his tent, as he called one of the travelers "Lord." However, what he couldn't have known is that this was an incarnation of God, in the flesh. We don't talk about the other times that God shows up in all the particularity of humanity. Obviously, we do

with Jesus as the prime example of this, but in the Old Testament we sometimes see God show up in the flesh. When he does, we should always take notice of what he says, to whom he says it, and why it is said at all.

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What was the last time you were a good host to someone you didn't know?

How can we recapture that spirit of hospitality?

When did you care for the "least of these?"

Day 10
Genesis 18:6-8

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6 So Abraham ran back to the tent and said to Sarah, "Hurry! Get three large measures of your best flour, knead it into dough, and bake some bread." 7 Then Abraham ran out to the herd and chose a tender calf and gave it to his servant, who quickly prepared it. 8 When the food was ready, Abraham took some yogurt and milk and the roasted meat, and he served it to the men. As they ate, Abraham waited on them in the shade of the trees.

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There are a couple things that I think we can surmise from these texts. 1) No one was going anywhere quickly. It takes a while to make bread, to kill a calf and to get it ready to eat. This meant that these visitors were going to be around for a significant amount of time. And 2) No one is a vegetarian in this story. Why does that matter? It probably doesn't, but I forgot what number two was by the time I was done writing number one, so I put this one in. .:.)

Seriously though, when you invited someone in for a meal, it meant preparing the meal, and that was no small task. Everything was being made from scratch, as it always was. The care that must have been taken to create the meal for these travelers was amazing, and I bet the meal was great too!

Why is food such an accelerant for relationships and conversations? Perhaps it is because we all need to eat, and that time it takes to prepare the food and eat creates an opportunity for us to gain insight, become comfortable, and learn to grow toward one another is a good thing.

We see this being expressed in the life of Jesus all the time. Luke 24:40-43; Luke 11:38; Mark 2:15; Luke 7:36; Matthew 26:26 are just a few of the texts about Jesus eating and spending time with people. They help us understand not only the humanity of Jesus, but also the importance of time together around a table.

Jesus ate just like we do. He was able to bring his disciples together in a powerful way over food. He taught over food, and he used food to teach. We should never underestimate the importance and power of the table as a place to grow, to share, to mourn, and to celebrate with one another.

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When do you get to spend time with your friends and family? Is it around food?

How can we intentionally become closer to those around us by using the table as a place to gather?

What is the best meal you have ever had with friends and/or Family?

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9 “Where is Sarah, your wife?” the visitors asked. “She’s inside the tent,” Abraham replied.

10 Then one of them said, “I will return to you about this time next year, and your wife, Sarah, will have a son!” Sarah was listening to this conversation from the tent. 11 Abraham and Sarah were both very old by this time, and Sarah was long past the age of having children. 12 So she laughed silently to herself and said, “How could a worn-out woman like me enjoy such pleasure, especially when my master—my husband—is also so old?”

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This is always the most interesting part of this particular story. As the men were waiting with Abraham, “they” asked (plural) where his wife was. Abraham answers relatively flippantly, probably with a motion toward the tent. (The Hebrew is a little gruff). Then, one of them mentions that the next year at the “reviving”, or spring of the next year, he would come back and there would be a son.

As you can imagine, these being tents, sound travels, and Sarah could hear what they were saying. She found it funny that someone would think that she and Abraham would have a child. In her words, she was “worn-out” and therefore not able to have a child in her old age. She did think about her husband and his advanced age as well. I’ve always thought that was a particularly human and husband/wife response by Sarah. She was basically saying, “I’m old, but so is that geezer I married!” It sounds like something my wife might say about me!

But if you notice that she said this to herself, and laughed to herself. Again, much like my wife. We can watch a sitcom, and she won’t laugh out loud once, but at the end she might say “that was funny.” When I did not think she found any of it funny at all! This is what happens when you have been married for a long time and you don’t have to wear all your emotions on your sleeve anymore. In fact, when you are first married, you constantly wonder what the other

person is thinking. However, the longer you are married, the less you want to ask that question to your significant other, they might just tell you!

But what is interesting is that she wasn’t alone in her thoughts. More on that tomorrow!

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Have you ever been in a long-term relationship?

How have things changed over the years?

What is the best thing you have learned from your significant other?

Day 12
Genesis 18: 13-15

13 Then the Lord said to Abraham, "Why did Sarah laugh? Why did she say, 'Can an old woman like me have a baby?' 14 Is anything too hard for the Lord? I will return about this time next year, and Sarah will have a son." 15 Sarah was afraid, so she denied it, saying, "I didn't laugh." But the Lord said, "No, you did laugh."

Okay, here we go. The one that Abraham had called "Lord", and who still gets that designation, calls out what is going on in Sarah's head and heart! He mentions that she was laughing, and then he asks two rhetorical questions of Abraham, although they were just as much meant for Sarah. He asks if "anything is too hard for the Lord?" And, "can an old woman like me still have a baby?" These questions were meant for Sarah, but they were given to Abraham. Sarah seemed to know this, and she responded by saying, "I didn't laugh." But then The Lord argues and seems to finish the argument.

This is a kind of a strange argument they are having. Things seem contentious, and she doesn't want to be accused of something she feels like she didn't do, even though, apparently, she did. Why would she try to argue with this man? Remember, she hadn't done it out loud, so it is possible that she wouldn't have assumed that he knew what she was talking about. But he did, because he was God.

Of course she was confused, and of course she wanted to not be accused of being disrespectful to these men. However, it also reminds us of the supernatural premise of his words. The fact that he was saying they would have a son would have been ridiculous to her and to Abraham. It almost seems unfair that she was called out on her incredulity. She was making a pretty normal assumption about her age and her body's ability to bear a child. However, there are times when God decides he will supersede the situation, even physically, and create something that was needed so his own ends could be accomplished.

Have you ever had something happen to you that could only be described as a miracle?

What purpose was God trying to accomplish through it?

Is it possible that you interpret something as a miracle that might not have been?

Should we be careful as to what we say is a miracle or not? Why or why not?

16 Then the men got up from their meal and looked out toward Sodom. As they left, Abraham went with them to send them on their way. 17 "Should I hide my plan from Abraham?" the Lord asked. 18 "For Abraham will certainly become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth will be blessed through him. 19 I have singled him out so that he will direct his sons and their families to keep the way of the Lord by doing what is right and just. Then I will do for Abraham all that I have promised." 20 So the Lord told Abraham, "I have heard a great outcry from Sodom and Gomorrah, because their sin is so flagrant. 21 I am going down to see if their actions are as wicked as I have heard. If not, I want to know."

To end this pericope, it seems that the Lord is having a bit of a conversation with himself about what he should and shouldn't tell Abraham about the plans he has for Abraham. Perhaps it was a tool of the author, or perhaps God speaks to himself in some of the same ways that we find ourselves speaking to our inner voices. I don't know the answer for this, but I think that there is an interesting thing happening of which we should take note. The Lord is trying to foreshadow the plans that he has for Abraham, but isn't sure if it is in the best interests of Abraham to know what is in store for his life.

I have often wondered if I would have taken the track that I did in life if I knew what it really entailed. Would I have made the choices that led me here? Would I have taken the chances that needed to be taken, or have been cautious when life needed to be handled with care. I don't know for sure, but this conversation that the Lord is having with either himself or with his travel companions seems to be asking the same question.

As I get older, I find myself wishing more and more that I was comfortable in the present, rather than constantly thinking about the future. I need to be more present with my family, my

friends, my job and my congregation. But I find myself constantly thinking about what I can and might be doing next. Maybe the next is not as great as what I have already been given, and I need to respect it. This piece of the story reminds me that this is an ongoing discussion, and perhaps I need to let God have that discussion with himself, and I need to be ready to listen, and to be hospitable when God shows up at my door.

Would you have made the choices you did if you knew where you would have ended up?

Why are we so interested in the future, rather than finding comfort in the present?

Was Abraham interested in his future? Or was he old enough to be thinking more about his past? Light that sheds from the creator of the Universe.

How do you interpret Sarah's interaction with the Lord in this passage? What conclusions do you gather from the "argument" they have? (Gen 18:13-15)

INTRODUCTION

The following is a guide to help facilitate discussion. Feel free to add or subtract or change questions to fit the conversation, and pray for the Spirit to lead in all things.

OPEN

When a friend or family member is visiting you for the first time, how do you plan out the hosting experience? Are there any signature dishes, restaurants, or sights that you take guests to?

HEAD

Read together Genesis 18:1-21. (you may choose to read part or all, whatever your group has time and desires), and share any thoughts, insights, or impressions you had as you read through the passage.

What does Abraham offer to the travelers?

Why do you think Abraham was flippant when he was asked about his wife's location?

Abraham and Sarah had already received numerous promises from God by the time they encountered these travelers. In spite of that, Sarah is amused by what the travelers promise her. Why do you think that's her attitude at this time?

How would you describe the travelers words and actions in this passage, especially the one designated as "Lord"?

How do you think Abraham felt after hearing the Lord's words in Genesis 18:16-21?

HEART

God desires to have a relationship with His people, and in this story, we get to see the Lord receive the hospitality of His creations. What is one takeaway you have from reading about a fellow human hosting God?

One misconception about God is this notion that He makes it difficult to understand His will or desires for us. The interaction Abraham and the Lord have is a perfect example of how God actually prefers to make it clear to His people what He'd want for them. What else do you learn from the Lord's monologue at the end of our passage? (Gen 18:16-21)

Think about the words, actions, and promises made in Abraham's encounter with the travelers. What does this theophany illustrate about God's character?

HANDS

Reflect on the daily commentary and the discussion that you've had today. Summarize some of the key characteristics that we've learned (or refreshed) about God's character. How do those characteristics impact or inform our treatment of others in 2022?

LIVING WORDS for YOUR WEEK

For I know the plans I have for you," says the LORD. "They are plans for good and not for disaster, to give you a future and a hope. (Jeremiah 29:3, NLT)

THE WALK (YOUTH) Jesus and Abraham
Week 2 of 9 Blessings on Blessings on Blessings
Genesis 18:1-21

INTRODUCTION

The following is a guide to help facilitate discussion. Feel free to add or subtract or change questions to fit the conversation, and pray for the Spirit to lead in all things.

OPEN

Growing up we are taught to share with others. This can be a difficult lesson to be taught because innately within us we desire things for ourselves, not out of evil desires but simply because that's how we're wired. We have to choose to share. Think of a time where you had to learn to share.

HEAD

In this portion of scripture we see an incredible promise; The Lord promises Abraham and Sarah that they will have a child. This promise is notably surprising because of the age of both Sarah and Abraham. Even so, God declares that they would have a child. Through Abraham God says that he will become a nation that will bless the earth. The baby promised to Sarah and Abraham would be a blessing to them, yet at the same time it will be a blessing to all nations. Here we learn that the blessing given to them is also a blessing to the world.

HEART

The life of Jesus was not just for some people, it was for all people. The life of Jesus teaches us that all people are invited into right-relationship with him - meaning that salvation is extended to humanity. In Genesis we see that God is consistent. His goal was not simply to bless Abraham and Sarah but to bless the world through Abraham and Sarah. God always blesses individuals so that they will bless others. We are included in that salvation that Jesus brings. We are called to right-relationship with Jesus - that is a promise we can hold on to.

HANDS

Today we are both blessed by Jesus and called to be a blessing to others. As we grow in our relationship with Jesus we must understand that we are called to bless others. To love Jesus is to love people - there is no way around that. As we move forward in our relationship with Jesus may we continue to learn to love others as he has loved us.

LIVING WORDS for YOUR WEEK

"For this is how God loved the world: He gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life. God sent his Son into the world not to judge the world, but to save the world through him."

John 3:16-17

INTRODUCTION

The following questions are a guide to help families with children understand God and discover His love through- out the series. You may think of other ideas that fit the needs of your family.

Read Genesis 18:1-21 together with your family. As you read the text, think about and discuss the some of these things with your family:

Have you ever seen something you thought was impossible actually happen? What happened?

What did the men say would happen to Abraham and Sarah? Do you think Abraham and Sarah believed the men in the story?

If what the men told Abraham and Sarah actually came true, how do you think it was possible that it would happen?

[illegible]

WEEK 3

Day 15
Genesis 32:22-23

22 During the night Jacob got up and took his two wives, his two servant wives, and his eleven sons and crossed the Jabbok River with them. 23 After taking them to the other side, he sent over all his possessions.

UMMMMM. . .

Two wives. . .

Two Servant Wives. . .

And 11 children?

Are we okay with this?

Welcome to the Old Testament. It is a wild world that doesn't always look like ours. It has a different set of rules, at times, and it is full of fascinating characters and stories that we don't spend too much time on, as they don't always make too much sense in the world we find ourselves in today. While some of the context of this story makes us uncomfortable, the overarching theme is important. So we will press on knowing that this is the story of Jacob, who must possess his own faith, although he is not yet morally ready to do so.

If you remember Jacob, he stole his birthright from his older brother, Esau, and he had quite an eventful life prior to this event. But what we are about to see is a tying up of loose ends when it comes to Jacob. You see, he is about to receive that birthright, the promise of Canaan, but he needs to possess his own faith, and to deserve it by personal encounter, rather than by heredity alone.

There are antagonists in this story; first Esau, then Laban, and now Esau again, but the one that he is going to have to deal with personally is none other than God. While he experienced life under the unfair treatment of Laban, he learned that he must rely on the provision of God and not on himself or someone else. This was a hard

lesson for him to learn, and sometimes, we have equally as hard a time learning that we have to rely on God first, rather than after we have exhausted ourselves by working that much harder to see what we want to see come to fruition.

Have you ever tried and exhausted every avenue, only to find that you needed to give it to God much earlier than you have? I think we have all experienced this at some point in our lives. We try and we try, but we don't receive, often because we are not ready to receive what it is that God has been preparing for us. God has a tendency to give us what we need, when we need it, but not before we are ready for it. This is deeply frustrating, but not uncommon when we think about God's provision.

If it were up to me, I would have taken all those things that God has given me all at once, and not waited until I was ready, and it would have been a disaster. I don't know why it is so hard for us to "wait on the Lord," but we really need to learn how to do this better than we do!

When have you waited on the Lord?
Was it beneficial? Or would you have rather had things on your timing?
What should you do while you wait on God?

24 This left Jacob all alone in the camp, and a man came and wrestled with him until the dawn began to break. 25 When the man saw that he would not win the match, he touched Jacob's hip and wrenched it out of its socket. 26 Then the man said, "Let me go, for the dawn is breaking!" But Jacob said, "I will not let you go unless you bless me."

So he is alone and some random person comes into camp and they begin wrestling? I wish the author would have put some more details into this story, as it feels we are missing some parts here. Who was this guy? Did he just show up and start wrestling? How is it that he just came out of nowhere? Can I just start wrestling with someone? I will if they show up in my tent!

Obviously, we are not talking about just anyone showing up in his tent. And while it didn't seem like it at the beginning, when he touches Jacob's hip and wrenches it out of its socket, we see we are not dealing with just any man. Jacob seemed to notice this as well. He realized that he was wrestling with the Divine, and therefore he wanted the blessing before he let God go.

Have you ever wrestled with God? Have you ever felt like you are in a wrestling match with Jesus? I am not talking about a physical altercation, but rather a wrestling for understanding, for blessing, and for hope? Have you found yourself waking up in the morning with more questions for God than with answers from Him? Is it possible to both love and obey God, while still being deeply frustrated by the wrestling match it feels like you are in?

I think we can both be wrestling and still be asking for blessings. I don't think it is unreasonable to believe that we have a "both/and" relationship with God, rather than a this/that relationship. Relationships can be difficult and complicated, why wouldn't they be with God? We can love and struggle with God at the same time.

When Jacob realized that he was wrestling with something other than a human, he also realized that the rewards were more than just coming out of the tent with a victory. He recognized that there was an opportunity to live with the blessing that comes from an interaction with the Divine, and therefore he begged for that blessing, and received it.

This was his Christophany. . .

In that moment, he began to realize who God was, and therefore who Christ was, as they are the same. He began to see life differently, and he began to live life differently as well. My hope is that your interaction with the divine, even if it is a wrestling match, may create that change in perspective for you as well!

Have you ever wrestled with God about something?

What was the outcome?

Did you receive God's blessing when the wrestling match was over? What did that look like in your life?

27 "What is your name?" the man asked. He replied, "Jacob." 28 "Your name will no longer be Jacob," the man told him. "From now on you will be called Israel, because you have fought with God and with men and have won."

Names are important things in scripture, as they are today. However, in scripture, each name meant something different. While this is true in many cultures today, then it was even more important than it is to us today. Our identity came from our family lineage, which was often included in the names that were given. As well, it is often that names were changed when significant events happened in the life of the person in question. This same thing happens when Jacob wrestles with the Divine in this story.

The man asks for Jacob's name, and then directly gives him a new one, and for a reason. The reason is that he had fought with God and men and he had won. This is a pretty big deal, if you ask me. He is given an entirely new name, one that would be adopted, obviously, by his people. And the reason for this is that he would not let go of God once he figured out who it was that he was really fighting.

I wonder if we have this same type of tenacity when it comes to making sure that we hold on to God in our struggles and our trials? Can we find a handhold and hold on for dear life?

When you rock climb, there are times that you feel like you are falling, or about to fall, and you can't do anything but simply hold on for dear life. Even if you have a rope and are safe, there is a feeling that you are about to lose it all. It is in those times that we begin to find out some really interesting things about ourselves. When you don't give up, give in, and you hold on tightly to that which you know will save you, you begin to realize that you have more strength than you previously thought you had.

How are you going to hold on for dear life to the God that gave you that life today?

What does it mean to you to hold on when you feel like everything is getting away from you?

What kind of blessings do you think God has for you?

-

29 "Please tell me your name," Jacob said.
"Why do you want to know my name?" the man replied. Then he blessed Jacob there.

-

Jacob wants to have a conversation, which seems reasonable. And true to his competitive nature, as we have seen expressed throughout his life, he wants the name of his opponent. Was it because he wanted bragging rights over this man? The fact that the man asks why he would need to know it shows that it might have been an advantage to Jacob to have.

Bragging rights were something I loved having when I was in elementary school. If my team won the game we were playing at our first recess of the day, we could brag about it until lunch, where there would be, invariably, a rematch. Having those bragging rights meant the world to me when I was in third grade, maybe not so much now! I don't know if Jacob was looking for those rights to brag about who he had beaten in the wrestling match, but it probably would have been nice.

What do we have to brag about when it comes to our relationship with God? Is God something that we have to try and overcome in our lives, or is it something that we can simply take solace in throughout our life? Do we have the same competitive nature that Jacob had, so that we view every interaction as a game to be won? Is God our opponent or is he our coach?

Some of us are simply born more competitive than others. For all the competitive sports that I have played, I don't really have a competitive nature. I like to win, sure, but it is not a necessity for me and my self-image. Perhaps it is because when I was a Junior in high school our coach had a play a summer league that was well beyond what our basketball team could handle. I went to La Sierra Academy, and we were playing against the largest high schools in Riverside. Riverside Poly, North High School, Canyon Springs, Romona! All of these high schools had thousands

of kids, and walking into Riverside Poly's gym we got to see all of the awards that Reggie Miller, who would go on to play very successfully in the NBA, had won over his tenure at that school.

We lost.

A lot!

But we learned that winning isn't everything. Sometimes, there is a blessing in losing, and bragging rights are only good until you step on the court again the next time you play. So try hard, leave it on the court, and learn everything you can, every time you play.

I don't know if Jacob wanted bragging rights, but he did want to know the name of the man who he wrestled with. The man didn't give it, and the conversation seems to end with Jacob being blessed. That should be enough!

-

Are you competitive in nature? Is that a good thing for you?

What is a story of the best win you have had? How about the worst loss?

How can you integrate that nature into a positive thing in your life?

30 Jacob named the place Peniel (which means “face of God”), for he said, “I have seen God face to face, yet my life has been spared.”

Jacob named this place after the event that took place. However, the form of this word could be used to say not just “face of God” but “Face to Face with God”. Which is something that surely took place. Interestingly, you may have heard the story of “Jacob wrestling an Angel”, but that clarification that it was an angel comes from Hosea, which came much later.

Why would it need to be an angel, rather than God? Why would Hosea say that?

In the stories of the Patriarchs, there was often a “Theophany” or revelation/encounter with God, and this story is no different. However, the idea that someone could wrestle with God and win didn’t sit well with some. Therefore, it is possible that the interpretation of this encounter being an angel would make sense. No one would want to worship a God that can’t beat Jacob in a wrestling match!

However, with a few thousand years of perspective, perhaps we could say that a God who would condescend to his creations in this way actually shows us strength, rather than weakness. We know it was not a fair match. While Jacob won, it was simply a touch that took his hip out of the socket. At any point, and I can’t believe I need to say this, God could have evaporated Jacob from existence. However, this clearly wasn’t the point of this interaction, it was for something else.

This interaction happened in order to further the mission of God. Augustine, in his book “City of God” mentions that the angel was a “type” of Christ (or Christ himself). This Christophany that Jacob experienced was not about who could win a wrestling match, it was about God’s willingness to incarnate his love in this world, to this person. It is a powerful interaction not be-

cause of the outcome of the match, but because God was willing to show up and interact with his people.

Have you ever had a Christophany, when you felt the presence of God powerfully?

Have you come face to face with God?

Where does God show up in your life?

Day 20
Genesis 32:31-32

-

31 The sun was rising as Jacob left Peniel, and he was limping because of the injury to his hip.

32 (Even today the people of Israel don't eat the tendon near the hip socket because of what happened that night when the man strained the tendon of Jacob's hip.)

-

Interactions with God leave a mark. Not always a limp, but a mark, a memory, a lasting impression. This night, for Jacob, was filled with struggle, exertion, frustration, epiphany, and Christophany. He started the night wrestling for his life and he ended the night with a blessing and a new name from God himself.

It was a pretty eventful night in that tent.

Have you ever had a situation where you knew that everything was about to change, and so you just sort of leaned into it? When one day wouldn't be like the other. When the sun would come up and you would see everything differently from then on out?

We don't get a lot of those opportunities in our life, but when they come, we have to accept the changes that come and understand that it is entirely possible that they were put in place by the will of God in our lives. And by the way, those changes do not always have to be good things. Sometimes, those changes that happen seem and feel very negative at the time. Hopefully, we can learn and change and grow from these encounters, but sometimes that takes a great deal of time and perspective. And we feel the repercussions of these encounters for years.

We cannot assume that every single thing that happens to us is God-willed or God-ordained, as God values our freedom to choose. However, we can see hints and allegations of Jesus alive and present in our lives, and this realization should help us move through those nights where everything changes, so that we might walk out, sometimes with a limp, to lead, to grow, and to live in a different way than we had previously.

Perhaps this is what is meant by being "born-again". A new perspective, a new outlook, and sometimes, even a new name!

-

When have you experienced God in a way that changed everything?

How can you help someone else have that Christophany?

If you could choose a new name, what would it be? And Why?

Is struggling always a bad thing?

INTRODUCTION

The following is a guide to help facilitate discussion. Feel free to add or subtract or change questions to fit the conversation, and pray for the Spirit to lead in all things.

OPEN

Growing up did you ever have a nickname that you don't go by today?

HEAD

Read Genesis 32: 22-32 together and share any wisdom, insights, or questions in response to the reading.

Knowing that Jacob and Esau had a strained relationship, why do you think Jacob chose to spend time alone on the night before they met?

Who do you think is the "man" in the story?

Why would he wrestle with Jacob and why would he leave Jacob injured?

Names meant so much in Biblical times. What do you think it meant for Jacob to receive a new name?

Why do you think Jacob, now Israel, wanted to know the "man's" name?

Jacob realized at some point that he was talking to God/Jesus. If no one could look at God's face and live, how did Jacob survive?

HEART

How do you see the Jesus you know from the New Testament in this story with Jacob?

Have you ever wanted a blessing so much you wouldn't move until you received it? If so, share. If not, why?

Israel means, 'struggles with God.' Why was this such a fitting name for Jacob and the generations that would come from him?

Do you have any wounds from your journey that are actually helpful reminders for you in your faith?

If Jesus is involved in this story, there must be good news. What good news can we take from this story?

HANDS

If God were to give you a new name, something for you to live into, what do you think it would be or what characteristic might it lean into? What have you been struggling with and what blessing do you need at this time in your journey?

LIVING WORDS for YOUR WEEK

"I have told you all this so that you may have peace in me. Here on earth you will have many trials and sorrows. But take heart, because I have overcome the world."

John 16: 32-33

"...I am with you always, even to the end of the age."

Matthew 28: 20

THE WALK (YOUTH)

Week 3 of 9

Jesus and Jacob

No Pain No Gain

Genesis 32: 22-32

INTRODUCTION

The following is a guide to help facilitate discussion. Feel free to add or subtract or change questions to fit the conversation, and pray for the Spirit to lead in all things.

OPEN

"No pain no gain" This is a well known phrase we've all heard. Normally we use it in context of doing things that are uncomfortable and difficult but will better us in the end. Think of a time where you had to tell yourself "no pain no gain"

HEAD

Jacob wrestles with God. What a crazy thing to think about! It wouldn't be too out of topic to say wrestling with God isn't something you want to do. Jacob finds himself in a situation where he has to wrestle God - the creator, the undefeated one. In the process of wrestling with God, God sees that he was not going to best the man, which doesn't mean that he was going to lose, he does two things. First, he touches his hip and it is wrenched out of its socket. Second, the man gives Jacob a new name, Israel. Here we see a very interesting story - we see a man wrestle with God, get injured, and become new. What do you think this tells us about the process of becoming new?

HEART

Many of us may wish that a life with Jesus is a pain free life, yet this is not always the case. Here we see an instance in which a man had to experience pain before experiencing life change. This is teaching us something - perhaps the pain that we feel isn't meaningless but rather purposeful. Let's not let this idea get away from us, but let's think about this. Perhaps in the same way a tree must be pruned in order to produce fruit is the same way that we must experience a degree of pain to become new. Jesus knew this to be true as well - Jesus knew that in order to save humanity it would require him to experience pain. Yet Jesus understood that no pain no gain.

HANDS

Today I encourage you to not run from pain but rather embrace the pain. May we look at our pain from another perspective. We are not owned by our pain nor defined by our pain but rather we are made stronger by our pain.

LIVING WORDS for YOUR WEEK

"Jacob named the place Peniel (which means 'face of God'), for he said, 'I have seen God face to face, yet my life has been spared.'"

Genesis 32:30

INTRODUCTION

The following questions are a guide to help families with children understand God and discover His love throughout the series. You may think of other ideas that fit the needs of your family.

Read Genesis 32:22-32 together with your family. Think about some of these questions as you discuss the text with your family.

Have you ever gotten into a wrestling match with a sibling? If so, who usually wins? Why do you think that is?

In the story, who do you think Jacob is wrestling with? Why does he want to know their name?

What does Jacob ask for from the man? And what happens to Jacob?

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

WEEK 4

Day 22
Numbers 22: 22-23

-

22 But God was angry that Balaam was going, so he sent the angel of the Lord to stand in the road to block his way. As Balaam and two servants were riding along, 23 Balaam's donkey saw the angel of the Lord standing in the road with a drawn sword in his hand. The donkey bolted off the road into a field, but Balaam beat it and turned it back onto the road.

-

Context! We need some context. Go back and read the whole of the 22nd chapter of Numbers to grasp this context more completely. Basically, God is not happy with this prophet, as he was not exactly doing what God had asked him to do. Therefore, he shows up as "an angel of the Lord", which was often God himself, by the way. The donkey sees this and runs off the road. This makes Balaam angry, so he beats this donkey.

Have you ever ridden a donkey?

Growing up, we used to go to Santorini each year as part of my father's tour. On Santorini, you are dropped off at the base of the hill, and you need to either take the tram up to the town, or you have to go up on these major switchbacks on a donkey. You can walk up, but because there are so many donkeys and so much donkey detritus that it makes the way pretty treacherous to walk.

So each year, we would hire some donkeys and they would run up, in a train, to the top of the switchbacks where the town was located. I only have one word for this: Frightening! Those donkeys would run up at full throttle, and there was very little you could do. They would give us reins, but they did nothing. Donkeys do what they want, and when they are nose-to-tail, they run as fast as they can, with the guy in charge beating them with a switch to make them run faster up the hill.

The only thing scarier was to go down on a donkey. I did that one time, and that was enough. Think of it, a donkey, running at full

speed on a solid 17% decline down the hill, and making hairpin turns every 100 meters. It was definitely not the best experience of my life, albeit one of the most harrowing.

-

Needless to say, donkeys have minds of their own. When this donkey had a Theophany, he bolted. And it made Balaam pretty upset.

Did you notice anything about this story that seems a little off?

I hate that Balaam beat his donkey, how do you feel about mistreating animals?

Why is this part important to the story?

-

24 Then the angel of the Lord stood at a place where the road narrowed between two vineyard walls. 25 When the donkey saw the angel of the Lord, it tried to squeeze by and crushed Balaam's foot against the wall. So Balaam beat the donkey again. 26 Then the angel of the Lord moved farther down the road and stood in a place too narrow for the donkey to get by at all. 27 This time when the donkey saw the angel, it lay down under Balaam. In a fit of rage Balaam beat the animal again with his staff.

-

Okay, more of the same. In these two other instances we see the same thing happening. In detail, we are told that the Lord revealed himself to the donkey and the donkey did what anyone would do, freaked out a little bit.

Yesterday I asked if you saw anything that seems a little off about this story? Of course, the fact that Balaam is beating his donkey is not great, but that was pretty much par for the course at the time and in this culture. Livestock are not always treated the same as family pets are. But is there anything else?

Did you notice that God revealed himself only to the donkey? GOD DIDN'T REVEAL HIMSELF TO HIS PROPHET!

What can we take from this? Perhaps God thought the donkey was more worthy to see the revealed God than his prophet was. This is a pretty serious indictment about the prophets' worth and ability to do what God had asked. This means that the Donkey was a better prophet than Balaam. Donkeys were, at times, metaphors or symbols for prophets, and this parallel is not to be discarded. Prophets were stubborn and hard headed, as donkeys were. However, often, prophets were hard-headed in order to do what God had asked, rather than being stubborn against God's ask. When someone is described as "beastly" it is the metaphor of a donkey that is invoked in one's thoughts.

All of this to say that God was more comfortable showing himself to a beast, than to a prophet. I wonder if God was ever more comfortable showing himself to my two Italian greyhounds than to me, because I have been too stubborn and hard-headed as well? It wouldn't surprise me if this were true.

How do we work hard not to be so stubborn that God reveals himself to someone other than us? How can we have the attitude of one who wants to see God, and is willing to be humble enough in order to see just that?

I think it starts on our knees. By supplicating ourselves to the conversation with God, and by taking an attitude or position of listening, we begin to hear God reveal himself. We don't want to miss it, so we need to pay attention. Perhaps Balaam could have seen the revelation of God that the donkey did if he had just paid better attention to God, and less attention to his own anger and frustration.

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Do you think God has ever revealed himself and you have missed it?

Are you stubborn and hard-headed?

How can we make sure we don't miss when God is revealing himself?

28 Then the Lord gave the donkey the ability to speak. "What have I done to you that deserves your beating me three times?" it asked Balaam. 29 "You have made me look like a fool!" Balaam shouted. "If I had a sword with me, I would kill you!"

Okay, now it gets weird.

And we can admit that when it happens. Sometimes, scripture veers into the supernatural, and we need to be prepared for it. How we interpret what happened is up to each of us and the Holy Spirit to help us understand these super-normal things that are happening. Regardless of where you fall on the idea of a donkey speaking like and to a human, let us not miss the point of the story.

The donkey begins to talk with Balaam, and he is none too happy about what has been happening between the two of them! No one likes to be beaten, and a donkey is no different. He makes a point to let Balaam know that he didn't need to be beaten 3 times! Balaam was concerned about looking like a fool, as he was not able to control his animal. He is so angry that if he had a weapon, he would have used it.

Now that's interesting, if he had a sword, he would have killed the donkey.

I know this will not be popular, but I think there is a lesson here. Access to weapons creates more opportunity for violence. We live in an age of violence, in a culture of violence, and if you are reading this in the United States, I believe that access to such powerful weapons has helped to accelerate that culture of death and violence.

I understand about the 2nd Amendment, I really do. However, I don't know that it was meant for the kind of weapons that are now available to the populace at large. The ongoing efforts to make it easier to get these weapons into everyone's hands troubles me as a Christian. I hope that it bothers you as well. Jesus said many

things against violence, and we need to take those things seriously. I hope we do.

I won't carry on this discussion, as it is a hot topic and people get upset pretty easily over this issue. I just wanted to comment on this phrase that was included. Balaam was so upset that if he had access to a weapon, he would have killed the donkey, his donkey. I am glad he didn't have access to a sword.

Have you ever been so upset that you wanted to cause someone or something harm?

What do you do with anger like this?

What do you think Jesus said about violence and anger, and are we supposed to take what Jesus said as truth?

How have you seen violence in our culture play out in your life?

30 “But I am the same donkey you have ridden all your life,” the donkey answered. “Have I ever done anything like this before?” “No,” Balaam admitted. 31 Then the Lord opened Balaam’s eyes, and he saw the angel of the Lord standing in the roadway with a drawn sword in his hand. Balaam bowed his head and fell face down on the ground before him.

Now the donkey is thoroughly confused. He has known Balaam all his life and he confronts Balaam on his behavior, and he even reasons with him about how he has been a pretty good donkey up until this point. And to his credit, Balaam admits he has been a pretty good donkey so far.

I think that we should always take into account the previous history people have with us when it comes to understanding why they are acting a certain way now when previously they haven’t acted this way. I know it was a donkey we are dealing with in this story, but if you have ever had a friend who started acting differently than you were used to, it is worth finding out if something is going on in their life.

A simple question as; “Are you okay?” can start off a conversation that might change the way you think about someone’s behavior and behavior toward you. It is often in a misunderstanding that we have to go beyond behavior and move toward understanding. Understanding is always the point of conflict. Even if we don’t end up agreeing with the other person’s point of view, at least we can understand where they are coming from and how they got to the conclusions they have come to. This is important.

It wasn’t until Balaam admitted to the donkey and to himself that something more must be happening that we see his ability to recognize the Theophany that was happening in front of him. Have you noticed that this happens a great deal in scripture? It is not until we humble ourselves and are willing to see another point of

view that we can truly see God working in our lives and around us.

How can you open your eyes to what is happening in someone else’s life?

Have you ever asked “are you okay?” and ended up with way more than you bargained for?

Have you ever had someone change the way they treat you for what seems like no reason? What did you do? Can you go back to them now and figure it out?

32 "Why did you beat your donkey three times?" the angel of the Lord demanded. "Look, I have come to block your way because you are stubbornly resisting me. 33 Three times the donkey saw me and shied away; otherwise, I would certainly have killed you by now and spared the donkey."

Well, it just sounds like Balaam made this divine messenger, and perhaps God, pretty angry. I don't think that God likes being ignored, especially by one of his Prophets. He says as much in verse 32. He is basically making the case that the donkey is a better prophet than Balaam, which is consistent with the story so far.

Do you think that God still gets angry? What do you think angers God? And do you think it is justified? What do you think it is like when God gets angry? I was watching a show about Vikings, and when the thunder crashed, they mentioned the Gods. Do you think it is like that? Do you think that natural disasters are what God makes happen when he is frustrated? I even heard a person say that a massive fire was God's punishment for what the people in the region were doing.

That kind of thinking is very Old Testament, if you don't understand the Old Testament! I don't believe that our seasons have anything to do with God's anger, nor do I believe that God is vindictive in any way shape or form. However, I do believe that God does feel what we feel, and he feels it profoundly. As I write this, Russia has invaded Ukraine, and I believe that God feels every bullet wound, every shrapnel piece that flies into flesh, and every home that is burned and destroyed. While not just in Ukraine, but everywhere in the world where there is aggression, oppression, and violence.

Because he feels that, I believe that he also feels anger, righteously, against those who would visit suffering on the innocents of this world. The feelings that come through in this text are clear.

God is upset at the pain being inflicted, but he is also angry at Balaam's unwillingness to listen to him. If we feel like this about people who don't listen to us, even our children at times, can you imagine the volume of frustration that God must feel at all times?

In the midst of that frustration, we still see a God who loves us and wants the best for us. He is constantly working to help us not only make the right decisions, but to also bless us and be with us. It is truly amazing that God, in the midst of all of it, still loves and cares for us without reservation.

Can you love and still be angry with the object of your love?

Have you ever experienced what you would interpret as God's anger?

How did it make you feel?

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34 Then Balaam confessed to the angel of the Lord, "I have sinned. I didn't realize you were standing in the road to block my way. I will return home if you are against my going." 35 But the angel of the Lord told Balaam, "Go with these men, but say only what I tell you to say." So Balaam went on with Balak's officials.
-

Balaam finally acquiesced to what God wanted for him. However, God was able to make a change in the plans and use Balaam in the situation that he had forced. God was now going to use Balaam to say only the words that God wanted him to say. I think that this put Balaam on a relatively short leash.

What hits me pretty powerfully about this text is God's ability to be flexible regardless of the circumstances. God works a bit like a GPS system. Constantly having the ability to reroute us in our journey through life. Without this ability, I think that we would constantly be lost. Sometimes it is hard for us to see what God is doing, and where he is guiding us. However, it is also a particularly human situation that we take wrong turns when we know we shouldn't go to certain places. This is why we need a God who is flexible, who forgives, and who never gives up. He can use us even when we are thinking that we made massive mistakes or went in the wrong direction.

God seems to have a willingness to let the mission be the thing that drives his engagement with us. He could have simply cut Balaam off, sent him home and on his way, but rather than that, he decided he would use him in any way that he could. It was also probably a test to see if Balaam could stick to what God wanted him to say. That is the problem with prophets, they are a little squirrely at times.

So where do we see Jesus in these texts?

When we see God emoting, we are reminded that He understands our feelings and our behav-

ior. Much of this is because of the incarnation of Jesus and his particular make-up. When we experience the love, anger, frustration, joy, and celebration of God, it is tied directly to the humanity of Jesus, and how we experience being made in the image of God. That likeness we experience comes from somewhere, and when we recognize that Jesus is the DNA architecture from which we were created, we begin to understand how God can feel like we do; it is because we feel like He does!
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Have you ever felt what someone else is feeling?

What do you think God feels about you?

How can we be more intentional about connecting with God's emotions toward us and the world?

What are some ways you can tune your heart and mind into the will of God this week?

INTRODUCTION

The following is a guide to help facilitate discussion. Feel free to add or subtract or change questions to fit the conversation, and pray for the Spirit to lead in all things.

OPEN

What phrase describes your personality best: wise as an owl, sly as a fox, quiet as a mouse, stubborn as a mule, loyal as a dog, slow as a turtle or quick as a rabbit? Please explain!

HEAD

Read Numbers 22:22-35 together and share any wisdom, insights, or questions in response to the reading. *It may be helpful to read all of ch. 22

It's interesting that Balaam didn't see the Angel of the Lord but his donkey did. What do you think God is/was communicating through this wild encounter? How does it apply to us today?

What do you see as the most amazing part of this story? That the prophet couldn't see the Angel? That the donkey could see? That the donkey could talk?! Something else?

How would you describe Balaam? A true or false prophet? A good or wishy-washy prophet? Are there any attributes or characteristics of Balaam that you identify with?

HEART

Why do you think God was angry with Balaam for leaving/going when he had just told him to (v.20) and told him to go again later (v.35)?

Has God ever "re-routed" you? If your life has gone through a course-correction, was it positive or negative? What was your response to it?

Why is it that even when we know God's will we so often struggle to adhere to it? Are you more comfortable doing things your way or God's way?

What do you need more of this week to be more open and accepting of God's plan for your life? How can this group support and pray for you in those efforts?

LIVING WORDS for YOUR WEEK

"Above all else, guard your heart, for it affects everything you do... Look straight ahead, and fix your eyes on what lies before you. Mark out a straight path for your feet; then stick to the path and stay safe. Don't get sidetracked; keep your feet from following evil."

-Proverbs 4:23, 25-27.

THE WALK

Week 04 of 09

Jesus and Balaam

JESUS IN EDEN

Genesis 1-2, John 1: 1-3

INTRODUCTION

The following is a guide to help facilitate discussion. Feel free to add or subtract or change questions to fit the conversation, and pray for the Spirit to lead in all things.

OPEN

If you had to lose one sense or ability that you currently have, what would it be and how do you think your life would change?

HEAD

Read together Genesis 1-2 (you may choose to read part or all, whatever your group has time and desires), John 1: 1-31, and share any thoughts, insights, or impressions you had as you read through the passage.

Why did the disciples believe the blindness of the man was a direct result of either his sin or his parent's sin?

What does Jesus' answer to the disciples' question reveal about how he views the man's suffering?

Did Jesus have to use mud to heal the man? If not, why do you think he did?

Do you think it would have been easier for the Pharisees to dismiss the healing if the man became blind later in life versus being born blind? Explain.

Why didn't the blind man's parents stand up for their son more?

HEART

What were the Pharisees blind to that became clear in this story?

Think about the blind man's journey from blind to sight; from not being able to go to synagogue to now having access, only to be kicked out because of his witness to who he thought Jesus was. Knowing all this, reflect on the

blind man's journey and Jesus' action of seeking the man out in verse 35. Is Jesus only interested in physical healing? Who enabled the man to want to believe? Who enables us? (see also John 14: 6)

Miracles and signs are to reveal to us more about God. Why do we want to make miracles and what we learn about God about us instead of about Him?

What is something that God has done in your life and what did it reveal to you and others about Him?

How do you and I, broken as we are, become better witnesses to who God is?

HANDS

Thinking of something that God has done in your life, is there someone in your circle of influence (family, friend, coworker, neighbor) that you can share that with and what you learned about God through that experience? If so, pray for an opportunity to witness to them about God.

LIVING WORDS for YOUR WEEK

For everyone has sinned; we all fall short of God's glorious standard. Yet God, in his grace, freely makes us right in his sight. He did this through Christ Jesus when he freed us from the penalty for our sins. For God presented Jesus as the sacrifice for sin.

Romans 3: 23-25, NLT

INTRODUCTION

The following questions are a guide to help families with children understand God and discover His love throughout the series. You may think of other ideas that fit the needs of your family.

Read Numbers 22:22-35 together with your family.

This sounds like it is straight out of Dr. Doolittle. Can you imagine if your pet talked to you? Or even more wild, if an angel appeared in front of you?

How many times did the donkey see the angel before Balaam finally saw the angel?

What did the donkey do each time he saw and angel?

Why do you think the angel appeared to Balaam on the road? What would you do if an angel appeared in front of you and gave you instructions?

This image shows a full page of white paper with horizontal blue or grey ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page, providing a template for handwriting practice or general writing. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the page.

WEEK 5

Day 29
Exodus 3:1-3

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One day Moses was tending the flock of his father-in-law, Jethro, the priest of Midian. He led the flock far into the wilderness and came to Sinai, the mountain of God. ² There the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a blazing fire from the middle of a bush. Moses stared in amazement. Though the bush was engulfed in flames, it didn't burn up. ³ "This is amazing," Moses said to himself. "Why isn't that bush burning up? I must go see it."

-

I love this text because it shows God's flair for the dramatic! Really? A burning bush? Seems a little over the top for me. However, sometimes God shows up in really dramatic ways, and it is just what we need to finally appreciate that he is present and deeply connected to us and what is happening in the lives of his people.

Moses is doing the worst of all jobs in the ancient world. He is basically watching sheep do very little. A parallel to today's jobs would be a parking lot attendant. Not a lot happens in those jobs. They are still important, but pretty lackluster at times. They can be boring, and not much happens, until something seriously happens; a car getting stolen, a mugging, or something similar. However, the majority of the time, it's just sitting and watching sheep munch on whatever they can find in the desert.

So when there was a bush engulfed in flames, of course Moses was going to check it out. We do the same thing when we see an accident with a flaming car on the side of the road. We are curious creatures, and so going and taking a look is not out of the question, probably for any of us! As well, Moses has very little to do that would take up his time. Perhaps he was bored and just wanted to see something that might make the day more interesting. Regardless of the reason, he walked up and knew something amazing was happening.

Have you ever known that something amazing was about to happen in your life? What did

you do? Did you lean into it, or shy away from it? When these things happen in our lives, it is often a test of our character, as much as knowing something horrible is going to happen to us. When something great, something amazing, or something out of the ordinary happens, we need to accept this and see what God has for us. Life truly can be an adventure, if we allow it to be, and in that way, we can live our lives as a celebration of God's plan, rather than approaching them with fear and trepidation.

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Have you ever known that something amazing was about to happen in your life? What did you do?

When God sends good things, how do you respond?

Do you think God showing up in the bush was a little dramatic?

Day 30
Exodus 3:4

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4 When the Lord saw Moses coming to take a closer look, God called to him from the middle of the bush, "Moses! Moses!". "Here I am!" Moses replied.

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There is one point to be made in this text today. God knew Moses' name, and called him by it.

Do you think that God knows your name? I'm serious, do you think he knows your name? And would he ever call your name out when he wanted something from you?

To think that the God of the Universe is interested in you and knows you so personally that he knows who you are is pretty powerful. While we have this academic understanding that God knows a lot, and a lot about you, the idea that God knows your name is pretty intimate. In a world with 7 billion people, to think that God knows you, your name, what you love and what you could do without, what you have and what you don't have, is pretty impressive.

The truth is that he knows more about you than that. He has a very clear understanding of everything about you, and that knowledge has not turned him off to you. Rather, it has made him love you even more than you could imagine. There is really nothing you can do that will diminish God's love for you. While it doesn't always feel like a constant in our lives, it is. Sometimes, we have to lean on the fact that God loves us, rather than on the feelings we have about that love.

It's kind of like forgiveness. Sometimes, we don't feel forgiven, although it is promised in scripture. We have a tendency to think that we need to feel forgiven or it is not the case. But if we lean into the promise of forgiveness, we can live as if we have been, and then the feelings begin to come. It is a bit of a cart before the horse situation, but we need to believe in the fact before the feeling at times.

God calling out your name might be a shocking thing to you, but for Moses, he took it in stride. Knowing that it is possible for God to do all that he was doing in the bush, burning it and not burning, and still being able to call out the name of someone he loves and someone for whom he has big plans. Moses, maybe because he had been in the desert for so long, was ready for a calling to come from God. He had been prepared, and he was ready to do what God would have him do!

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Are you ready to hear God call your name?

More importantly, are you ready to do what he has called you to do?

How has God spoken to you in the past, how do you think he will in the future?

Day 31
Exodus 3:5-6

5 "Do not come any closer," the Lord warned. "Take off your sandals, for you are standing on holy ground. 6 I am the God of your father—the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." When Moses heard this, he covered his face because he was afraid to look at God.

What is your holy ground?

Where do you feel like you are doing the work that God has given to you? Where do you find yourself where you want to take off your shoes in order for you to honor the goodness and greatness of God in the work that he has given you? Where has God shown up so that you know you are standing in the presence of God and that presence makes this place holy?

Have you ever had an encounter with God that made you realize how unworthy you were to untie his sandals, to even be present in the presence of God?

It is proper for us to notice that when people in scripture found themselves in the presence of God, they often feared for their lives. There is a sense of unworthiness that they recognized in themselves, and Moses was no different. In fact, fear is often introduced into the equation because of the unequalled power of God. When we see God, 2 things happen: 1) We recognize that his power is much greater than we could have imagined, and 2) That in the presence of such power, we are often overwhelmed by our sense of worthlessness.

However, God never leaves us there. He recognizes that this will be part of the experience, and he quickly moves past our fear to show us what he has for us. A job, a calling, a family, a legacy, an opportunity. God is a god that bestows gifts to his children, and if we are lucky enough to be in his presence and know that we are, then we can also know that God has something for us, and that we have been called and claimed as his children.

You know, Moses had been on that patch of dirt before, and it was never considered holy before this moment. So what changed? God showed up! That's the change that makes the mundane things in life become deeply holy and important. Without the presence of God, we stand on patches of dirt, but with the presence of God, we stand on an ever-undulating opportunity to move and be moved by what God is doing and what God will do in our lives.

What is your holy ground?

What has God called you to and said he would be present with you while you do it?

Have you ever felt God so strongly that you feel fear?

Day 32
Exodus 3:7-10

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7 Then the Lord told him, "I have certainly seen the oppression of my people in Egypt. I have heard their cries of distress because of their harsh slave drivers. Yes, I am aware of their suffering. 8 So I have come down to rescue them from the power of the Egyptians and lead them out of Egypt into their own fertile and spacious land. It is a land flowing with milk and honey—the land where the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Hivites, and Jebusites now live. 9 Look! The cry of the people of Israel has reached me, and I have seen how harshly the Egyptians abuse them. 10 Now go, for I am sending you to Pharaoh. You must lead my people Israel out of Egypt."

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This is the call.

The call is derived from the cries that God has heard of those who are being misused and abused under the Egyptian economic system. This was a system that demanded more and more from less and less resources and time. It was brutal, and the Israelites were the ones who bore the brunt of this system. They had been crying out to God for quite a while, and he heard their cries and his plan was to bring Moses back from the desert in order to be the one who was able to lead them out of Egypt.

God recognized that his people needed their own land, and they needed a land that was abundant in many things. But he recognizes that this land is filled with a few people at this point. In fact, he lists off 6 different tribes that were currently living in the land that God had given them.

What is interesting is that if you go to the Israeli government website, they quote the promise that God gave the Israelites about this land, and still claim that this land has been given to them. While I'm not interested in arguing the politics of this in today's world with you, I do think that this was a big promise, and yet God knows it will not be an easy journey to get to

this new land.

But nevertheless, he is asking—no, telling—Moses that he is going to use Moses to get his people out of Egypt. He gives him a command: "Now Go", and this is pretty much how God always works. His calling is a call to go, never a call to stay. When God calls, your life is going to be moving into a place of chaos for a while, and that is okay, because God is going to be with you.

We all like the idea of being called by God, but there is one word that always comes to mind when God calls us: inconvenient! It is never simple or easy for us to do what God is calling us to do. However, it is possible when we have God involved in the process. Without God being there, we could never really do the things that he asks us to do. But with God, all things are possible.

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Do you think that God hears your cries?

Do you think he will send you a deliverer?

How can you know that you are called by God to do something? Does community recognizing your call matter?

11 But Moses protested to God, “Who am I to appear before Pharaoh? Who am I to lead the people of Israel out of Egypt?”. 12 God answered, “I will be with you. And this is your sign that I am the one who has sent you: When you have brought the people out of Egypt, you will worship God at this very mountain.”

Moses was incredulous, and why wouldn't he be? He was concerned about going back to Egypt, because he left under pretty spurious circumstances. Without some protection there would be some problems. However, let us not forget that 40 years had now passed and it seems as if a great deal of those people he was running from were no longer in power. But that doesn't mean that he was any less concerned about heading back in that direction.

Have you ever been asked to do something that is probably not going to go very well?

I have done a lot of weddings over the years. I enjoy them, and I think I am actually pretty good at them. However, because I am a good public speaker, often people will think that I am probably a pretty good Emcee for their reception. Now, I know that for sure I am not a good Emcee, I am horrible. I can't remember people's names, what comes next in the program, or what I am supposed to be doing. I can't be funny at the drop of a hat, it has to be very natural and organic, which means I can't really deliver a joke at all. There are people, even pastors (I'm looking at you Paddy McCoy!) who can do this, but NOT ME!

So when God called on Moses to go back to where he had come from and free the people, he just wasn't sure this was something that was a really good idea.

God answers his fears by simply saying, “I will be with you”. That was supposed to be enough for Moses to stop asking those questions and understand that everything was going to be

okay. But of course, it wasn't quite enough for Moses.

Why do you think we always need more than one promise from God? We don't seem like we simply say “Okay” with the first promise that God gives us. There are over Seven Thousand promises in the whole of scripture, and it feels like we need every single one of them to convince us that God is good, that he is with us, and that he wants what is best for us. If there was simply one promise, just the promise that God would be with us, I am pretty sure that we would ignore it and keep looking for others.

But don't you think that essentially every promise in scripture is that promise that God will be with us? Whether it is the covenants in the Old Testament, the incarnation in the New Testament, or his promise to come back and be with us in the second coming, they are all saying the same thing: God will be with us!

Do you believe that God is with you today?
How can you know? How can you trust this promise?

If God were sitting right next to you today, what would you ask for, what would you say?

13 But Moses protested, "If I go to the people of Israel and tell them, 'The God of your ancestors has sent me to you,' they will ask me, 'What is his name?' Then what should I tell them?" 14 God replied to Moses, "I am who I am. Say this to the people of Israel: I have sent me to you."

This is one of the most important statements in scripture. God says "Ego Eimi". It has been translated as "I am". But that is not really the greatest translation of this particular phrase. Moses would have heard it differently than this. We have become used to this language over the last few thousand years, but what if we heard something that we weren't so familiar or comfortable with?

A better translation of this phrase would be: "I cause to be because I cause to be". The statement that God was making was that he is the primary cause of all life and everything in the universe. It is not a declaration of divinity, it is a declaration of EVERYTHING. He is the cause, the sustainer, the creator, the savior, and everything in between. He is the beginning and the end, not because of his knowledge, rather, because of his EVERYTHING-NESS. It all exists because, in and through him. Without him, there is nothing to even exist. This is the beginning and the end of all life, all thought, and all everything.

Does this seem like too much for God to take on? I suppose so. However, nothing or no one else could take this on in any way. So it must be God.

The reason Moses was asking about "who should I say sent me. . ." is because the names of God often were interpreted to be a different to be different aspects of his character, and in some more extreme cases, it would be seen as almost a different part of God in the pantheon of their understanding of divinity. Perhaps this is one of the reasons for the unequivocal nature of his declaration and statement to Moses. He didn't want anyone to be confused as to who was

sending Moses back into the fray by sending him to Egypt.

Moses had led a relatively boring existence for the last 40 years, but now he is being called back into the real work! He is being called back into the game in order to be a precursor for the savior of the world, by leading Israel away from Egypt. And Moses is not seen necessarily as a type for Jesus, unlike Adam, he is still an example of how God can use someone to bring about a different reality for those he claims as his own.

Have you ever been called to do something you don't want to do?

What would you have said to God in this situation?

What do you think of God? Is it with this much power?

The following is a guide to help facilitate discussion. Feel free to add or subtract or change questions to fit the conversation, and pray for the Spirit to lead in all things.

OPEN

What's a geographical location that is special to you? How long has it been of special significance to you? Why?

HEAD

Read together Exodus 3:1-14. (you may choose to read part or all, whatever your group has time and desires), and share any thoughts, insights, or impressions you had as you read through the passage.

What is Moses' reaction to the bush? Why do you think Moses is so collected and curious when he sees the bush and hears a voice?

How does God identify Himself to Moses at the start of their conversation? Why do you think God chose this title for their conversation? (v. 6)

What does God call Moses to do? How does Moses react? If you were to evaluate their statements logically, who would be more logical in their words—God or Moses?

Moses asks that God give him a name to offer the Israelites. What is the name God provides at this point in the passage? What is the meaning of this name? (v. 14)

How would you describe the conversation between Moses and God in this passage? Was it easy? Difficult? Argumentative?

HEART

One of the key elements of this story is the holy ground. It's holy because God's presence is there—in a bush in the desert. This is meaningful because it reaffirmed the idea that their God could appear anywhere. Do you believe God's ability to show up anywhere is good or bad? Why or why not?

The daily study guide commentary noted that Moses is reacting to the inconvenience of God's call. Why do you think Moses was so sensitive to the challenges (vs. the opportunities) he'd face? When God calls you, are you more sensitive to the challenges or opportunities?

The promises made to Moses in this passage are reflective of the promises God makes to His people—collectively and individually. Do you believe that God is with our church? And do you believe that God is with you?

Think about the words, actions, and promises made in Moses' encounter with the burning bush. What does this theophany illustrate about God's character?

HANDS

Reflect on the daily commentary and the discussion that you've had today. Take a moment to pray for God to give you a clear calling for this year. Make an action plan for how you plan to fulfill this calling and share it with your study group or an accountability partner.

LIVING WORDS for YOUR WEEK

"Do not be afraid or discouraged, for the LORD will personally go ahead of you. He will be with you; he will neither fail you nor abandon you."

(Deut 31:8)

Exodus 3:1-14

INTRODUCTION

The following is a guide to help facilitate discussion. Feel free to add or subtract or change questions to fit the conversation, and pray for the Spirit to lead in all things.

OPEN

Have you ever found something in an unexpected place? Perhaps you've lost your keys or your wallet at some point and found it in the most unexpected place, like the refrigerator. Share this experience with each other.

HEAD

We have often labeled places where God is able to show up. Often we say that God is at church, God is in hospitals, or any other place where "good" work is done. This was a concept in scripture as well. There were specific places where one would encounter God. What's so awesome here in this portion of scripture is that God's presence makes the place around him holy. A normal bush in a normal part of a mountain because holy ground because of God. This teaches us that God's presence makes something holy.

HEART

Jesus furthers the idea of where someone could encounter God. Jesus is God coming down to humanity; this beautiful truth is the reason why we celebrate life! Although Jesus resurrected and ascended into heaven, his presence was still with us. The holy spirit chooses to dwell within us - meaning we are made holy because of the presence of God in our lives.

HANDS

When we think of holy things we don't often think of ourselves. This is often because we can clearly see the places in life where we fall short. Humanity isn't very known for being good. Yet we learn something so awesome in this scripture. We learn that God makes places holy because of his presence. Today, know that you are holy because God chooses to dwell within

LIVING WORDS for YOUR WEEK

"God answered, 'I will be with you. And this is your sign that I am the one who has sent you: when you have brought the people out of Egypt, you will worship God at this very mountain.'"

Exodus 3:12

INTRODUCTION

The following questions are a guide to help families with children understand God and discover His love throughout the series. You may think of other ideas that fit the needs of your family.

Read Exodus 3:1-14 together with your family.

A bush that's on fire but doesn't burn up? No wonder Moses went to investigate.

Why do you think the bush was not burning up?

The voice of God told Moses that he was on holy ground. Why do you think he asked Moses to take off his shoes here?

When Moses said he was afraid to lead the people out of Egypt, what did God promise him? Do you think God does the same thing for us today?

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WEEK 6

Day 36
Joshua 5:1

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5 When all the Amorite kings west of Jordan and all the Canaanite kings who lived along the Mediterranean coast heard how the Lord had dried up the Jordan River so the people of Israel could cross, they lost heart and were paralyzed with fear because of them.

The very first line of this part of the book of Joshua is a fulfillment of the promise that the land would be given to them. The people of the land of Canaan seemed to certainly understand that something was about to happen to them that they didn't necessarily have control over, and it wouldn't end well for them. Really, they believed that there was a God that was greater than theirs and that they might have to answer to that God at some point in time. It seemed to them that their time was getting very close.

Such reactions of fear were pretty commonplace when the children of Israel showed up. I think this was true for a few reasons; 1) There were a lot of them. 2) They could be relatively bloodthirsty.

I know we don't like to think of our faith ancestors as brutal, but they were at times. As well, they were coming back to a land they believed God had promised them, and so they did not need to deal kindly with the inhabitants of those lands, as those inhabitants were usurpers of what Israel would and still does see as her birthright.

Have you ever had something that was promised to you? You feel like you have some sort of right to take it. And certainly this is what Israel felt about the land of milk and honey. When you feel like it has been promised to you, feel a sense of ownership that is reasonable, but can certainly be inconvenient for those who also feel some ownership.

The truth is, today, what you have been promised and what you own is the fact that you are a child of God. It has been promised and it has

been made a reality in the life and death and resurrection of Jesus. We can know this, beyond a shadow of a doubt. It is important that we live in the reality of the grace and salvation of Jesus, regardless of how we feel about it sometimes.

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When God promises something, he makes good on those promises.

What have you been promised that you didn't get?

What have you been promised that you did?

How can you know whether or not we have really been given what God promises us?

Day 37
Joshua 5:2-3

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2 At that time the Lord told Joshua, "Make flint knives and circumcise this second generation of Israelites." 3 So Joshua made flint knives and circumcised the entire male population of Israel at Gibeath-haaraloth.

How in the world is this somehow showing us Jesus in the Old Testament?

I think this is a fair question for this particular text. And why in the world are they going to do a mass circumcision? And how is this a nice devotional for a random day in this series?

Again, fair questions.

First, we know that in the upcoming texts we will see why it is that a mass circumcision was needed. Secondly, it is part of a larger reveal that we will see in the larger portion of this text for this week. We know that Joshua was always a bit of a type for Jesus in the Old Testament, they even share a bit of a name. So, in this regard, the revealing of the story of Joshua and the children of Israel is always a revealing of who Jesus is, and how Jesus saves people.

But yes, there is a brutal reality to the story of a mass circumcision in this story. But the truth is, rituals are an important part of faith, and this ritual was in preparation for what was coming next for them. The preparation they were given was not one that was particularly militaristic, but it was spiritual. Rather than running war games, or training the men, we see that God is requiring a spiritual preparation for his people so that they might take the land and use it as God is wanting, not simply consuming all that is there. Rather, a spiritual preparation is more in order with what God wants.

How are you being prepared spiritually?
What is God doing in your life before you get to jump in on what he has prepared for you?
What is God getting you ready for?
How is He preparing you spiritually?
How do you know?

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4 Joshua had to circumcise them because all the men who were old enough to fight in battle when they left Egypt had died in the wilderness. 5 Those who left Egypt had all been circumcised, but none of those born after the Exodus, during the years in the wilderness, had been circumcised. 6 The Israelites had traveled in the wilderness for forty years until all the men who were old enough to fight in battle when they left Egypt had died. For they had disobeyed the Lord, and the Lord vowed he would not let them enter the land he had sworn to give us—a land flowing with milk and honey. 7 So Joshua circumcised their sons—those who had grown up to take their fathers' places—for they had not been circumcised on the way to the Promised Land. 8 After all the males had been circumcised, they rested in the camp until they were healed.

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Circumcision was an early sign of the covenant between God and Abraham (Genesis 17:11). It was done for every male in each generation. However, it seemed to not have been done during the time in the wilderness. This is ironic because Moses had an experience when the Lord tried to kill him because he had not circumcised his own child. (Exodus 4:24-26). However, he must not have been too concerned about circumcision as he allowed an entire generation to go without, and then differentiated that generation from their sons by this requirement.

As well, this is the first time we really see the beginning of Israel's real identification with this land that was promised to them, and marks a deep contrast with the preceding generation, which had rebelled against Moses and the Lord.

An important piece here is to notice that Joshua obeyed God explicitly, and the wording is identical in the command that we see in verse 2. The name of the hill mentioned in verse 3 literally means "hill of foreskins"! I know this is gross, but it means there were more than a few men who went under the knife that day.

This ritual was especially important to have happened before Passover. As it is part of the ritual that was required before they could partake in it. Do you have any rituals that help prepare you for what you are about to do?

Let's ask this in the more practical:

Before you come to church, is there anything you do to prepare yourself for worship? Do you take time to prepare? Do you read? Do you listen to music? Do you spend time in prayer? Do you come to church full of food, or hungry for the word? What rituals and habits do you have that actually accelerate your experience of worship and communion with God?

While most of us don't have to see a "hill of foreskins" to know God is doing something (I am already apologizing for that sentence), we do need to see how God is working in our lives, and we can see that when we have prepared ourselves to see it.

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What Sabbath morning rituals do you have?
How can you come to church more prepared to worship?

What is the greatest desire of your heart when you come before the throne of Grace?

9 Then the Lord said to Joshua, "Today I have rolled away the shame of your slavery in Egypt." So that place has been called Gilgal to this day.

Name Changes, or the simple act of naming things always signifies something greater in scripture. And of course, this is no different. The men were not able to move too quickly after the mass circumcision (of course!), and so they remained at Gilgal until they were healed (v.8) Passover happened during that time, and while they were not completely healed, they were certainly well enough to join in the Passover services.

What we see is that the "reproach of Egypt" was being let go and rolled away. The Gilgal sounds like the Hebrew word for roll (gilal). In other words, or words that would make more sense to us, the stench of their repression in Egypt had been taken away from them. They were no longer those people, they were now a conquering army. With that change in attitude towards them, came a recognition that things were now different and they needed to mark this difference by naming the place where they were.

If you could change your name, what would you change it to? Would it be something very different, something that told a story, or something that sounded much the same? When my daughter went to college she decided that she wanted people to call her by her full first and middle name. So still, when I meet someone who knows my daughter, I know how long they have been in her life; if they say both names, they are newer!

These Israelites no longer had to feel the shame of the Reproach of Egypt that was heaped upon them for generations. Now, they are free to begin anew, to start fresh and redefine who they are to the world.

Would you like a new start today? Because you can have it. It is always being offered to

us through the grace and forgiveness of Jesus Christ. Everyday his mercies are new to us, take him up on it.

If you picked a new name, what would it be? Have you ever had a reputation that was hard to get rid of? How did you finally shed that reputation?

Can you start new, right now? How can you do that? Is it really as easy as a prayer?

Day 40
Joshua 5:10-12

10 While the Israelites were camped at Gilgal on the plains of Jericho, they celebrated Passover on the evening of the fourteenth day of the first month. 11 The very next day they began to eat unleavened bread and roasted grain harvested from the land. 12 No manna appeared on the day they first ate from the crops of the land, and it was never seen again. So from that time on the Israelites ate from the crops of Canaan.

No more Manna!!!

That's a big deal when you have had that resource for your whole life. Many of those Israelites wouldn't have ever known what it was to plant crops, to forage from the land, or to live any differently than they had become used to. It was probably a shock that the manna stopped being present each morning. However, they were in the land of "milk and honey", so there was probably much more to eat than they had been used to as they were stuck in the Sinai peninsula over the last 40 years.

This is also signifying that things are different now. The naming of the area, stopping manna each day, means that God is signifying that something different is going to become normal now. And as we all know, it is difficult getting used to any of the new normal in our lives. Think of going to the same store to eat lunch everyday for 40 years, and then suddenly, it isn't there anymore. That would be shocking to us, as I am sure it was for them as well.

How do we get used to a new normal, even when the new thing is better than the old thing? Change is never easy, and the change the Israelites were having to endure was probably very difficult. It was also an end to a very important epoch in Israel's history. The event is also presented in a way that reminds us of the very first Passover (Exodus 12). The food is not the point, but the fact that the food is coming from the new land means that the new land is now their home.

Where is your home?
What did you do the first day you were in your new house?
How can you get used to the new normal?

13 When Joshua was near the town of Jericho, he looked up and saw a man standing in front of him with sword in hand. Joshua went up to him and demanded, "Are you friend or foe?" 14 "Neither one," he replied. "I am the commander of the Lord's army." At this, Joshua fell with his face to the ground in reverence. "I am at your command," Joshua said. "What do you want your servant to do?" 15 The commander of the Lord's army replied, "Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy." And Joshua did as he was told.

This last bit of text in this story reminds us that the preparation that was needed was spiritual, not militaristic. Spiritual concerns were to be of first importance when they were to face what was in store for them.

This principle stands true today. God wants our undivided attention and loyalty, and of course, our holiness. Perhaps we don't talk about holiness enough, and perhaps we don't understand it very well either. Too often, our understanding of holiness has to do with behavior, rather than a state that we live in when we are fully connected to Jesus. We have a tendency to think that if we just do the right things, we will be holy. But holiness has a great deal more to do with being proclaimed as holy by Jesus than it does with the way we do certain things in our lives.

When Joshua meets the man with the drawn sword, which is pretty disconcerting, he is in the proximity of Jericho. He sees this man and asks if he is friend or foe. This man tells him who he is, the commander of the Lord's Army. Wow! That's a big deal. There have been questions about whether or not this was someone who was willing to do battle for Israel, or even if God was calling Israel his army. However, the words used have been used before to deal with the concept of a heavenly army, so this was not a man, it was someone from heaven.

Joshua recognized who this man was, and immediately prostrated himself on the ground and

worshiped him. This was a recognition that he is in the presence of the divine, whether it was the divine himself or someone that the God of the universe sent from heaven. What is clear is that this man was for Israel, and not against them. Therefore, we know that God would be with them in the next episode of this story.

Have you ever wondered if God was for you or against you? What made you think that? What changed your mind? How can we know that God is for us? (Luke 4)

Have you ever had an encounter with the divine?

What does it mean to you to be holy?

Do you think behavior makes you holy?

INTRODUCTION

The following is a guide to help facilitate discussion. Feel free to add or subtract or change questions to fit the conversation, and pray for the Spirit to lead in all things.

OPEN

Have you ever met someone who you were incredibly nervous or intimidated to meet? Who was it and what was that experience like?

HEAD

Read Joshua 5: 13-15 together and share any wisdom, insights, or questions in response to the reading.

Who and what was standing in Joshua and the Israelites way from going farther on their journey?

Joshua's first response to the man with the sword was to ask if he was a friend or foe. Why do you think Joshua didn't recognize the man as from God?

Other than having a sword in hand, what do you think this "man" who identifies himself as "the commander of the Lord's army" looks like?

Who do you think the "man" in the story is?

We don't have a violent Jesus in the New Testament. He even tells Peter to put his sword away. Why is He carrying a sword here?

When Jesus introduces Himself, Joshua falls face down in reverence. Why do you think this was the common response to a Godly encounter?

What made the ground where Joshua was holy?

How is Joshua's story similar to his mentor Moses? What do you think him having his own encounter with God would have meant to him now that Moses is gone?

HEART

What kinds of things get in our way of accomplishing God's call in our lives?

Do you and I walk on holy ground today? If so, when, where, and what should our response be?

Have you ever had an encounter with Jesus that was undeniable? If so and you're willing to share with the group, please do.

Is struggling always a bad thing?

Do you have any wounds from your journey that are actually helpful reminders for you in your faith?

If Jesus is involved in this story, there must be good news. What good news can we take from this story?

HANDS

If God were to give you a new name, something for you to live into, what do you think it would be or what characteristic might it lean into? What have you been struggling with and what blessing do you need at this time in your journey?

LIVING WORDS for YOUR WEEK

"What shall we say about such wonderful things as these? If God is for us, who can ever be against us?"
Romans 8: 31

"This is my command—be strong and courageous! Do not be afraid or discouraged. For the Lord your God is with you wherever you go."
Joshua 1: 9

THE WALK (YOUTH)
Week 6 of 9

Jesus and Joshua
I listen to God

Joshua 5: 13-15

LIVING WORDS for YOUR WEEK
“At this, Joshua fell with his face to the ground
in reverence.”
Joshua 5:14

INTRODUCTION

The following is a guide to help facilitate discussion. Feel free to add or subtract or change questions to fit the conversation, and pray for the Spirit to lead in all things.

OPEN

We all know people who carry a lot of influence in our lives. It can be a friend, a parent, or a teacher. Think of a person in your life that carries a lot of influence in your life and share why that person does.

HEAD

We see Joshua here encounter the commander of the Lord's army. This meeting is nothing short of a God encounter - an event in which a normal human encounters divinity. Joshua postures himself well in this encounter. Instead of asking questions or being skeptical, Joshua reacts by listening to what the man said. A question can be raised in our lives: are we listening to what the God moments in our lives are saying? Joshua chose to listen to the man and take off his sandals. He showed reverence and respect to the man. In the same way, we are called to show reverence and respect when God shows up in our lives.

HEART

God's presence is a gift. Here in this portion of scripture we see a powerful moment in which Joshua gets to encounter divinity. It's in this divine encounter that Joshua receives God's promise of victory. Here's what we can learn - God wants to give us victory yet it requires us to listen intently.

HANDS

Are you listening to God when he speaks to you? The victory that God wishes to give us requires us to listen and act upon what God says. May we be a people that listens and acts when God speaks.

INTRODUCTION

The following questions are a guide to help families with children understand God and discover His love throughout the series. You may think of other ideas that fit the needs of your family.

Read Joshua 5:13-15 together with your family.

We've heard of Joshua and the battle of Jericho, but just before we get to that part of the story, we have this text.

Who did Joshua meet on the road to Jericho?

What did Joshua do when he met this person?

Why do you think he responded the way he did?

The Commander of the Lord's Army helped Joshua win the battle of Jericho (ch.6) How do you think the Commander of the Lord's Army can help you?

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WEEK 7

11 Then the angel of the Lord came and sat beneath the great tree at Ophrah, which belonged to Joash of the clan of Abiezer. Gideon son of Joash was threshing wheat at the bottom of a winepress to hide the grain from the Midianites.
12 The angel of the Lord appeared to him and said, "Mighty hero, the Lord is with you!"

Can you believe that when I was in college, I took an entire class just on the book of Judges? 10 weeks, on Judges, and we barely scratched the surface of some of the most bizarre books in Scripture.

In Judges, you find the Israelites breaking their covenant with God again and again as they open the doors of their hearts to other gods. As they prostitute themselves to receive the idols of their neighbors, God allows them to receive the consequences of their decisions. They fall into slavery, starvation, and other ills because they abandoned the way that leads to life.

But God continues to show that He is slow to anger and abounding in love and faithfulness (Exodus 34: 6). When Israel cries out to God for help, though they don't deserve it, God rescues.

We witness this pattern again with the story of Gideon. Gideon is one of the judges chosen to rescue Israel from the oppression of their neighbors. But Gideon doesn't fit the mold of what or who we think a hero should be. When, "the angel of the Lord," comes to call him, we find Gideon hiding in the bottom of a winepress. Yet still, what does the angel call Gideon? "Mighty hero," or in other translations, "Mighty man of valor."

This angel we believe to be Jesus, and the foreshadowing of the ultimate rescue mission that we call the gospel, is found clearly in this short encounter with Gideon.

You and I are plagued with an enemy. For Gideon, it was the Midianites. For us, it's the

devil and our own brokenness. Time and time again we go astray, each of us turning to our own way (Isaiah 53: 6), and yet, at just the right time, Christ came and died for us (Romans 5: 6) just as he came to Gideon.

And when Jesus calls Gideon a "Mighty hero," it makes me think of a story told by author Shane Claiborne in his book, *Irresistible Revolution*. He tells about a time when he and a friend of his were arguing over something involving Jesus. His friend was much more traditional and conservative than he was, but they enjoyed the respectful disagreement and wrestling with truths that followed. In this day's argument, however, Shane's friend made the statement that Jesus never talked to a prostitute. Shane came unglued as he reached for his Bible to show his friend all the places where that statement wasn't true. Before Shane could find his first reference, his friend said, "No Shane, you don't understand. Jesus never talked to a prostitute because he would never have seen anyone as a prostitute." Shane closed his Bible and smiled.

Jesus comes to us all, in our best and worst moments, and he not only calls us to something better, He sees us as something better; children of God, in whom He loves and with whom He is well pleased. That gospel is found not just in the New Testament, but right here in the book of Judges.

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Who or what enemies do you feel are fighting against you right now? Depression or anxiety? Disease? Addiction?

What would you want God to say to you if He were standing in front of you right now?

How does knowing that God comes in search of you even in the midst of your fear, give you courage for the day?

-

13 “Sir,” Gideon replied, “if the Lord is with us, why has all this happened to us? And where are all the miracles our ancestors told us about? Didn’t they say, ‘The Lord brought us up out of Egypt’? But now the Lord has abandoned us and handed us over to the Midianites.”

As I’m writing this reflection, I’m also preparing a sermon on Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead. There is a similar statement made to Jesus in that interaction, as there is in this one.

In John 11, Lazarus was sick and his sisters, Martha and Mary, sent him word in hopes that Jesus would come and heal him. If you know the story, then you know that Jesus didn’t get there in time to save Lazarus. In fact, Jesus didn’t even come right away. Instead, he waited a couple of days before traveling.

Upon arriving in Bethan, the home of Lazarus, Martha, and Mary, Martha went straight up to Jesus and said, “Lord, if only you had been here, my brother would not have died.” Martha believed Jesus was the Messiah, that he could have healed Lazarus, she just didn’t understand why he didn’t.

Gideon also doesn’t understand. Sure, he’s heard the stories of old; the stories of an all-mighty God who saved the Israelites from the hand of the Egyptians. Those were the good ole days when God seemed so active, so present, so mighty to save.

But from Gideon’s current vantage point, their enemies have the upper hand and God is nowhere to be found. Every time the Israelites plant a crop, or build a house, or try to settle down and relax, the Midianites swoop in and take everything from food to livestock to livelihood. Gideon is tired of hiding, tired of getting knocked down again and again, so he’s left asking, “if the Lord is with us, why has all this happened to us?”

That question has been echoed by many over

the years. If the Lord is with us, why does my son have leukemia? If the Lord is with us, why did my husband cheat on me? If the Lord is with us, why are we hit at every turn with another disease (COVID), or war (Ukraine and Russia), or bills we can’t pay? If the Lord is with us, then why?

We’ll get to Jesus’ answer to the why in tomorrow’s passage, but I think it’s appropriate to sit with the why today, because there isn’t always a good answer. Life in this world poses lots of challenges, and sin is truly an awful state of existence. In my life, I have been comforted most by those who sit with me in the why, holding me up, and whispering in my ear that I’m not alone.

Maybe that’s why Jesus comes in the form of an angel to Gideon at this moment. He could have been a voice from a burning bush, a talking donkey, or a pillar of cloud, but instead he comes in a recognizable form to remind Gideon that he is not, nor ever has been, alone. If you’re in a ‘why’ time of your life, I hope you know that He is with you even when it doesn’t feel like it.

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Was there a time in your life when you remember feeling like you were all alone?

Is there someone in your circle of influence today that you could reach out to, a text, a call, an email, who may need to be reminded that they are not alone?

How would you answer Gideon’s question, “if the Lord is with us, why has all this happened to us?”

Day 45
Judges 6:14-16

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14 Then the Lord turned to him and said, "Go with the strength you have, and rescue Israel from the Midianites. I am sending you!"

15 "But Lord," Gideon replied, "how can I rescue Israel? My clan is the weakest in the whole tribe of Manasseh, and I am the least in my entire family!"

16 The Lord said to him, "I will be with you. And you will destroy the Midianites as if you were fighting against one man."

Well this isn't the way Gideon would have written his story. He wanted God to act, absolutely, but he probably would have been more comfortable watching and cheering God on from the sidelines. So when Jesus told Gideon, "I am sending you!" Gideon did what we all do, he immediately looked to himself and gave Jesus all the reasons why that was a bad idea.

Gideon tells Jesus, as if he didn't already know, that his family is the last one anyone in their right mind would choose. And Gideon himself? Well, he's the last of the last. He's the guy no one picks to be on their team. I mean, at the moment he's hiding in a winepress for pity sake.

Does this order of events sound familiar to you? God calls someone to do something, and that someone says no along with a list of reasons why.

Sarah - "How could a worn-out woman like me enjoy such a pleasure." (Genesis 18: 12)

Moses - "please God, send someone else." (Exodus 4: 13)

Jeremiah - "O Sovereign Lord, I can't speak for you! I'm too young!" (Jeremiah 1: 6)

Mary - "But how can this happen? I am a virgin." (Luke 1: 34)

These are just a few samples. This happens time and time again throughout Scripture, and if it teaches us anything it should teach us that

when God calls, it's more about Him than it is about us. Even in the call to Moses, when Moses asks God, "Who am I to appear before Pharaoh and lead the people of Israel out of Egypt?" God's answer is simply, "I will be with you."

So it seems that God doesn't need our ability, He just needs our availability. He'll take care of the rest.

But as we'll see with Gideon, as we did with all the other giants of the faith mentioned above, the promise of God's presence isn't tangible enough for us. We want more proof, more assuredness, more to hold on too before we act. And God, in His graciousness, often gives more; a staff, a vision, a peace that passes understanding, a confidant, a community. God even goes so far as to become one of us, taking on human flesh, to show us just how with us He truly is. Oh what love what wondrous love, oh what a God, a beautiful Savior, a blessed redeemer, our prince of peace.

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Was there a time in your life that God called you to do something you knew you couldn't do on your own?

In what ways has God shown up in your life?

What are some of your favorite promises from Scripture from God to you?

17 Gideon replied, "If you are truly going to help me, show me a sign to prove that it is really the Lord speaking to me. 18 Don't go away until I come back and bring my offering to you."

He answered, "I will stay here until you return."

19 Gideon hurried home. He cooked a young goat, and with a basket[a] of flour he baked some bread without yeast. Then, carrying the meat in a basket and the broth in a pot, he brought them out and presented them to the angel, who was under the great tree.

One time I found myself in an airport that I shall not name because it's my least favorite airport in the world and I don't want to offend any of you who live there (although if you do live close by this airport, then it's a wonder you ever make it out of that airport to visit anywhere).

During one of my trips to this airport, I was going to a conference close by. I had rented a car, so as I de-boarded the plane, I made my way to the rental car counter.

As I approached the front of the airport, I followed a sign that said "Rental Cars" and pointed up a set of escalators. Once I got to the top of the escalators, there were several ways to turn but I couldn't find another sign. I chose what looked like a well-worn path, but then saw another sign that said "Rental Cars" but pointed back the direction I came. I did this two other times before I magically ended up in the exact same spot I started.

I desperately needed good signs, but there were none to be found. So "bad signs" became the 2,347 reasons why I hate this airport.

Gideon wanted a good sign from Jesus; one that would prove to him beyond any shadow of a doubt that God would be with him as he went up against the enemy. Another word for sign is miracle. Gideon wanted proof, something

supernatural, something without any other worldly explanation.

But then something weird happens. Gideon goes home and cooks a meal.

According to scholars, Gideon wasn't sure at this point that the angel of the Lord was in fact an angel, and/or, sent from God. Maybe the angel looked a little too ordinary. I mean, when someone encounters a holy being they often fall face down on the ground. Not only does Gideon not have that kind of reaction, there isn't anything mentioned at the beginning of this encounter about the angel's appearance, which is also not common.

So maybe the angel had an ordinary appearance, nothing flashy or seemingly special about him. Sounds a bit like a prophecy about the coming Messiah from the book of Isaiah, "There was nothing beautiful or majestic about his appearance, nothing to attract us to him." (Isaiah 53: 2)

Many people in Jesus' day missed who He was because he appeared as a "mere man." (John 10:33) They wanted a show, but instead they got a man; flesh and bones. What they missed was that the flesh and bones were a miracle. They attacked Jesus for being a man who claimed to be God, instead of marveling at Jesus who was a God that became man.

May we not miss the signs that are all around us; the miracle of life, the beauty of creation, the presence of a friend. When we are always looking for the extraordinary, we miss the beauty found in the ordinary all around us.

Have you ever asked for a "sign" to do or not do something? If so, did you ever get it?

Look around where you are sitting right now. What can the ordinary things around you teach you about the nature and character of God?

If Jesus' physical appearance was nothing out of the ordinary, what helped attract people to him before his death? After?

-

20 The angel of God said to him, "Place the meat and the unleavened bread on this rock, and pour the broth over it." And Gideon did as he was told. 21 Then the angel of the Lord touched the meat and bread with the tip of the staff in his hand, and fire flamed up from the rock and consumed all he had brought. And the angel of the Lord disappeared.

22 When Gideon realized that it was the angel of the Lord, he cried out, "Oh, Sovereign Lord, I'm doomed! I have seen the angel of the Lord face to face!"

As I was reading this story, I thought about a magic show we took my kids to when they were about 11 and 9 years old.

During the show, the magician asked for a volunteer and looked right at my son. He wasn't a stage-type, but he loved magic and was willing to participate. The magician ended up putting him into a box, securing the box with a lock, spinning it around a few times and then guess what happened? My son disappeared.

The show went on and we expected the magician would give our son back to us, but after a few more tricks, he hadn't been returned to us. We got more and more, let's just say curious, when the magician performed his last act that involved our son and the magician's assistant reappearing in yet another box (turns out, our son got to hang out with the assistant backstage, which he didn't mind at all).

This moment between Jesus, the angel of the Lord, and Gideon has the appearance of a magic show. There's a staff, fire that comes from a rock, the angel disappears. But what does all this mean?

Remember from yesterday that Gideon was still looking for proof of the "angel's" origin and promise of rescue, so he brings the makings of an offering. When the angel touches the meat

and bread with the tip of the staff and the fire consumes it, Gideon immediately knows that this being is the real deal. Where his initial response was nothing out of the ordinary, his response now is similar to others who came before him who thought that no one could see Him and live (Exodus 33: 20).

But we know from the story that not only does Gideon live, he goes on to fulfill the vision that Jesus had of him when they first met, "Mighty hero." Jesus, in all his wisdom and grace, uses Gideon in all his weakness and doubt, proving again that God's grace is all we need, for His power is made perfect in our weakness. (2 Corinthians 12: 9)

That said, Gideon's story is a story I know too well. So often I realize Jesus' presence and work in my life after the fact. In the middle of it, I'm too consumed with my own struggles, worries, and doubts. I wish I was better and being more sensitive and aware of what God is up to in my here and now. Maybe, with the help of a community of believers, there are ways to recognize God's activity because I do believe that God is always up to something.

-

Have you ever had a moment that as soon as it passed you knew that "Surely, the Lord was in this place and I wasn't even aware of it"? (Genesis 28: 16)

How could you and I live our lives in a way to make us more sensitive and aware of the God who is present and at work all around us?

23 "It is all right," the Lord replied. "Do not be afraid. You will not die." 24 And Gideon built an altar to the Lord there and named it Yah-weh-Shalom (which means "the Lord is peace"). The altar remains in Ophrah in the land of the clan of Abiezer to this day.

25 That night the Lord said to Gideon, "Take the second bull from your father's herd, the one that is seven years old. Pull down your father's altar to Baal, and cut down the Asherah pole standing beside it. 26 Then build an altar to the Lord your God here on this hilltop sanctuary, laying the stones carefully. Sacrifice the bull as a burnt offering on the altar, using as fuel the wood of the Asherah pole you cut down."

27 So Gideon took ten of his servants and did as the Lord had commanded. But he did it at night because he was afraid of the other members of his father's household and the people of the town.

So many times in Scripture, when someone encounters the Lord, their first response is to fall down flat on their face (prostrate). In some places, it even adds, "as if dead." And so many times in Scripture, God's response to us is, "Don't be afraid." It's as if God is fighting to get us back to the time when we could walk with him in the garden in the cool of the day; the time when there is no more fear and we are forever wrapped in His arms of strength and protection.

Gideon is so in awe of this encounter with the Lord that he builds an altar so that he, and those who come after him, may always remember what happened.

You see, Gideon built an altar because he knew that what had happened to him, would happen again. At the beginning of this story, Gideon questioned why all the bad things were happening to them if God was with them. He couldn't see God's presence, couldn't feel it, and certainly didn't feel as if he could point to anything as

proof that it was there. God, through Jesus, proves that He is in fact with him, so Gideon builds an altar in hopes that future generations won't forget like he did.

Gideon then goes faithfully into the night to carry out the Lord's commands. But we know how fickle he is. We know he will need more signs in the coming pages, more proof of God's presence. And, we know that God is gracious with him, meeting him where he was at every step of the way.

So much of Gideon's story stirs in our heart the story of and our desire for the Savior. For too many of us, we look around and struggle to see Jesus in our day to day lives. There is too much pain, too much violence, too much brokenness. If God is with us, then why have all these things happened?

But just like with Gideon, God sends us Jesus as a reminder that He is faithful even when we are not. (2 Timothy 2: 13) And when Jesus took on flesh and bones, he reminded us that though in this world we will have trouble, not only has he overcome the world, but he is with us always, even to the end of the age. (John 16: 33, Matthew 28: 20)

-

Whatever we face today, may we cling to the promises and teachings of Jesus, and may we, along with Gideon, hear those same words, "It is all right...do not be afraid."

Can you remember a time when you stood, or kneeled, or laid down, in awe of God? What? When? Where?

One of Jesus' names was Immanuel, God with us. Can you name a way that Jesus is with you right now?

Is there any fear in your life right now that you need to surrender to the ever-present Lord who is with us?

share about God's faithfulness and grace in your life. How has He been patient with you? How has He been present and trustworthy?

INTRODUCTION

The following is a guide to help facilitate discussion. Feel free to add or subtract or change questions to fit the conversation, and pray for the Spirit to lead in all things.

OPEN

Have you ever had doubts or questions about God's goodness and/or faithfulness? What were you going through (or perhaps are currently going through) that made you question/doubt? What was the outcome of that experience and how did it impact your relationship with God?

HEAD

Read Judges 6:11-27 together and share any wisdom, insights, or questions in response to the reading.

We begin this story by seeing Gideon in an interesting place. He's essentially hiding out and keeping his actions hidden from his enemies. How would you describe Gideon and/or his actions? Mighty or bold? Cautious or fearful?

The Angel of the Lord arrives and makes a powerful declaration about Gideon. Is that statement congruent with your estimation of him? What does this say about God that He'd call Gideon by a name that didn't match his actions? What does this tell us about how God looks at us?

In v.13 Gideon asks some questions and expresses some doubt. What response does he get?

HEART

Instead of accepting and embracing the call of God, Gideon asks more questions, makes excuses for his weaknesses, and then expresses more doubt. What kind of excuses have you made before God? How did they hold up against His promises for you?

God was incredibly patient with Gideon and allowed him to question and ask for signs on his way to obedience. Take a moment to reflect and

At the end of our passage God asks Gideon to make a bold move—to tear down idols and establish something new...or more appropriately, make a renewed commitment to Him on behalf of his tribe. What “idols” in your life are needing to be torn down so that old commitments can be re-established and renewed?

HANDS

What keeps you from stepping out in obedience? What is one thing you can do this week, or maybe even just one step you can take, that will lead you to greater obedience?

Despite all of Gideon's doubts, he was counted as one of the moguls of faith in the great faith chapter of Hebrews 11 (v.32). In what area of your life do you need to hear this word? That the strength of the Lord is made perfect in your weakness and that His plans for your life vastly outweigh all of your doubts and fears? May you find strength and assurance in those promises!

LIVING WORDS for YOUR WEEK

“But this precious treasure—this light and power that now shines within us—is held in perishable containers, that is, in our weak bodies. So everyone can see that our glorious power is from God and is not our own.

We are pressed on every side by troubles, but we are not crushed and broken. We are perplexed, but we don't give up and quit. We are hunted down, but God never abandons us. We get knocked down but we get up again and keep going. Through suffering, these bodies of ours constantly share in the death of Jesus so that the life of Jesus may also be seen in our bodies.”

-2 Corinthians 4:7-10.

THE WALK (YOUTH)

Week 7 of 9

Jesus and Gideon

GO WITH GOD

Judges 6: 11-27

INTRODUCTION

The following is a guide to help facilitate discussion. Feel free to add or subtract or change questions to fit the conversation, and pray for the Spirit to lead in all things.

OPEN

Are you the type of person that likes having a plan or are you okay with not having a firm plan? Discuss why you chose your answer.

HEAD

Gideon very much felt like God had abandoned his plans. He thought back to the promises that were given about the Israelites and compared them to their current situation. What was clear to him was that something had seemingly gone wrong. I'm sure the disciples felt similarly when they saw Jesus crucified. I can imagine the questions they may have been asking; I thought Jesus was going to become king?; I thought we were going to institute a new kingdom?; How did God let this happen? These were all valid questions that the disciples had. Yet, what we know retrospectively is that God had a plan all along. Both Gideon and the disciples had to learn to trust God even when it seemed like things were not going according to plan.

HEART

The story of Gideon and the disciples teach us this truth: we can have peace with God even when things are not at peace. Gideon named his Alter "the LORD is at peace". Gideon understood that he didn't need everything figured out in order to experience peace. Instead, Gideon found that peace was possible before the blessing came. Today, find comfort in the reality that peace is available to you even before your situation is figured out. God is still dependable even when things are not figured out.

HANDS

Gideon shows that we are able to question God. We are able to ask him where he is when things aren't going according to plan. This tells us that we are able to question and wonder and still be in the will of God. Today know that God wishes to give you peace even when you have questions.

LIVING WORDS for YOUR WEEK

"And Gideon built an altar to the LORD there and named it Yahweh- Shalom (which means 'the LORD is peace')".

Judges 6:24

INTRODUCTION

The following questions are a guide to help families with children understand God and discover His love throughout the series. You may think of other ideas that fit the needs of your family.

Read Judges 6:11-27 together with your family.

When your parents or the adults in your life give instructions or ask you to do something, do you do it right away, or ask a lot of questions before starting?

The angel of the Lord appeared to Gideon and gave him instructions. What did the angel ask Gideon to do? Did Gideon do it right away?

What did the angel say to Gideon to reassure him everything would be okay? (v. 12, 14, 16)

Have you ever felt like you were too young, or didn't have what you needed to succeed? Ask God to remind you, like Gideon, that he is with you too!

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

WEEK 8

Day 50
Isaiah 40:1-2

“Comfort, comfort my people,”
says your God.
2 “Speak tenderly to Jerusalem.
Tell her that her sad days are gone
and her sins are pardoned.
Yes, the Lord has punished her twice over
for all her sins.”

I love the first word of this text: Comfort, Naham, in Hebrew. It is given twice in order to imply that it needs to happen with some urgency. Like a parent calling to a child, we see God here being emphatic that his people need to be comforted and taken care of. He is exhorted to speak kindly and tenderly, and to let her know that the sad days are gone, and she is forgiven.

There has already been a punishment, twice, in fact. And that punishment came because of her sin and unbelief. However, a new era has begun and she needs to be told in a sweet and thoughtful manner. It means that there will be a time of great joy, the restoration of the land, and the redemption of God's people.

This begins the establishment of the kingdom of God here on earth. The audience to this writing will receive God's comfort because their God, not their friend or king, but their God, has positive plans and will act with love and compassion to his people, his family.

This is such a great text, and it is a calling out that there is a God who loves his people dearly, and is establishing a kingdom for them here on the earth. It is one of the greatest calls to the coming messiah that we see in the Old Testament and it begins with the exhortation that these great and good words are given in a spirit of comfort to his people.

Have you ever gotten good news in a way that didn't sound very good? The disconnect between being admonished about a good thing is hard to understand. God wanted his people to listen to the good news, and therefore he wanted it given

in a good way to those same people. When the music matches the words the song is that much better.

Have you ever heard music that wasn't very good, but the words were? Was it a disappointment? What about the other way around?

How do you like to receive good news?

What would you do if you knew God was about to bless you?

Day 51
Isaiah 40:3-5

-

3 Listen! It's the voice of someone shouting,
"Clear the way through the wilderness
for the Lord!

Make a straight highway through the waste-
land

for our God!

4 Fill in the valleys,
and level the mountains and hills.

Straighten the curves,
and smooth out the rough places.

5 Then the glory of the Lord will be revealed,
and all people will see it together.
The Lord has spoken!"

-

Wow! All these great texts that we have seen
before as they are connected with John the
Baptist in the New Testament. But this text
goes into detail about how the way needs to be
cleared for the Lord.

I was driving in Tennessee a bit ago and they
were making a road through a hill. They weren't
making a road up a hill, rather, through a hill.
When it was done, which it was on my next
trip, you didn't even realize that there was a hill
around you until you were deeply into the hill.
It was amazing how well they prepared the road
for the cars. It was truly a joy to drive on, and it
was even really pretty.

This text is telling us that the way for the Lord,
the messiah, needs to be fully prepared so that
we can see it and feel it. We need to make our
lives straight as we are preparing to see the
Messiah in our lives as well. When the text says
"fill the valleys", what valleys in your life need to
be filled?

Lastly, v. 5 says that the Glory of the Lord will
be revealed. It doesn't say it will be revealed in
history, or in nature, but in its true glory. We
will see the coming of the Lord. The children of
Israel held onto this promise for hundreds of
years after this was written. When Jesus showed
up, they were confused, as he came in the form
of a human, a baby human, with all the requisite

needs and messes that come with babies. Is it
any wonder that from this amazing language
we see people missing how Jesus showed up?
Probably not!

-

How would you prepare the way for the Lord?
Do you want to see God's glory in your life-
time? How can you do that now?

Were these texts speaking specifically of Jesus?

-

A voice said, "Shout!"

I asked, "What should I shout?"

"Shout that people are like the grass.

Their beauty fades as quickly
as the flowers in a field.

7 The grass withers and the flowers fade
beneath the breath of the Lord.

And so it is with people.

8 The grass withers and the flowers fade,
but the word of our God stands forever."

9 O Zion, messenger of good news,
shout from the mountaintops!

Shout it louder, O Jerusalem.

Shout, and do not be afraid.

Tell the towns of Judah,

"Your God is coming!"

10 Yes, the Sovereign Lord is coming in power.
He will rule with a powerful arm.

See, he brings his reward with him as he
comes.

11 He will feed his flock like a shepherd.

He will carry the lambs in his arms,
holding them close to his heart.

He will gently lead the mother sheep with
their young.

-

These texts are interesting in that they seem to be a conversation at times, and a declaration at other times. Here, we have the conversation. A call to "shout", and an answer of "what should I shout?" Then, we have the following texts that are very clearly telling us what we should be declaring about the coming of the Lord.

Remember, this is a word to an exiled people, and they would have loved to hear some words of comfort, and these words were just the comfort they needed. What sort of comfort do you need and do you hear when you read these texts? Do they give you the comfort they might have given the children of Israel when they heard them?

By the time we get to v. 9 we see the climax of this introductory announcement of salvation

comes the clear understanding that God is declaring a visit to earth, and with that visit is the power of God in the world. As well, provision for his flock and leadership will all be wrapped into the same package. As well, the visual of the leader holding a lamb, caring for the lamb, and bringing families along together are important notes.

What do you think of these texts? We often reference Isaiah, but do we often read it? I know it is written in a vernacular language that we don't often speak, but there is a beauty to it. It is poetic in nature, probably meant to be sung, and a continued comfort to us all. Certainly, it would have been a comfort to the Israelites that would have heard.

We can't mistake the direct illusion to the coming of Jesus in these texts. We know, with hindsight, that Jesus is the shepherd, and he is the one who would carry the lamb close to his heart. These words still make a strong statement to us today.

-

What do these words mean to you today?

If Jesus has already come, how are they of comfort to us?

Has anyone ever written you a poem, or have you written one for someone else? How did they like it?

Day 53
Isaiah 40: 12-17

-

12 Who else has held the oceans in his hand?
Who has measured off the heavens with his
fingers?

Who else knows the weight of the earth
or has weighed the mountains and hills on
a scale?

13 Who is able to advise the Spirit of the Lord?
Who knows enough to give him advice or
teach him?

14 Has the Lord ever needed anyone's advice?
Does he need instruction about what is
good?

Did someone teach him what is right
or show him the path of justice?

15 No, for all the nations of the world
are but a drop in the bucket.

They are nothing more
than dust on the scales.

He picks up the whole earth
as though it were a grain of sand.

16 All the wood in Lebanon's forests
and all Lebanon's animals would not be
enough

to make a burnt offering worthy of our God.

17 The nations of the world are worth nothing
to him.

In his eyes they count for less than nothing—
mere emptiness and froth.

-

This text spends some time talking about how
sovereign and transcendent God really is. In no
uncertain terms God is spoken of as one who
has the world in his hands, and literally, the hills
on a scale! Amazing.

While we could go into a lot more about the
language of today's text, I think I will just leave
you with this exercise: READ IT AGAIN. Then,
READ IT AGAIN. Then, READ IT AGAIN.

I want these words to be seared into your mind
so that when you question the power of God in
the world, when you worry he might not be able
to take care of you, when you are struggling with
your life being out of control, you can remember

these words and remember that God has got
this! He can handle anything life is throwing at
you, and that means that you can handle all of it
as well.

-

Do you ever feel like you can't handle what is
coming at you?

How big would God have to be to do the things
that this text says he does?

How can you remember these texts in your
times of struggles?

18 To whom can you compare God?
What image can you find to resemble him?
19 Can he be compared to an idol formed in a mold,
overlaid with gold, and decorated with silver chains?
20 Or if people are too poor for that,
they might at least choose wood that won't decay
and a skilled craftsman
to carve an image that won't fall down!
21 Haven't you heard? Don't you understand?
Are you deaf to the words of God—
the words he gave before the world began?
Are you so ignorant?
22 God sits above the circle of the earth.
The people below seem like grasshoppers to him!
He spreads out the heavens like a curtain
and makes his tent from them.
23 He judges the great people of the world
and brings them all to nothing.
24 They hardly get started, barely taking root,
when he blows on them and they wither.
The wind carries them off like chaff.

Again, we are given to the grandeur of God. In these texts, the questions of “who can. . .” are posed to us as rhetorical questions, because obviously, there is nothing and no one who can stand up to the power of God, and this power is what sustains us, what gives us hope, and what we can remember when we think things are falling apart.

Perhaps, when things feel like they are falling apart is really when God is just moving things around a bit, and from his vantage point, there is really nothing to worry about.

What can compare to God in our lives? Nothing, and that is the point of these texts. There is nothing that can even come close to being able to take up the space that God can take up in the universe, therefore, we probably don't need to worry about too much on our end. While these

words sound good, I know it is much harder to make sense of in our lives.

If we lived with the confidence that these texts might give us, do you think we would live our lives differently? Do you think that we could tackle anything that was thrown at us, could we weather any storm? Do you think we could live with the joy that comes from knowing we are safe within the arms of a savior? If we could, don't you think life might be a little better?

So let's do it. Let's lean into these words and take them literally. Let's believe that God is really this powerful and really this loving toward us. If we can do that, maybe we can find the peace that is promised to us.

Who can compare to God?
Why are idols so offensive to God?
Do you have any idols in our life that you think might be taking the place of God today?

-

25 "To whom will you compare me?
Who is my equal?" asks the Holy One.

26 Look up into the heavens.
Who created all the stars?

He brings them out like an army, one after
another,
calling each by its name.

Because of his great power and incomparable
strength,

not a single one is missing.

27 O Jacob, how can you say the Lord does not
see your troubles?

O Israel, how can you say God ignores your
rights?

28 Have you never heard?

Have you never understood?

The Lord is the everlasting God,
the Creator of all the earth.

He never grows weak or weary.

No one can measure the depths of his under-
standing.

29 He gives power to the weak
and strength to the powerless.

30 Even youths will become weak and tired,
and young men will fall in exhaustion.

31 But those who trust in the Lord will find
new strength.

They will soar high on wings like eagles.

They will run and not grow weary.

They will walk and not faint.

-

The last 3 texts of this pericope are the ones
that are always quoted. But I love the preceding
texts as well. They are so confident in the power
of God, they are so sure of themselves, but in
such a good way.

I think that we have become a little embar-
rassed of claiming that God is this good and this
great. We live in a world that doesn't like these
declarations that much. And I get that. There can
be an arrogance to claiming something like this.
And often, we as Christians have claimed these
things in ways that are less than gracious.

However, given in the right way, in humility,
in awe, and with grace, these can be exactly
the words that people need to hear in order to
believe and trust in God. By reminding people
that these texts are really an explanation of
how amazing God really is, we can give them a
glimpse into the marvel that really is this God
who loves us so dearly. If we can get out of the
way, they can begin to see God the same way
that we do, and that is an incredible gift that we
can give to people on their faith journey.

Read these texts again and see what you
haven't seen before. And make it a point to see
where it is that Jesus is seeping through the
words. We, obviously, have the perspective of the
Cross, so we know these words are about Jesus.
But how can we discover these words again for
the first time?

-

When was the last time you read this?

What does this tell you about God? Write it
down in one word.

How can we see Jesus in these texts?

INTRODUCTION

The following is a guide to help facilitate discussion. Feel free to add or subtract or change questions to fit the conversation, and pray for the Spirit to lead in all things.

OPEN

When you're feeling down, what is something you do that helps you feel better? An edible treat? A phone call to a friend? A favorite Psalm or passage in Scripture? Something funny?

HEAD

Read Isaiah 40 together and share any wisdom, insights, or questions in response to the reading.

What are some of the allusions to Jesus and His coming do you see in this passage?

If you were in captivity, nothing going your way, oppressed, poor, one challenge after another, what in this passage would you find most comforting?

If you felt like the above mentioned captivity was because of your bad choices, how do you think you might be tempted to think God feels about you? How do these words in Isaiah remind you of God really feeling towards you?

Verses 25-26 are really about worship, reminding people to look up. What is it about worship that helps us in our times of trouble? If worship is helpful in tough times, why is it so hard to do?

Verses 28-31 are familiar verses to many. What do these verses mean to you about the Lord we serve?

HEART

Take a moment to look over the passage while thinking about the life of Jesus. What phrases cause you to think about a story about Jesus' life and teachings?

A couple of times in this passage, God through Isaiah reminds the people of who He is; "Do you now know, have you not heard?" Why is it so easy to forget how God has led us in the past, when our present is difficult? How can we help remind ourselves and each other of our God who is an ever-present help in times of trouble?

What would "soaring on eagle's wings" look like or mean for you in your life right now?

HANDS

If you haven't done so already, try to memorize Isaiah 40: 28-31, and to help, write it out in your own words (paraphrase). Think of this passage when you need comfort, and know that the Lord Jesus is near, He is able to save.

LIVING WORDS for YOUR WEEK

"Have you never heard? Have you never understood. The Lord is the everlasting God, the Creator of all the earth. He never grows weak or weary. No one can measure the depths of his understanding. He gives power to the weak and strength to the powerless. Even youths will become weak and tired, and young men will fall in exhaustion. But those who trust in the Lord will find new strength. They will soar high on wings like eagles. They will run and not grow weary.

They will walk and not faint.

Romans 8: 31

~~"This is my command—be strong and courageous! Do not be afraid or discouraged. For the Lord your God is with you wherever you go."~~

Joshua 1: 9

INTRODUCTION

The following is a guide to help facilitate discussion. Feel free to add or subtract or change questions to fit the conversation, and pray for the Spirit to lead in all things.

OPEN

What brings you peace? We all find peace in different ways. Some of us find it in music, others of us find it in friends. Discuss together the different things that bring you peace.

HEAD

In this portion of scripture we see people who are hurting and in need of relief. The language used is poetic yet relatable. "The grass withers and the flowers fade beneath the breath of the LORD". This seems to explain life well - that both good and bad can happen in the presence of God. Yet there is such a great hope in this scripture. In verse 9 we see the great hope; the hope is that God is coming! The arrival of God brings relief.

HEART

We all know the all too real feeling of despair. It's this feeling within us that convinces us that life will not get better - that our situation will continue to remain the same. There is something that breaks this despair - it's called hope. As believers in Jesus we have hope. We have hope that Jesus is returning, and along with Jesus is a new life that is free from despair and full of joy. Today rest in the reality that Jesus is coming!

HANDS

There is hope in your words. You can be the one to spread hope to others! God is calling you to shout and spread his good news - that is the good news that Jesus is returning!

LIVING WORDS for YOUR WEEK

"Your God is coming!"

Isaiah 40:9

INTRODUCTION

The following questions are a guide to help families with children understand God and discover His love throughout the series. You may think of other ideas that fit the needs of your family.

Read Isaiah 40:26-31 together with your family.

These words were written to God's people in captivity. They were meant to bring hope and courage. Think about how this text might bring you courage the next time you feel things are just not going your way.

How do these verses describe God?

What does this text tell us about those who trust in God?

Challenge yourself and your family to memorize part or all of these texts. You can also write the encouraging words in sticky notes and place them somewhere you can see them every day and be reminded of God's promises.

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

WEEK 9

1 This is the message that the prophet Habakkuk received in a vision. Habakkuk's Complaint
2 How long, O Lord, must I call for help? But you do not listen! "Violence is everywhere!" I cry, but you do not come to save. 3 Must I forever see these evil deeds? Why must I watch all this misery? Wherever I look, I see destruction and violence. I am surrounded by people who love to argue and fight. 4 The law has become paralyzed, and there is no justice in the courts. The wicked far outnumber the righteous, so that justice has become perverted.

The Lord's Reply

5 The Lord replied, "Look around at the nations; look and be amazed. For I am doing something on your own day, something you wouldn't believe even if someone told you about it. 6 I am raising up the Babylonians, a cruel and violent people. They will march across the world and conquer other lands. 7 They are notorious for their cruelty and do whatever they like. 8 Their horses are swifter than cheetahs[c] and fiercer than wolves at dusk. Their charioteers charge from far away. Like eagles, they swoop down to devour their prey. 9 "On they come, all bent on violence. Their hordes advance like a desert wind, sweeping captives ahead of them like sand. 10 They scoff at kings and princes and scorn all their fortresses. They simply pile ramps of earth against their walls and capture them. 11 They sweep past like the wind and are gone. But they are deeply guilty, for their own strength is their god."

Habakkuk's Second Complaint

12 O Lord my God, my Holy One, you who are eternal—surely you do not plan to wipe us out? O Lord, our Rock, you have sent these Babylonians to correct us, to punish us for our many sins. 13 But you are pure and cannot stand the sight of evil. Will you wink at their treachery? Should you be silent while the wicked swallow up people more righteous than they? 14 Are we only fish to be caught and killed. Are we only sea creatures that have no leader?

15 Must we be strung up on their hooks and caught in their nets while they rejoice and

celebrate? 16 Then they will worship their nets and burn incense in front of them. "These nets are the gods who have made us rich!" they will claim. 17 Will you let them get away with this forever? Will they succeed forever in their heartless conquests?

Habakkuk was a contemporary of Jeremiah, Nahum, and Zephaniah. So, needless to say, there was a lot of wisdom going around. In this text, we are seeing Habakkuk give a complaint, and then we hear the Lord's reply. The questions that Habakkuk is asking are questions that we could be asking God today. Why is it that things are so bad right now? Is God still listening to us and our complaints? What happens if things get worse and worse? What about the Climate? What if my person doesn't get into leadership in our nation? What happens if this pandemic doesn't stop? Does God even care about us?

We all have so many questions about why things are the way they are, and what is God going to do about it, that it seems like we can hardly find time to praise him for what is good in our lives. And Habakkuk seems to be no different, although he is ready to hear God's response.

But God's response is a little disheartening if you ask me. It seems as if he is raising up a group of bloodthirsty people that will kill all of those around them. In fact, it seems like he is doing this despite the complaints of Habakkuk. What is strange is that commentators see this book as a book about the providence of God. While it may not seem like it yet, we will continue to look for how God provides for his people through the words of this prophet.

How many complaints do you have for God?

Do you think that God provides for you?

How can you hear God's reply to your complaints?

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1 I will climb up to my watchtower and stand at my guardpost. There I will wait to see what the Lord says and how he will answer my complaint.

The Lord's Second Reply

2 Then the Lord said to me, "Write my answer plainly on tablets, so that a runner can carry the correct message to others.

3 This vision is for a future time. It describes the end, and it will be fulfilled. If it seems slow in coming, wait patiently, for it will surely take place. It will not be delayed.

4 "Look at the proud!

They trust in themselves, and their lives are crooked. But the righteous will live by their faithfulness to God.

5 Wealth is treacherous, and the arrogant are never at rest. They open their mouths as wide as the grave, and like death, they are never satisfied.

In their greed they have gathered up many nations and swallowed many peoples.

6 "But soon their captives will taunt them.

They will mock them, saying, 'What sorrow awaits you thieves! Now you will get what you deserve! You've become rich by extortion, but how much longer can this go on?'

7 Suddenly, your debtors will take action. They will turn on you and take all you have, while you stand trembling and helpless.

8 Because you have plundered many nations, now all the survivors will plunder you. You committed murder throughout the countryside and filled the towns with violence.

9 "What sorrow awaits you who build big houses with money gained dishonestly! You believe your wealth will buy security, putting your family's nest beyond the reach of danger.

10 But by the murders you committed, you have shamed your name and forfeited your lives.

11 The very stones in the walls cry out against you, and the beams in the ceilings echo the complaint.

12 "What sorrow awaits you who build cities with money gained through murder and corruption!

13 Has not the Lord of Heaven's Armies promised that the wealth of nations will turn to

ashes? They work so hard, but all in vain!

14 For as the waters fill the sea, the earth will be filled with an awareness of the glory of the Lord.

15 "What sorrow awaits you who make your neighbors drunk! You force your cup on them so you can gloat over their shameful nakedness.

16 But soon it will be your turn to be disgraced.

Come, drink and be exposed! Drink from the cup of the Lord's judgment, and all your glory will be turned to shame.

17 You cut down the forests of Lebanon. Now you will be cut down. You destroyed the wild animals, so now their terror will be yours. You committed murder throughout the countryside and filled the towns with violence.

18 "What good is an idol carved by man, or a cast image that deceives you? How foolish to trust in your own creation—a god that can't even talk!

19 What sorrow awaits you who say to wooden idols, 'Wake up and save us!' To speechless stone images you say, 'Rise up and teach us!'

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Can an idol tell you what to do?

They may be overlaid with gold and silver, but they are lifeless inside. 20 But the Lord is in his holy Temple. Let all the earth be silent before him."

Habakkuk says he will wait in the watchtower for God's response. Where do you wait for the response that God might have for your complaints? This was a place where he could focus on the spiritual calling of his life, and God's response to his questions. Human responsibility and divine providence are complementary teachings in the Old Testament. These doctrines appear to run on parallel tracks, each necessary for the completion of the other. God certainly may work in his world without the cooperation of human instruments, but the biblical evidence indicates that God chooses to use the work of his chosen servants.

This is why it was so important for Habakkuk to be able to focus on what God was doing and on what God was going to tell him, via the vision, about his love and providence for us. God chooses to use us, and chooses to partner

with us to fulfill his desires for this world. It is an incredible opportunity for us to work with God, and we will never be disappointed in the response we receive when we are connected to the grace and power that comes only from God.

So perhaps the question for today is; “what is God partnering with you to get done in the world?” It might be that he has great plans for you, or it might be that the partnership is mostly God and a little bit of us. It doesn’t really matter, except to know that it is God who is asking and it is God who is providing the opportunity and it is God who is making sure it happens. While we are partners, the onus and responsibility is less on us than on God. In this way, we are sure to succeed, as our job becomes faithful to what God is asking us to do.

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What do you think God is asking you to do?

Do you think God will provide you the tools to make it happen?

How can you be sure that God is really working with you?

Day 59
Habakkuk 3

1 This prayer was sung by the prophet Habakkuk:
2 I have heard all about you, Lord.
I am filled with awe by your amazing works.
In this time of our deep need,
help us again as you did in years gone by.
And in your anger,
remember your mercy.
3 I see God moving across the deserts from Edom,
the Holy One coming from Mount Paran.
His brilliant splendor fills the heavens,
and the earth is filled with his praise.
4 His coming is as brilliant as the sunrise.
Rays of light flash from his hands,
where his awesome power is hidden.
5 Pestilence marches before him;
plague follows close behind.
6 When he stops, the earth shakes.
When he looks, the nations tremble.
He shatters the everlasting mountains
and levels the eternal hills.
He is the Eternal One!
7 I see the people of Cushan in distress,
and the nation of Midian trembling in terror.
8 Was it in anger, Lord, that you struck the rivers
and parted the sea?
Were you displeased with them?
No, you were sending your chariots of salvation!
9 You brandished your bow
and your quiver of arrows.
You split open the earth with flowing rivers.
10 The mountains watched and trembled.
Onward swept the raging waters.
The mighty deep cried out,
lifting its hands in submission.
11 The sun and moon stood still in the sky
as your brilliant arrows flew
and your glittering spear flashed.
12 You marched across the land in anger
and trampled the nations in your fury.
13 You went out to rescue your chosen people,
to save your anointed ones.
You crushed the heads of the wicked

and stripped their bones from head to toe.
14 With his own weapons,
you destroyed the chief of those
who rushed out like a whirlwind,
thinking Israel would be easy prey.
15 You trampled the sea with your horses,
and the mighty waters piled high.
16 I trembled inside when I heard this;
my lips quivered with fear.
My legs gave way beneath me,
and I shook in terror.
I will wait quietly for the coming day
when disaster will strike the people who
invade us.
17 Even though the fig trees have no blossoms,
and there are no grapes on the vines;
even though the olive crop fails,
and the fields lie empty and barren;
even though the flocks die in the fields,
and the cattle barns are empty,
18 yet I will rejoice in the Lord!
I will be joyful in the God of my salvation!
19 The Sovereign Lord is my strength!
He makes me as surefooted as a deer,
able to tread upon the heights.
(For the choir director: This prayer is to be
accompanied by stringed instruments.)

Well it seems that Habakkuk has come to understand that God is providing for his people. Not only is God providing, but he is going forth and destroying other nations for Israel. This chapter, in particular, seems almost like something you would read in the Psalms, and in fact, has been connected in form and content with different Psalms over the years. As well, it seems to be written as a song, and there is even a word that translators can't figure out, but they suspect it is a musical notation.

Why is it that when we think of the greatness of God it is often best experienced through music? Is it because we need the background of music to do justice to the mystery and awe we experience when we really begin to understand how God has been moving all these years? Or perhaps there is nothing as powerful as when we sing of our anticipation of the great things that God is going to do in the future. Music and God

just seem to go together, and therefore, it makes sense that this chapter would be seen as a song.

But what is overwhelming about the chapter, besides the fact that it doesn't seem like the rest of Habakkuk, is that it is complete in its reliance and hope on God. As well, the chapter speaks of when God will show up, and we know this to be a precursor to the salvation that we experience through Jesus. As we see in those words, there is a sense that Jesus is the one that gives us strength, sustains us, and gives us hope. As well, it is Jesus that allows us to tread in the highest places. Also, what I love about this text is that even when things aren't going okay, even when the olive trees are not giving olives, and the flocks die in the fields, regardless, he will glorify the Lord. We talk a lot about blessing, and what it is. Here is a perfect example of what it means to understand the blessing of God as more than simply something that is received when things are going well, but it is something that can transcend the circumstances of our lives. We understand that we can be deeply blessed even when things are going poorly, and we can continue to praise God through the trials and tribulations, that might ultimately be the blessing we were looking for.

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Are you blessed today? What does that mean to you?

How can you praise God in the midst of difficult times?

What does it mean to you to "tread the heights?"

Day 60
Zephaniah 1

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1 The Lord gave this message to Zephaniah when Josiah son of Amon was king of Judah. Zephaniah was the son of Cushi, son of Gedaliah, son of Amariah, son of Hezekiah.

Coming Judgment against Judah

2 "I will sweep away everything from the face of the earth," says the Lord.

3 "I will sweep away people and animals alike.

I will sweep away the birds of the sky and the fish in the sea.

I will reduce the wicked to heaps of rubble, and I will wipe humanity from the face of the earth," says the Lord.

4 "I will crush Judah and Jerusalem with my fist

and destroy every last trace of their Baal worship.

I will put an end to all the idolatrous priests, so that even the memory of them will disappear.

5 For they go up to their roofs and bow down to the sun, moon, and stars.

They claim to follow the Lord, but then they worship Molech,[b] too.

6 And I will destroy those who used to worship me

but now no longer do.

They no longer ask for the Lord's guidance or seek my blessings."

7 Stand in silence in the presence of the Sovereign Lord,

for the awesome day of the Lord's judgment is near.

The Lord has prepared his people for a great slaughter

and has chosen their executioners.[c]

8 "On that day of judgment," says the Lord,

"I will punish the leaders and princes of Judah and all those following pagan customs.

9 Yes, I will punish those who participate in pagan worship ceremonies, and those who fill their masters' houses with violence and deceit.

10 "On that day," says the Lord,

"a cry of alarm will come from the Fish Gate

and echo throughout the New Quarter of the city.

And a great crash will sound from the hills.

11 Wait in sorrow, all you who live in the market area,[e]

for all the merchants and traders will be destroyed.

12 "I will search with lanterns in Jerusalem's darkest corners

to punish those who sit complacent in their sins.

They think the Lord will do nothing to them, either good or bad.

13 So their property will be plundered, their homes will be ransacked.

They will build new homes but never live in them.

They will plant vineyards but never drink wine from them.

14 "That terrible day of the Lord is near.

Swiftly it comes—

a day of bitter tears,

a day when even strong men will cry out.

15 It will be a day when the Lord's anger is poured out—

a day of terrible distress and anguish,

a day of ruin and desolation,

a day of darkness and gloom,

a day of clouds and blackness,

16 a day of trumpet calls and battle cries.

Down go the walled cities

and the strongest battlements!

17 "Because you have sinned against the Lord,

I will make you grope around like the blind.

Your blood will be poured into the dust,

and your bodies will lie rotting on the ground."

18 Your silver and gold will not save you

on that day of the Lord's anger.

For the whole land will be devoured

by the fire of his jealousy.

He will make a terrifying end

of all the people on earth.

-

This is disconcerting.

I can't imagine that Zephaniah was excited to get these words from God. Prophets often don't like the words that they receive from God, as

they have to be the messengers to bring a message of God's wrath, frustration, and anger. And the children of Israel, just like us, don't really like to receive these kinds of messages either. This message has put Zephaniah in a bad place, as he has to be the bearer of bad tidings.

We often think of prophets as those who are almost like fortune tellers. But in the Old Testament we see that they are the ones who bring the word of the Lord. While that word is often about what will happen if they don't change their ways, it is rarely about the far away future and what will happen. This message, given in this book, is a message of warning that God is not happy with what is happening in the land. There is idol worship, a general disregard for those less fortunate, and the society at the time was leaning so heavily into their economics to save them that it is even mentioned in v.18 that their money will not save them from God's anger.

While this is not a particularly uplifting group of verses, it does give us some insight to how God feels when his people disregard, ignore, and are disobedient to his word. In fact, if we were to extrapolate what he was saying to them into our vernacular, it would sound like this; "why did you stop paying attention to God, and waste all your time finding other ways to occupy your time?"

The people were losing focus and were finding other Gods to worship. They were forgetting about how God had been faithful in the past and would be faithful in the future. This is a common theme in many of the minor prophetic books, and Zephaniah is no exception.

I wonder, have you ever forgotten what God did in the past for you? Do you need the words of this first chapter today to remind you that God is present and has been faithful to us in the past and will remain faithful in the future, however frustrated he is with us today?

When was God faithful to you?
Were you faithful to him?
Have you needed to remember that God is faithful, albeit frustrated at times with us?

Day 61
Zephaniah 2

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A Call to Repentance

2 Gather together—yes, gather together,
you shameless nation.

2 Gather before judgment begins,
before your time to repent is blown away like
chaff.

Act now, before the fierce fury of the Lord falls
and the terrible day of the Lord's anger
begins.

3 Seek the Lord, all who are humble,
and follow his commands.

Seek to do what is right
and to live humbly.

Perhaps even yet the Lord will protect you—
protect you from his anger on that day of
destruction.

Judgment against Philistia

4 Gaza and Ashkelon will be abandoned,
Ashdod and Ekron torn down.

5 And what sorrow awaits you Philistines
who live along the coast and in the land of
Canaan,

for this judgment is against you, too!

The Lord will destroy you
until not one of you is left.

6 The Philistine coast will become a wilderness
pasture,

a place of shepherd camps
and enclosures for sheep and goats.

7 The remnant of the tribe of Judah will pasture
there.

They will rest at night in the abandoned
houses in Ashkelon.

For the Lord their God will visit his people in
kindness

and restore their prosperity again.

Judgment against Moab and Ammon

8 "I have heard the taunts of the Moabites
and the insults of the Ammonites,

mocking my people
and invading their borders.

9 Now, as surely as I live,"

says the Lord of Heaven's Armies, the God of
Israel,

"Moab and Ammon will be destroyed—
destroyed as completely as Sodom and

Gomorrah.

Their land will become a place of stinging
nettles,

salt pits, and eternal desolation.

The remnant of my people will plunder them
and take their land."

10 They will receive the wages of their pride,
for they have scoffed at the people of the Lord
of Heaven's Armies.

11 The Lord will terrify them
as he destroys all the gods in the land.

Then nations around the world will worship
the Lord,
each in their own land.

Judgment against Ethiopia and Assyria

12 "You Ethiopians will also be slaughtered
by my sword," says the Lord.

13 And the Lord will strike the lands of the
north with his fist,

destroying the land of Assyria.

He will make its great capital, Nineveh, a deso-
late wasteland,
parched like a desert.

14 The proud city will become a pasture for
flocks and herds,
and all sorts of wild animals will settle there.

The desert owl and screech owl will roost on its
ruined columns,

their calls echoing through the gaping win-
dows.

Rubble will block all the doorways,
and the cedar paneling will be exposed to the
weather.

15 This is the boisterous city,
once so secure.

"I am the greatest!" it boasted.

"No other city can compare with me!"

But now, look how it has become an utter ruin,
a haven for wild animals.

Everyone passing by will laugh in derision
and shake a defiant fist.

-

Lots of judgment happening here. But it begins
with a way to thwart that judgment.

Repentance.

It's pretty simple. Remember the ways of God
in your life, remember that God is good and
just and faithful, and remember to put him in
the honored place in your life and in your heart.

Before his judgment comes the opportunity to be fully made new, to humble ourselves, and to receive the grace of God, and his incredible mercy. He has laid out how this happens, and it is not difficult. Rather, it is a remembering of the place that God deserves in our life and a faith that he will continue to be that good God we often sing about.

So what is so difficult about repentance? Repentance requires that we recognize our position in the world. As well, we recognize where we are with God and see the path to get there. Usually, it is not by great deeds, but rather, by prayer and humility by which we come to the throne of grace in our lives. While we love a hero's journey, for us, the journey to reconciliation with Christ will always be a humble prayer, on our knees, knowing that God will receive us again.

But the text goes on to be pretty explicit about the ways that God will excise judgment on each of the surrounding lands. And truthfully, it is not very pretty at all. God does have the ability to judge, and he does have the ability to exact punishment on these lands. However, he always offers an opportunity for repentance and for reconciliation. Most of the time we just don't see it, can't hear it, or are too proud to accept it.

What do you need to accept to be reconciled to Jesus today?

Are you afraid of God's judgment? It sounds pretty bad in these texts.

How can you remember what it is that God has done for you in the past?

Day 62
Zephaniah 3

-

Jerusalem's Rebellion and Redemption

3 What sorrow awaits rebellious, polluted
Jerusalem,

the city of violence and crime!

2 No one can tell it anything;
it refuses all correction.

It does not trust in the Lord
or draw near to its God.

3 Its leaders are like roaring lions
hunting for their victims.

Its judges are like ravenous wolves at evening
time,

who by dawn have left no trace of their prey.

4 Its prophets are arrogant liars seeking their
own gain.

Its priests defile the Temple by disobeying
God's instructions.

5 But the Lord is still there in the city,
and he does no wrong.

Day by day he hands down justice,
and he does not fail.

But the wicked know no shame.

6 "I have wiped out many nations,
devastating their fortress walls and towers.
Their streets are now deserted;
their cities lie in silent ruin.

There are no survivors—
none at all.

7 I thought, 'Surely they will have reverence for
me now!

Surely they will listen to my warnings.

Then I won't need to strike again,
destroying their homes.'

But no, they get up early
to continue their evil deeds.

8 Therefore, be patient," says the Lord.

"Soon I will stand and accuse these evil
nations.

For I have decided to gather the kingdoms of
the earth

and pour out my fiercest anger and fury on
them.

All the earth will be devoured
by the fire of my jealousy.

9 "Then I will purify the speech of all people,
so that everyone can worship the Lord

together.

10 My scattered people who live beyond the
rivers of Ethiopia

will come to present their offerings.

11 On that day you will no longer need to be
ashamed,

for you will no longer be rebels against me.

I will remove all proud and arrogant people
from among you.

There will be no more haughtiness on my
holy mountain.

12 Those who are left will be the lowly and
humble,

for it is they who trust in the name of the
Lord.

13 The remnant of Israel will do no wrong;
they will never tell lies or deceive one another.

They will eat and sleep in safety,
and no one will make them afraid."

14 Sing, O daughter of Zion;
shout aloud, O Israel!

Be glad and rejoice with all your heart,
O daughter of Jerusalem!

15 For the Lord will remove his hand of judgment

and will disperse the armies of your enemy.
And the Lord himself, the King of Israel,
will live among you!

At last your troubles will be over,
and you will never again fear disaster.

16 On that day the announcement to Jerusalem
will be,

"Cheer up, Zion! Don't be afraid!

17 For the Lord your God is living among you.
He is a mighty savior.

He will take delight in you with gladness.

With his love, he will calm all your fears.[b]

He will rejoice over you with joyful songs."

18 "I will gather you who mourn for the appointed
festivals;

you will be disgraced no more.[c]

19 And I will deal severely with all who have
oppressed you.

I will save the weak and helpless ones;

I will bring together

those who were chased away.

I will give glory and fame to my former exiles,
wherever they have been mocked and

shamed.

20 On that day I will gather you together
and bring you home again.

I will give you a good name, a name of distinction,

among all the nations of the earth,
as I restore your fortunes before their very eyes.
I, the Lord, have spoken!"

This starts out rough, but gets better and better
and better!

-

I love how by v.15 it is clear that the God of the universe is willing to dwell among his people. He will not only dwell, but give them a path to salvation and even glory. He will protect, provide and provision them for everything that lies ahead. And God even recognizes that in the midst of all the bad, there were some in Jerusalem who were faithful and trustworthy through it all.

I wonder if we are those people? Are we the faithful? Are we waiting for the coming of the King? Are we ready to have him come and live among us? Do we really want God to come?

Or are we like so many others, distracted and finding new gods to worship all the time. Our gods don't look like ancient pagan gods, but they seem to take that place nonetheless in modern society. It is so easy for us to turn our heads away from God because there are so many opportunities for us to be entertained and distracted. While Jesus is ever present though the Holy Spirit, it is tough for us to sometimes remember that he dwells among us spiritually, and will soon come to dwell among us physically as well.

The book ends on a high note, just like Zephaniah. God says that he will bring us all home again. And that really is it, isn't it. It is really about reunion, reconciliation, and repentance in order to be one with Jesus again. And when we are one with Jesus, we are one with those who are in Jesus, whether they have gone before us, or will come after us.

The Good news is that the king is coming, and

is willing to be with us. He came before, and will come again, and soon. I hope sooner than we think. As I look around I am worried about the state of the world. But what gives me strength, what gives me hope, is the promise of a God who loves his people so much that he was willing to sacrifice for us, and he has promised not to abandon us.

-

Do you believe that Jesus is coming again?

Do you believe that his death on the cross gave us victory over sin, and his resurrection gave us victory over death?

How does this reality make life different for you? Make judgment different? Make living in victory different?

Where else in the Old Testament can you see Jesus coming through?

INTRODUCTION

The following is a guide to help facilitate discussion. Feel free to add or subtract or change questions to fit the conversation, and pray for the Spirit to lead in all things.

OPEN

What's a geographical location that is special to you? How long has it been of special significance to you? Why?

HEAD

Read together Exodus 3:1-14. (you may choose to read part or all, whatever your group has time and desires), and share any thoughts, insights, or impressions you had as you read through the passage.

What is Moses' reaction to the bush? Why do you think Moses is so collected and curious when he sees the bush and hears a voice?

How does God identify Himself to Moses at the start of their conversation? Why do you think God chose this title for their conversation? (v. 6)

What does God call Moses to do? How does Moses react? If you were to evaluate their statements logically, who would be more logical in their words—God or Moses?

Moses asks that God give him a name to offer the Israelites. What is the name God provides at this point in the passage? What is the meaning of this name? (v. 14)

How would you describe the conversation between Moses and God in this passage? Was it easy? Difficult? Argumentative?

HEART

One of the key elements of this story is the holy ground. It's holy because God's presence is there—in a bush in the desert. This is meaningful because it reaffirmed the idea that their God could appear anywhere. Do you believe God's ability to show up anywhere is good or bad?

Why or why not?

The daily study guide commentary noted that Moses is reacting to the inconvenience of God's call. Why do you think Moses was so sensitive to the challenges (vs. the opportunities) he'd face? When God calls you, are you more sensitive to the challenges or opportunities?

The promises made to Moses in this passage are reflective of the promises God makes to His people—collectively and individually. Do you believe that God is with our church? And do you believe that God is with you?

Think about the words, actions, and promises made in Moses' encounter with the burning bush. What does this theophany illustrate about God's character?

HANDS

Reflect on the daily commentary and the discussion that you've had today. Take a moment to pray for God to give you a clear calling for this year. Make an action plan for how you plan to fulfill this calling and share it with your study group or an accountability partner.

LIVING WORDS for YOUR WEEK

"Do not be afraid or discouraged, for the LORD will personally go ahead of you. He will be with you; he will neither fail you nor abandon you."
(Deut 31:8)

THE WALK (YOUTH)

Jesus and the Minor Prophets

Week 9 of 9

God is our Hope

Habakkuk & Zephaniah

INTRODUCTION

The following is a guide to help facilitate discussion. Feel free to add or subtract or change questions to fit the conversation, and pray for the Spirit to lead in all things.

OPEN

Have you ever been in a situation where you feel like nothing can be done? A word that describes this feeling is hopeless. We've all felt hopeless at some point. Take some time to share some fears you've had about the future.

HEAD

In Habakkuk we see people in pain and turmoil. In Zephaniah we see a people destined to be in pain and turmoil. Both of these books have some pretty heavy truths that are not very hopeful. Yet in both of these books we see something awesome; we see the promise of God. God promises to his people that he would not leave them there but rather, in their despair and disobedience he was going to stick by them.

HEART

We so often feel as though God has abandoned us. This can be because of mistakes or because some kind of shame in our life. One of our first instincts is to think that God has abandoned us. Yet, in these two books we find a picture of a God who leans in and chooses humanity. Yes God requires obedience, yet this obedience is what leads to his blessing. This teaches us that God always has a plan for us - even in the most bleak of situations. .

HANDS

Is God's hope your first thing you look at when you encounter difficult situations? Here we find that we can choose to depend on God first. We are called to be a people who are obedient and dependent on the love of God - meaning we believe that God is the answer to our suffering. We choose to allow God to move in even the most

difficult of situations.

LIVING WORDS for YOUR WEEK

"Sing, O daughter of Zion; shout aloud, O Israel! Be glad and rejoice with all your heart, O daughter of Jerusalem! For the LORD will remove his hand of judgment and will disperse the armies of your enemy. And the LORD himself, the King of Israel, will live among you! At last your troubles will be over, and you will never again fear disaster."

Zephaniah 3:14-15

INTRODUCTION

The following questions are a guide to help families with children understand God and discover His love throughout the series. You may think of other ideas that fit the needs of your family.

We don't often get to read from Habakkuk and Zephaniah. But the promises of God to save and rescue his people are written throughout these texts.

How many promises can you count in these texts? What promise do you like the best?

Have you ever lost someone or something that you loved very much? What does God promise he will do for those who have lost?

Our God delights in you, in each of us. He loves us so much, He would do anything for you, and anything to save you. His promise to "bring you home again" isn't just for exiles in this text. This promise is for each of us. Do you want to go home with God?

This image shows a full page of blank, lined paper. It features approximately 20 evenly spaced horizontal grey lines across its entire width, providing a guide for handwriting or typing. The background is a solid off-white color.







