

EASTER

— DEVOTIONAL —

*I Will Sing of My
Redeemer*

Dear Church Family,

We are believers in Jesus who gather on the first day of each week for worship, prayer, and the teaching of the Scriptures. This practice is both a declaration and a reminder that for the Christian every Sunday is Easter Sunday.

This weekly commitment, however, doesn't mean our recognition of the Easter holiday should be routine or anticlimactic. Our celebration of Easter is significant. As significant as the defeat of death should be.

For centuries Christians have used the weeks leading up to Easter as a time for repentance and prayer. The focus on repentance was to be a reminder that they though they have sinned greatly, Christ is a great Savior from their sin.

That's what this devotional is designed to do. It's a journey through 6 of the 7 Penitential Psalms (all of them except Psalm 51). These Psalms are rich with expressions of repentance and sorrow over sin, but they are also full of hope and life at the joy of being forgiven.

As you read through these 6 Psalms and ponder the thoughts that our staff has written, the hope is not for you to remain sad or miserable. Our hope is to lift you out of the sorrow that accompanies sin with the wonder of God's love and grace. The goal is for you to joyfully sing of your Redeemer.

That's what made David sing. He wrote these Psalms (songs) to exalt his Redeemer and to do that he had to express his deep need for redemption.

Happy Easter,

The Staff at Faith Bible Church

I Will Sing of My Redeemer

Lyrics by Philip Bliss

I will sing of my Redeemer
And His wondrous love to me;
On the cruel cross He suffered,
From the curse to set me free.
Sing, oh sing, of my Redeemer,
With His blood, He purchased me.
On the cross, He sealed my pardon,
Paid the debt, and made me free.

I will tell the wondrous story,
How my lost estate to save,
In His boundless love and mercy,
He the ransom freely gave.
Sing, oh sing, of my Redeemer,
With His blood, He purchased me.
On the cross, He sealed my pardon,
Paid the debt, and made me free.

I will praise my dear Redeemer,
His triumphant power I'll tell,
How the victory He giveth
Over sin, and death, and hell.
Sing, oh sing, of my Redeemer,
With His blood, He purchased me.
On the cross, He sealed my pardon,
Paid the debt, and made me free.

I will sing of my Redeemer,
And His heav'nly love to me;
He from death to life hath brought me,
Son of God with Him to be.
Sing, oh sing, of my Redeemer,
With His blood, He purchased me.
On the cross, He sealed my pardon,
Paid the debt, and made me free.

Psalm 6

To the choirmaster: with stringed instruments; according to The Sheminith. A Psalm of David.

6

- O Lord, rebuke me not in your anger,
nor discipline me in your wrath.
- 2 Be gracious to me, O Lord, for I am languishing;
heal me, O Lord, for my bones are troubled.
- 3 My soul also is greatly troubled.
But you, O Lord—how long?
- 4 Turn, O Lord, deliver my life;
save me for the sake of your steadfast love.
- 5 For in death there is no remembrance of you;
in Sheol who will give you praise?
- 6 I am weary with my moaning;
every night I flood my bed with tears;
I drench my couch with my weeping.
- 7 My eye wastes away because of grief;
it grows weak because of all my foes.
- 8 Depart from me, all you workers of evil,
for the Lord has heard the sound of my weeping.
- 9 The Lord has heard my plea;
the Lord accepts my prayer.
- 10 All my enemies shall be ashamed and greatly troubled;
they shall turn back and be put to shame in a moment.

Prayer

Lord, use the next six weeks in the Psalms to draw me closer to you. Give me a deeper recognition of my sin, and an even richer knowledge of your love and forgiveness.

Week 1 Day 2

Psalm 6:1

*O Lord, rebuke me not in your anger,
nor discipline me in your wrath.*

The sixth Psalm is the first of seven penitential Psalms recognized by the early church which were recited as an act of penance on Ash Wednesday. This act of worship was done as a way of confessing sin and seeking God's forgiveness.

However, Psalm 6 has no confession or prayer for forgiveness. Generally speaking it is a Psalm of lament. Whether in sickness or in peril, David is weary from what seems like an unending onslaught against the Lord's anointed king. His only hope is to cry out for salvation.

Verse one begins with a plea from David that the Lord would not rebuke him in the wrath only reserved for the wicked. David was God's anointed ruler, a man after God's own heart. The Bible presents the wrath of God as being directed toward those who openly rebel against the divine Creator. Wrath is the just response given by a holy God toward sinfulness and wickedness. Sin is a rebellion against our creator. It's a willful denial of what is true and holy for what is fleeting and filled with unrighteousness.

God's wrath is the due punishment for those who rebel. In fact, Ephesians 2:3 tells us that "we were all by nature children of wrath." No matter how many times we try to work ourselves out of the trouble that our sinful nature and actions have earned, God's wrath is still our punishment. We have rebelled. Lamentations 3:66 says of the Lord, "You will pursue them in anger and destroy them from under the heavens."

God's wrath is our due, so we have only one choice... cry out for forgiveness and await the mercy of the Lord.

Response

- What does the wrath of God tell us about how God views sin?
- How should we view our sin in light of God's wrath?
- Knowing sin brings wrath, how should we view the sacrifice of Christ?

Prayer

Lord, I have rebelled against you. Your commands I have not kept and your will I have not followed. Forgive me. Cover me with your grace and mercy, so that I might be found faithful in your sight. Help me to rely upon you as I go about my days, for it is in my walking with you that I find security for my days and grace for my sins. Amen.

Psalm 6:2

*Be gracious to me, O Lord, for I am languishing;
heal me, O Lord, for my bones are troubled.*

Sin is agonizing. The depravity of man is constantly licking at our heels. The effects of sin can enter our lives through self or others and when it does, it can bring darkness with it. David's soul languishes. In Hebrew the description is drooping, similar to fainting. It's the idea of losing all strength and growing weak. Have you ever been there?

David continues his lament in verse 6, "I am weary with my moaning; every night I flood my bed with tears; I drench my couch with my weeping."

We long to get away, look away, and run away. We long to find a place where sorrow doesn't exist and pain is not present. Our desire is for a place of perfect peace and rest. What we find in our anguish is that maybe God is calling us to Himself. Our response to sin is everything.

The Bible is not silent about mental distress, and David is one of the greatest examples of calling out to God when he experiences it. Even David, a mighty warrior, felt anguish. He felt the physical, emotional and mental weariness of sin. And when he did, he was faced with a decision on how to respond to the heaviness.

He cries out for healing and reprieve inside the mercy of God. He responds in a way that tells us that he understands the character of God. Because God has shown mercy in the past and because it reveals His glory, David knows he will be in alignment with God's will for his life when he asks for mercy. God has the power to bring down heavy justice. But time and again, we see him be gracious when his people come to Him in repentance.

Psalms are the places we go during seasons of lament. We feel the weightiness of our sorrow over sin and hear the heart cry out in desperation. We sit there. We pray. We wait.

Response

- After all the description of where David's heart is, he knows one thing — healing will come through the mercy of God. He cries out with that knowledge. Are you crying out to God in your anguish over sin?

Prayer

Be gracious to me. I have grown weak and feeble as I begin to understand my sin. My vitality is gone. My bones hurt and I feel the frustration and annoyance of them. I beg for your gracious mercy. YHWH, heal my heart.

Week 1 Day 4

Psalm 6:3
*My soul also is greatly troubled.
But you, O Lord—how long?*

“How long, O Lord?” Pressure mounts and becomes unbearable, yet our question remains the same: “How long, O Lord?” Disease decays our flesh, and our question persists, “How long, O Lord?” Relationships boil over into strife, and our question continues to be “How long, O Lord?”

Sitting in the silence of the Lord is often unbearably difficult. We wait eagerly to hear from the Lord because the world around us is faltering from sin, yet every time we tune our ears to heaven, silence surrounds us. We yearn to be filled with the joy of the Lord, yet His silence has sent us spiraling into despair.

It’s easy to listen to the sound of silence and fill your head with doubts and questions about the character and nature of God. We know what God has said about Himself. We know that the Bible tells us that He is good, but in our lived experience we feel left alone in the dark. We feel helpless, alone, and desperate.

David sat in this same darkness, pleading with the Lord to be his rescuer; yet he was only able to utter the words “How long, O Lord?” The trouble that surrounded him had eroded his joy leaving him with more questions than he had answers. It was a dark season for David, yet he still knew who to look for in hope. Yes, David was desperate. Yes, David was longing to be rescued, yet even in his despair David knew who to look to for hope. His dismay did not dissuade the intent of his heart, for it was set on God even though he could not hear the voice of the Lord.

When God’s silence seems deafening, we must cling to His promises. In His promises we find hope and the strength to continue even when we cannot hear His voice.

Response

- When you cannot discern the Lord’s voice how do you normally respond?
- What promises can you cling to when God seems distant or quiet?

Prayer

Lord, oftentimes my questions remain unanswered, but your promises remain constant. I will rest in the knowledge that you have ordained my path. Whether I can or cannot see it I will follow you.

Psalm 6:4

*Turn, O Lord, deliver my life;
save me for the sake of your steadfast love.*

David senses a break in communion with God and prays, “Turn, O Lord.” In other translations the word “return” is used. Once you have experienced deep, abiding relationship with God, there is a need for it all the time. When it is broken through sin, a sense of longing will overcome the believer. We are unsettled and restless. We chase after the steadfast love of the Lord.

In his book, Confessions, St. Augustine wrote, “Thou hast formed us for Thyself and our hearts are restless until they find rest in Thee.” David understood this lament. In his restlessness, he cries out to God and pleads his case for deliverance by appealing to the steadfast love of the Lord. A characteristic of God that is revealed throughout all of Scripture, but is especially evident in the Psalms.

As believers we do not put our hope in shifting circumstances, we place it in the never-changing love of God. Our hope does not minimize suffering and misery, instead it is placed squarely on God. Our deliverance will come through the knowledge of who God is to us and the world.

Charles Spurgeon explained, “In seasons of severe trial, the Christian has nothing on earth that he can trust, and is therefore compelled to cast himself on God alone. When no human deliverance can avail, he must simply and entirely trust himself to the providence and care of God. Happy storm that wrecks a man on such a rock as this! O blessed hurricane that drives the soul to God — and God alone!”

When we have come to the end of ourselves, only then do we truly appreciate deliverance that comes because of God’s steadfast love.

“The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases; his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness. ‘The Lord is my portion,’ says my soul, ‘therefore I will hope in him.’”

Lamentations 3:22-24

Response

- Are you trusting God for your deliverance from sin?
- Are you leaning into the steadfast love of God for salvation?

Prayer

Lord, turn to me. Deliver my life and save me for the sake of your steadfast love. Knowing that your mercies never come to an end, let me know your faithfulness. You are my portion and I will put my hope in you. I will seek you and wait quietly for your salvation.

Week 1 Day 6

Psalm 6:8-9

*Depart from me, all you who do iniquity,
for the Lord has heard the voice of my weeping.
The Lord has heard my supplication,
the Lord receives my prayer.*

For seven verses David has pleaded to the Lord in his anguish with no response. Every time he called out to the Lord it's as if he simply heard the dial tone. He had cried so many tears that his bed had become soaked with them. He had cried out into the empty darkness hoping his plea would be accepted by God with no word in response.

Abruptly, in verses 8-9, David pivots and now stands confidently to boast about the fact that the Lord has heard his cry. His cries of heartache have turned to cries of joy, extolling the wonderful faithfulness of a God who has promised to bless those who find their refuge in Him. So, what changed? How did David move so quickly from dismay to assurance?

David's perspective changed as he began to look beyond his current situation to the one who stood omnipotent over his entire life. The tyranny of the moment had clouded his vision, that is until he looked to the light of the Lord who broke the fog of his mind and allowed him to see where his hope truly lies

God is faithful to His beloved. He has promised to listen to the cries of His people and respond in love. 1 Peter 3:12 tells us, "For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous and His ears are attentive to their prayer."

When God hears the cries of His people He will always respond. Maybe not in the way that we would like, but always in the way that we need. We can rest in knowing that our God is for us and not against us and that "God works all things together for the good of those who love Him." So, cry out to the Lord, express your pain, and then rest in the knowledge of His ultimate power and love over your life.

Response

- How does it encourage you to know that the Lord hears our cries?
- What promises of God can you cling to in times of pain and heartache?

Prayer

Lord, my life often feels out of my control. Help me to remember that you have promised to be with me, to guide me, and that you love me unconditionally. Hear my cries as I submit to you. Sin and pain surround, but I know that you stand above them all. I trust that you will never leave me or forsake me. You are my rock and my shield. Amen.

Psalm 32

A Maskil of David.

32

Blessed is the one whose transgression is forgiven,
whose sin is covered.

- 2 Blessed is the man against whom the Lord counts no iniquity,
and in whose spirit there is no deceit.
- 3 For when I kept silent, my bones wasted away
through my groaning all day long.
- 4 For day and night your hand was heavy upon me;
my strength was dried up as by the heat of summer. Selah
- 5 I acknowledged my sin to you,
and I did not cover my iniquity;
I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the Lord,"
and you forgave the iniquity of my sin. Selah
- 6 Therefore let everyone who is godly
offer prayer to you at a time when you may be found;
surely in the rush of great waters,
they shall not reach him.
- 7 You are a hiding place for me;
you preserve me from trouble;
you surround me with shouts of deliverance. Selah
- 8 I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go;
I will counsel you with my eye upon you.
- 9 Be not like a horse or a mule, without understanding,
which must be curbed with bit and bridle,
or it will not stay near you.
- 10 Many are the sorrows of the wicked,
but steadfast love surrounds the one who trusts in the Lord.
- 11 Be glad in the Lord, and rejoice, O righteous,
and shout for joy, all you upright in heart!

Prayer

Father, true blessing comes when I am in fellowship with you. Help me to reveal to you all that gets in the way of that. Don't allow me to hide from you, but in you.

Week 2 Day 2

Psalm 32:1-2

*Blessed is the one whose transgression is forgiven,
whose sin is covered.*

*Blessed is the man against whom the Lord counts no iniquity,
and in whose spirit there is no deceit.*

When I was 4 years old I had done something I knew was wrong. I was so fearful of the discipline I would receive I hid in a garage trash can, hoping never to be found. I concealed myself there for a very long time and listened as my mother walked by yelling my name and calling neighbors to find out if they'd seen me. It wasn't until I heard my mother say that she was going to call the police that I came out from my hiding. When I climbed out of the trashcan panic turned to relief. There were tears, hugs, and the big question, "What were you doing?"

When Adam and Eve sinned in the Garden (Genesis 3) they quickly realized they had made a grave mistake. Their eyes were opened and they covered themselves with fig leaves, hiding from God, hoping never to be found.

Obviously, God found them and He knew what they had done. In the midst of Adam and Eve explaining themselves to God, He then mercifully covered them with animal skins to relieve their shame.

The lesson is this: We know our sin needs to be covered. We hide because we know we've done wrong, which is why God says to the believer, "If you hide and cover yourself, I'll not cover you. But if you uncover yourself, if you're willing to admit your sin, I'll cover you."

And God does this by sending our sins somewhere — He sends them to Christ. Jesus took our sins upon himself. Our righteous Lord was stripped and crucified so that sinners could be covered.

"God made him who knew no sin to be sin for us that we might
know the righteousness of God in Him."

2 Corinthians 5:21

Response

- Are you quick to uncover your sin to God and others or do you conceal it? Which approach brings happiness and blessing?

Prayer

Heavenly Father, I am blessed to have my sin covered. Happiness is the result of going to you in confession and repentance. Overcome my impulse to hide my sin, looking instead to the gracious covering you provide.

Psalm 32:5

*I acknowledged my sin to you,
and I did not cover my iniquity;
I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the Lord,"
and you forgave the iniquity of my sin. Selah*

When Adam and Eve first sinned in the Garden of Eden, their immediate reaction was to run, hide, and cover their shame. You and I have unfortunately inherited this instinct. When we sin we have the uncanny ability to reason away our shame with phrases like "it's not that big of a deal," "it only happened once," "this isn't hurting anyone," or to numb the shame with food, drugs, alcohol, or entertainment. Left on our own we would never cast ourselves on God's mercy.

Luckily for us, God in His grace has provided a way to prick our numbed conscience by the use of guilt. Guilt, much like physical pain, is a gift that lets us know something is wrong and drives us to a point of agony until we address the root cause. David describes his guilt in the previous verses with phrases like "my body wasted away" (v. 3), "Your hand was heavy upon me," and "My vitality was drained away as with the fever heat of summer" (v.4).

It's only when David is completely undone by guilt that he is even willing to stop running and stop hiding his sin and to go before God to acknowledge his sin. Guilt helps us reach the end of ourselves and drives us to the point of confession and to seek forgiveness from God which is our only relief.

Response

- What ways are you trying to insulate yourself from guilt?
- What sin is God trying to get you to address in your life through the use of guilt?

Prayer

Lord, thank You for the grace of guilt which leads us to the confession of our sins and thank You for Your promise that "If we confess our sins, You are faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9).

Week 2 Day 4

Psalm 32:7

*You are a hiding place for me;
you preserve me from trouble;
you surround me with shouts of deliverance. Selah*

A disastrous scene unfolds in Revelation 6:15-16. We are told of “the kings of the earth and the great ones and the generals and the rich and the powerful, and everyone, slave and free” all calling out to the rocks and hills to “fall and hide us from the face of him who is seated on the throne.” It is the climactic day of God’s judgment. The slain Lamb of God is now the devouring Lion, and there will be no place to hide for His enemies.

From the beginning sin compels man to hide from God. After the fall, man wants nothing to do with God. Adam and Eve know they deserve his wrath, so they hide from Him in fear.

Yet between the sin in Genesis and the wrath to come in Revelation stands the Cross of Christ. At the cross, the full, unbridled wrath of God came down upon Jesus, and, in that moment of judgment, there was nowhere for Jesus to hide. No fig leaves or shade trees. No mercy, no grace, no compassion. Jesus, for us, is exposed to the all-consuming expression of sin’s cruelty and the wrath of God.

For God’s just judgment to pass by sinners like you and me, it has to find Jesus. That is what Paul meant in Colossians 3 when he said the believer’s “life was hidden with Christ in God.” Hiding in Christ is the only place to hide. To use the language of David in Psalm 32, Jesus is our “hiding place.” It is there our lives are eternally preserved.

Outside of Christ, there is no safe place to hide, but hidden in Christ there is peace and safety and songs of joy.

Response

- In what ways do you think of God as a hiding place for you?
- In what ways do you hide in other less capable shelters?

Prayer

Father, thank you for giving me a place to run that is full of grace, truth, and love. Thank you that Jesus endured your wrath so that I would not have to. Thank you that he didn’t hide, so that I could hide in Him.

Psalm 32:10

*Many are the sorrows of the wicked,
but steadfast love surrounds the one who trusts in the Lord.
Be glad in the Lord, and rejoice, O righteous,*

In the verses leading up to verse 10 the wicked are likened to an obstinate horse or mule that constantly wants go its own direction because in its pride and ignorance it thinks it knows the best path, but in reality it is without understanding. It does not trust that the one leading it knows a better path so it resists and fights and ultimately has to be led around with a painful bit and bridle in its mouth in order to go the correct direction.

David is warning us from his own experience in this Psalm that when he lacked trust and went his own way and ignored God's guidance, his sin brought him to a place where his "body wasted away" (v.3) and where his "vitality was drained away as with the fever heat of summer" (v.4). Our lack of trust in God leads to painful correction and a life of unnecessary sorrows.

In contrast, the ones that humble themselves and give up trying to go their own way and who trust in the Lord's instruction and guidance will be surrounded by His goodness and mercy in every direction.

"Trust in the Lord with all your heart and do not lean on your own understanding, in all your ways acknowledge Him and He will make your paths straight. Do not be wise in your own eyes; Fear the LORD and turn away from evil. It will be healing to your body and refreshment to your bones."

Proverbs 3:5-6

Response

- Do you trust God with ALL your heart?
- What areas in your life are you choosing to go your own way?

Prayer

Lord, I want to live a life where Your lovingkindness surrounds me in every direction. Please reveal to me where I am choosing to go my own way. Help me give up control and to yield to your guidance and please lead me down Your straight paths.

Week 2 Day 6

Psalm 32:11

*Be glad in the Lord, and rejoice, O righteous,
and shout for joy, all you upright in heart!*

Ira Sankey, the great song leader who accompanied D.L. Moody on his evangelistic campaigns used to sing:

My life flows on in an endless song;
Above earth's lamentation;
I hear the sweet, not far-off hymn
That hails the new creation;
Through all the tumult and the strife
I hear the music ringing;
It finds an echo in my soul—
How can I keep from singing?

How can I keep from singing? That is the mood of every sinner who knows they have received God's forgiveness in Christ. God has put more joy inside of them than they contain. He has lifted them out of the mire of their sin and placed them in his love and grace. Certainly, a cause for praise.

Psalm 32 begins with David declaring how "blessed" he is. This word for blessed can be translated happy. Receiving forgiveness should make you happy. This same idea is returned to in verse 11 when we are encouraged to "Be glad." When the sinner confesses their sin and knows he is forgiven, sorrow over sin quickly gives way to gladness of heart, and in our gladness of heart we sing of the redemption we have experienced.

The closing line of the Psalm goes a step further, instructing us to "Shout!" John Phillips in his writing on the Psalms reminds us that this is not David who is the speaker here, but the Lord Himself. The Lord's command to the one who's been forgiven and redeemed is to not hold back in praise, but to "Shout!"

When we shout others can hear us. When we shout we get people's attention. When we shout, we tell others what the Lord has done.

Response

- Have you experienced forgiveness so that it compels you to express joy in a way that other people notice what the Lord has done?

Prayer

Heavenly Father, you are the Lord of joy. When my circumstances don't add up to joy help me to look to the joy of my salvation. Overwhelm me with gladness that's found in you.

Psalm 38

A Psalm of David, for the memorial offering.

38

- O Lord, rebuke me not in your anger,
nor discipline me in your wrath!
- 2 For your arrows have sunk into me,
and your hand has come down on me.
- 3 There is no soundness in my flesh
because of your indignation;
there is no health in my bones
because of my sin.
- 4 For my iniquities have gone over my head;
like a heavy burden, they are too heavy for me.
- 5 My wounds stink and fester
because of my foolishness,
- 6 I am utterly bowed down and prostrate;
all the day I go about mourning.
- 7 For my sides are filled with burning,
and there is no soundness in my flesh.
- 8 I am feeble and crushed;
I groan because of the tumult of my heart.
- 9 O Lord, all my longing is before you;
my sighing is not hidden from you.
- 10 My heart throbs; my strength fails me,
and the light of my eyes—it also has gone from me.
- 11 My friends and companions stand aloof from my plague,
and my nearest kin stand far off.
- 12 Those who seek my life lay their snares;
those who seek my hurt speak of ruin
and meditate treachery all day long.
- 13 But I am like a deaf man; I do not hear,
like a mute man who does not open his mouth.
- 14 I have become like a man who does not hear,
and in whose mouth are no rebukes.
- 15 But for you, O Lord, do I wait;
it is you, O Lord my God, who will answer.
- 16 For I said, “Only let them not rejoice over me,
who boast against me when my foot slips!”
- 17 For I am ready to fall,
and my pain is ever before me.

- 18 I confess my iniquity;
I am sorry for my sin.
- 19 But my foes are vigorous, they are mighty,
and many are those who hate me wrongfully.
- 20 Those who render me evil for good
accuse me because I follow after good.
- 21 Do not forsake me, O Lord!
O my God, be not far from me!
- 22 Make haste to help me,
O Lord, my salvation!

Prayer

Lord, help me to be honest with you. You know me better than I know myself, and you love me more than anyone. Show me your love and acceptance this week.

Psalm 38:4

*For my iniquities have gone over my head;
like a heavy burden, they are too heavy for me.*

We weigh out things we purchase or plan to carry with some kind of limit in mind. When a task involves carrying something bulky or dense we instinctively ask ourselves “I wonder how heavy that is?” or “Am I going to be able to handle that by myself or do I need to find someone to help me move it?” Our goal is to match our ability to the burden that we need to bear and to leave some margin in case we misjudge it or take a mis-step.

Our iniquities don't afford us the opportunity to accurately plan ahead for the fall out. By the very nature of sin, its consequences are always more severe, significant and impactful than we think it will be. In our foolishness we jump right into trouble or overestimate our ability to escape.

The Psalmist pictures his iniquities as a wave crashing into and over him. He has been pulled by the tide or an expected tempest into a situation completely overwhelming and out of his control. We also see the depth and density of iniquity. The weight is immense and the more we fight to free ourselves the more we fail under it.

The final crushing blow is when we come to the realization that these iniquities are our own. By our own will, choosing, striving and manipulations we have brought this wave and crushing burden on ourselves. It then leaves us only with questions we hope someone will answer: How long will this go on? Is there any way out? Why did I make such a foolish choice? Is there any mercy available? Is there anyone who cares enough to save me?

Response

- Am I making the foolish move to consider a sinful path believing I can handle it?
- Do I now realize this crushing burden I am carrying is the result of my own willful iniquity?

Prayer

Lord, I now know this overwhelming situation I am in is a result of my iniquity. I thought I was strong or smart enough to work my way through anything. The consequences you have brought into my life are because your Law is true and you are gracious in allowing me to see the truth.

Psalm 38:9-10

*O Lord, all my longing is before you;
my sighing is not hidden from you.
My heart throbs; my strength fails me,
and the light of my eyes—it also has gone from me.
My friends and companions stand aloof from my plague*

When we sigh at the realization of our current circumstances, the groaning comes from the depths of our physical being. Our sigh seems to be saying “OK, here it is, it’s not just going to disappear.” As with the Psalmist, the sighing may be accompanied by a racing heart, inability to function normally in our daily routine or even weakness that keeps us immobilized at times. We may recognize the source of the negative emotion as our sin or it may be unknown to us.

Just as Joseph could easily recognize in Pharaoh’s cupbearer & baker that some situation was overwhelming them; our countenance falls and the light in our eyes becomes dim when we are overwhelmed by our sin and circumstances. When you see an acquaintance, friend or family member who looks “down”, you’ve noticed that the light in their eyes is dim or gone. They are probably sighing in secret. Possibly afraid to tell anyone of their struggle and might not even know their need and path to their Redeemer.

Our Lord knows everything that is behind our sighing. He has orchestrated all of the circumstances leading up to that moment. Our inner desires and expectations are fully exposed to his loving embrace and care. The conviction we may feel is the Holy Spirit working in us and for us. He has carefully planned our future growth and supplies all of the grace necessary to restore and increase our strength as well as the light of our understanding and appreciation for who He is for us.

Response

- What situation in my life am I sighing over that I can recognize God’s hand in allowing, and then trust His heart and grace to carry my through?
- Who am I near to that seems overwhelmed? How can I encourage them in the truth of God’s care in every circumstance of their life?

Prayer

Lord, I am sighing because of the overwhelming feelings I have in my body and soul. I come to you for both forgiveness and restoration. I call upon You, the One whose blood is my peace, whose righteousness is my strength and whose condemnation is my freedom. Grant to me your grace and forgiveness today.

Psalm 38:15

*But for you, O Lord, do I wait;
it is you, O Lord my God, who will answer.*

Is theology practical?

A.W. Tozer famously wrote, "What comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us." Whether we are good students of theology or not, what we believe is true about God directs our actions and informs our feelings. In Psalm 38, we see in David's prayer that his knowledge of God's character plays itself out in his response to his situation. His good theology is on display in his words, actions, and heart posture!

Leading up to verse 15, the Psalmist writes of his sins which have brought him low and justly drawn God's wrath. His friends and family have abandoned him in his distress and his enemies taunt him. They throw insults and threats at him but he does not respond—rather, he waits for the Lord. David silences himself, in humility listens for the word of God, and patiently trusts that the Lord will restore and save him from His own righteous indignation (see verse 3). How can David have this kind of bold hope and expectation? Because he knows the Lord's character. He has been a student of his ways and a lover of his Word.

David knew what was true about the Lord from His own declaration to Moses: "The Lord — the Lord is a compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger and abounding in faithful love and truth, maintaining faithful love to a thousand generations, forgiving iniquity, rebellion, and sin. But he will not leave the guilty unpunished, bringing the consequences of the fathers' iniquity on the children and grandchildren to the third and fourth generation" (Exodus 34:6-7 CSB).

David clung to the truth – the good theology – that told him the justice of God and the punishment of his sin were true to God's character... but also true to the Lord's character was His exponentially greater inclination toward mercy and forgiveness. And in that knowledge, David could patiently and expectantly wait for God's restoration and compassion. As can we.

Response

- As David's knowledge of the Lord fueled his trust in God's faithfulness to restore and forgive, so too does our knowledge of God's character and the redeeming work of Christ enable us to confess our sin with confidence that we will be shown mercy! How are you habitually growing in the knowledge of God and his Son and fueling your own trust?

Prayer

Father, you are faithful to restore us when we humble ourselves before you in repentance and faith. Thank you for the blood of Christ, which washes away my sin and assures me of your pardon. Fill my mind and heart with great thoughts of you and let that knowledge be fuel for my love towards you and my trust in your goodness. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.

Week 3 Day 5

Psalm 38:17-18

*For I am ready to fall, and my pain is ever before me.
I confess my iniquity; I am sorry for my sin.*

In Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, there is a powerful portrayal of the effects of guilt in the character of Lady Macbeth. After ambition and greed led her to commit murder, she was driven to madness by her guilt. In one of the best known scenes, Lady Macbeth stands at her wash basin scrubbing an imagined blood stain on her hands — her husband and doctor look on as she obsesses over cleaning off the guilt of her violent deed: "Out, damned spot!... What, will these hands ne'er be clean?... Here's the smell of blood still... What's done cannot be undone" (Act V, scene i).

There is a similarity between the murderess's fixation and King David's distress over his sin. In today's passage we read, "my sorrow is continually before me... I am full of anxiety because of my sin," and in Psalm 51:3 David writes, "My sin is ever before me." Surely you can relate to this oppressive sense of guilt over your own sin! Even for those of us who know Christ to be our Savior from sin, when we actively pursue evil instead of good, death instead of life, we will (indeed, should) feel the painful recognition of our failure to walk in a manner worthy of Christ!

As we experience the "sorrow" and "anxiety" produced by our guilty conscience (like David), scripture encourages us to allow the godly grief to lead us toward confession and repentance (2 Corinthians. 7:10)! Our temptation is to quickly push away the discomfort of guilt with distractions, defensiveness, or denial. But if we do not let ourselves feel the horror of our sin and agree with God about the evil of rebelling against his commands, we'll be less inclined to truly repent. We need to see the incongruity of our sinful actions with our calling to walk in holiness, confess our guilt before the Lord, cling to mercy, and turn away from our sin in repentance and faith.

Response

- What is your response when you feel "sorrow" and "anxiety" over your own sin? Do you allow godly grief to lead you towards confession and repentance? Or are you quick to push away the discomfort and pain of guilt with distractions, defensiveness, or denial?

Prayer

God, who is like You? Inviting sinners and habitual backsliders to come to you with their deepest regrets, failures, and sources of shame? You are merciful and bear with me in my weakness. May I have a deep repentance, that knows the horror of sin before I've run towards it, not just after. Thank you for the complete salvation provided in Christ, which assures that I will be sanctified and made holy through his work in me. It's in his name I pray, Amen.

Psalm 38:21-22
*Do not forsake me, O Lord!
O my God, be not far from me!
Make haste to help me,
O Lord, my salvation!*

We can look at this passage as two key promises God makes with His people. The fulfillment of each promise is made a reality in specific accomplishments of Christ's work.

On the cross, Christ was forsaken for us. He cries out as our substitute: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" Because of His perfect obedience in suffering even unto death we know that this request of the Psalmist is answered. By His perfect sacrifice, He is our Priest forever, "holy, innocent, unstained, separated from sinners, and exalted above the heaven," always making intercession for us before the Father. Although separate, he is never far from us.

He is ever present to be our help. He will lose none that the Father has given to him. We often sing the words from the song, "In Christ Alone":

"No guilt in life, no fear in death;
This is the power of Christ in me;
From life's first cry to final breath;
Jesus commands my destiny...
Here in the power of Christ I'll stand."

When we come to the end of ourselves, we find Him there. Full assurance in faith meets us because of His love, His power to save us and His commitment and keep us.

Response

- How does Hebrews 10:19-22 exhort us to act based on His priestly office?
- What concerns and worries should I turn my attention from when I'm reminded who holds my destiny in His hands?

Prayer

Lord Jesus, I acknowledge you as my great High Priest. I confess my sin before you knowing the endless fountain of forgiveness is found in you. And I take my next steps in full obedience with the assurance you command the outcome of each one.

Psalm 102

A Prayer of one afflicted, when he is faint and pours out his complaint before the Lord.

102

Hear my prayer, O Lord;
let my cry come to you!

- 2 Do not hide your face from me
in the day of my distress!
Incline your ear to me;
answer me speedily in the day when I call!
- 3 For my days pass away like smoke,
and my bones burn like a furnace.
- 4 My heart is struck down like grass and has withered;
I forget to eat my bread.
- 5 Because of my loud groaning
my bones cling to my flesh.
- 6 I am like a desert owl of the wilderness,
like an owl of the waste places;
- 7 I lie awake;
I am like a lonely sparrow on the housetop.
- 8 All the day my enemies taunt me;
those who deride me use my name for a curse.
- 9 For I eat ashes like bread
and mingle tears with my drink,
- 10 because of your indignation and anger;
for you have taken me up and thrown me down.
- 11 My days are like an evening shadow;
I wither away like grass.
- 12 But you, O Lord, are enthroned forever;
you are remembered throughout all generations.
- 13 You will arise and have pity on Zion;
it is the time to favor her;
the appointed time has come.
- 14 For your servants hold her stones dear
and have pity on her dust.
- 15 Nations will fear the name of the Lord,
and all the kings of the earth will fear your glory.
- 16 For the Lord builds up Zion;
he appears in his glory;

- 17 he regards the prayer of the destitute
and does not despise their prayer.
- 18 Let this be recorded for a generation to come,
so that a people yet to be created may praise the Lord:
- 19 that he looked down from his holy height;
from heaven the Lord looked at the earth,
- 20 to hear the groans of the prisoners,
to set free those who were doomed to die,
- 21 that they may declare in Zion the name of the Lord,
and in Jerusalem his praise,
- 22 when peoples gather together,
and kingdoms, to worship the Lord.
- 23 He has broken my strength in midcourse;
he has shortened my days.
- 24 "O my God," I say, "take me not away
in the midst of my days—
you whose years endure
throughout all generations!"
- 25 Of old you laid the foundation of the earth,
and the heavens are the work of your hands.
- 26 They will perish, but you will remain;
they will all wear out like a garment.
You will change them like a robe, and they will pass away,
- 27 but you are the same, and your years have no end.
- 28 The children of your servants shall dwell secure;
their offspring shall be established before you.

Prayer

Lord, this Psalm helps me see how small I am, but how big you are. You are eternal. I am not. You are faithful. I often fail to be, and yet you answer me when I pray to you. Thank you, Lord.

Week 4 Day 2

Psalm 102:1-2

Hear my prayer, O Lord;

let my cry come to you!

Do not hide your face from me

in the day of my distress!

Incline your ear to me;

answer me speedily in the day when I call!

The title of this Psalm is “A Prayer of one afflicted, when he is faint and pours out his complaint before the Lord”. The anonymous writer of this Psalm is clearly under a very heavy weight — he’s troubled, he’s distressed, and he’s desperate — both for himself and for his community.

The range of the Psalmist’s emotions is very broad, but notice that his direction of seeking help is singular! He knows that God alone is able and that His divine power is the only source of hope. This reminds us of Job’s prayers to God as he goes through incredible trials, as well as the beautiful Psalm 121 “I will lift up my eyes to the mountains; From where shall my help come? My help comes from the Lord, who made heaven and earth.”

When we are overwhelmed by our circumstances and emotions, we should seek the Lord first. Too often we look in other directions for support and aid, then seek God as a last resort after those other channels fail. We also should take the Psalmist’s example of approaching God with a balance of confidence and humility. We have confidence in Him, His power, and the fact that He allows us to boldly approach His throne of grace. At the same time, we recognize that God isn’t indebted to us in any way, but because of His compassion and mercy chooses to hear our prayers and pleas, so we come before Him humbly.

Response

- God welcomes us as we honestly express the emotions and burdens that are overwhelming us. As His children, we can bring our deep pain, sorrow and worries before the Lord, and He inclines His ear to us and lovingly listens. Come to Him honestly and humbly right now, in full confidence that He hears and understands, and seek Him as your first and only true source of help.

Prayer

Father, thank You for making a way through Jesus for me to come to you in prayer, and thank You for being a caring compassionate Father who sees and hears me. I know that my help comes from You, the Lord who made everything, so I ask for faith to trust You over my emotions. Your presence is my comfort and my joy.

Psalm 102:6-7

*I am like a desert owl of the wilderness, like an owl of the waste places;
I lie awake; I am like a lonely sparrow on the housetop.*

I'm going to go out on a limb and guess that most of us have never described ourselves as being like a desert owl in the wilderness or a lonely sparrow on a housetop. I would imagine though, that each one of us can relate to feeling depressed, grieved, distressed, anxious, dejected, overwhelmed, abandoned, or sleepless as we walk in difficult times and circumstances. Those are the deep emotions the Psalmist is experiencing and expressing as he mourns the devastation of Jerusalem here in Psalm 102.

In his "Treasury of David", Charles Spurgeon helps us understand the illustrations used here. Speaking about the desert owl, he says this bird is "loving solitude, moping among ruins, hooting discordantly." What a poignant picture! When negative emotions overwhelm us, it is so common to withdraw from others (loving solitude), sulk and remain stuck in the grief of what has been lost (moping among ruins) and moan and complain (hooting discordantly).

The sparrow is a bird that is happy in company, but the picture here is of feeling lonely and helpless while watching over things that cause us to mourn and are out of our control. Spurgeon states "he who has felt himself to be so weak and inconsiderable as to have no more power over his times than a sparrow over a city, has also, when bowed down with despondency concerning the evils of the age, sat himself down in utter wretchedness to lament the ills which he could not heal." We certainly can relate to this in our day and time.

Response

- Do the pictures of the desert owl and the lonely sparrow describe you in ways? The Lord is patient and full of strength. He promises He is with us when we feel utterly alone and graciously lifts our heads to see His truth and power reigning over our circumstances. As we'll see the Psalmist remember as we come to the second half of Psalm 102, He is supremely sufficient in every way.

Prayer

Lord, I bring everything that overwhelms me today to You. Help me to see where I withdraw, remain stuck in grief or worry, or give in to despair. You alone are sufficient and all-powerful. Help me to fix my eyes on You, and to be mindful of the joy and peace of Your presence with me in each moment. Thank you for lovingly hearing my prayer.

Week 4 Day 4

Psalm 102:12

*But you, O Lord, are enthroned forever;
you are remembered throughout all generations.*

In the first eleven verses, the Psalmist candidly expresses his anguish during afflictions. The focus is on his own pain and weakness. However in verse 12, he pivots the focus to God:

But You, O Lord,...

As his perspective changes, some amazing contrasts to the first part of the Psalm come into view. Earlier in verses 3 and 11 he speaks about how his life is fleeting and unsubstantial, but now in verse 12 he praises God's eternal and unchangeable nature. Even though our lives are frail, God and his purposes will stand forever. Even though Jerusalem lies in ruins and the Psalmist's nation is nearly extinct, he remembers and returns to the truth that God still sits on His throne, ruling and reigning over whatever happens.

The second half of this verse holds another contrast. As time passes, we will all be forgotten — even those men and women with the greatest of worldly accomplishments. But the name of the Lord will never fade. His character and renown will continue through all generations and from age to age. Spurgeon says "All other things are vanishing like smoke, and withering like grass - but over all the one eternal, immutable Light shines on, and will shine on when all these shadows have declined into nothingness."

Response

- Where do you need to say "But You, O Lord..." today?
- In what ways do you need to shift your focus from your own pain and weakness to God and his character - his love, compassion, goodness, power, sovereignty, and eternity? Remember that the Lord reigns forever, but the struggles of today will pass.

Prayer

Today, Oh Lord, I choose to focus on you. Because of who you are, I can trust you in any situation. I can wait for your purposes and your timing and I can trust your ways. This life and these troubles will pass eventually, but you, O Lord, abide forever!

Psalm 102:18-20

Let this be recorded for a generation to come, so that a people yet to be created may praise the Lord: that he looked down from his holy height; from heaven the Lord looked at the earth, to hear the groans of the prisoners, to set free those who were doomed to die

In 1 Samuel 7 after the Israelites defeat the Philistines, Samuel puts up a stone as a memorial to God's deliverance of His people and names it Eben-Ezer which translated means "stone of help." We often sing about this Ebenezer monument in the hymn "Come Thou Fount," and it's a concept that holds powerful meaning. A quote from The Expositor's Bible commentary explains, "It was no doubt a testimony to a special help obtained in that time of trouble; it was a grateful recognition of that help; and it was an enduring monument to perpetuate the memory of it."

Here in Psalm 102:18-20 the writer calls us to raise our own Ebenezer of praise to the Lord because of all that He has done for us. He heard our cries when we were prisoners doomed to death, and He set us free. With grateful hearts, we should continuously echo the words of the hymn writer saying, "I will tell the wondrous story, how my lost estate to save; In His boundless love and mercy, He the ransom freely gave."

Charles Spurgeon puts these verses from Psalm 102 in a wonderful perspective. "Registers of divine kindness ought to be made and preserved. We write down in history the calamities of nations — wars, famines, pestilences, and earthquakes are recorded; how much rather should we set up memorials of the Lord's loving-kindness! Those who have in their own souls endured spiritual destitution, and have been delivered out of it, cannot forget it; they are bound to tell others of it, and especially to instruct their children in the goodness of the Lord. The praise of God should be the great object of all that we do, and to secure him a revenue of glory both from the present and the future is the noblest aim of intelligent beings."

Response

- How can you "raise an Ebenezer" to God's goodness as you walk through this week?
- How might God be giving you an opportunity to pass on a testimony of His loving-kindness to your acquaintances, friends, co-workers, children or grandchildren today?

Prayer

Lord God, I want Your praise to be the great object of all I do, both to honor You and to serve as a testimony and a memorial of Your loving-kindness to those around me. Give me boldness to live, speak and worship in a way that gives You glory both today and in the days to come.

Week 4 Day 6

Psalm 102:25-27

“Of old You founded the earth, and the heavens are the work of Your hands. Even they will perish, but You endure; And all of them will wear out like a garment; Like clothing You will change them and they will be changed. But You are the same, and Your years will not come to an end.” (NASB)

Psalm 102 ends with this glorious declaration of who God is and why He is worthy of our trust.

“Of old You founded the earth, and the heavens are the work of Your hands...”

God is the Creator. He made the world, the heavens and each of us from nothing. Knowing that, we realize that nothing that we mourn the loss of or long to see transformed is beyond Him or the scope of His power.

“Even they will perish – but You endure; And all of them will wear out like a garment; Like clothing You will change them and they will be changed.”

God stands when all things fall. Even His visible creation wears out like clothing, but He is making a new Heaven and a new earth where all everything will be perfectly restored.

“But You are the same, and Your years will not come to an end.”

Just as a person stays the same when he has changed his clothing, God is the unchanging One. He does not decay, He does not diminish, and His years cannot be counted.

Response

- What an incredible comfort it is to remember that we are sons and daughters of the Creator and the Restorer of all things. As you acknowledge that He is in full control of every situation you have a burden for and long to see changed, take time today to give those things to Him in full surrender and trust.

Prayer

God, thank You for your word and the way it shines a light on who You are. Like the Psalmist, I remember and rejoice in the fact that You made all things and will make all things new. All of time is in Your hands, and You are working all things together for Your purposes and glory. I joyfully surrender the things that weigh heavily on me today to You.

Psalm 130

A Song of Ascents.

130 Out of the depths I cry to you, O Lord!

- 2 O Lord, hear my voice!
Let your ears be attentive
to the voice of my pleas for mercy!
- 3 If you, O Lord, should mark iniquities,
O Lord, who could stand?
- 4 But with you there is forgiveness,
that you may be feared.
- 5 I wait for the Lord, my soul waits,
and in his word I hope;
- 6 my soul waits for the Lord
more than watchmen for the morning,
more than watchmen for the morning.
- 7 O Israel, hope in the Lord!
For with the Lord there is steadfast love,
and with him is plentiful redemption.
- 8 And he will redeem Israel
from all his iniquities.

Prayer

Heavenly Father, this Psalm speaks of your steadfast love and forgiveness. Convince my heart of your love and grace this week. Thank you, that you hear my prayers.

Week 5 Day 2

Psalm 130:1
*Out of the depths I cry to you, O Lord!
O Lord, hear my voice!*

In Psalm 130 verse 1, the writer cries out to God from the depths of human suffering, hoping for, expecting and insisting on God's hearing. Have you been there before?

The Depths. They sound so far removed from God's presence — a place none of us wants to be but suddenly we find ourselves there. Many people before us have experienced these depths: Job, Jonah, Paul, and the Psalmists described the depths this way: "the pit of destruction..." (Psalm 40:2) or "deep mire where there is no foothold" (Psalm 69:2).

All of those are descriptive of where we can find ourselves when we feel abandoned, hurt, or disappointed; suffering great loss and grief. And most of all we find ourselves longingly desperate to hear from God.

Even as children of the Most High God we still can find ourselves so distraught from our present "depths" that we can convince ourselves that God has left us.

Just like the Psalmist, we cry out from the depths of our need and distress. Maybe it's the circumstances we're currently in or maybe we're experiencing great spiritual misery for our sins...whichever one it is, we sense a separation for our Lord. It's like our very selves are lost. Lost in the depths.

We know as Christians that we're not to trust our feelings, but to place our faith and hope in who we have been taught to trust. Our God. We're suffering, yet He's still God. We're disappointed, yet He's still God. We're ashamed, yet He's still God. We think we're hopeless but God is full of hope.

In these times, we must continue to cry out to God from the depths and recall that our God is with us even in the depths. Psalm 139:8 tells us: "If I go up to the heavens, You are there; if I make my bed in the depths, You are there."

And lastly remember our LORD's great love for you stated in Ephesians 3:17-19, "And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ..."

Response

- When you find yourself feeling separated from God, to what truths do you cling?

Prayer

God, you are always with me. I know that to be true. Sometimes the depths seem so far away from you, that I'm desperate to sense your presence. Please restore my heart today as I remember your word that you will never leave me or forsake me. Amen

Psalm 130:2

*Let your ears be attentive
to the voice of my pleas for mercy!*

The Psalmist in verse 2 begins with a plea for God to hear him. He uses what is called an anthropomorphism. Which is the attribution of human characteristics to non-human entities, especially God. He does this referring to God's ears meaning "Let God listen to my cry."

Sometimes we focus on wishing that God would bring more justice in the world. But, when you think about it, is it really justice that we want or need? Justice means that everyone gets what they deserve. Actually, we really want justice applied to everyone else, but not to us.

No, our cry should be for Mercy. Mercy does not give us what we deserve. Mercy gives us what we do not deserve. Especially in relation to salvation. Christ received Justice, we receive mercy by faith.

At the funeral of former Soviet leader Leonid Brezhnev. His widow did something almost unbelievable. She stood motionless by the coffin until seconds before it was closed. Then, just as the soldiers touched the lid, Brezhnev's wife performed an act of great courage and hope. She reached down and made the sign of the cross on her husband's chest. There in the citadel of atheistic power, the wife of the man who had run it all hoped that her husband was wrong. She hoped that there was another life, and that that life was best represented by Jesus who died on the cross, and that the same Jesus might yet have mercy on her husband. Sadly, it was too late for Brezhnev, but it is not too late for us.

Response

- How often have you cried out for justice?
- How often have you cried out for mercy?

Prayer

Lord, listen to my cry for your mercy. I am a sinner and apart from your mercy, I have little hope. Once I lived in the passions of my flesh, carrying out the desires of my body and mind, just like everyone around me. But you, O Lord, because you are rich in mercy, because you have a great love for me, have saved me and made me alive in Christ. I sit in the richness of your mercy, in deep gratitude for what you have done for me (Ephesians 2:3-5).

Week 5 Day 4

Psalm 130:3-4

If you, O Lord, should mark iniquities,

O Lord, who could stand?

But with you there is forgiveness,

that you may be feared.

The first step that is necessary to comprehend the Gospel of Salvation is to clearly understand that you are a sinner. The Holy Spirit's convicting work accomplishes just this as we see from John chapter 16.

When he (the Holy Spirit) comes, he will convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment (John 16:8).

When a person recognizes his or her lack of righteousness, the message of God's forgiveness through Christ's death becomes practically irresistible.

Once we have received the forgiveness of God through Jesus Christ, our response should be that we "fear" Him. Fearing the Lord in the Old Testament essentially means "to trust Him" which leads to worship with reverence and awe.

When the Moravian missionaries first went to the Eskimos, they could not find a word in their language for forgiveness, so they had to compound one. This turned out to be "Issumagijoujngnainermik." It is a formidable-looking assembly of letters, but an expression that has a beautiful connotation for those who understand it. It means, "Not-being-able-to-think-about-it-anymore."

God requires a just payment for sin because He is holy, but He grants forgiveness because He is love.

Response

- Have you ever paused to realize how much you have sinned against God in your life?
- Have you ever paused to realize that all of your sins have been forgiven in Christ?
- Are you ready to trust God completely and worship Him with reverence and awe?

Prayer

Lord, thank you for forgiving me. You have delivered me from the domain of darkness and transferred me to the kingdom of your beloved Son, in whom I have redemption, the forgiveness of sins (Colossians 1:13-15).

Psalm 130:5-6

*I wait for the Lord, my soul waits,
and in his word I hope;
my soul waits for the Lord
more than watchmen for the morning,
more than watchmen for the morning.*

The Psalmist compares himself to the watchmen of a city looking for the first rays of the rising sun. At dawn they would be relieved of their duties by other guards. Then they could rest from their labors.

The Psalmist was eagerly waiting for new mercies to come to his nation from God. Notice that these new mercies were found in “His Word.” The Psalmist’s hope was in the truthfulness of the promises in God’s Word.

So it is with us, we are patiently waiting for the coming of Christ as promised in the Bible. This is the Blessed Hope that comforts us and empowers us to serve Christ until He comes.

Someone asked John Wesley what he would do if he knew his Lord would return at that time the next day. He said in effect, “I would go to bed and go to sleep; wake up in the morning, and go on with my work, for I would want Him to find me doing what He had appointed me to do.”

“. . . we wait for the blessed hope — the glorious appearing
of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ”

Titus 2:13 (NIV84)

Response

- Does the soon coming of Christ at the Rapture energize you in your service for Him?
- Does the soon coming of Christ at the Rapture provide the hope that keeps you going when things are not going real well?

Prayer

Lord, I am prayerfully watching for your return. Give me great patience as I wait. The more I grow to know you, the more I long for your return. My greatest desire is that I be found doing your will and deep in your Word. Give me the strength and courage needed to daily live this way and make your glorification my greatest priority.

Week 5 Day 6

Psalm 130:8
*And he will redeem Israel
from all his iniquities.*

We began this week in the depths. The depths of sin and the mire of its consequences.

But there is no better hope than what is presented in Psalm 130:8 when it says that “He will redeem Israel from all our iniquities.” He will do it. Man cannot do it, but He will.

Genesis 3:15 subtly reveals God’s redemptive plan, inviting us to wonder about how God will defeat Satan and save his people. God told the serpent that “He shall bruise your head and you shall bruise his heel.”

The “HE” of Genesis 3:15 is Jesus Christ.

Dwell on that word “HE”. Have you ever really thought about the He and all He encompasses? Colossians 1 tells us in verse 15-18 that “He is the image of the invisible God.” “Through Him all things were created.” “And He is before all things and in Him all things hold together.” That’s a lofty status. “HE” is the greatest being in the universe. But take a moment to also consider Philippians 2:5-6: “He did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing...And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient unto death—even death on a cross!”

How do sinners move from the depths of sin to the realization that ‘He is faithful and just to cleanse us from all unrighteousness’? 1 John 1:9 says when we “confess our sins”. When we confess our sins He moves us “from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of His Beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sin.” (Colossians 1:13-14)

This work of redemption results in even greater glory for “HE” who has saved us. Consider the rest of the verse in Philippians: “God has highly exalted Him and bestowed on Him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is LORD to the glory of God the Father.” (2:9-11)

Today we worship the “He” who redeems, forgives, renews, restores, and reigns. Jesus is the “HE” of Psalm 130, verse 8.

Response

- Take a moment and ponder all Christ is. What words describe your devotion to the One who died to redeem you?

Prayer

Lord, there is so much power in the name of Jesus. You have redeemed us through the sacrifice of your son. Thank you, God for the indescribable gift of Jesus. Amen.

Psalm 143

A Psalm of David.

143

- Hear my prayer, O Lord;
give ear to my pleas for mercy!
In your faithfulness answer me, in your righteousness!
- 2 Enter not into judgment with your servant,
for no one living is righteous before you.
- 3 For the enemy has pursued my soul;
he has crushed my life to the ground;
he has made me sit in darkness like those long dead.
- 4 Therefore my spirit faints within me;
my heart within me is appalled.
- 5 I remember the days of old;
I meditate on all that you have done;
I ponder the work of your hands.
- 6 I stretch out my hands to you;
my soul thirsts for you like a parched land. Selah
- 7 Answer me quickly, O Lord!
My spirit fails!
Hide not your face from me,
lest I be like those who go down to the pit.
- 8 Let me hear in the morning of your steadfast love,
for in you I trust.
Make me know the way I should go,
for to you I lift up my soul.
- 9 Deliver me from my enemies, O Lord!
I have fled to you for refuge.
- 10 Teach me to do your will,
for you are my God!
Let your good Spirit lead me
on level ground!
- 11 For your name's sake, O Lord, preserve my life!
In your righteousness bring my soul out of trouble!
- 12 And in your steadfast love you will cut off my enemies,
and you will destroy all the adversaries of my soul,
for I am your servant.

Prayer

Lord, lead me to know the truth about you and your steadfast love for me.

Week 6 Day 2

Psalm 143:2

*Enter not into judgment with your servant,
for no one living is righteous before you.*

After Martin Luther penned his Ninety-five Theses, he nailed them to the front door of the Castle Church at Wittenberg, Germany, launching the Protestant Reformation. The first thesis read, "When our Lord and Master, Jesus Christ, said 'repent,' He meant that the entire life of believers should be one of repentance." That is, our entire life should be marked by confession of sin and bowing to the Lord's authority. Psalm 143, the last of the seven Penitential, or Repentance, Psalms, powerfully confirms that truth.

Psalm 143 breaks evenly into two halves marked by the musical notation "Selah" (V. 6). Verses 1-6 are the Problem; verses 7-12 are the Prayer. David opens this Psalm in verse one in prayer by appealing to the character of God, His faithfulness and righteousness, as the basis to answer his prayer. He banks his whole hope on God's character and God's covenant. But even as those words come off of David's lips, it's almost like a dark thought flashes across his mind. Because, if the Lord is faithful and righteous, one thing is for certain, David is not. He is suddenly pulled up short as he thinks of his own sinfulness. Painfully aware of his own depravity, David humbly acknowledges his guilt before God; He repents. . . . again! His life of repentance is on full display. Is yours?

Response

- Do your thoughts about the character of God regularly push you to times of repentance and confession?
- Declare often that your hope is not in your goodness but in God's goodness.
- Thank God for David's greater Son the Lord Jesus who paid the price for your sin in full.

Prayer

Father, You're merciful, You're faithful, You're righteous, but please don't deal with me as I deserve. Don't give me what I deserve; give me what I need. Don't deal with me on the basis of what I'm like; deal with me on the basis of what You're like. Thank you for sending Jesus to satisfy your righteous demands on my behalf and for bringing me to faith in Him.

Psalm 143:5

*I remember the days of old;
I meditate on all that you have done;
I ponder the work of your hands.
I stretch out my hands to you;
my soul thirsts for you like a parched land. Selah*

This verse is a direct response to circumstances in David's life. We know that trials and tribulations come for all at one point or another. The question is not if, but when. When we are faced with trials in life we choose how we respond. Do we become bitter due to our circumstances? That certainly can feel like the easiest and most satisfying response, but we see here that David does not go in that direction. Instead, he chooses to remember the ways that he has seen God miraculously work in his life in the past and meditate on them.

As followers of Christ, we too should follow this example. When my life gets hard and things don't go the way I want them to, I normally focus my attention on the negative circumstance in front of me. David makes it clear how to get through these times. We should focus on the faithfulness of God that is constantly displayed in our lives. We might not be able to see His hand at work in the middle of difficult circumstances, but we can see how God has been faithful before and meditate on all that He has done.

As Christians, there is no better example of God's love and faithfulness than to look to the cross of Christ. When worldly circumstances arise that are not favorable, we should look to the finished work of Christ on the cross. Meditate on the goodness of God that can be easily seen throughout your life, and most importantly in the gospel messages.

Response

- What are some ways you have seen God work in your life?
- When circumstances get tough how can you remind yourself of God's faithfulness?

Prayer

God thank you for your faithfulness. I pray that as life distracts me I would always remember all that you have done for me. Thank you for the ultimate display of love and faithfulness that we see in Christ. Amen.

Week 6 Day 4

Psalm 143:8

*Let me hear in the morning of your steadfast love,
for in you I trust.*

*Make me know the way I should go,
for to you I lift up my soul.*

In the midst of a dark time in David's life, we see this verse. David's trust is not in himself to get out of poor circumstances. Above all he trusts God and so we see him asking God to speak to him and teach him in the way that he should walk.

When we find ourselves in a crisis in life, so often we rely on ourselves to fix it. For many of us in Edmond, Oklahoma, we might feel like we can easily handle a lot of the issues that come into our lives on a regular basis. Maybe someone you love gets sick and your first reaction is to spend as much money as you can to fix it. Of course, that is not a bad thing at all, however, sometimes we do this and get weeks or months into these kinds of situations before we realize that outside of a few half hearted prayers we are relying on ourselves and our own ability to fix things more than we are on God.

In these situations, we can turn to a verse like this for guidance. David is specifically asking God to guide his steps so that as he walks through this time of crisis in his life he makes the correct decisions, not because of his own strength, but because of God leading him. Our first reaction should always be the same as David's. Ask God for help and direction then listen and follow His lead.

Response

- Why do you think we so often turn to countless other things before God in times of trial?
- How does this passage personally encourage you to handle difficult situations?

Prayer

God thank you that you are always near in difficult times. Help me turn to you in difficult circumstances and look to you for instruction. Help me walk in ways that are honoring to you. Amen

Psalm 143:10
*Teach me to do your will,
for you are my God!
Let your good Spirit lead me
on level ground!*

David was a mature believer. He knew that no matter how far along someone is in their relationship with God there is always more to learn. He also knew that the best way to accomplish this is for the Spirit to lead him and to do God's will no matter where it leads.

So often I find myself hesitant to completely surrender to the direction and will of God. I think that it might result in me having to surrender something that I really love or enjoy. I'm convinced that the possibility of giving up that thing that I so badly desire is not worth complete surrender to the will of God. We see, however, that David does not think this way. As a mature believer, he knows that being led by the Spirit to do God's will is the best way to know God better. Whether victory or defeat it didn't matter. David knew that submitting to the will of God meant he would know Him better.

Like David, we should never be content with the current state of our relationships with God. We should strive to know him more every day. At times that means being willing to possibly give up certain things in our lives. However, with the proper perspective, we see that giving up anything we might value now for the sake of knowing God better is not really a sacrifice at all.

Response

- What are some things that you might need to give up in order to focus on growing in your knowledge of and relationship with God?
- How can you change your perspective to make potential sacrifices less painful?

Prayer

God I pray that you would teach me your will. Help me to surrender to you in every circumstance.

Psalm 143:11-12

*For your name's sake, O Lord, preserve my life!
In your righteousness bring my soul out of trouble!
And in your steadfast love you will cut off my enemies,
and you will destroy all the adversaries of my soul,
for I am your servant.*

Hudson Taylor, the famous missionary who founded the China Inland Mission, was scheduled to speak at a large church in Melbourne, Australia. The moderator of the service introduced him in eloquent and glowing terms. He told the large congregation all that Taylor had accomplished in China, and then presented him as “our illustrious guest.” Taylor stood quietly for a moment, and then opened his message by saying, “Dear friends, I am the little servant of an illustrious Master.”

David is confessing the same thing in Psalm 143. This Psalm begins and ends with similar language. This literary device is called an inclusio or what we might call “bookends.” David calls himself “Your servant” (V. 2), and ends with the words, “For I am Your servant” (V. 12). Also, at the beginning and the end of the Psalm David calls on God to act on his behalf for God’s glory and honor—for God to act based on His character (VV. 1, 11)

So, these two thoughts bracket Psalm 143.

- God is faithful and righteous and acts for the sake of His Name and glory.
- David is God’s servant.

Based on these bookends, we could say that Psalm 143 teaches us that the most important thing in life is for God to be my God and for me to be His humble servant. Or to put it in Hudson’s Taylor’s words—for me to view myself as a little servant of an illustrious Master. Do you view yourself like that?

Response

- Every day this week when you get up in the morning say to the Lord, “For I am Your servant.” Commit to serve His purposes and agenda. See how that transforms how you live, think, and act.
- Are you seeking daily to magnify God’s Name and His glory in your life?

Prayer

Father, You are my God, and I am Your servant — every day. Answer me. Teach me. Deliver me. Preserve me. Do it all for the sake of Your Name — for your honor and glory. May Your Name be praised forever. Amen.

FaithKids Devotions

Week 1: February 26-March 4

Psalm 6 is about someone who is hurting and is asking God to deliver his life. Our children might not be able to totally understand this Psalm of Lament, but they can understand when they hear this story of the Crippled Man at the Pool of Bethesda that this man needed the healing power of Jesus.

Read/Tell this story to your children: Based on John 5:1-30

Have you ever been in a hot tub where the “jets” were on, and the water is moving around? Well, the Pool at Bethesda was like that except the water was moved naturally as a part of an underground spring (water flow). In today’s story we are going to learn about a pool of water that people thought was very special.

In the city of Jerusalem there was a pool of water called “Bethesda”. It was a beautiful pool with porches built around it so that people could sit and rest. Sometimes the water in the pool was very calm. But sometimes the water would bubble up.

Many sick people liked to go to the Pool of Bethesda. Some were blind or paralyzed. Others could not walk. They came to the pool and waited for the water to bubble up. People believed that if they touched the bubbly water before it stopped bubbling then they would be made well.

One day Jesus passed by the pool and saw one of the men lying down beside the pool all alone. He noticed that the man was very sad, so He stopped to talk to Him.

The man could not stand or walk because his legs did not work properly. He was sad because he had been unable to walk for thirty-eight years. Every time the water bubbled up the man tried to get to it and touch it, but he could not. He was also sad because he had no friends to carry him to the pool. Jesus asked the man, “Do you want to get well?”

The man told Jesus that he really wanted to get better but there was no one to carry him to the bubbly water. He was very sad. He thought that no one cared that he was sad.

But Jesus cared that the man was sad! He listened to the man and then He said something very surprising: “Get up! Pick up your mat and walk.”

As soon as Jesus said this to the man, the man was cured. For the first time in thirty-eight years, he was able to stand up. He did just as Jesus said and picked up his mat and walked.

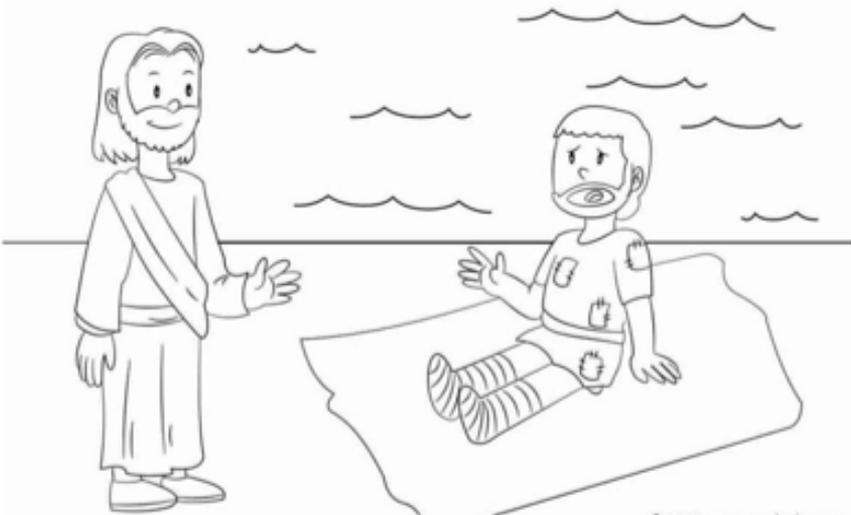
People asked the man who had made him well. The man could not answer because he did not even know the name of the man who had healed him. The man was so excited that he had not noticed Jesus slipping back into the crowd.

Later he saw Jesus at the temple, and Jesus told the man to go and to sin no more. He was so happy to see Jesus. He was glad to see the man who had made him well.

Family Response

- Why was the lame man lying alone beside the Pool of Bethesda? Waiting to touch the bubbly water and be healed.
- Why was the lame man beside the pool so sad? He could not get to the bubbly water in time to be healed.
- What did Jesus say to the lame man beside the pool? “Get up! Pick up your mat and walk.
- Read Psalm 6:2 “Have mercy on me, Lord, for I am faint; heal me, Lord, for my bones are in agony.”

Sometimes we are like this paralyzed man, even though we can walk, we need the Lord to help us and show kindness (mercy) because we are weary and tired. God is always there to help us.



Week 2: March 6-11

Psalm 32 is about someone who recognizes they have been forgiven and they are thankful for what Jesus has done.

Today's story is about the woman at the well. It's found in John 4:4-42.

It takes place in Samaria at Jacob's well. Show the picture of Jacob's well.

Jesus was on His way to Galilee, and it was a long walk. Because Jesus was fully human, He got tired, just like we do so He saw a place to rest and get some water. But that wasn't the only reason Jesus stopped there. He had a very special meeting planned there with a woman who needed to hear about forgiveness.

Most people got water from this well in the morning or evening, but this was right in the middle of the day when this woman approached the well. That was probably because she was wanting to avoid the people who didn't like her. She wasn't liked by people because of the wrong things she had done. But Jesus isn't like other people. He loves all people. And not only did she do wrong things, but she was a Samaritan woman and Jewish men did not talk to them, but again, Jesus isn't like anyone else.

Jesus asked for a drink from this Samaritan woman, and she was so surprised. She asked Him why He would ask her for a drink.

Jesus answered her, "If you knew the gift of God and who it is that is saying to you, 'Give me a drink,' you would have asked Him, and He would have given you living water." (John 4:10)

The Samaritan woman couldn't understand what Jesus was talking about. He didn't have a bucket or a rope to get water from the well. How could He get water, and why would He call it living water? Jesus said to her, "Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again. The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life." (John 4:13-14)

Again, the Samaritan woman did not understand what He was saying and that He was talking about spiritual problems. She wanted physical water so she would not be a thirsty, but Jesus knew she had a bigger problem than being thirsty. She had a sin problem.

Jesus then asked her about her husband. She answered that she had no husband and Jesus said, "you are right. You have had five husbands." He was pointing out her sin problem of not being faithful to her husband.

The Samaritan woman tried to change the subject and asked Jesus about the right place to worship God. But Jesus had not come to talk about where to worship but rather about what true worship is. Jesus is concerned about the heart of each one of us.

The interesting thing about the Woman at the well, she had heard the Messiah was coming. In fact, she said to Jesus that she knew the Messiah was coming and that He would explain everything. Jesus responded, "I who speak to you am He."

Everything changed for this woman. She realized that this man was the Messiah who could save her. She went back to town because she had news to tell. "Come, see a man who told me all that I ever did. Can this be the Christ?"

Jesus was concerned about lost people—sinners in need of forgiveness and salvation. God sent Him to earth to tell of His great salvation. Many of the Samaritans believed in Jesus because of what the woman at the well told them. They even asked Jesus to stay with them and teach them. So, He did! He stayed two more days and many more believed in Jesus. The Samaritans said to the woman, "It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves and we know that this is indeed the Savior of the world." (John 4:42).

Family Response

- Use a glass of water and talk about how important it is for our bodies to have water.
- What does "living water" do for our hearts? (Even though your children may be too young to fully understand the phrase LIVING WATER, introduce it to them that it means salvation by trusting in God and that it's forever.)
- Share these two verses about Jesus:
 - a. John 3:36: Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him.
 - b. Psalm 42:1 As a deer pants for flowing streams of water, so my soul pants for you, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God.
- What does this true story tell us about God? He loves all people. It doesn't matter how much we've sinned, because we all have a sin problem, but He provided a way to be with Him forever through Jesus.



Week 3: March 13-18

Psalms 38 is the focus for this week, and it talks about how we put our problems and hurts before God. Our friends can't help us, only God can.

The story for this week for our families is the story of the 10 Lepers found in Luke 17:11-19.

As Jesus traveled about, He performed signs and wonders and healed the sick. When people heard that Jesus was coming, they gathered on the road ahead and waited for Him to arrive. One day on His way to Jerusalem, somewhere between Samaria and Galilee, ten lepers waited outside a village, hoping to see Jesus.

Leprosy was a terrible, incurable disease back then. Once a person got leprosy, He was required to leave his home and family and live outside the city, away from other people. The Jewish law said a leper had to call out "Unclean! Unclean!" to warn people who got near him to stay away.

When the lepers saw Jesus outside the village, they stayed at a distance, but instead of calling out "Unclean! Unclean!" they called out, "Jesus, Master have mercy on us (Luke 17:13). When Jesus saw the lepers and heard their request, He said, "Go and show yourselves to the priests" (Luke 17:14). That was what the law told a leper to do if he was healed. If the priest agreed that the leprosy was gone, the person could go back to his home and family. When the lepers heard Jesus' command, they hoped He had healed them, and they hurried to obey.

As they went on their way to the priests, all ten were healed! How happy they must have been! But do you know what happened next? Only one of them turned around to thank Jesus for what He had done. That man praised God loudly, at the top of his lungs, and when he reached Jesus, he fell at His feet and thanked Him over and over.

The leper who returned was a Samaritan, a group of people the Jews didn't like. Jews and Samaritans didn't usually like to be together. Jesus looked down at the thankful man and said, "Didn't I heal ten lepers? Where are the other nine? Didn't anyone come back to thank God except this foreigner?" Then Jesus said something amazing to the thankful man, "Get up and go your way. Your faith has made you well."

In the end, many Jews disliked Jesus and didn't believe who He was. They rejected Him as the Messiah. In this story the Samaritan who knelt at Jesus' feet got more than his leprosy healed; God touched his heart as well. The other nine found healing for their leprosy, but this man found Jesus and forgiveness for his sin. Jesus praised him for his faith.

You and I might not have leprosy, but our hearts are sick with sin just like this man's heart and body was. When Jesus died on the cross, He made a way for all of us to have our sins removed and forgiven. That is something BIG to be thankful to God for.

Family Response

- Can you think of a time that something really great happened, and you were so happy about it? Maybe a birthday party or your friends or cousins came over to play? Did you thank someone for making that happen?
- How can you be thankful?
- How many of these lepers had a sin problem? (All of them)
- How many of these lepers recognized they had a sin problem? (Only one) It's important that all of us know that we have a sin problem that separates us from God. The Bible says that "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. (Romans 3:23), so what can we do? (Return to Jesus like the leper did and recognize that Jesus came to forgive our sins.)
- Jesus teaches us to love people. How can we do a better job at doing that as we go through our day to day living? Can we do more as a family to love others?



Week 4: March 20-25

Psalm 102 is about being in distress and feeling sad about the current afflictions and sensing despair and sorrow because of them.

The story for this week's family time is about Nehemiah found in the Old Testament book of Nehemiah, chapters 1-6.

Even though Jerusalem's temple was now complete, the walls around the city were still broken down and the many gates to the city had been burned, making it easy for anyone to attack it. A Jewish man named Nehemiah lived in Babylon, which was quite a way away from Jerusalem, and served the King of Persia. One day, Nehemiah asked a traveler from Judah how things were going in Jerusalem. When the traveler told him that the walls were broken down and the gates were burned, Nehemiah was very, very sad. Right then Nehemiah prayed to the LORD. He asked the LORD to forgive His people's sins and to work in the king's heart so that he would allow Nehemiah to leave and help his people.

The King saw that Nehemiah was sad and he asked him why. When the king heard that the walls of Jerusalem were broken down, he asked Nehemiah what he could do. This was just what Nehemiah had prayed for! He asked the king to send him to Jerusalem to help rebuild its walls. Amazingly the king agreed! He even gave Nehemiah letters that allowed him travel through the land under the king's protection, and he wrote orders to the keeper of the king's forest to give Nehemiah whatever he needed for the work.

So, Nehemiah returned to the city of Jerusalem. One night Nehemiah went out to inspect the broken walls and make a plan. Then he gathered the officials, priests, nobles, and those who would do the work and said, "You see the trouble we are in. Jerusalem lies in ruins with its gates burned. Let's join together to rebuild the walls, so that the people around us will no longer make fun of us and our God." Nehemiah told the people how God had answered his prayers and brought him, with the king's blessing, to help them. The people were so encouraged by Nehemiah's report that they said, "Let us rise up and build!" (Nehemiah 2:18). And they got ready to rebuild the walls.

Even though the king was helping Nehemiah, the enemies of Israel stirred up trouble. A man named Sanballat tried to discourage the people by making fun of them and accusing the Jews of rebelling against the king. But the people kept working, with each family rebuilding the wall closest to their home. As the broken places in the wall started to close, Sanballat planned an attack against Jerusalem. But Nehemiah posted guards and men with swords stood in the gaps. When Sanballat received word of the guards, he called off his attack and Nehemiah got the work started again. Half of the people worked on the walls while the other half guarded the work with

spears, shields, bows, and armor. When the gaps were almost filled,

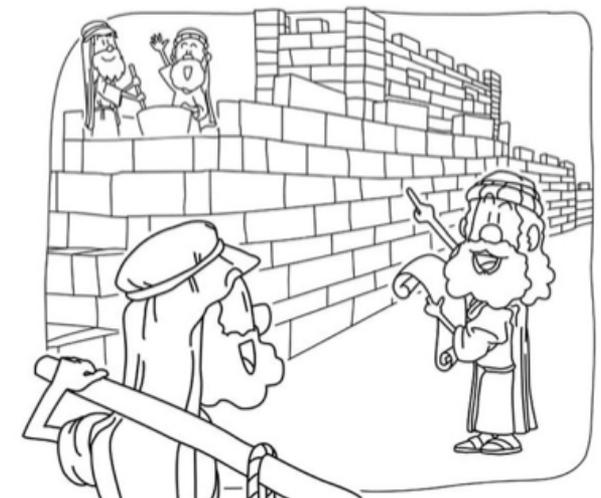
Sanballat again tried to stir up trouble by saying that Nehemiah was rebelling against the king. But Nehemiah did not stop the work, and when the wall was finished, the enemies of Jerusalem were afraid. They knew God had helped His people finish the work.

God first worked in King Cyrus's heart to rebuild God's temple and then the Lord worked in the heart of Nehemiah king's heart to restore Jerusalem's walls and gates. God did this because Jerusalem was an important part of God's saving plan. Jesus would one day be put on trial inside the city and crucified just outside its walls. God also worked in Nehemiah's heart to restore Jerusalem. All of this was a part of his larger plan to save us.

Family Response

- Can you think of something that as a family you've worked on together? How important was every person and every job? What did you like about working together?
- When Nehemiah heard about Jerusalem being in shambles, what did he do as the very first thing? (He prayed to the One True God.)
- What do you do when you are really sad about something? We might cry, complain, or tell our friends about it. We forget to pray and ask God to help us.
- How does the Nehemiah story help us to think forward to when Jesus comes?

Jerusalem is where Jesus came in on Palm Sunday where people were so excited to see Him; the Last Supper was in the Upper Room; Jesus washed His disciples' feet; He was arrested, put on trial and killed. He also rose from the dead 3 days later. Jerusalem is an important place.



Week 5: March 27-April 1

Psalm 130 This Psalm is about being in the depth and feeling separated from God. Waiting to hear from God and trying to remember that God redeems us and never leaves us.

The story for this week's family time is about Jonah from the Old Testament. Jonah chapters 1-4.

While Elisha the prophet was serving God in Israel, God raised up another prophet named Jonah. One day God called Jonah and said, "Get up and go to Nineveh, that great city, and warn them that judgment is coming of their evil ways. Nineveh and its people were Israel's enemies. So, Jonah was not happy. He didn't want to warn them! He wanted God to punish them instead. Jonah knew that if Nineveh turned away from their sin, the Lord would forgive them because He is kind, merciful, slow to get angry, and full of love. He didn't want Nineveh to experience that. So instead of obeying the Lord, Jonah ran away. He got on a ship sailing in the opposite direction, to Tarshish. He even told the crew he was running away from the Lord.

But God sent a storm so fierce that it threatened to destroy the ship. After praying to their gods (these gods were not the True God) with no success, the sailors woke Jonah. They cast lots to see who was responsible for the danger they were in. This is like drawing straws: whoever got the shortest one was the one who was to blame. When the lot fell to Jonah, the sailors remembered he was running away from God. Jonah admitted that the storm was his fault. He said the sailors could save their ship by throwing him into the sea. Although they tried to row to shore, the storm was too powerful, so at last they picked up Jonah and threw him overboard. Right away, the sea calmed.

What happened to Jonah? The Lord sent a great fish to swallow him, and Jonah was its belly for three days and three nights. Jonah knew it was the Lord who had saved him, and he prayed to God for help. The Lord commanded the fish to spit Jonah out onto dry land. Afterward the Lord again told Jonah to go and warn Nineveh. This time, Jonah obeyed. He traveled to Nineveh and gave them the Lord's warning.

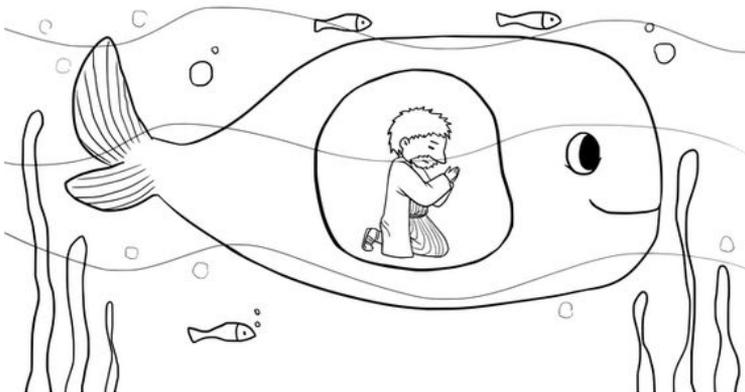
What do you think happened next? When they heard Jonah's words, the whole city of Nineveh turned away from their sin and asked God for mercy. And just as Jonah predicted, God accepted their repentance and saved them from the disaster He had threatened. The only problem was that Jonah still didn't like it! He left the city angry and stopped to rest on a nearby hill. God allowed a plant to grow and shade Jonah from the hot sun. This made Jonah very happy. But to teach Jonah a lesson, God sent a worm to eat the plant and a hot wind and sun to destroy it. When Jonah got angry the plant was destroyed, the Lord said to him, "If you can have pity for a plant, why shouldn't I care about the thousands of people in Nineveh?"

Did you know that Jesus compared himself to Jonah? He said, “Just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth” (Matthew 12:40). Just as the Lord sent a fish to swallow Jonah, so the Lord sent Jesus to die for our sin. Just as the Lord ordered the fish to release Jonah, so the grave had to release Jesus—it could not hold Him.

The Gospel story was hidden in the story of Jonah until Jesus opened it up for us to see. Also, God’s mercy to Nineveh gave a hint that God planned to save people from every nation, not just Israel. That is very best news for us.

Family Response

- Have you ever been in a storm? What was it like? (One thing we can learn about storms is that God is always with us. He was with these sailors and with Jonah and He will always be with us.)
- When something bad began to happen, the sailors needed someone to blame. So, they blamed Jonah and threw him overboard. Have you seen people do this: When something happens, they blame other people? In this case the sailors were right to blame Jonah, but we know that all people have a sin problem and only God, through trusting in Jesus, can save us from that.
- When Jonah was in the belly of the whale, what does the Bible tell us he did? (He prayed.) We need to remember to pray to God every day to help us. We need to pray for our parents, our families, and friends to love God. Can you think of some ways we, as a family, could remember to pray every day?
 - a. Always pray at meals, even at restaurants.
 - b. Leave notes around the house to pray for people.
 - c. Write down words that compliment God so we can praise Him for His greatness. (Can you think of words that compliment God?)



Week 6: April 3-8

In Psalm 143, the Psalmist is feeling deserted, left alone, not knowing what to expect in the next few hours or days. He is afraid that his enemies are coming after him.

The Disciples: Based on accounts of Jesus's arrest, trial and crucifixion from Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John

The disciples of Jesus were already so confused after the Supper they had had with Jesus. There He had washed their feet and had commanded them to do that for others. Why was Jesus even saying these things? And they had watched one of their own, Judas Iscariot, leave after Jesus had talked about someone turning on Him.

Now Jesus had asked three of them to go pray with Him in the Garden. Now that seemed like a normal thing to do. But then, out of exhaustion, they had fallen asleep. Jesus came and woke them up and told them how important it was for them to pray. But soon they fell asleep again. Then, Jesus stood up in the garden, woke up His friends and said, "now is the time. Everything that was written about me--what God has been telling His people all through the long years—it's all coming true."

And into the night, with burning torches and lanterns, with swords and clubs and armor, they came—an army of soldiers. Judas led them straight to Jesus so they could arrest Him. Jesus was waiting for them. The guards marched Jesus off and took Him to the leaders. The leaders put Jesus on trial. "Are you the Son of God?" they asked?

"I AM," Jesus said.

"Who do you think you are? To call yourself God? You must die for calling yourself the Son of God."

While all of this was happening, what do you think happened to the disciples who had loved and followed Jesus for the past three years? Well, Peter had tried to defend Jesus when he was being arrested by drawing a sword and cutting off the soldier's ear, but Jesus healed it and told Peter not to do that. But now what should they do?

The disciples ran. They were afraid for their own lives. All of them left Jesus and ran away, but Peter stopped and followed some distance behind the crowd. He had followed the crowd into the courtyard of the high priest. Peter was warming himself by the fire with the guards when a servant girl saw him there. She looked at Peter closely and said, "You also were with Jesus."

But Peter denied it saying, "Woman I do not know Him." A little bit later someone else saw him and said, "You are one of them." But Peter denied that too. And an hour or so later, someone insisted that Peter had been with Jesus, but Peter said, "Man, I do not know what you are talking about." Then the rooster crowed. During their supper, Jesus had told Peter this would

happen. Peter was crushed. The Bible says in Luke 22 that Peter cried bitterly.

The disciples had left Jesus unsure as to what to do.

While Jesus was being crucified, He saw one of His disciple's, John, with His mother. There is a possibility that they watched from a distance, but there's no other account of any disciples there during that terrible time. In fact, we don't hear about them again until two of them meet Jesus on the road after He was resurrected (brought back to life.)

In the gospel of John, it tells us that the disciples were locked in a room because they were afraid the Jewish leaders would find them, when suddenly, Jesus appeared to His disciples. They were startled and afraid, thinking they were seeing a spirit. But Jesus showed them His hands and His feet and suddenly they were full of joy because Jesus was truly alive. Jesus said to them, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent Me, even I am sending you." (John 20:21)

Family Response

- Have you ever had a time where you felt all alone? Or a time you were scared?
- What can we do when we are afraid or feel all alone?
- Even after spending three years with Jesus, watching him do miracles and wonders, why do you think the disciples deserted Jesus when He was being crucified? (They were afraid they would be arrested too.)
- This Friday is Good Friday. Talk about why Christians call this day "Good."

*Because it's the day that Jesus paid the TOTAL cost for our sins.

*Our sin problem will now be gone when we trust in Jesus

*God shows us how much He truly loves us by sacrificing His Son for our sins.

*God shows mercy and grace.



*Mercy is not punishing someone who deserves it. Mercy says, "I could punish you, but I choose not to for what you have done." Mercy shows God's kindness toward us.

*Grace is giving us a gift we do not deserve. Salvation is a free gift from God, and we've done nothing to deserve or earn it.

Faith Worship Night

Sunday, February 26

6:00

(Childcare is available for Infants through PreK)

Palm Sunday

Sunday, April 2

8:15, 9:30 and 11:00

Good Friday

Sunday, April 7

7:00

(Childcare is available for Infants through PreK)

Easter Sunday

Sunday, April 9

8:00, 9:30 and 11:00

(Adult Bible Fellowships will not meet.)

(Sunday School is available for Infants through PreK)

A generous overflow will be available in
the Chapel during all services.