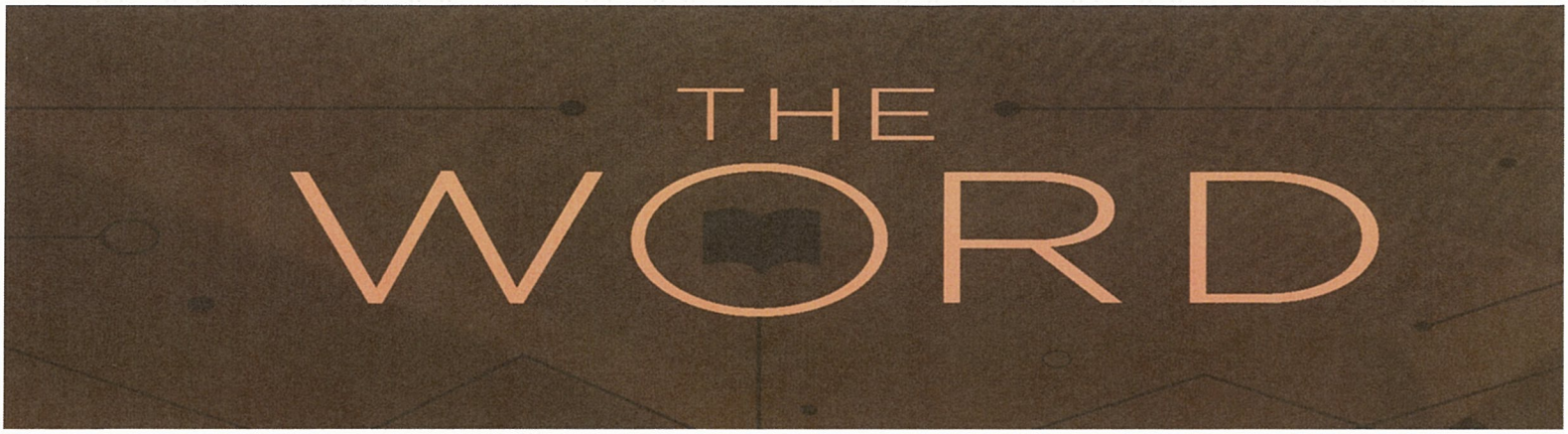
D3 Groups

Prayer, Bible Study and Accountability

THE WORD



Bible Study for D3 Groups at FBC Franklinton

2021

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THE WORD

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A BIBLE READING PLAN FOR BUSY BELIEVERS

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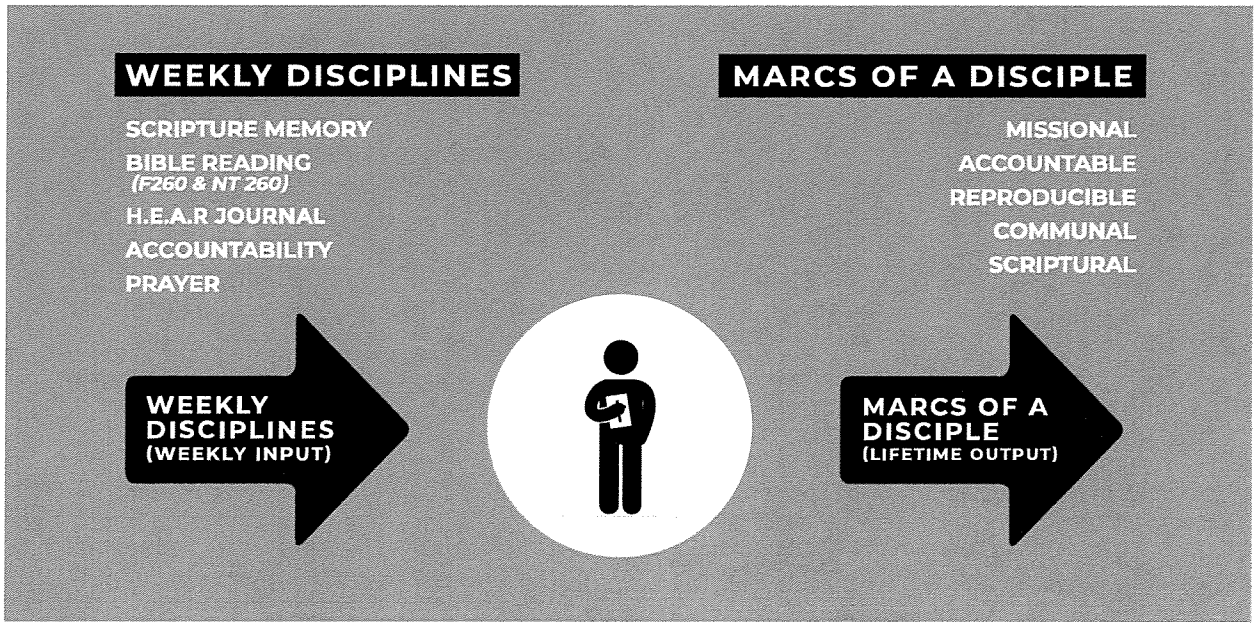
SET EXPECTATIONS

It's important that we all have the same expectation for this group. Below is an image called the D-Group DNA. This image and the next couples of pages explain what is unique about this D-Group.



WHAT WILL WE DO?

1 TIMOTHY 4:7-8

"Have nothing to do with godless myths and old wives' tales; rather, train yourself to be godly. For physical training is of some value, but godliness has value for all things, holding promises for both the present life and the life to come."

We train in godliness by weekly committing to the five disciplines.

FIVE WEEKLY DISCIPLINES

1. Accountability
2. Bible Reading (F260/NT260)
3. H.E.A.R. Journal
4. Prayer
5. Scripture Memory

Which of the five weekly disciplines are you currently doing well?

Which do you need to grow in the most?

WHAT IS A H.E.A.R. JOURNAL?

A H.E.A.R. Journal is a simple way to help you read the Bible with the intention of applying it. By asking four simple questions, you can understand and apply any passage. In addition, journaling is a great discipline because it helps you retain three times more of what you read.

Every week, each of us will share a H.E.A.R. Journal and discuss what we have heard from God's Word. There is not a set amount of H.E.A.R. Journals that you must do each week, but the goal with this discipline, as with all of the others, is to improve as time goes on. Consider how often you currently journal and do "+1" of that. So, if you have never journaled, just try to do a couple a week. If you journal occasionally, try to do three times a week. The hope is that as you get more comfortable with this discipline and experience its benefit, you will want to increase this number throughout the year.

Take a look at the H.E.A.R. Journal example on page 11. As you read through your reading plan this week, create a H.E.A.R. Journal by using these four questions.

- **H (HIGHLIGHT):** What is a verse(s) that stood out to you in your reading?
- **E (EXPLAIN):** What is the author's intended meaning in the context of the passage?
- **A (APPLY):** What is the principle to live by today?
- **R (RESPOND):** How will I respond to the application in my relationships and/or situations this week?

When the group gets together next week, you will share your H.E.A.R. Journal, and as a group discuss how to best use this method.

SAMPLE H.E.A.R. JOURNAL

READ: PHILIPPIANS 4:13
DATE: JANUARY 10, 2019
TITLE: SECRET OF CONTENTMENT

H (Highlight) - "I am able to do all things through Him who strengthens me." Philippians 4:13

E (Explain) - Paul was telling the church at Philippi that he has discovered the secret of contentment. No matter the situation in Paul's life, he realized that Christ was all he needed, and Christ was the one who strengthened him to persevere through difficult times.

A (Apply) - In my life, I will experience many ups and downs. My contentment is not found in circumstances. Rather, it is based on my relationship with Jesus Christ. Only Jesus gives me the strength I need to be content in every circumstance of life.

R (Respond) - Lord Jesus, please help me as I strive to be content in You. Through Your strength, I can make it through any situation I face.

GOOD APPLICATION QUESTIONS FOR EXAMINING A TEXT:

A helpful framework to use when trying to discern what application you should take from a text is S.P.E.C.K

S - Is there a **SIN** to confess and avoid?

P - Is there a **PROMISE** to keep?

E - Is there an **EXAMPLE** to follow?

C - Is there a **COMMAND** to obey?

K - Is there **KNOWLEDGE** of God I need to reflect on?

Once you identify what your application is, you can finish your RESPONSE section by asking, "How should I respond to this application in my relationships and/or situations this week?"

WHAT WILL GOD DO?

2 TIMOTHY 3:16-17

"All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work."

HEBREWS 4:12

"For the word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart."

Each of these verses speak to how the Holy Spirit uses God's Word to change our lives. Though we commit to the disciplines above, it is not our effort that changes us, but the Holy Spirit through His Word. The disciplines provide room in our lives for God to work.

WHAT WILL HAPPEN?

As we allow the Word of God to work in our lives we will see its impact through five areas known as the MARCS of a Disciple.

M

MISSIONAL
A disciple engages with those unengaged with the church.

A

ACCOUNTABLE
A disciple is real with oneself, God, and others.

R

REPRODUCIBLE
A disciple invests in men and women who are of F.A.I.T.H. (Faithful, Available, Intentional, Teachable, Hungry)

C

COMMUNAL
A disciple intentionally shares life with other believers.

S

SCRIPTURAL
A disciple experiences intimacy with Christ through regularly reading, meditating, and obeying God's Word.

D-GROUP COVENANT

OVER THE NEXT EIGHTEEN MONTHS, I WILL DO MY BEST TO...

- Give myself fully to the Lord during this time as I anticipate a season of accelerated spiritual transformation.
- Commit to this group and consider how I may best spur others on in their relationship with Jesus.
- Meet weekly with my D-Group (60-90 minutes). When unable, I will stay involved through sharing H.E.A.R. Journals and prayer requests.
- Commit to the five weekly disciplines: Bible Reading, H.E.A.R. Journals, Scripture Memory, Accountability, and Prayer.
- Contribute to a group atmosphere of confidentiality, honesty, and transparency.
- Pray every week for the other members of my D-Group and those in my life who don't know Jesus.
- Pray and look for others in my life who I can invite into a new D-Group when my current group decides to multiply.

Signed Member: _____

Signed Leader: _____

Date: _____

THIS WEEK

Choose the reading plan your group will use (F260 or NT260) and begin reading. (NOTE: Day 1 of each week is Monday and the weekends are for you to catch up on the readings). Look at page 11 and try to do a H.E.A.R. Journal on your favorite reading this week.

IN THE BEGINNING

THE WORD

SESSION SNAPSHOT

THE CONFLICT THAT CHANGED THE COURSE OF HISTORY

NARRATIVE PASSAGE:

Genesis 2:18-25; 3:1-6

GOSPEL FOCUS:

1 Corinthians 6:18-20

TAKEAWAYS:

- God created everything, but sin corrupted everything
- God redeemed us through Jesus

LAST WEEK'S READING:

- Genesis 1-2
- Genesis 3-4
- Genesis 6-7
- Genesis 8-9
- Job 1-2

KNOW THE WORD

PASSAGE OVERVIEW

The creation and fall of humanity is one of the most famous passages in Genesis. Here, we see God's perfect design for mankind--two parts of the same flesh working together to carry God's image across the Earth. But, as we know, something goes terribly wrong, and sets a plan in motion that plays out over the course of human history.

COMMENTARY AND STUDY MATERIALS

2:18-19 After seeing a whole chapter's worth of "God saw that it was good," we are introduced to the first instance of "It is not good" here. Perhaps God used Adam's work of naming the animals He brought before him to instill in him, even if it was subconsciously, the desire for someone like him, the way it seemd that the animals had other animals like them.

v.20 "No helper was found corresponding to him" is not a reflection on God's inability to provide for Adam's need. This was not a moment when God saw that He'd made a fatal error in only making one man. Rather, He'd given Adam something of Himself. Adam bore God's very image: he had a capacity to consider himself in light of his surroundings, to decuse, to long for soemthing he'd been made for, even if he didn't know what it was. Adam didn't need a companion because he needed something to subdue; he needed Eve because he was missing that other element from God's nature. Adam was simply not complete--it was not "good" yet.

3:1 Genesis 3:1 is connected to 2:25 with a clever bit of wordplay. We see Adam and Eve as arummim (naked), whereas the serpent was called arum (shrewd). Adam and Eve's nakedness represents the fact that they were unaware of evil and the need for protection, and the serpent's shrewdness demonstrates that he was ready to take advantage of it.

It is worth noting that "shrewdness" and "craftiness" are not necessarily bad things by themselves. Jesus tells His disciples to be as shrewd as serpents but as innocent as doves (Matthew 10:16). The problems come when that shrewdness is paired with evil intent instead of innocence.

Since we live in the conflict initiated in these verses still today, we must be aware of the snares of the Enemy and ready to thwart them so that we can continue the task He set before us when He made us: to take His image to the ends of the Earth.

STUDY THE WORD

Every now and then, the perfect piece of advice comes along, usually from someone you respect. "Work before you play, but make sure you play," your father might have told you. "It's okay to not be okay," your friend might have said when you were having a rough day.

What is a piece of advice you've been given that has stuck with you?

In Genesis 2, God made an observation about the very first people that remains true to this day: it is not good for us to be alone. Each of us has something that someone else needs. Together, let's discover how this truth will help us overcome a conflict that has been around since the beginning.

OUT LOUD, READ GENESIS 2:18-25

As you read, pay attention to the experience Adam had--especially as he noticed that each of these animals had other animals like them.

What do you think God meant when He said, "It is not good for the man to be alone"?

How have you experienced your own need for other people?

God knew from the beginning that mankind wasn't supposed to be alone. He built us in His image, with qualities that look like His. And more than that, He built us as beacons that point back to Him: creations that carry the fingerprint of their creator.

What do you think it means that mankind was made in the image of God?

How does being God's image-bearer affect the way that you live your day-to-day life?

As God's image-bearers, we are the physical representations of our invisible Creator. But not by ourselves. Adam by himself was not complete until God made him a counterpart.

From the very beginning of time, God designed us to need one another. We need each other physically, spiritually, and with regard to the mission God handed us--to be His image-bearers on Earth.

Do you think it's true that God designed us to be in relationship and community with one another? Why or why not?

What does it look like to use our relationships with the people around us in a God-honoring way?

OUT LOUD, READ GENESIS 3:1-6

After you read, compare what the serpent said to what God's instructions were in Genesis 2:15-17. Pay special attention to the way that the serpent twisted God's Word.

What are the differences between what God told Adam and what the serpent said?

Was there any element of truth in what the serpent said? What does that tell you about the nature of the lies the enemy tells?

The slope that the serpent led Eve down was a tricky one. It was untruth masked by innocent-sounding questions and lies wrapped around a kernel of what God told them.

That is the way temptation usually comes to us: in gradual increments. At first, it doesn't seem like anything outlandish--just the simple question "Did God really say?"

How have you found temptation coming in your own life?

How did Eve respond to the serpent's tempation?

What do you think we can do to avoid falling into the same response?

Without much of a fight at all, Eve weighed her options and decided that what the tempter offered her was more enticing than the relationship she shared with her Creator.

This is the exact same struggle that persists to today. Temptation will still come in subtle forms, and so we must be careful to be on our guard against it. With the help of the Holy Spirit, along with having God's Word hidden in our hearts, we can learn how to better resist it every day.

What advice have you picked up through the years about how to resist temptation?

What benefit do you think surrounding yourself with life-giving community will have as we fight the temptation to disobey the Lord?

APPLY THE WORD

Since the Fall in Genesis 3, humankind has battled temptation. Simply put, temptation is a choice about which fruit you prefer: the fruit that the tempter offers or the fruit that is produced by a life lived in obedience to the Lord. What the tempter offers is enticing--that is what makes it a temptation.

In a lot of cases, even though temptation comes in a million forms, it looks the same when you boil it down: it becomes a question of who is on the throne of your life. Are you tempted to trust your own standard above God's? Are you tempted to listen to your own voice instead of the Lord's?

Before you close your time in prayer, encourage those in your group to take a few minutes when you are done to answer the following and share updates next week:

In what form does temptation come most often to me, personally?

What specifically should I do to combat it when it looks like this?

How can I better prepare for when it comes next?

PREPARE FOR NEXT WEEK

Next Week's Reading:

- ***Job 38-39***
- ***Job 40-42***
- ***Genesis 11-12***
- ***Genesis 15***
- ***Genesis 16-17***

IN THE BEGINNING

THE WORD

SESSION SNAPSHOT

PROMISE KEEPER

NARRATIVE PASSAGE:

Genesis 15:1-18

GOSPEL FOCUS:

Luke 22:20

TAKEAWAYS:

- God makes promises that He keeps
- God provides for His people

LAST WEEK'S READING:

- Job 38-39
- Job 40-42
- Genesis 11-12
- Genesis 15
- Genesis 16-17

KNOW THE WORD

PASSAGE OVERVIEW

A covenant is a promise, but on an even grander scale. The covenant that we will see today was on such a scale that it formed the foundation of an entire people group: the nation of Israel. As we look at this account, we will see how the promises God makes, He keeps.

COMMENTARY AND STUDY MATERIALS

v.1 Because he had just defeated a much larger army a few chapters ago, Abram probably saw this strange man in his room as he was sleeping and assumed he was an assassin sent in retribution. So when the Lord told him to not be afraid, it was probably as much for his mental comfort as for his physical anxiety. The Lord goes on to tell Abram that He is his shield--something which was probably very much on Abram's mind.

vv.2-3 Abram probably appreciated what God said to him, but there was likely a twinge of doubt in the back of his mind. Maybe he thought that this promise felt empty. He might have been saying something like, "What good is this promise if I, an old man, don't have any children?"

Abram's response was honest and represents boldness and genuine questioning. He didn't hold his frustration toward God in his heart; instead, he made his questions and requests known to the One who was more than capable of answering them.

vv.4-5 God heard what Abram was asking and decided to answer in absolutely clear terms: it will be from Abram's own body that his heir would come. But we know, looking back on this account, that the promise God made was still fifteen years from being fulfilled.

It's worth noting that God uses language that Abram could understand to communicate just how big His promise was. The descendants Abram would have would outnumber the stars, for instance. This doesn't mean that Abram would have trillions and trillions, an uncountable number, but that the promises God makes God keeps, and He goes above and beyond what we could ever think to ask, hope, or imagine. This was absolutely true: God made Abram into a nation that would bring forth the most beautiful gift the world would ever know: Jesus Christ.

STUDY THE WORD

What is an example of a promise that someone has made you?

Did they keep that promise?

Giving someone our word is a tricky thing. It is something that only works if we have a relationship with that person, because what they are telling us is, "Listen. You know me. You can bet based on the relationship that we've established that my word is good and I will keep it."

But human promises don't carry the weight of the kinds of promises God makes. In today's passage, Abram is going to see this firsthand.

OUT LOUD, READ GENESIS 15:1-11

Take note of the kinds of things that God said to Abram, and then also pay attention to the kinds of questions Abram asked in return.

Notice verses 5-6. If you were in Abram's position, do you think you'd believe God? Why or why not?

What do you think of God's response to Abram's disbelief? Does it surprise you? Why or why not?

Why is it difficult to trust God when you don't know the details?

There is a an important distinction between Abram having full-on disbelief and having questions about the way that God was going to fulfill this promise to him. Abram wasn't disbelieving out of defiance or out of an unclean heart, he was asking honest questions of God in the context of a conversation. Abram might have had a hard time believing the facts, but he had not trouble at all trusting God's character.

It's not always the easiest thing to believe God. That's okay. God knows that. We don't always have to have all of the details ironed out, and it's okay to ask about them. But we must ask in faith--trusting that the God who promised is the same God who will fulfill.

Abram's actions in verses 10-11 show that he was willing to see God through, even though it might not have made sense.

Have you ever trusted God with a situation even though it didn't make "sense" in the moment?

How did that situation turn out?

When God calls us to do something, go somewhere, talk to someone, or take a certain action, we might not always understand everything about it. That is okay. Sometimes, the things that God calls us to is not so much so that we can do something for HIm, but so that we can practice trusting Him in small things so that it's easier to trust Him with big things later.

OUT LOUD, READ GENESIS 15:12-18

After you read, explain something about biblical covenants. In the kind of covenant Abram understood, the two parties making the covenant would kill an animal, separate it so that there was a path to walk down the middle of it, and then they would both walk down the center of the path. This symbolized their seriousness to the commitment, showing that if they didn't hold up their end of the bargain, they would have the same fate as the animal they'd killed.

Take a hard look at the way God made the covenant with Abram in verses 17-18.
What was God's end of this covenant--what did He promise to give Abram?

What was Abram's end of this covenant--what did he promise to give God in return?

The most remarkable thing about the way God promises things to us is that He holds the entirety of the covenant in his hands. In the covenant with Abram, Abram was asleep the entire time. God made it so. Abram didn't have an "end" to hold up in this covenant because God took the entire weight of it on Himself.

This is the exact same picture of what happens to us in the new covenant He made with us through Jesus. What we get is salvation. A right relationship with God. Eternal security with our Creator. And the miracle is that we have nothing on our end to hold up. There's nothing we could possibly do to earn the gift we received with the new covenant in Christ's blood.

How does seeing God's covenant with Abram affect the way you see His covenant with us through Jesus?

How does this give you hope?

How does this affect the way you see the people around you?

How does this affect the way that you live your day-to-day life?

APPLY THE WORD

When God makes a promise, He keeps it, regardless of what we do on our end to hold it up. He is a faithful God with an endless supply of mercy and grace, which He poured out for us through His Son on the cross. He made Jesus into the sacrifice that made the covenant of our Salvation binding, and He was the only party with an end to hold up.

Before you close your time in prayer, encourage those in your group to take a few minutes when you are done to answer the following and share updates next week:

> ***How have you responded to the offer of grace God showed for us through Jesus?***
>
> ***How does that need to affect your daily life this week?***

PREPARE FOR NEXT WEEK

Next Week's Reading:

- ***Genesis 18-19***
- ***Genesis 20-21***
- ***Genesis 22***
- ***Genesis 24***
- ***Genesis 25:19-34, 26***

IN THE BEGINNING

THE WORD

SESSION SNAPSHOT

TRUSTING GOD THROUGH THE TESTS OF LIFE

NARRATIVE PASSAGE:

Genesis 22:1-14

GOSPEL FOCUS:

Hebrews 11:17-19

TAKEAWAYS:

- Growth in your faith requires testing from God

LAST WEEK'S READING:

- Genesis 18-19
- Genesis 20-21
- Genesis 22
- Genesis 24
- Genesis 25:19-34, 26

KNOW THE WORD

PASSAGE OVERVIEW

From the time God promised a son to Abraham to the time that son was born, fifteen years had gone by. Abraham, at this time, was 100 and Sarah, his wife, was 90. This child was an absolute miracle. In today's passage, we'll see that God wanted to prove something to both of them: His promises are good, but their faith needed to grow still.

COMMENTARY AND STUDY MATERIALS

v.1 When God tested Abraham, it wasn't necessarily that God wanted to make Abram have more faith, it was that God wanted Abraham to learn just how deep his faith could be. Growing Abraham into a man of faith wasn't an overnight process, it took years. It was a slow process that God was faithful to walk with him through.

Notice that Abraham's response when God called was healthy: he simply said, "Here I am." He was ready to do whatever God required of him.

v.2 Every single thing that God said to Abraham in this verse probably felt like one more twist of a knife. Not only was Isaac Abraham's son, he was his only son. Whom Abraham loved. Whom Abraham was to take to be a sacrifice. Not just a sacrifice, but a burnt sacrifice.

In the land where Abraham lived, the Canaanite priests often offered human sacrifices to their gods. At this point, Abraham might have been wondering whether Yahweh was like one of these other pagan gods, who wanted human blood for payment and worship. But through this vivid event, he was going to learn that Yahweh is the exact opposite. Not only does God not work the way those other gods work, He provides the sacrifice Himself for the sins of the people.

v.5 When Abraham said that they would be back, we shouldn't assume that he knew all along that God was going to test him. It is more likely that Abraham truly intended to go through with the sacrifice God told him to make, but that God would raise the boy back from the dead. Hebrews 11:17-19 clarifies that Abraham was acting in this moment purely on faith, and confirms that Abraham believed God was who He said He was, meaning that if he ended up killing Isaac, God was certainly capable of bringing him back to fulfill His promise.

STUDY THE WORD

When have you had to make a difficult decision before?

How did that decision play out?

We've all been in those moments: we're staring down the barrel of a decision that is going to hurt no matter which way we decide to go. It fills your stomach with dread, it causes you to lose sleep, and it dominates your waking thoughts.

What Abraham is about to learn about these decisions, and what we can, is that they are opportunities for our faith in God to grow.

OUT LOUD, READ GENESIS 22:1-14

As you read, try to put yourself in the position of Abraham. What do you think he was feeling?

Abraham and Sarah had been waiting for fifteen years to get Isaac. But throughout this passage, we don't see any of their emotions. What do you think was going through their minds?

What do you think the difference between a "test" and a "temptation" is?

God will never tempt us to sin, but He will test us. A better way of thinking about a "test" is that God will give us an opportunity to make the right choice. In Deuteronomy 30, God told the Israelites that they had a choice: they could choose life or death. This is not a temptation, it is an opportunity to show God that we trust Him.

What are some things that we learn about Abraham in verses 3-10?

What do you think he meant in verse 5?

What do you think it means to demonstrate true faith?

As Western Christians, it's easy to talk about faith as though it's something we do in our heads, like it's a set of facts we agree with. But that isn't what faith is at all. Biblically speaking, faith is better referred to as "faithfulness": behaving in a way consistent with someone who has faith in and believes God.

What do you think it means to live by faith in today's context?

What are some situations that you've seen where people have had the opportunity to demonstrate faith?

Living by faith takes on any number of forms, but they all boil down to the same thing: you decide that trusting God, believing His promises, and obeying His Word is the most important thing regardless of what situation you face.

> ***Isaac was meant to be a sacrifice to God. Have you ever been asked to sacrifice anything to obey and follow God?***
>
> ***How have you seen someone living a life consistent with sacrifice?***

One of the easiest ways to see sacrifice in action is when someone lives out Jesus' words in John 15:13, where He says that true love is when someone puts their life aside for someone else.

We can practice living sacrifically by considering others to be more important than we are. We can live in a manner consistent with that of someone who looks for needs around them, evaluates what they have, and gives it up to meet what someone else needs more.

> ***Abraham named the place where he was to sacrifice Isaac "God Will Provide."***
> ***How have you seen God provide for you?***
>
> ***How does seeing God provide affect your faith in Him?***
>
> ***What can you do to look for opportunities to demonstrate that you are living by faith?***

APPLY THE WORD

Living a life of faithfulness takes time. You have to grow into it, just like Abraham did. But as you demonstrate faith in the Lord, you will find that He will continue providing ways for you to grow in your trust of Him, and in return, your faith in Him will continuously be strengthened.

Before you close your time in prayer, encourage those in your group to take a few minutes when you are done to answer the following and share updates next week:

> ***What is a situation you are facing right now that you can use to grow your faith in God?***
>
> ***What is a step you can take this week to demonstrate to God that you trust Him?***

PREPARE FOR NEXT WEEK

Next Week's Reading:

- ***Genesis 27-28***
- ***Genesis 29-30:24***
- ***Genesis 31-32***
- ***Genesis 33, 35***
- ***Genesis 37***

IN THE BEGINNING

THE WORD

SESSION SNAPSHOT

PRIDE COMES BEFORE THE FALL

NARRATIVE PASSAGE:

Genesis 37:1-11

GOSPEL FOCUS:

1 Corinthians 6:18-20

TAKEAWAYS:

- There are no accidents in the economy of God

LAST WEEK'S READING:

- Genesis 27-28
- Genesis 29-30:24
- Genesis 31-32
- Genesis 33, 35
- Genesis 37

KNOW THE WORD

PASSAGE OVERVIEW

After settling in Canaan, Jacob and his sons set to work: tending flocks, planting fields, and carving out a living among the people surrounding them. Today's passage tells the beginning of Joseph's story: one that begins with a man who was shown great favor by his father. But as the favor goes to his head and as the rest of the story plays out, we will discover that God is faithful despite our circumstances. There are no accidents in His economy.

COMMENTARY AND STUDY MATERIALS

v.2 The "bad report" that Joseph brough about his brothers is a word with a little bit of trouble surrounding it. The Hebrew phrase is "et dibbat am ra'ah," which is usually translated a "bad report," though it can refer to many things: like something misleading (Numbers 13:32) or slanderous (Proverbs 10:18). The adjective "ra'ah" here can imply something hurtful, disagreeable, or even wicked. There is no doubt that what Joseph said about his brothers made them look bad, but there is a possibility that it was even untrue.

While the first option is most likely and most consistent with his character in the rest of the story, there is no doubt that the most generous reading of this passage shows Joseph doing little to nothing to bridge the divide between him and his brothers--a divide that is gets its teeth from his father's blatant favoritism. The favoritism Jacob showed Joseph has no place in a God-fearing home.

v.3 Jacob's favoritism was loud and boisterous, to the point of giving Joseph a coat that was distinct, lavish, and most likely a full-length tunic that extended to the wrists and ankles. While the brothers were sent to be working men, Joseph was given an article of clothing that denoted privilege and status, which he could wear while his brothers worked.

v.9 The first time that Joseph shared his dream, it was probably unwise--his brothers were already fed up with him. But this time, it was borderline braggadocious. The divide between brothers is now firmly set.

While Joesph's story is one that can ultimately be a miniature of Jesus' story, at this point, Joseph is quite the opposite. Jesus was blameless and without sin. But part of Joseph's story is how God used him despite his flaws, and used the humility He instilled through trials to save both an entire nation and the future of God's people.

STUDY THE WORD

Every day is a fresh chance to evaluate the day before and make conscious decisions to confront things about us that may need to be changed. Sometimes, those are big things: they are big displays of sin that are easy to see. Sometimes, they're more subtle: a mask you've been wearing for years without knowing.

When is a time you've had to make an attitude adjustment after recognizing where you've been wrong?

For a lot of us, maybe the adjustment that needs to happen becomes clear after we evaluate the way our past affects us in the present. Maybe it's the result of some habit we've formed or a misstep we haven't corrected. One way we can do this is by studying the life of Joseph.

OUT LOUD, READ GENESIS 37:1-4

As you read, pay close attention to the tension between Joseph, his father, and his brothers. Throughout this section, keep in mind the harmful ways that favoritism affects this family.

Where do you see strife and conflict beginning to pop up in this family?

How are each of the people in the passage contributing to it?

How do you usually respond to conflict?

Jacob (who is also called Israel in this passage) didn't hide the fact that he had a favorite son: Joseph. Everybody knew it. They showed their understanding of this favoritism in different ways: Joseph showed it by spreading rumors and harmful reports about his brothers. His brothers showed it by being openly hostile toward him. And Jacob used his favoritism to show just how out of touch he was with what his family was going through.

If you are a parent: What are some ways that we are out of touch with what our kids are dealing with?

If you are not a parent: What are some ways you've felt like older generations are out of touch with what you are dealing with?

For everyone: How do you think that this divide can be bridged?

The favoritism that Jacob showed was undoubtedly a sin. But each party involved did nothing to bridge the divide between them. That can only come when we put ourselves in the other's shoes and allow the Holy Spirit, not our own ambitions, to guide our interactions with those around us.

OUT LOUD, READ GENESIS 37:5-11

Pay attention to both the content of the dreams themselves and the way that Joseph handled the gift God gave him.

Why do you think that God gave this dream to Joseph?

Why do you think that what Joseph handled it was inappropriate?

What God was doing in and through Joseph with these dreams was a miracle. It was setting up the mechanism by which countless lives would be saved in the future, but Joseph's pride (or perhaps his insecurity) paired with the mess of his home life caused him to dig the rift between him and his brothers even deeper. Many times, we are tempted to do the same: to use the ways we've been treated as an excuse to be disobedient, prideful, or irresponsible.

Perhaps Joseph shared this dream because he was prideful. How have you seen pride lead to trouble before--whether it was in your life or someone else's?

Maybe Joseph shared the dream because he was seeking affirmation and attention from his brothers. When do you feel the need to get affirmation from others?

Joseph's story is one of new beginnings. We don't have to let the destructive patterns of the past determine how we move forward and obey the Lord. Even though nobody in this account is free of blame, God was in control. He had a plan, and even the destructive pattern Jacob, Joseph, and their family were establishing couldn't stop it.

How have you seen destructive patterns in someone's life before, even if it was your own?

Why is it difficult to recognize patterns like this when you're in the middle of them?

What do you think it takes to break out of destructive patterns?

What role does the Holy Spirit play in breaking you free from them?

Joseph's story begins with brokenness: the brokenness of a family plagued by favoritism. The brokenness of strife between brothers. But it is just the beginning of a story that shows how God is bigger than all of it.

APPLY THE WORD

Pride plagues the heart of every single person, no matter who they are. It takes different forms for each of us, but once it takes root, it is difficult to break out of.

Pride is at the center of what sin is: at its core, sin is us believing our way, our thoughts, our code is more important than God's. For Joseph, pride looked like flaunting his status before his brothers. For his brothers, it looked like jealousy of what Joseph had. For Jacob, it looked like treasuring the relationship he picked more than the relationship that God gave him.

Before you close your time together, take a few minutes to get alone with the Lord. Ask the Holy Spirit the following questions and then journal your answers to them:

Where is pride taking a root in my life?

What do I need to do right now in response to it?

PREPARE FOR NEXT WEEK

Next Week's Reading:

- ***Genesis 39-40***
- ***Genesis 41***
- ***Genesis 42-43***
- ***Genesis 44-45***
- ***Genesis 46-47***

IN THE BEGINNING

SESSION SNAPSHOT

LOSING YOUR COAT WITHOUT LOSING YOUR CHARACTER

NARRATIVE PASSAGE:

Genesis 39:1-23

GOSPEL FOCUS:

1 Corinthians 6:18-20

TAKEAWAYS:

- Temptation always has an escape
- God is in control of everything

LAST WEEK'S READING:

- Genesis 39-40
- Genesis 41
- Genesis 42-43
- Genesis 44-45
- Genesis 46-47

KNOW THE WORD

PASSAGE OVERVIEW

By this point in Joseph's story, he has already seen a number of ups and downs. First, he was the prized child in his father's eyes, which turned him into the object of scorn from his jealous brothers. He has been forgotten about, seen his hopes dashed, and, finally, been granted a place of prominence in Pharaoh's palace. But today a different trial comes his way, and the way he responds to it will teach us about how we can respond to it, too.

COMMENTARY AND STUDY MATERIALS

v.1 When the text calls Potiphar one of Pharaoh's officers, the word it uses can also be translated eunuch, which usually refers to a servant in a prominent household who has been castrated. Howver, since in later years it became a term that referred to a servant in more general terms, it is unknown whether Potiphar was a eunuch in the traditional sense or in the more general one.

It is worth noting that this, perhaps, could have played in to the events that transpire later with his wife and Joseph. Regardless of her motivations, Joseph's determination to not take advantage of his position in Potiphar's house is to be taken as seriously as one can.

v.7 There are thousands of reasons why people seek out activity that goes against what God commands of His people. According to some accounts of ancient Egypt, the expectation for many prominent figures, especially women, was not that they would be strictly monogamous. It was basically assumed that they would have extramarital affairs.

Regardless of what the culture of the day dictated, though, Joseph knew the standard that God had set for him. In this way, we see that the temptation Joseph faced is not all that different from one that may arise today, which makes his example all the more poignant to follow.

v.21 Seeing that the Lord was with Joseph is the overarching theme of Joseph's life. We see this exact same phrase five times in this chapter alone:

Genesis 39:2, 3, 5, 21, 23

Even though Joseph had seen (and would see more) dark times, God was with him the entire time.

STUDY THE WORD

No two people's stories or situations are the same, but everybody on the planet has something in common: we're going to move in and out of difficult seasons. What today's passage will show us is that we can't control what happens to us—but we can control how we respond to it.

OUT LOUD, READ GENESIS 39:1-6

Keep in mind what you know about Joseph's story so far as you read.

> ***Verse 5 tells us that Joseph had the blessing of the Lord on all that he had. What does it mean to be blessed?***
>
> ***So far, how have we seen the burdens in Joseph's life ultimately be good things?***
>
> ***When have you seen burdens become blessings in your life?***

Since we already know the end of Joseph's story, it's easy to look at how God ultimately fit all of the pieces together. But for Joseph, experiencing it one moment at a time, each step in his story probably felt like the last. But Joseph's understanding of "blessing" was different than the one that we often have. While we are tempted to attach blessing to prosperity, Scripture is filled with people who were blessed even though they experienced huge seasons of "pits." Together, consider the following:

> ***Was Joseph more "blessed" in the pit or in Potiphar's house? Why?***
>
> ***Was God's presence more real to Joseph when he was being sold into s slavery or when he was given power? Why?***

OUT LOUD, READ GENESIS 39:6-10

Pay attention to the specific way temptation came to Joseph and his persistence in resisting it.

> ***New temptation came to Joseph during this season of his life. What are some new things we are dealing with in this season of our own lives?***
>
> ***What was the mindset that kept Joseph from falling into temptation? What does that mindset look like for us today?***

Joseph wasn't old by this point, but he had already experienced a number of highs and lows—and God was with him through each of them, even if it seemed in the moment like He wasn't. Joseph's story teaches us something incredible: God is looking to see if He can trust us when nobody is looking so that He can use us when everyone is looking. With this in mind, Joseph focused on the things he could control and wasn't concerned about the things he couldn't.

OUT LOUD, READ GENESIS 39:11-18

When someone talks about "temptation," what is generally the first thing that comes to mind? Why do you think that is?

In verse 12, the word "escape" is the same word used to mean "escape death" or "retreat in battle." Why do you think leaving was so urgent for Joseph?

While temptation comes in many forms, one of the most prevalent that we see in our culture today is sexual temptation. As we will see in a minute, this is particularly dangerous: sexual sin affects us in a more personal way than any other sin. God created people with desires that, when approached properly, bring us closer to Him. Twisting them around influences us physically, emotionally, and spiritually.

OUT LOUD, READ 1 CORINTHIANS 6:18-20

Paul explains that our bodies do not belong to us. What do you think this means? How does it affect the way we use them?

What do you think it means to view our bodies as Temples?

Once we shift the way we see ourselves—that we are not our own but were, instead, bought at a price—that will change the way we approach sin. We are citizens of a higher kingdom, people of a greater calling than just self-gratification and pleasure-seeking Our bodies are extensions of Christ's body Where the world says that our bodies exist to bring us pleasure, God tells us that our bodies are the very temples in which He dwells.

OUT LOUD, READ GENESIS 39:19-23

God's hand was on every part of Joseph's life—even these terrible times. How does that affect how you view the things you're dealing with right now?

What is a trial that you are facing right now? How can we help you,

APPLY THE WORD

Joseph's story is one that is frought with tension and drama, but more than that, it teaches us about what it means to learn from your mistakes, behave faithfully, and trust God with the outcome of our lives.

As we learn to trust God in the same way Joseph did, we will also learn how to better respond when we are faced with temptation in the many forms we find it.

Before you close your time in prayer, encourage those in your group to take a few minutes when you are done to answer the following and share updates next week:

> ***Am I running away from a trial God is trying to guide me through?***
>
> ***What is something I have gone through that can help someone else currently struggling with it? Who is someone I can reach out and encourage this week?***

PREPARE FOR NEXT WEEK

Next Week's Reading:

- ***Genesis 48-49***
- ***Genesis 50 - Exodus 1***
- ***Exodus 2-3***
- ***Exodus 4-5***
- ***Exodus 6-7***

SESSION SNAPSHOT

WHEN GOD CALLS

NARRATIVE PASSAGE:

Exodus 3:1-15

GOSPEL FOCUS:

1 Corinthians 6:18-20

TAKEAWAYS:

- God speaks into our lives and calls us to obey
- When God calls us, we must respond with obedience

LAST WEEK'S READING:

- Genesis 48-49
- Genesis 50 - Exodus 1
- Exodus 2-3
- Exodus 4-5
- Exodus 6-7

KNOW THE WORD

PASSAGE OVERVIEW

Many years after Joseph died, after he and his family and the faithfulness of his God were forgotten, the Israelites became enslaved by the Egyptians. After the king called for the death of all Israelite newborns, Moses' parents hid him in some reeds, where he was discovered by Pharaoh's daughter. He lived for forty years in Pharaoh's house before being exiled to the desert to live with his people, where he lived for forty more years. Now, he is being sent back as an emissary from God to the people who raised him.

COMMENTARY AND STUDY MATERIALS

v.1 Whenever a shepherd is mentioned in the Old Testament, we can immediately be looking for a way that this shepherd will relate to Christ, who calls Himself the "Good Shepherd" (John 10:11). This shepherd will either be an example of a bad one or a good one, both of which highlight some characteristic of who Jesus is.

Moses is also interesting because Israel was perpetually on the lookout for the Messiah who would be one "like Moses." He represents the kind of shepherd who was coming to deliver God's people—all of them: Jews and Gentiles, alike.

v.2 "The Angel of the Lord" is different than "An angel of the Lord." We see "The Angel of the Lord" in

Isaiah 63:9, where this Angel suffers for His children and saves them;
Genesis 32:24, where this Angel wrestled with Jacob;
Genesis 48:16, where this Angel redeemed Jacob from evil;
1 Corinthians 10:4, where this Angel guided the Israelites through the desert.

v.4 There are two names for God that are found throughout Scripture (among many other titles): Yahweh and Elohim. Yahweh is traditionally translated (especially throughout the CSB) "Lord" and Elohim is traditionally translated "God." The Hebrew for this verse reads, "When Yahweh saw.....Elohim called."

vv.7-9 When God says, "I have observed," the Hebrew records it as "I have surely seen." The verb and tense used do not mean simply "I just now saw," it implies continual observation: watching closely for the entire duration of the events that He is saying He has observed.

STUDY THE WORD

"Imposter Syndrome" is what we call it when you are working a job you do not feel qualified for, even if you absolutely are qualified and capable to do it. At some point, we've all been involved in something that we feel underqualified for.

Have you ever dealt with "Imposter Syndrome" before? Tell us about it.

In today's passage, Moses gets a mission that he feels completely unqualified for. But that doesn't matter to God: God doesn't call the qualified. He qualifies the called. It is our job to simply obey.

OUT LOUD, READ EXODUS 3:1-15

Pay attention to the kinds of objections Moses raised to God's commands, and then notice the way that God responded--not with reassurances that Moses could do it, but reassurances about who He is.

What is the first question Moses asks of God?

Why do you think that he asked this question?

Why is it easy to underestimate what God can do through us?

Moses' first question was one grounded in self-doubt. He was focused on what he could do under his own power, not on the power of the One sending him. The more we focus on what we are capable of, the more we will notice that we were never built to do it on our own, without God's power. If we are focused only on what we can do, we'll always look like Moses did: full of doubt, and not confident in the One who works through us.

Re-visit verses 7-9. What are the four things God says He is aware of?

What are the specific ways God says about how He will rescue His people?

What, if any, principles in these verses still apply to us today?

God understands His people's affliction, He hears His people's cry, He feels His people's suffering, and He sees His people's oppression. Then, He reveals that He will deliver them from the power of the Egyptians, that He will bring them to a bountiful land that they will inherit, that He will send Moses to speak to Pharaoh, and that Moses will lead them out of Egypt.

Remember, no matter your level of expertise or what kind of affliction you are burdened with, God sees it and has a plan that will always result in His glory. As believers, that should be our focus, too.

Re-visit verses 11-15. What were Moses' insecurities with being sent by God?

Do you relate with his fears? Why or why not?

Do you think that not knowing what to say when sharing God's Word is a legitimate fear? Why or why not?

For many people, they fear sharing God's Word because they are nervous about not having the answers to every question that may be asked of them or knowing how to respond if faced with something difficult. Moses doubted himself like crazy, but God still developed him into the most influential leader in Israel's history.

We can take steps to prepare ourselves, though. We can spend time in God's Word to know it better. We can meditate on the things that He has said and spend time with Him in prayer to learn how to better rely on His strength instead of our own. We can ready ourselves in the quiet, personal moments so that we are prepared when we put our faith into action.

When Moses returned to Egypt, it would have felt different than when he grew up there. He had a new identity, one that was not just Egyptian. What do you think it was like for Moses as he returned, now a stranger in a place he used to live?

In what ways are believers like Moses, living as a stranger in a familiar land?

Just like Moses, we are foreigners living in a land that was once familiar to us. Ephesians 2 tells us that we once walked as people dead in our trespasses and sins, like the world around us. But now, because of the power of Christ, we are new creations, citizens of a kingdom bigger and more eternal than the one we see in our everyday lives. Living with this knowledge changes the way we interact with the people around us and imbues the things we do with a sense of purpose that we didn't have before.

What do you struggle with most when it comes to living missionally?

What does it look like to lean on the Holy Spirit to accomplish the work Jesus has called you to?

APPLY THE WORD

Living missionally doesn't mean doing something earth-shaking; it simply means living in obedience to what the Lord is telling you to do. Not everyone will be called across the globe every single time; most of the time, God will start with simply calling you across the street.

It is not our place to ask questions like "why?" or "why me?" when God calls us. Instead, it is our job to follow through faithfully and without hesitation.

Before you close your time in prayer, encourage those in your group to take a few minutes when you are done to answer the following and share updates next week:

> ***Who is someone in your life who needs to know Jesus that you can begin building an intentional relationship with?***
>
> ***What do you think it would look like to consider that person your personal mission field?***

PREPARE FOR NEXT WEEK

Next Week's Reading:

- ***Exodus 8-9***
- ***Exodus 10-11***
- ***Exoeus 12***
- ***Exodus 13:17 - 14***
- ***Genesis Exodus 16-17***

SESSION SNAPSHOT

AN ACCEPTABLE SACRIFICE FOR OUR SINS

NARRATIVE PASSAGE:

Exodus 12:1-13; 21-27

GOSPEL FOCUS:

1 Corinthians 5:7

TAKEAWAYS:

- God has a plan for our salvation
- Christ's blood covers us once and for all

LAST WEEK'S READING:

- Exodus 8-9
- Exodus 10-11
- Exodus 12
- Exodus 13:17 - 14
- Exodus 16-17

KNOW THE WORD

PASSAGE OVERVIEW

At this point in the Israelites' story, the Jews are captives in Israel. Moses, the Egyptian prince-turned-shepherd, has approached Pharaoh nine times with the same plea straight from the mouth of the Lord: "Let my people go." Each time, Pharaoh has refused and a plague has come upon the Egyptians. Now the Lord is giving directions to Moses for how to prepare His people for the final plague which will eventually convince Pharaoh to, at long last, let God's people go.

COMMENTARY AND STUDY MATERIALS

v.3 "The people," or "all the congregation," depending on your translation, is the Hebrew word edat. An edat is a group of people joined together for a specific purpose. It describes Israel as a religious body; this is the first time in all of Scripture where you'll find it. Edat carries similar connotations to the New Testament Greek word ekklesia, referring to the church.

v.4 Rabbis have determined the number of people that constituted a household that is "too small for a whole animal" as no less than 10 people per Passover lamb, but no more than 20. Consider having your Life Group, which probably fits within that range, bond with, slaughter, and cook an entire lamb to eat in one night.

v.12 Any time firstborns are mentioned throughout Scripture, the idea of privilege should come to mind. The firstborn was considered the favored one before God and received all manner of special treatment. If God is judging the firstborns, He is making a statement that any of the rest of us are under His judgment all the more.

Ancient Egyptians had a great many gods, many of whom they believed were incarnated as animals. God killing the firstborn of the animals was not just needless or overly cruel; it was a direct insult to the Egyptians' religious system. He was demonstrating that He was the only true God and the only One worthy of people's fear.

v.23 "The Destroyer" is a word found thirty-five times in the Old Testament and refers to an instrument of God's divine will. In this case, the particulars of the method God uses to exact His judgment are not the important thing: what is crucial is that God, Himself, is the direct cause of it. In Verse 13, He says "I" six times in reference to His divine judgment on the Egyptians. He is the Author of life and the Architect of death; nothing is beyond His sovereign control (Job 1:21).

STUDY THE WORD

Sometimes, it feels like everything around us is spinning out of control. They might feel like little things: flat tires or mix-ups. They might feel like personal calamties: sudden illness or tragedy. What we will see today, though, is that nothing that happens under God's eye goes unnoticed. And nothing happens without it being a part of His plan.

OUT LOUD, READ EXODUS 12:1-13

As you read, keep in mind a few of the details that you know about Jesus and His death on the cross. If you need, you can point these out as you read.

> ***Jesus' death on the cross occurred thousands of years after this was written on Passover--the celebration of this exact event. Where do you see parallels between the preparations for Passover and Jesus' death on our behalf?***

The way that the Hebrews would be spared from the angel of death was if the spotless lamb died in place of the firstborn of their house. Likewise, we are spared from God's wrath by the blood that Jesus offered as a sacrifice in place of ours. The wages of sin is death. Christ's blood is sufficient to cover it.

An easy way to think about sufficiency in a practical way is in terms of money. Have you ever gone to pay for something with a debit card, only to find out that you had insufficient funds? Think of this in terms of Salvation: sin causes separation from God, and separation from God results in eternal punishment. Nothing we could save up would ever be able to save us from this punishment; the only thing sufficient to cover our debt is the blood of Christ.

> ***This chapter contains some vivid and gruesome imagery. Why do you think that it was important for the Israelites to see all of the violent imagery associated with Passover?***
>
> ***Why do you think it is important for us to remember the sacrifice Passover foreshadowed--Jesus' sacrifice for us on the cross?***

The Israelites were going to have a rough night that night. The animals they sacrificed weren't bought from a market, they were likely raised alongside the very children their blood was going to protect. But all throughout Israel's history, God repeatedly showed them that sacrifice was the method through which they were going to be saved: in this case, from slavery. Later on, from their sin. And eventually, the sin of the world was going to be covered in the exact same way.

OUT LOUD, READ EXODUS 12:21-27

Pay attention to what Moses commanded and how closely it sticks to what God told him. Notice also that he institutes this ritual as something they weren't only supposed to do once, but which they were to remember for years to come.

What are some of the things you think the Israelites were thinking as they were listening to Moses give these instructions?

After this night was over, they were going to be able to say, "I am alive because a lamb died in my place." How is this relevant to us today in light of Christ's blood that covers us?

Ephesians 2 reminds us of our state before Christ: we were dead. But because God was merciful and provided a lamb to cover our sins—He literally gave us Blood that would turn eternal destruction away—we have been made alive with Christ. The beauty of the Gospel is not just that we don't deserve what Christ provided, it's that we actively deserve the opposite. Christ's blood, however, is sufficient to pay the penalty we owe on our own.

The Israelites painted their doorposts with the blood of the sacrifcial lamb as a "distinguishing mark" (v.13). Think back to how you were before Christ and compare it to how you are after professing faith in Christ.

What are some distinguishing characteristics that mark that change in your life?

What are some things that you have heard are necessary for salvation—either from other people, other religious systems, or worldly philosophies? What does the Word of God tell us saves a person?

God's Word is abundantly clear about what it takes to be saved. Have someone read the following passages:

Romans 10:9-10
Romans 10:13
Mark 1:15
Acts 16:31

How does reading about Passsover strengthen your understanding of what passages like these say?

APPLY THE WORD

When the Israelites heard their instructions, they didn't get to pick and choose which parts of the sacrifice they wanted to use (v.10). They had to be all-in. They needed to display total obedience, even if it was hard. If they had omitted steps, or even if they had waited a day to sacrifice the lamb, it would have been too little, too late.

We are in the same situation today. Partial or delayed obedience is disobedience. We cannot reserve one or two areas of our life to surrender to the Lord; Jesus' blood either covers us entirely or not at all. We don't get to pick and choose. When we are covered with His blood, we hand ourselves entirely over to Him.

Before you close your time in prayer, encourage those in your group to take a few minutes when you are done to answer the following and share updates next week:

What is an area of my life that I am witholding from turning over to God?

Where am I not being fully obedient to what God is telling me to do?

PREPARE FOR NEXT WEEK

Next Week's Reading:

- ***Exodus 19-20***
- ***Exodus 24-25***
- ***Exodus 26-27***
- ***Exodus 28-29***
- ***Exodus 30-31***

SESSION SNAPSHOT

GRACE DEMANDS MORE

NARRATIVE PASSAGE:

Exodus 20:1-17

GOSPEL FOCUS:

Matthew 22:36-40

TAKEAWAYS:

- God's Law is not a restriction of your happiness, but an expression of His love
- Christ is the perfect embodiment and completion of God's Law

LAST WEEK'S READING:

- Exodus 19-20
- Exodus 24-25
- Exodus 26-27
- Exodus 28-29
- Exodus 30-31

KNOW THE WORD

PASSAGE OVERVIEW

After the Israelites' thrilling escape from Egypt into the desert, they must begin organizing into the religoius community and nation that they are. In this passage, we see the famous Decalogue, or Ten Commandments, given to Moses as the groundwork upon whih other rules and regulations for ancient Israel could be laid. We will see how God's standard for our lives helps us maintain fellowship with Him and with those around us.

COMMENTARY AND STUDY MATERIALS

vv. 2, 8, 12 The verb forms of the words for "Am," "Remember," and "Honor" are the only words in this passage that are not finite. That means that these verses could have a meaning like, "I, being the Lord your God..... [therefore observe commandments 1-3]. This is important because it lays out these commandments in two different sections: fellowship with God (vv. 2-11) and fellowship with each other (vv. 12-17).

v. 3 The Hebrew word al-panaya gives us what many translations render "besides". Some other versions say "except," like "have no God except for Me." These renderings don't generally carry the full weight of al-panaya, though, because it usually carries more of a tone of hostility. Of being against. We can read this as "Have no other god that stands against Me." We need to be careful to not give our allegiance to anything or anyone which challenges the authority of God.

v.7 The "name" of God refers to much more than just the pronunciation of His name. It stands for at least three other things: His nature, His doctrinal teaching, and His moral and ethical teaching. Taking God's name in vain means more than invoking the utterance of His name, it means more, "Do not invoke My name in a situation where I have no place being." We have seen atrocities committed in the name of God; this is certainly what is meant by taking God's name in vain.

v. 17 To "covet" here means "to pant after." Coveting is a process that involves both body and mind: the eyes must see first, then the mind considers it, which causes the will to go over to it, and the body follows through. Any step of this process is covered under the word "covet." It is not just an outward sign; it deals with the motivations of the heart.

This is in line with the teaching Jesus gave on this subject in Matthew 5:27-28.

STUDY THE WORD

When we are children, our parents set up guardrails around us to keep us safe. When we can and cannot leave the house, what kinds of places we can and cannot go, and who we should and should not spend time around. At the time, these rules might not make much sense, but once we get older we start to see that they were for our protection, not our hinderance.

What is a rule you grew up with that didn't make sense until you were older?

In the same way, God gave His people rules that did way more than just restrict their actions. These commandments showed what kind of God the Israelites served.

OUT LOUD, READ EXODUS 20:1-11

Keep in mind as you are reading that this section of commandments deal with the people's relationship with God. It is easy to see these as archaic and out of date, but try to see as you are reading how very little has changed about mankind's hearts since they were given.

Verse 4 talks about making idols. What do you think it means to make an idol for yourself?

What do you think it means to worship something that isn't God?

Be honest: what sorts of things do we worship in this day and age?

To worship something is to proclaim that it has ultimate worth, the final say in our thoughts, actions, or deeds. If we are not careful, we can find ourselves in service of our schedules rather than the prompting of the Holy Spirit. We can find ourselves worshiping wealth and possessions rather than the God who makes them possible. We can find ourselves worshiping ourselves or another person rather than the Creator who made them.

Verse 7 talks about misusing God's name. What do you think it means to do this?

How have you seen God's name misused before?

Misusing God's name does not necessarily only mean saying His name (or title) in a situation when you are not addressing Him. It also means using His name to accomplish things He plays no part in, or to use it in order to make a name for yourself. Using God's name in an inappropriate way shows ultimate disrespect for Him as creator, King, and Lord of all creation.

Verses 8-11 do something interesting: they command us to rest. Why do you think that He did this?

How good are you at being intentional about resting?

When do you feel most rested?

God obviously does not need to rest, but He built it in to creation and, later, into the pattern of the Israelites' weeks. We must make time to be rejuvenated both physically and spiritually.

OUT LOUD, READ EXODUS 20:12-17

Notice as you read that these verses shift the focus of the relationship. While the first set of commandments focused on our relationship with God, the second set focuses on our relationships with each other.

How is this set of commandments different than the commandments that came before them?

How have you noticed that your vertical relationship (with God) affects your horizontal relationships (with others)?

Once our relationship with God is in order, we'll notice that it spills over to the people around us. What is interesting is that if we are careful about cultivating a proper relationship with God, these next commandments are redundant. If we truly love God properly, we will not need to go out of our way to love His creation properly, as well. But, since mankind is fallen and plagued by sin, it helps to have some signposts to tell us where the danger areas are.

OUT LOUD, READ MATTHEW 22:36-40

Jesus gave this answer after the Pharisees tried to trap Him into saying something heretical. Instead, Jesus summarized the whole law with two simple commands that get to the heart of what the Law means.

How do you see Jesus' words from Matthew reflected in the Ten Commandments?

How do you see God's character and love reflected in the commandments He gives His people?

APPLY THE WORD

There are more than 233,000 miles of train tracks in the U.S. alone. You could make it to almost any major city by train, and it is still the most efficient way to get around some of them. But the second one of those trains leaves the tracks, it does not have the freedom of open space; it is instantly grounded and unable to move at all.

Likewise, God's boundaries for our lives are not inhibitors of our freedom, rather they are what allow us the opportunity to have freedom at all.

Before you close your time in prayer, encourage those in your group to take a few minutes when you are done to answer the following and share updates next week:

What is an aspect of God's commands that you struggle with the most?

How does it affect your relationship with Him? With those around you?

What can you do change this week to maintain right fellowship with God?

PREPARE FOR NEXT WEEK

Next Week's Reading:

- ***Exodus 32-33***
- ***Exodus 34 - 36:1***
- ***Exodus 40***
- ***Leviticus 8-9***
- ***Leviticus 16-17***

SESSION SNAPSHOT

A PICTURE IS WORTH A THOUSAND WORDS

NARRATIVE PASSAGE:

Exodus 34:28-35

GOSPEL FOCUS:

Acts 2:37-41

TAKEAWAYS:

- Jesus proved He was God by speaking a language HIs disciples understood
- Jesus is the promised Messiah who came to fulfill what Moses couldn't complete

LAST WEEK'S READING:

- Exodus 32-33
- Exodus 34 - 36:1
- Exodus 40
- Leviticus 8-9
- Leviticus 16-17

KNOW THE WORD

PASSAGE OVERVIEW

Even though Scripture is a collection of 66 books written by dozens of authors over hundreds of centuries, it tells just one story of one God. Today we will be exploring pairs of passages written thousands of years apart, but for one purpose: seeing Jesus as the promised Messiah who came to fulfill what Moses couldn't.

COMMENTARY AND STUDY MATERIALS

Ex. 34:28-35 The first time that Moses descended Sinai with the written instruction from God, he saw that the Israelites had turned to worshipping idols, became enraged, and smashed the tablets he was carrying on the ground. Now, having ascended the mountain again, he came down once more: this time causing the people to stare in awe as his appearance was transformed because of his close communion with God.

Mark 9:2-4 Early in His ministry, Jesus took a handful of disciples up a mountain to find solitude. While there, Jesus transfigured right in front of their eyes in a way that their Hebraic minds would have instantly connected with the way Moses ascended a mountain and shone from his contact with God. As if that were not proof enough, Jesus was then joined woth Moses and Elijah.

Ex. 33:18-23 Just before Moses ascended the mountain to meet with God a second time, god told Him how His presence would be marked: it would be as if Moses were in the crevice of a rock and God passed in front of it, letting Moses see only His back.

Mark 6:45-50 The disciples were rowing home after a long day when the sea became rough. They were struggling against the wind when they looked and saw Jesus walking on the waves with the intention of passing them by--the sam way God passed Moses in the rock.

Ex. 32:23-28 When Moses saw that the Israelites had begun worshipping a golden calf, he gathered the Levites around him and gave them a grave instruction: to begin killing people in the camp. That day, three-thousand people died.

Acts 2:37-41 The Holy Spirit came down in a mighty way on the day of Pentecost, which caused Peter to begin preaching. After he finished, those who listened became convicted, repented of their sins, and 3,000 people were saved.

STUDY THE WORD

The Jewish people knew for centuries that the Messiah they were looking for was one who would come along and look like Moses (Deuteronomy 18:15-19). During His earthly ministry, Jesus took countless opportunities to prove that He was this Messiah--and that He came along to do what Moses couldn't: truly, finally save God's people and restore a Kingdom ravaged by sin.

OUT LOUD, READ EXODUS 34:28-35 AND MARK 9:2-4

As you read these two passages, notice the similar language used to describe both Moses' and Jesus' transfiguration.

> ***Was the connection between these two accounts obvious to you? What made it that way?***
>
> ***Why do you think it was important for Peter, James, and John to see Jesus this way--especially since they probably knew the Exodus passage by heart?***

The Jewish people didn't think like the Greeks did, with facts and figures and lists; they thought in pictures. So when Jesus descended the mountain transfigured, the connection would have been immediate: "this is exactly the same as when Moses communed with God!"

Not all of Jesus' disciples had the realization that Jesus was the Son of God at the same time. But moments like this proved it to them. He was doing exactly what the Messiah was supposed to do: He was a prophet like Moses that was coming to finish the work Moses started.

> ***When did you become convinced about who Jesus was? What was it that led you to that conviction?***

OUT LOUD, READ EXODUS 33:18-23 AND MARK 6:45-50

The important thing to pay attention to in this passage is the specific phrase "pass by" (or the specific phrase used in your translation). Notice the scenario in which God would pass Moses by, and that Jesus "passed by" the disciples on the water in order to prove a specific truth about Who He was.

> ***What do these two passages tell you about how God makes His glory known?***
>
> ***Why do you think we're unable to fully comprehend God's glory? What does that mean to you?***
>
> ***How has God made His glory known to us today?***

The most spectacular displays of God's glory are less than even Moses saw, which was only His back. He is so much bigger, so much more majestic, so much more incomprehensible than we can comprehend. But still, He lets us see Him in glimpses. Little snippets--enough to remind us that He is God and we are not.

Jesus was teaching a lesson about who He was to His disciples. Do you think that they got it? Why or why not?

Do you think we respond to God's presence with fear and reverence (Like in Exodus 19:16, 1 Samuel 4:7, Jonah 1:16) today? Should we?

OUT LOUD, READ EXODUS 32:23-28 AND ACTS 2:37-41

The parallels in these passages come in opposites--death and life--and in specific numbers. As you read, pay attention to both the mood of each of them and how the Acts passage "re-balanced" what happened in Exodus.

How do you feel about what Moses told the Levits to do in Exous 32:23-28?

What do you think it means to feel righteous anger (even if you don't respond to it appropriately)?

How did God's work in Acts 2 fix something that went wrong in the Exodus passage?

In the Exodus passage, notice that it was not God commanding the killing, but Moses. He took a righteous anger and turned it into an opportunity for bloodshed--hardly the first or only time in his life where his reaction was less than godly. Even when righteous anger is justified, we live in bodies tainted by sin. We are going to mess up.

But Jesus is more than capable of being the one who turns our mess-ups into opportunities for His glory.

Moses was famous for liberating Israel from bondage in Egypt. In your own words, how did Jesus do what Moses could not by liberating us from sin?

What makes you convinced that Jesus was who He said He was--the Son of God?

APPLY THE WORD

Jesus used pictures to tell His followers who He was. He spoke their language and used the techniques that they were familiar with to explain the things He needed to explain.

He does the same with us. He knows how we think and understands what we need in order to see Him for who He is: the only one who can liberate us from our bondage to sin.

Perhaps you have seen this for yourself. Maybe you haven't. Regardless of which camp you are in, there are steps that you can take today in light of what Jesus has revealed.

Before you close your time in prayer, encourage those in your group to take a few minutes when you are done to answer the following:

What do I need to be liberated from by Jesus today?

What needs to change in my life in light of Jesus' finished work on the cross?

PREPARE FOR NEXT WEEK

Next Week's Reading:

- ***Leviticus 23***
- ***Leviticus 26***
- ***Numbers 11-12***
- ***Numbers 13-14***
- ***Numbers 16-17***

SESSION SNAPSHOT

FALSE EVIDENCE APPEARING REAL

NARRATIVE PASSAGE:

Numbers 13:17-33; 14:1-9

GOSPEL FOCUS:

2 Corinthians 5:7

TAKEAWAYS:

- Walk by faith, not by fear
- Respond to God with obedience, regardless of how scary it may seem

LAST WEEK'S READING:

- Leviticus 23
- Leviticus 26
- Numbers 11-12
- Numbers 13-14
- Numbers 16-17

KNOW THE WORD

PASSAGE OVERVIEW

In this passage, the Israelites are at the mouth of the land that God promised them as they were exiting Egypt. God has moses send men to scout out the land and bring back an honest report so that they may best know how to enter it. Instead, the majority bring back an exaggerated and negative report, meaning they allowed their circumstances to overshadow the promises of God.

COMMENTARY AND STUDY MATERIALS

13:27 "A land flowing with milk and honey" is a proverbial phrase that takes us back to Exodus 3:8 and God's call to Moses to rescue His people from Egypt. It does not mean that literal milk and honey were flowing across the ground. It refers, instead, to the fact that the land was bountiful and as rich as God promised it would be.

vv. 28-29 Notice that the false report that the spies gave was twice as long as the "good" truthful one. Even good things, like the size of the grapes, became ominous and communicated fear rather than joy.

v. 32 "So they gave a negative report...." reads, if we translated each word literally, "and they spread about an evil report." We see the same phrase in 14:37, where those who spread the evil report were struck dead.

v.33 The negative report's exaggeration reaches a head when it references the "fallen ones," or the Nephilim. This could only have had one purpose: to make the Israelites afraid. There is no way that Nephilim could have been walking around in the kinds of numbers that these spies reported seeing, since the last time we even saw them mentioned in Scripture was just before the flood which wiped all of them out.

14:1-2 The false report spread like wildfire. Notice that nobody in the camp is talking here about Yahweh's grace and power, only about how insurmountable their odds seem. The references to wailing and crying are to bring to mind a whole community of people completely wrapped up in angry, cursing, screaming grief.

v.6 When Joshua and Caleb tore their clothing, they were practicing the Jewish custom of mourning a death. They were not necessarily mourning a physical death, but rather the loss of faith and death of hope among God's people.

STUDY THE WORD

There's nothing that can kill the atmosphere of a room quite like an attitude that is out of line. It starts with one person and then slowly trickles out--first to the people around them, then to people nudging each other asking what their problem is.

When is a time you've seen someone's attitude be contagious to everyone around them, whether it was positive or negative?

Today's passage shows a situation where one group of people's attitude affected not just their group but the entire camp of Israelites. They let their fear get the better of them instead of trusting in the promises of the Lord.

OUT LOUD, READ NUMBERS 13:26-33

Just before this passage, Moses sent spies in to the Promised Land and asked them to report back what they found. Keep in mind the difference between the attitudes of Joshua and Caleb versus that of the rest of the spies.

From what you've read of the Old Testament so far, what are some of the things that the Israelites have already seen God do?

Why do you think that they doubted God's ability to deliver on His promise about this land?

Why do you think that doubting is sometimes easier than having faith?

After all that Israel had seen up to this point, it is amazing that they could've forgotten what God was capable of. They'd seen Him split the sea in half. They watched Him inflict ten different plagues on the Egyptians. They were fed by manna that came fresh from heaven each morning in the desert. It is incredible to think that they could base such overwhelming negativity and rebellion on the report of ten spies.

What is something (or a few things) that you've seen the Lord do in your own life?

Why is it important to take time out to remember what He's done?

The struggle between faith and doubt is not new in the life of God's people. Throughout the Old Testament, the Israelites were constantly forgetting what God had proven He could do, and instead caving to the fear of what was right in front of them. Doubt often comes as the thing we can see right in front of us, and we are often too nearsighted to see God's Promise entirely overshadowing it. Faith, on the opposite hand, is the substance of things hoped for and our evidence of things unseen (Hebrews 11:1)

OUT LOUD, READ NUMBERS 14:1-9

Again, notice the difference of opinions in this passage: this time between the Israelites and Joshua/Caleb. It is interesting to see how one false report bloomed into full-blown panic in the Israelite camp.

> ***In 14:4, the people plan to head back to slavery in Egypt. Why do you think this felt like a viable option for them?***
>
> ***Why is it so tempting to go back to things that held us captive rather than move forward into freedom?***

Like the people of Egypt, we frequently consider returning to bondage we once knew...not because it is less painful, but because it is at least painful in expected ways. Too often, we are slaves to familiarity, when God's call for us to trust Him. It is not trust if we are familiar with where we are going. A good question to ask ourselves to know which side we fall on is, "Am I more concerned about God's glory or my present relief?"

> ***When is a time you've had to step out in faith and do something you were uncomfortable with?***
>
> ***How did God see you through that situation? How did it turn out?***

In 1956, Elisabeth Elliot lost her missionary husband when he was killed making contact with a tribe of people in eastern Ecuador. She did not collapse into grief, resort to bitterness, concoct a revenge scheme, or renounce her faith because of the hardship she was facing; rather, three years later, she moved in with this tribe and ended up making disciples among the people there.

> ***Tell about a situation in your life that felt insurmountable, but which God saw you through.***
>
> ***Are you in the middle of a situation like this right now?***
>
> ***How does remembering what God has done for you (and for others) help you deal with situations like that?***

APPLY THE WORD

If you are a believer who is walking by the Spirit, you are going to be called to step out of your comfort zone, even if it is just for something small. These situations can be like what the Israelites were facing in this moment: will you succumb to the fear (however real the fear may be) or will you trust in the God who called you?

Perhaps you feel as though you've never been asked to step out in faith, into a realm where you're fearful. That's okay, too. It may be that you haven't made yourself available for it yet. What you will find is that situations exactly like those are the ones where you will feel your Lord most strongly.

Before you close your time in prayer, encourage those in your group to take a few minutes when you are done to respond the following and share updates next week:

Write down a current situation that is your "Canaan." What giants are keeping you from stepping out with faith into God's promise?

Pray for an opportunity to share what God has seen you through with someone who needs to hear it and be encouraged in it this week.

PREPARE FOR NEXT WEEK

Next Week's Reading:

- ***Numbers 20; 27:12-23***
- ***Numbers 34-35***
- ***Deuteronomy 1-2***
- ***Deuteronomy 3-4***
- ***Deuteronomy 6-7***

SESSION SNAPSHOT

HOW TO LEAVE A LASTING LEGACY

NARRATIVE PASSAGE:

Deuteronomy 6:4-9

GOSPEL FOCUS:

Matthew 22:34-40

TAKEAWAYS:

- God's people are distinctive
- God's people are disciple-makers

LAST WEEK'S READING:

- Numbers 20, 27:12-23
- Numbers 34-35
- Deuteronomy 1-2
- Deuteronomy 3-4
- Deuteronomy 6-7

KNOW THE WORD

PASSAGE OVERVIEW

For the ancient Jewish people, Deuteronomy 6:4-9 was the apex of all Scripture. It was the first thing that Jewish boy or girl would learn as soon as they could speak. It was the first thing on their lips every morning. As we look at this important passage of Scripture, we can use the Shema to understand how we can set our own homes up for godliness and leave a lasting legacy for years to come.

COMMENTARY AND STUDY MATERIALS

v.4 Shema is the Hebrew word for "Listen" or "Hear." What it connotes is deeper than that, though: it means to listen with the intention of obedience. In essence, if you hear and do not obey, you have not heard at all.

Following the command to hear is a peculiar group of words focusing on God and calling Israel to give Him and Him alone their allegiance. Three basic truths can come out of this verse: (1) God is Yahweh, the faithful, covenant-making, covenant-keeping God who is the Sovereign creator. (2) He is also "our God," the God who entered into an intimate and special covenental relationship with the nation of Israel. (3) Not only is He incomparable, but He is the only God for the Israelites and they are the people on whom He has set His love.

v.5 Here, Moses shows us what love in light of covenental allegiance looks like: it demands the entire being. Moses specifically notes loving God with all of our heart, soul, and strength not because that represents the whole of human personality but to demonstrate just how far-reaching this kind of commitment is. Israel's, and our, allegiance to God is to totally consume every aspect of our being.

vv. 7-9 By pairing "sit.....walk" and "lie down....get up," Moses refers to both these ctions and all of the actions in between them (like saying "from A to Z"). The idea is that God's people should take opportunities to speak these truths in every part of their lives. Teach them to your children, saturate your home with them, speak them as effortlessly as you breathe. The overwhelming point of this section is not that Moses is prescribing the scenarios in which believers should talk about God's truth, but that it should be the topic of everyday conversation. A godly home will be built, and saturated with, God's truth.

Tell about a time when you had to do something entirely new--a new job, a new city, etc.

What was most difficult about it? What was the most exciting?

Beginning something new is daunting. It certainly was for the Israelites. They were about to enter a land they could call home for the first time in a generation, they were about to encounter a major change in leadership, and they were stepping out in faith to take something God had promised them. That's why today's passage was so crucial for them as they were going through a transition of their own.

OUT LOUD, READ DEUTERONOMY 6:4-9

As you read, remember that this passage was committed to memory by everyone from children the oldest adults. Try to picture in your mind what it felt like to recite this day in and day out--and what that would do to your mindset toward your own household.

What do you think it means to love God as completely as verse 5 says?

What are some things that get in the way of us doing that?

The kind of love that God demands is not an on-again, off-again sort of love. Verse five describes every facet of who we are: what we do, what we think, and what we feel. By loving God with every aspect of each of these parts of who we are, we have every base covered. Suddenly no part of our lives is free from wholehearted devotion to God's Word.

Verses 7-9 paint a picture of a household fully devoted to God's Word.

What does it look like today to devote yourself to God's Word? How does it look to your family? Your friends? People who don't even know you?

What do you think are some practical ways we can keep God's Word front and center, even with a lot going on?

So often it is easy to let the things of God slide in order to make room for the dozens of concerns accompanied by everyday life. there are bills to pay. there are problems to address. There are gatherings to attend. There are schedules to manage.

But devotion to the Lord is not like these things. It's not an add-on to the busyness. Instead, it is the filter through which everything else is managed. Moses instructed Israel to keep God's Word in their hearts and to repeat them often. the same is true for us: spending time with God is not its own separate compartment, it's what we were built for.

OUT LOUD, READ MATTHEW 22:34-40

After you read, keep in mind that Jesus was walking into what His opponents thought was a trap. Notice the way that He both skillfully evaded the trap and taught a principle for living at the same time.

Why do you think that Jesus said today's passage was so important?

How does making God your first priority affect the way you handle difficulties?

How do the two commands Jesus references here summarize the whole of God's Law?

The Law was crucial to the Israelites. There are entire psalms written about how much God's people love His commands! But every one of them can be boiled down to the two that Jesus mentioned in this passage. Love God above all else, and love your neighbor as yourself. If you are committed to doing these two things, the rest of the law will follow. God is not interested in someone who keeps His law like a checklist; He wants those who worship Him in Spirit in Truth. If we focus on loving God with every part of us, the rest will follow.

How can you naturally incorporate talking about God into your everyday life?

How does keeping God's Word at the front of your mind affect the way you live?

What is the difference between having godly speech and living a godly life?

If the Lord is your first priority, talking about Him is not something you have to make a conscious effort to do; it will overflow naturally and line up with the way that you live. May it not be said of belivers that they preaching about a God of grace but don't extend it. We must consciously live in such a way that people take stock of our entire lives and see only the Lord shining through us.

What are some of the things that hinder us from teaching others God's ways?

What can you begin doing now to invest God's Word into someone else?

APPLY THE WORD

You don't have to have a household of your own to take the words of Deuteronomy 6 seriously. The principle in this passage is that it begins in you and then flows out from there into the people around you, whether those people are your family, your friends, your coworkers, or your community.

Before you close your time in prayer, encourage those in your group to take a few minutes when you are done to answer the following and share updates next week:

> ***What is a step I can take to begin taking God's Word more seriously in my own life?***
>
> ***What are the aspects of my life that I have trouble loving God with?***

PREPARE FOR NEXT WEEK

Next Week's Reading:

- ***Deuteronomy 8-9***
- ***Deuteronomy 30-31***
- ***Deuteronomy 32:48-52; 34***
- ***Joshua 1-2***
- ***Joshua 3-4***

SESSION SNAPSHOT

BUILDING PILLARS TO REMEMBER

NARRATIVE PASSAGE:

Joshua 4:1-9

GOSPEL FOCUS:

1 Corinthians 11:24

TAKEAWAYS:

- If God is the one calling you, it is not impossible.
- It is important to remind ourselves of what God has done in our lives

LAST WEEK'S READING:

- Deuteronomy 8-9
- Deuteronomy 30-31
- Deuteronomy 32:48-52; 34
- Joshua 1-2
- Joshua 3-4

KNOW THE WORD

PASSAGE OVERVIEW

The Israelites have been encamped at Shittim since the events of Numbers 22, at the brink of the end of their generation-long trek across the Palestinian wilderness. Now, all that stands in their way is the spring-swollen, fast-moving Jordan River. God is about to prove once again that He is capable of sustaining and carrying them, and then He will instruct them in the ways of never forgetting it again.

COMMENTARY AND STUDY MATERIALS

3:14 Just before the events of today's passage, the Israelites had to trust God to get them across the Jordan River. Joshua 1:11 tells us that the people had been camping for three days at the shores of the Jordan, looking at its fast-rushing waters recently flooded from spring rains. The constant sound of the rushing river must've weighed heavily on the million+ Israelite minds. God wanted them to be looking at it constantly, wondering "how in the world will we ever cross this river?" so that when He made it possible, they'd be that much more assured that it was His hand guiding them across.

This verse begins "when the people broke camp to cross the Jordan," know that it encompasses every feeling they would have been feeling as they sat next to the dangerous river which was the only thing separating them from the Promised Land.

4:4-6 In several places in the Old Testament, stone structures are built to remember different events: Genesis 28:18-22 (Jacob's encounter with God at Bethel); 31:45-47 (The covenant between Laban and Jacob); Exodus 24:4 (Moses' receipt of the Law); Joshua 7:26 (the destruction of Achan); 24:26-27 (Renewing the covenant at Shechem); and 1 Samuel 7:12 (Israel's victory over the Philistines). God is not just a God of action, but one of remembrance. When He moves in your life, take time to memorialize it in a way that you can look back to when you begin questioning if He's even there.

vv.8-9 Some have pointed to this set of verses as an inaccuracy in the biblical record. First, it seems as though the text points to two different piles of stones; second, it refers to some structure that has never been uncovered by archaeologists in the area.

STUDY THE WORD

All throughout Scripture, God is reminding His people to remember what He has done in their lives. Our memories are powerful--when used correctly.

What is one of your favorite memories? What makes it such a good one?

In today's passage, God is going to give the Israelites a tool to help them overcome their skirmishes with doubt that would come later, whether they use that tool or not: their memories. Let's see how remembering what God has done in our lives will prepare us for difficulties that come later.

OUT LOUD, READ JOSHUA 4:1-9

As you read, pay attention to the specific instructions that Joshua gives the Israelites. Try to imagine why he chose each of the specific actions the Israelites were supposed to do.

Give this passage some context. What do you know about what's going on in Israel's journey at this point?

Why was crossing the Jordan such a big deal for them as a nation?

The Israelites were at the end of a decades-long journey out of the land of Egypt into the land that was promised to them. For forty years, they'd been wandering in the desert, watching one generation pass away and the next take their place—all the while being sustained by God even when it seemed they were lost beyond all hope.

When is a time you've felt like you had no direction, no idea what to do next?

Did you rely on God to sustain you during this time? If so, what did that look like for you?

The people in your groups have undoubtedly gone through some "stuff" to get to where they are today. Marital issues, difficult moves, new jobs, being called to foreign missions, etc. This is an excellent time to talk about things that seemed hard or impossible (or at the very least frustrating) to get through at the time, and how God used it for the greater good in their lives.

For the Israelites, the desert had become their comfort zone. For most of them, it was the only life they'd ever known. So crossing the Jordan meant stepping out of what they were most comfortable with and moving into something that, though they knew God had promised they would have, they were entirely unfamiliar with.

Where is your comfort zone?

What do you think it would take you to leave it?

If we take an honest look at ourselves, we will find we're generally drawn toward the things that make us the most comfortable. It's okay to admit that you have a comfort zone. It's also okay to admit that you're scared to leave it. Use this as an opportunity to discuss the places we tend to stagnate and to figure out how we can focus not so much on our own comfort, but on how what we do can affect the growth of God's Kingdom.

What was the point of stacking the stones beside the Jordan?

How does it help us to have tangible reminders of what God has done in our lives?

What is something you've done to help you remember a monumental time in your life?

What is something you've done to help you remember something that God has done?

God knew that His children were forgetful. He watched them throw all of their jewelry in a fire and make an idol to worship right after He parted the Red Sea. He listened to them say that they'd have been better off as slaves in Egypt right after He freed them. He would watch them do this —so He had them do something that would help them remember. Now, whenever they went back and saw those stones taken from the middle of the Jordan River, they could remember that the only way they were able to even get them was because God made a way for it to happen. And He would continue making a way for them even when it seemed impossible.

Why do you think the Israelites were always so quick to forget what God had done for them?

Do you think that we are different? Why or why not?

The events of this book took place over forty or so years, and by the time it was written, Joshua (or perhaps even someone who added details—like those in Chapter 24 detailing Joshua's death) was able to say "The stones are still there today." They served as a physical reminder of God's faithfulness.

What is a "pile of stones" that you can set up today to remind you of a time God saw you through a difficult situation?

APPLY THE WORD

As we read the story of the Israelites' rocky relationship with trust in God, we are most likely reminded of ourselves. We tend to forget. We are, as the old hymn says, prone to wander. We and the Israelites are not that different from one another.

Before you close your time in prayer, encourage those in your group to take a few minutes when you are done to answer the following and share updates next week:

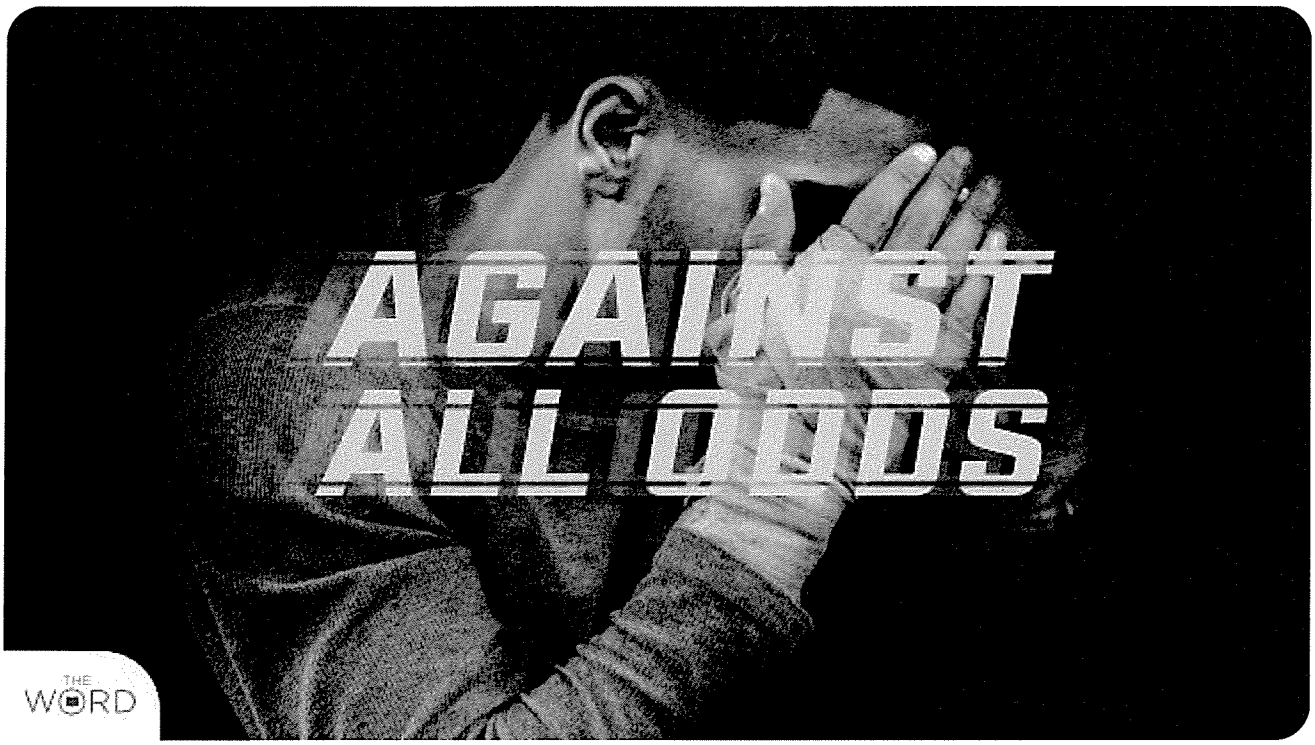
Where do I struggle with trusting God?

How can I use God's previous faithfulness in my life to help me in that area?

PREPARE FOR NEXT WEEK

Next Week's Reading:

- ***Joshua 5:10-15; 6***
- ***Joshua 7-8***
- ***Joshua 23-24***
- ***Judges 2-3***
- ***Judges 4***



SESSION SNAPSHOT

WHEN THE WALLS CAME TUMBLING DOWN

NARRATIVE PASSAGE:

Joshua 6:1-21

GOSPEL FOCUS:

2 Corinthians 5:7

TAKEAWAYS:

- Living in faith means living in obedience.
- God will accomplish His plans regardless of what our circumstances look like

LAST WEEK'S READING:

- Joshua 5:10-15; 6
- Joshua 7-8
- Joshua 23-24
- Judges 2-3
- Judges 4

KNOW THE WORD

PASSAGE OVERVIEW

As the Israelites prepared to enter the Promised Land, they were met with the high, thick walls of the fortress city of Jericho. Joshua sent spies in to scout it out, made contact with Rahab, and was about to see God sovereignly grant them victory over a seemingly unconquerable enemy.

COMMENTARY AND STUDY MATERIALS

v.1 The city was "strongly fortified" because they had been alerted to the presence of the Israelites and the threat that they represented. The terminology here refers less to the thickness and height of the walls for which the city was famous (and they were certainly technologically imposing in that way), and more to the preparations they had made for a position of defense in wartime. Physically and tactically speaking, the Israelites were no match for the city that stood before them.

v.2 The Lord's decree that He has handed over the city to the Israelites before they'd even begun marching tells us that this victory cannot be attributed in any way to the work or skill of the Israelites. The credit for victory goes only to the Lord.

v.4 This verse contains the first mention in this chapter of "seven," which is a number often used in the Bible to signify divine completion. After this, it is used thirteen times in this chapter. There will be seven days of marching, seven priests with seven horns, and seven laps on the seventh day. Interesting, the word "sabab," which is usually translated something like "march around," is used seven times in this chapter as well. Even the language speaks of God's sovereignty.

vv.8-14 In times of war, the priests and the Ark would not generally be out in the open, and most certainly not in the front of the line. This, paired with the fact that the Israelites were doing something that likely seemed pointless in the moment, contributes to the perceived strangeness of the Israelite's actions. It also points to the fact that God was there in the middle of His people the entire time, leading them even if they didn't understand.

v.16 The people marching around the wall for a week had done so without saying a single word. Every day, the people on the walls would have watched in puzzlement. The shout that the Israelites give in this verse would have had a profound effect of terror on those inside, especially as they saw the city walls crumbling underneath them.

STUDY THE WORD

Sometimes, we walk into a situation without knowing the first thing of what to expect. Other times, we walk in expecting one thing and we get something completely different. No matter who we are, we've had an experience with expectations coloring our first impressions of a new job, a new school, or a new environment.

When is a time you've had your expectations exceeded by a new situation? Have they ever been flipped on their head? Tell us about it.

OUT LOUD, READ JOSHUA 6:1-7

Notice that the Israelites didn't get the instruction in the first couple of verses; only Joshua did. The Israelites had no idea what they were walking into except for what Joshua told them in Verse 6.

Based on what you know of their story up to this point, what do you think that the Israelites were expecting when they entered the Promised Land?

God told them that He was going before them and that they simply needed to step in to what He promised them. How do you think they felt when they encountered resistance?

What do we expect when we're walking into something God called us to?

What God was teaching the Israelites by commanding them to march around the walls of the city was obedience based on faith. In a believer's life, there must be a balance between dependence and discipline: dependence on God to enable us to walk by the Spirit, and the discipline to respond faithfully to geht grace God has shown us. When God promises something to us, it's a sure thing. Even so, we must walk in obedience to what He has commanded.

OUT LOUD, READ JOSHUA 6:8-14

Pay attention to the specific instructions that Joshua gave. He was careful to give them only as much information as they needed in order to carry out the plan God had given him.

When is a time you've felt like you didn't understand how God could possibly have a hand in the things you were going through?

What do you think it means to trust the Lord even if we don't understand every step of the process?

Every day they got up to march, the Israelites most likely expected the opposite of what they ended up doing. Still, they were faithful to obey everything Joshua told them to do, and ultimately what God had told Him.

OUT LOUD, READ JOSHUA 6:15-21

Pay attention to how closely Joshua paid attention to the instruction the Lord gave him and how wisely he handed it out to the people. He didn't give them the entire plan up front, but gently guided them exactly the way he needed to so that they followed every bit of God's instruction.

When did the Israelites have victory over Jericho: when the walls fell or when God promised it? Why do you think so?

What victory have we already been given today? How does that affect the way you live?

God had given them victory over jericho the moment He said it: in verse 2. But they couldn't step into that victory until they obeyed His commands. Today, we've been given a similar victory over sin and death (like in 1 Corinthians 15:55-57) but we are still expected to wake up every day, take up our cross, and follow the One who gave that victory to us.

In your own words, what is the connection between faith and action?

Read the following passages and discuss how you can demonstrate your faith through action:

Deuteronomy 6:5

Matthew 28:19-20

Ephesians 5:22-23

John 13:35

God has given us countless ways to obey Him and prove our faith in His Word. We can do that through obeying the Great commandment, the Great commission, treating our spouses the way God has commanded, loving those around us, or any of the countless ways He asks us to step out in fath and depend on Him. God has been exceedingly clear about the ways those who are called by His name should live.

Is there something you are feeling the Holy Spirit leading you to do this week to live out your faith? What is it?

APPLY THE WORD

Every one of us has areas of obedience in which we struggle more than others. Where one person struggles, another might excel. For that reason, living out our faith is done the easiest when we have others holding us accountable and lifting us up where we need help.

A small group is an easy place to find that kind of accountability, but some might find it even more helpful to have a smaller, more intimate group who can help more specifically.

Before you close your time in prayer, encourage the people in your group to consider their relationships with the others in the group. Perhaps there could be opportunities for them to branch off with some that they trust to form smaller, more focused accountability groups. As you pray together, ask each of your group members to consider the following:

How can I better listen to what the Lord is telling me to do?

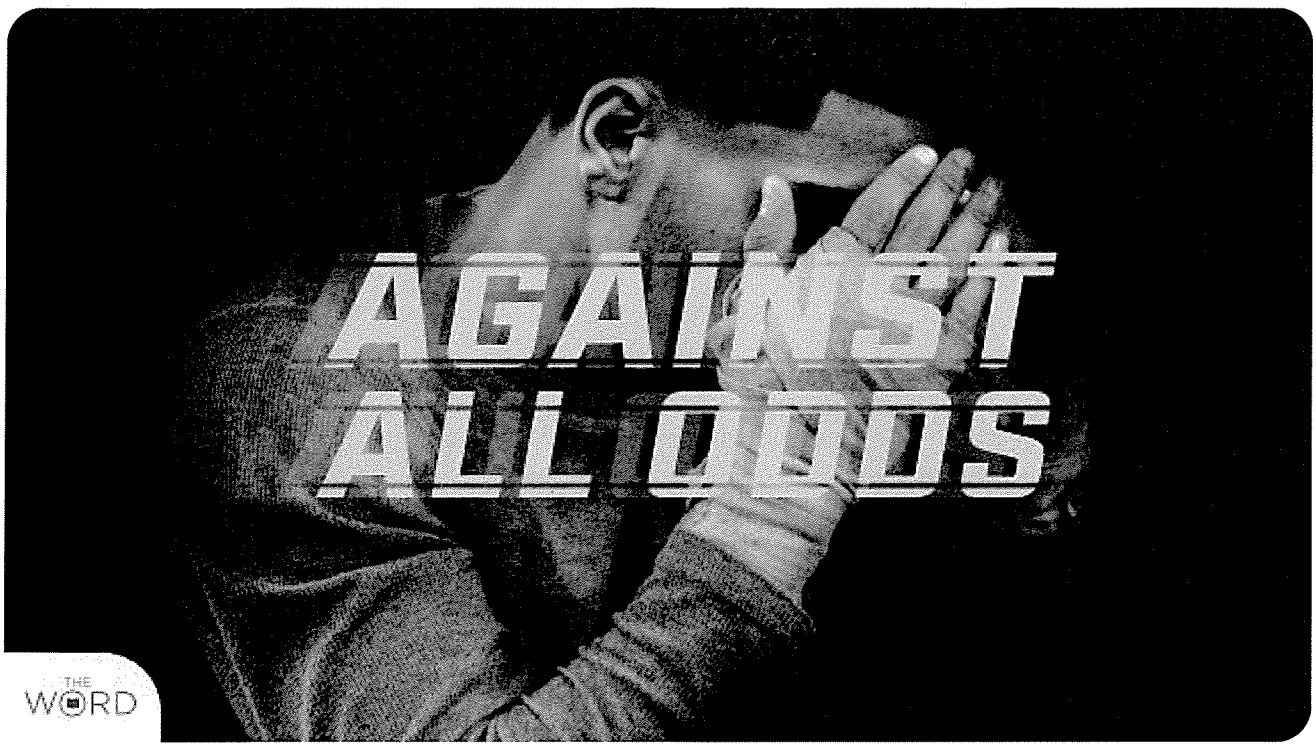
How can I better obey what the Lord has spoken to me?

What do I need to do to encourage others to do the same thing?

PREPARE FOR NEXT WEEK

Next Week's Reading:

- ***Judges 6-7***
- ***Judges 13-14***
- ***Judges 15-16***
- ***Ruth 1-2***
- ***Ruth 3-4***



SESSION SNAPSHOT

A SUREFIRE WAY TO WRECK YOUR LIFE

NARRATIVE PASSAGE:

Judges 16:21-31

GOSPEL FOCUS:

Hebrews 11:33-34

TAKEAWAYS:

- God will accomplish His plans in spite of our sin
- We should depend on others to keep us accountable

LAST WEEK'S READING:

- Judges 6-7
- Judges 13-14
- Judges 15-16
- Ruth 1-2
- Ruth 3-4

KNOW THE WORD

PASSAGE OVERVIEW

The Israelites have proven to be disobedient to the commands of God yet again by not taking control of the land they were promised, rejecting the kingship of the Lord, and turning to the gods of the Canaanites. Even so, God raises up judges to continually rescue them from their oppressors. The last in the line of these judges is Samson, who is a picture of Israel and who highlights our need for accountability while pursuing God's call on our lives.

COMMENTARY AND STUDY MATERIALS

Samson's story takes place over four chapters in Judges. Here are some of the key moments in his life:

13:15 God tells Samson's parents how He is going to use Samson right from the beginning: Samson is to "begin to save Israel" from the Philistines, who were in power. We will see God keep His word throughout these chapters.

14:3-4 "I want her" is, literally, "she is right in my eyes." This calls to mind Paul's language in Romans 1, where he discusses how God gave people over to their sinful desires. God was not tempting Samson or making him break the law; rather, he was sovereignly working out His own plan through Samson's wickedness. He has done this before, like in the life of Joseph: "You planned evil against me; God planned it for good to bring about the present result--the survival of many people" (Genesis 50:20).

14:19 Rememebr that God has been using Samson all along to judge the Philistines. Here, God does that in a rather direct way by taking control of Samson's body to kill thirty men.

15:16-18 After the Spirit empowered Samson to again punish the Philistines, Samson immediately takes credit for the feat, composing a song of praise to himself. He turns around and receives water out of the ground in a parallel to the arrogance of Moses in Exodus 17.

16:4 The name "Samson" resembles the word for "sunlight." "Delilah" resembles the word for "night." The number of red flags that should have popped up in Samson's mind during this encounter are numerous.

16:28-30 The final request Samson makes of God is bittersweet. On the one hand, he dies fulfilling the reason God gave him power in the first place. On the other hand, he asks for strength so that he can exact personal vengeance.

STUDY THE WORD

Samson's life is a sad one, but one that illustrates an important point: God accomplishes His plan regardless of how badly we tend to mess them up. In today's session, we're going to take a big-picture view of Samson's life in order to see how God remains faithful even when we are not.

OUT LOUD, READ JUDGES 13:3-5

Pay attention to the expectation that Samson's parents had for what Samson's life was going to be.

> ***When you were growing up, did you feel like your parents put any expectations on you? How did that affect you?***
>
> ***Do you think that being born for a specific purpose (like how Samson was born to save Israel from the Philistines) would be easy or hard to deal with?***

Almost all of us grow up with expectations of some sort--some more difficult to attain than others. But for most of us, those expectations don't look like the ones put on Samson when he was born. Samson's purpose came from God, but that didn't stop him from going out of his way to disrespect the people holding him to it. Look at one example of how Samson disrespected his parents:

OUT LOUD, READ JUDGES 14:8-9

As you read, remember that one of the expectations of Samson was that he would avoid anything unclean--and eating from the carcass of a dead lion certainly qualified as playing fast and loose with the avoidance of unclean animals.

> ***How do you think Samson's actions here demonstrated disrespect toward his vow? Toward his parents?***
>
> ***Why do you think that respect, especially for your parents, is so important to God? What does this kind of respect look like?***

God directly commanded HIs people to respect their parents. But what Samson did is the exact opposite of that. In Judges 13, both of his parents took the Nazarite vow, which prohibited them from, among other things, touching a carcass. By giving them honey from a carcass killed in Philistine territory, he made them break their own vows. This kind of behavior demonstrates where Samson's heart was focused: directly on himself.

OUT LOUD, READ JUDGES 15:1-8

Remember that Samson's wife at this time was a Philistine woman, and she represented the people Samson was sent by God to judge. By continually associating with the Philistines, he was going against God's command for his life.

God gave Samson incredible power to accomplish a specific task: to defeat the Philistines. Part of the deal is that he had to take a Nazarite Vow, which prohibits him from touching dead bodies (like he did in 14:8) or anything that comes from a grape vine (like he did in 15:5).

Instead of following through with his vow, though, Samsom spent the majority of his time falling in love with, hanging out with, and marrying people he was commissioned to free Israel from.

Why is it important to pay attention to the kind of company you keep?

When is a time you've been influenced by those around you--either for better or for worse?

How has the Lord used people around you to bring you closer to Him?

OUT LOUD, READ JUDGES 16:23-31

By this point in the story, Samson has married the Philistine woman Delilah and has given her the secret to his strength--or what he perceives to be the secret to his strength. He was arrested and brought before the Philistine rulers, the judge sent by God being judged by those he was sent to destroy.

If anyone was set up for success, it was Samson: he had a clear-cut calling in his life, he was equipped with the right upbringing to give him a good start, and he had a supernatural toolset to make it all happen. But at every turn, he used his gifts for his own gain rather than for God's glory.

Samson was given amazing tools to accomplish great things for God's glory, regardless of whether he did that or not. What tools have you been given, and how can use them for God's glory?

APPLY THE WORD

Even though Samson decided to discard it, God eventually did accomplish what He said He would through Samson--but not before Samson suffered heavily and, eventually, died. Fortunately for us, it is never too late to evaluate what path we are on, where we are headed, and what we can do to use what we have for God's glory.

Before you close your time in prayer, encourage those in your group to take a few minutes when you are done to answer the following and share updates next week:

Take a look at your friends. What are they like? Are they pursuing God or are they pursuing something else?

Take a look at your actions. If you keep doing what you're doing, where do you think you'll end up?

Take a look at the gifts God has given you. How are you using them to bring glory to God?

PREPARE FOR NEXT WEEK

Next Week's Reading:

- ***1 Samuel 1-2***
- ***1 Samuel 3; 8***
- ***1 Samuel 9-10***
- ***1 Samuel 13-14***
- ***1 Samuel 15-16***