

HIS
PLAN
OUR
PURPOSE

IS THERE MORE?

*Understanding the Storyline of the Bible
from Genesis to Revelation*

THE STORIES OF **GRACE, DELIVERANCE + PROMISE**

**PARTICIPANT
GUIDE**

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PARTICIPANT GUIDE

28
nineteen[™]

PURPOSE

OF THIS GUIDE

People from every generation seem to be asking the same question about life; “Is there more?”

The short answer is, yes. However, a more in-depth answer is that as we understand God’s plan and its impact on our purpose, we can better grasp what “more” there is as God’s chosen people.

Our goal throughout this year is to understand the storyline of the Bible from Genesis to Revelation. At its most basic level, the Bible is simply the story of God fashioning a people for Himself and redemptively interacting with them throughout history.¹

The Bible has 66 books, written by approximately 40 different people, covering a span of 4,000 years. There are 39 books in the Old Testament and 27 books in the New Testament. Each book reveals God’s Plan and Our Purpose. From Genesis to Revelation we see that there is more to life than what this world and culture have to offer. Because of Christ, there is grace, deliverance, promise, and so much more that will be revealed in the weeks and months to come.

How to use this Guide:

Work your way through this guide each week, prior to the lesson date. You can do a little each day or do it all at one time. It is designed to be used with your Bible, which is God’s blueprint for life.

¹ *Chronological Life Application Study Bible*, Tyndale House Publishers, Inc Carol Stream, Illinois, 2012, pg. A23

For each week:

- **READ** the scripture passages noted for each section.
- **PONDER** the points suggested in the outline based on the scripture passages you read.
- **ANSWER** the questions posed under each point.

Pray for your teachers and for those who will attend your class, that His story would come alive, that His plan would become clear, and that all would gain understanding that shapes our purpose.

IS THERE
MORE?

THE WHOLE STORY

Warren Weirsbe writes, “When He wrote the Bible, God didn’t give us a ponderous theology book divided into sections labeled God, Creation, Man, Sin, and so forth. Instead, He gave us a story, a narrative that begins in eternity past and ends in eternity future.”

FEATURED



THE STORY OF **GRACE**

> *January*



THE STORY OF **DELIVERANCE**

> *February*



THE STORY OF **PROMISE**

> *March*



THE STORY OF **FAITH**

> *April*



THE STORY OF **RENEWAL**

> *May*



THE STORY OF **PURPOSE + PRAISE**

> *June, July + August*



THE STORY OF **CHRIST: IN HIS OWN WORDS**

> *August + September*



THE STORY OF **POWER**

> *October*



THE STORY OF **CHANGE**

> *November*



THE STORY OF **HEAVEN**

> *December*

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THE STORY OF GRACE



This year we are embarking upon a brand-new curriculum which over the course of the next 12 months will tell God's story from Genesis to Revelation in 10 different story segments. The goal for this year is to understand how God's story impacts your story, and to learn how to effectively share His story with others. We will be studying scripture chronologically and encourage you to once again or for the first time read through the Chronological Bible. The weekend lessons will not be limited to the weekly reading, but this participant guide will let you know where we are going in each section as we discover His Plan - Our Purpose from Genesis to Revelation. This month we will focus on the Story of Grace in the book of Genesis.

If we are going to look at "grace," we need to understand what it means. The grace of God is the most profound, powerful, and humbling thing we will ever experience; but it is also one of the most difficult concepts for us to grasp clearly. We are accustomed to the understanding of what is fair and what people deserve. But the message of grace is different and unique. It has been said, "Grace is the opposite of karma, which is all about getting what you deserve. Grace is getting what you don't deserve." Grace is the love of God shown to the unlovely; the peace of God given to the restless; the unmerited favor of God.¹ Grace begins in the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth. Ray Stedman says "We must remember, as we study, that Genesis is the first chapter of

the story that ends with the presentation of the Lord Jesus Christ and the declaration of the way God has found to obtain the release of human life from despair and death, and to bring it into power, excitement, and grace. In other words, the God of Genesis is the God of the rest of the Bible.”²

So often, we think the God of the New Testament is the God of Grace and the God of the Old Testament is the God of Judgment. We will see today and the weeks to come that from the very beginning of the story, God is a God of Grace; and within the grace of God there will be boundaries and ultimately consequences, even judgment. God is love (1 John 4:16) and that love is demonstrated both through His grace and His judgment.

This month we are going to explore the Story of Grace in the following ways.

- | | |
|-----------|-------------------------------------|
| Jan 4/5 | Grace in Creation - Genesis 1 & 2 |
| Jan 11/12 | Grace in the Garden - Genesis 2 & 3 |
| Jan 18/19 | Grace in the Ark - Genesis 6-8 |
| Jan 25/26 | Grace to All - Genesis 15 |

Throughout these lessons prayerfully look at how God’s Story impacts Your Story. Consider the words of Dr. Warren Weirsbe: “When He wrote the Bible, God didn’t give us a ponderous theology book divided into sections labeled *God*, *Creation*, *Man*, *Sin*, and so forth. Instead, He gave us a story, a narrative that begin in eternity past and end in eternity future.”³

Let the story begin where it was intended; **In the beginning God.**

¹ Justin Holcomb, *What is Grace?*, Christianity.com.

² Ray C. Stedman, *Authentic Christianity*, Grand Rapids: Discovery House, 1996.

³ Warren Weirsbe, *Be Basic (Genesis 1-11)*, David C. Cook, 2010.

GRACE

IN CREATION

DATE

January 4 & 5

WEEK

1 of 4

KEY VERSE

Genesis 1:1

LESSON OUTLINE

1. The God of Grace
2. The Light of Grace
3. The Handiwork of Grace

THINGS TO KNOW

- Hebrew word for "ground" is Adamah
- Hebrew word for "man" is Adam
- From Adamah God made Adam

IN THE BEGINNING
GOD CREATED
THE HEAVENS AND
THE EARTH.

GENESIS 1:1

SETTING THE STAGE



The stage is simple; darkness, emptiness, vast void. Then it happens, God creates. And that is where it all begins.

Have you ever arrived at the movie theater after the movie already started? It may be just 5-10 minutes into the movie, but the story has begun, the characters have been introduced, and the context has been set. You spend the next 10-15 minutes trying to figure who goes with whom, where they are and what they want to accomplish. You end up trying to catch up and understand that which was made clear from the beginning, which you missed.

It is the same way for many people in life, especially at the beginning of the year wondering if this year is going to be different. Is this year going to be better? Is this year going to be more meaningful? Is my story going to be clearer this year? There are those who struggle to make sense of their own story because they have missed the beginning of it.

How does that happen? They were there when they were born obviously. But what about the beginning of all beginnings. Without a proper understanding of God and how we came into existence, we will never understand the purpose of our lives and how the story is supposed to unfold.

Today we are going to begin the story at the very beginning. We are going to focus on the first act of HIS story, with not just an actor or producer, but with the Creator: God Himself.

GRACE

IN CREATION

READ: Genesis 1:1-28; 2:1-8

POINTS TO PONDER

1. THE GOD OF GRACE

The first four words of the entire Bible introduce us to the primary character of the story, and the next six words lay the foundation.

GENESIS 1:1 *In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.*

In the beginning God created. Everything that exists is because God, in His grace, created the heavens and the earth. There is nothing that has ever existed that did not exist without this foundational truth of the story. God is Creator and throughout the entire Bible, writers, prophets, leaders, kings, priests and even shepherds recognized that truth.

Consider that from the very beginning of the story, even in the midst of the darkness, we are introduced to the fullness of God. God, the Creator was in the beginning. But before anything took shape, in the midst of the darkness we are introduced to the Spirit of God hovering and moving over the water. The activity of God's Spirit is the greatest word of comfort that human beings can know. He moved upon the face of the waters indicating that the chaos is not the final story.¹ The Spirit of God present at creation does not allow darkness to win. It does not allow darkness to intimidate or overpower. The presence of the Spirit of God shows that God wants to be ever present. In the midst of our darkness and challenges; in the midst of our chaotic circumstances; in the midst of when we are feeling void, God shows His grace and wants to be present with us.

¹ Dr. James Dixon, *Genesis: Expository Thoughts*, Darlington: Evangelical Press, 2005.



How has the God of Grace moved in your life during times of chaos?

2. THE LIGHT OF GRACE

While the Spirit of God was hovering over the water in the darkness with anticipation; it was at that moment of anticipation that everything changed. The grace of God changes everything with four spoken words; “*Let there be light.*” In the midst of the darkness with the Spirit of God moving over the surface of the waters, a candle was lit for all eternity.

Every time we see light it should be a reminder of the grace of God in creation.

The separation has been defined and named. Light will be called Day. Darkness will be called Night. It was in this part of creation that God begins a pattern of separation. Not only did God separate light from darkness/day from night. He also separated the waters above from the waters beneath (v. 6-8) and separated the land from the waters (v. 9-10). Later in the story of God in the Bible, He separates His people (Israel), from the nations around them (*Exodus 34:10-17*). In the Gospel of Matthew, He separates the sheep from the goats (*Matthew 25:31-46*).



How has the Light of Grace made a separation in your life?

3. THE HANDIWORK OF GRACE ---

From the dust of the ground, from that which God had created; He formed man. The Hebrew word for “ground” is “*Adamah*.” The Hebrew word for “man” is “*Adam*.” So, from *Adamah*, God made *Adam*.

The Hebrew word translated “formed” means like a pottery with clay, shaping and molding.

Notice that this is the only part of creation where God gets His hands dirty, if you will. There is an intimacy to this part of creation that exists nowhere else in the previous things created. God wanted to purposely form, mold and shape us into His likeness, making us unique and above all other creations.

God got personal when He created man. He did not just speak, but He interacted. With great care and deliberation God formed, shaped and molded man in His image.

 **How is God shaping and molding your life to be more like Jesus?**

HOW HIS PLAN SHAPES OUR PURPOSE

The Story of God begins in the beginning as does our individual stories. God created light that changed everything. Though God could have merely spoken man into existence like He did everything else, even with the animals that came out of the earth, God utilized the earth and not His hands in their creation. But with you and me and all humankind, we were unique from the beginning. By the Grace of God, He had something different in mind for us from the beginning. God was willing to get His hands dirty with us from the beginning, which is a clear picture of His grace in action.

As we start this new year; it is a time to reflect and renew. This is a new year, a new beginning, a new opportunity. Let this year be a year where you allow God to get His hands dirty in the shaping and forming of your life, your priorities, your relationships. Allow the God of Grace to do a life-changing work in you from the inside out; so that you may be His light in this dark world.

This year, let His Story shape Your Story. Let His Plan shape Your Purpose.

GRACE

IN THE GARDEN

DATE

January 11 & 12

WEEK

2 of 4

KEY VERSE

Genesis 2:16

LESSON OUTLINE

1. Grace In Responsibility
2. Grace In Freedom
3. Grace In the Fall

THINGS TO KNOW

- Everything needed for life was in the Garden of Eden.
- The Hebrew word "Akul" means eat without restraint.

AND THE LORD GOD COMMANDED THE MAN, SAYING, "OF EVERY TREE OF THE GARDEN YOU MAY FREELY EAT; BUT OF THE TREE OF THE KNOWLEDGE OF GOOD AND EVIL YOU SHALL NOT EAT, FOR IN THE DAY THAT YOU EAT OF IT YOU SHALL SURELY DIE."

GENESIS 2:16

SETTING THE STAGE



Today we continue with the Story of Grace, looking specifically at Grace in the Garden.

This week in Genesis chapters 2 and 3, we see the name of God become more personal. In Chapter 1, it was simply “God.” It was the Hebrew word, “Elohim.”

But now we have “LORD God,” which we see 11 times in 22 verses.

When you see LORD in all “caps” that is the Hebrew word for YAHWEH or Jehovah. It is the personal name of God. Think of it as the difference between Mr. Smith and John Smith. “John Smith” would be more personal, intimate, and accessible. So, in Chapter 2 we see God as more personal, intimate and accessible to His creation.

God did not wait until the New Testament with the birth of Jesus Christ to become personal and intimate and accessible. God is LORD God; YAHWEH/ Jehovah. A personal God from the very beginning of creation.

We know that God wanted to be involved from the beginning; hence the act of Grace in Creation. God never intended for His creation to be on cruise control or function like a robot. God created living plants, animals, nutrients that would allow growth and provision for all living creatures. His creation was designed to work together in perfect harmony, each unique element having purpose and value. In Chapter 2, we see this clearly in the midst of a garden.

God set, with great intentionality, that which He created in His own image, in the midst of a garden. We have seen the Grace of God in creation. And throughout creation, God spoke something into existence. Yet with man, He got His hands dirty by “forming” man in His own image, both male and female.

Understanding what grace means requires going back to an old Hebrew term that meant “to bend, to stoop.” To show grace is to extend favor or kindness to one who does not deserve it and can never earn it. Receiving God’s acceptance by grace always stands *Continued on page 16 >*

GRACE

IN THE GARDEN

Setting the Stage, continued > in sharp contrast to earning it on the basis of works. ¹

Throughout creation God had shown grace by bending, stooping, and leaning towards that which He had created, getting His hands dirty in forming man and woman. The expectation of God was that in turn Adam and Eve would get their hands dirty by tending and taking care of that which God had created.

READ: Genesis 2:8-17; 3:1-24

POINTS TO PONDER

1. GRACE IN RESPONSIBILITY ---

The LORD God planted a garden that we have come to know as the Garden of Eden. Everything you ever needed for life was in the garden.

The Tree of Life was in the “midst of the garden.” The Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil was in the “midst of the garden.”

Adam and Eve were to live LIFE in the “midst of the garden.” The choices they were to make were to be made in the “midst of the garden.” The responsibilities they had were to be carried out in the “midst of the garden.” This garden was like every other garden that takes responsibility to keep it working and growing.

There is grace in responsibility.

¹ Chuck Swindoll, *The Grace Awakening: Believing in Grace is One Thing. Living it is Another*, Thomas Nelson, 2006.

The concept of work and responsibility was never the result of the fall. The concept of work and responsibility is part of Grace in the Garden. God created us in such a way to give us the privilege of living freely, making choices, and having responsibility.



How has the grace of responsibility changed your perspective of work?

2. GRACE IN FREEDOM

God is making sure that Adam and Eve understand clearly that He wants them to experience grace in freedom.

We still live in the midst of the garden today. Everything we need for sustenance and nutrition is available to us, especially in this country. We have been given great freedom, but remember freedom exists in the realm of responsibility. The two always go together.

God did not complicate it at all; in fact, He made it quite clear. Man has been given responsibility and freedom; freedom to choose. Obedience to God leads to life and enjoying all that is provided; eating without restraint and freedom. Disobedience to God ultimately leads to death. It was simply one tree in the midst of the garden that was off limits. God was not being mean. In the midst of the garden, God showed grace.



How has the freedom to choose caused you to take responsibility?

3. GRACE IN THE FALL

“If Genesis 3 were not in the Bible, there would be no Bible as we know it. Why? Because the rest of Scripture documents the sad consequences of Adam’s sin and explains what God in His grace has done to rescue us.”²

It just takes a split second for your eyes to be taken off that which is right.

With a blink of an eye, and a bite of the fruit sin entered the world. Then the eyes of Adam and Eve were opened. They had been given responsibility and freedom. They had been given parameters that were for their own good.

Their eyes were open and for the first time they felt shame in their nakedness. Their initial response was to try and hide.

And yet, there is still grace in the fall.

God provided a covering of their physical bodies that symbolized a covering of their sin and disobedience. Blood had to be shed for the skin of an animal to be made into a tunic that covered both Adam and Eve.

In the New Testament, when Jesus was crucified on the cross; it would be the final sacrifice ever needed. Jesus was the Lamb of God who came to take away the sin of the world. The blood of Jesus was shed on the cross so that you and I might be eternally covered for our sins, thus clothing us with garments of salvation and wrapping us with robes of righteousness.



How has God’s grace covered your life?

² Swindoll, *The Grace Awakening*.

HOW HIS PLAN SHAPES OUR PURPOSE

Life was meant to be lived “in the midst of the garden.” As far back as Adam and Eve, there were responsibility and freedom. We are not to live with a sense of entitlement. If anyone had the right to be “entitled” it would have been Adam and Eve, yet God graciously gave them responsibility in the midst of the garden.

The freedom we have today is unparalleled in all of history. However, with greater freedom, comes greater responsibility and a greater possibility of falling. Not falling from grace but falling from that which God had purposed for us; a loving personal relationship with Him.

In the midst of the garden we are to stay on the path. It all comes down to choices. Regardless of whether or not we see the bright colorful trees or the pesky little weeds in the garden; we make a choice on whether or not to stay on the path.

- Do we stay focused?
- Do we stay connected with God?
- Do we stay connected with family and friends?
- Do we remain faithful in our values and morals?

Adam and Eve made a choice that has consequences to this very day for all of us. God showed them grace in the fall. God covered their nakedness which symbolized the sacrificial covering that would be necessary to be right before God. God showed grace once again through His Son, Jesus Christ as that final sacrifice; covering us for all eternity.

Remember what Adam and Eve experienced in the midst of the garden is available to you as well.

God's grace.
God's provision.
God's mercy.
God's forgiveness.
God's protection.
God's direction.

God's grace finds us right where we are in the midst of the garden, covering us, forgiving us and walking with us.

GRACE

IN THE ARK

DATE

January 18 & 19

WEEK

3 of 4

KEY VERSE

Genesis 9:11

LESSON OUTLINE

1. God Offers Grace Before Judgment
2. God's Grace Has a Time Limit
3. God's Grace Gives Us a New Beginning

THINGS TO KNOW

- We all need the greater ark, Jesus Christ to save us from the flood of God's wrath and deliver us to a new beginning.

THUS I ESTABLISH MY
COVENANT WITH YOU: NEVER
AGAIN SHALL ALL FLESH BE
CUT OFF BY THE WATERS OF
THE FLOOD; NEVER AGAIN
SHALL THERE BE A FLOOD TO
DESTROY THE EARTH.

GENESIS 9:11

SETTING THE STAGE



In Genesis 6, we are told that creation was in dire need of a “reset.” As we learned last week in Genesis 3, Adam and Eve introduced sin into this world, and since then it has spread across all of humanity (*Romans 5:12*). We see this in Genesis 4 with the first murder, as Cain kills Abel. Eight generations later, we see Lamech kill a man and even boast about it (*Genesis 4:23-24*). Then we get to chapter 6 and we are told that the sons of God were marrying the daughters of men (*Genesis 6:1-4*). Interpretations vary on those 4 complex verses ranging from the intermarriage of pagan, tyrant kings with God’s people, to the intermarriage of fallen angels with humanity. Regardless of the interpretation, we know that it was a detestable thing and it broke the heart of God. We are told in Genesis 6:5-6, ⁴⁵ *Then the LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.* ⁶ *And the LORD was sorry that He had made man on the earth, and He was grieved in His heart.*” When we read that passage, it initially seems harsh. Did the Father truly regret making people in His own image? Did God make a mistake in His creation? Kenneth Matthews explains: “God’s response of grief over the making of humanity, however, is not remorse in the sense of sorrow over a mistaken creation; our verse shows that God’s pain has its source in the perversion of human sin. The making of ‘man’ is no error; it is what ‘man’ has made of himself.”¹

God’s heart was broken over the sin of mankind. Sin grieves our God (*Ephesians 4:30*) not only because it robs Him of the glory that He is due, but it also robs us of the joy that He designed us to walk in. Because of this, God chose to hit the reset button through the flood. In one fierce storm, the likes of which will never be seen again, God blotted out nearly all the life on this earth. However, if you know the story, He did not blot out ALL living things. *Continued on page 22 >*

¹ *The New American Commentary, Volume 1A, p. 343.*

GRACE

IN THE ARK

Setting the Stage, continued > Because of His great mercy and grace, God preserved a remnant through one faithful servant, Noah (*Genesis 6:8*). As we journey through this story today, we will see that God's grace was extravagant, even in the midst of His righteous and terrifying judgment.

READ: Genesis 6:13-19; 7:11-16; 9:8-17

Noah is introduced in Genesis as a man that found favor in God's eyes. The Lord informed him of His plan to flood all of creation as a consequence for humanity's sin. However, God also tells Noah that he and his family will be spared through the construction of an unprecedented ark. In a baffling decree, Noah is commanded to build an enormous sea vessel in the middle of the desert. This was not a subtle DIY project that he was doing at home. He was building a 3-deck ship that was over 440 feet long, 73 feet wide, and 44 feet high. It would have yielded a displacement of 43,000 tons and provided approximately 95,700 square feet of deck area.²

Noah is told that at the appointed time, God will lead two of every kind of creature into this boat to ensure the future repopulation of the earth. But the truth is even with all those animals, there was still room to fit more people on that large of a boat. And I believe more could have boarded it because of our first point today.

POINTS TO PONDER

1. GOD OFFERS GRACE BEFORE JUDGMENT

In 2 Peter 2:5 it says Noah was a “*herald of righteousness*.” This means Noah was not just a ship-maker; he was also a preacher! God used those

² Victor Hamilton, *The New International Commentary on the Old Testament*, p. 282.

years of construction as a time where Noah proclaimed God’s righteous plan to his neighbors.

Noah’s friends and neighbors were given ample time to think about and accept his offer. This too is the case in our own lives. In fact, Peter says Jesus has not returned yet because He is giving us additional time to get on “our ark” (2 Peter 3:9). But sadly, many ignore the messengers and take the patience of Jesus Christ lightly. Unfortunately, the story of the flood tells us that the decision has devastating consequences. The story of Noah reminds us that the window of opportunity will eventually come to a close.

After years of construction, God fulfilled this tragic promise. Most commentators believe the flood waters came for 40 days and 40 nights.



How does grace precede judgment in your life?

2. GOD’S GRACE HAS A TIME LIMIT

God generously gave years for people to heed Noah’s warnings. God had been patient for generations in the past, however, the day came where His warnings were over. Instead of hearing about God’s wrath, people began to witness it for themselves. And God’s last word to them was not in the form of a sentence. It came through the form of divine action: He shut the ark’s door (*Genesis 7:7*).

First, God shut the door to protect those who were inside. God promised Noah and his family salvation through the ark. He was showing Noah that He would hold fast to His promise.

Secondly, God shut the door because time was up. I can only imagine the horror of what Noah must have watched. Jesus says just days before the flood, people were eating, drinking, marrying, and celebrating (*Matthew 24:38*). They were caught completely off guard by the raging storm. Undoubtedly, they must have run to that boat in desperation when

they saw the waters begin to rise. But they could not enter the ark because God's grace had a time limit.

So, God shuts the door and the rain begins to devastate the earth. For 40 days and 40 nights, the heavens are opened and creation experiences torrential downpour. Finally, after those 40 days, God closed the heavens but water continued to rise for 150 days (*Genesis 7:24*).



Are there people you know who may be like Noah's neighbors? Explain.

3. GOD'S GRACE GIVES US A NEW BEGINNING _____

The ark did not just protect Noah from death, it delivered him to a brand-new life! On that mountain, God set up a covenant with Noah, establishing a new agreement not just with him personally, but with all of creation for the future. God did not communicate any rules or stipulations to that agreement, He simply offered a sign to prove His intentions. What is the sign? A beautiful rainbow.

The rainbow reminded Noah, and reminds us, that we can have a new life through the grace of God. This is made available to us through Jesus Christ and His triumphant victory over death. All we have to do is follow Noah's example, and say yes to God's invitation through faith. And when we do, we no longer have to fear the flood waters of God's wrath, but instead we can begin a new life with a new purpose, just like Noah.



How has God's grace given you a new beginning?

HOW HIS PLAN SHAPES OUR PURPOSE

God was patient with His people for generations. Yet, the people continued to ignore God and go down their own path. The people intentionally rejected God's warning time and time again. This is not unlike what happens today in big and small ways.

God's grace in the ark is the same grace He offers to us today. The ark was a symbol of salvation for Noah and his family. The cross of Jesus Christ represents our salvation in that Jesus took all of our sin and punishment upon Himself on the cross to the point of death and then burial. But in just three days the grace of God shined forth not in the form of a rainbow this time, but in the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Jesus conquered death. Jesus paid the price. Jesus did that for you. If you have that relationship with Jesus Christ already, celebrate that victory.

If you do not have that relationship or are in doubt of that relationship, there is no better time than now to settle that in your heart once and for all. Let His Story impact Your Story. It is as easy as ABC:

A - Admit you have sinned. Tell God you are sorry for your sins and ask Him to forgive you.

B - Believe Jesus is God's sinless Son. John 3:16 says *For this is how God loved the world: He gave His one and only Son so that everyone who believes in Him will not perish but have eternal life.* Jesus never sinned, so He did not deserve the punishment for sin: death. Even though He never sinned, Jesus volunteered to take the punishment for your sins and for mine. He died on a cross and was buried. But death was not the end of the story. Three days after He died, Jesus rose and walked in newness of life!

C - Choose to make Jesus the Lord and Savior of your life. Ask Jesus to become your Lord and your Savior. Ask Him to teach you to live His way in your thoughts, words, and actions.

GRACE

TO ALL

DATE

January 25 & 26

WEEK

4 of 4

KEY VERSE

Genesis 12:5

LESSON OUTLINE

1. God Gives Us Grace In Our Suffering
2. God Gives Us Grace In Our Doubting
3. God Declares Us Righteous by Grace, Through Faith

THINGS TO KNOW

- About 30,000 stars are listed in the General Catalog used by astronomers and it is estimated that there are 100 billion more.

THEN HE BROUGHT HIM
OUTSIDE AND SAID, "LOOK NOW
TOWARD HEAVEN, AND COUNT
THE STARS IF YOU ARE ABLE
TO NUMBER THEM." AND HE
SAID TO HIM, "SO SHALL YOUR
DESCENDANTS BE."

GENESIS 12:5 (NKJV)

SETTING THE STAGE



God used Abram to change His Story. Abraham was the Patriarch of Israel, whose story is told in Genesis chapters 12-23.

Despite God's swift judgment of sin most people ignored Him and continued to sin. But God revealed himself to Abram, who would later be renamed Abraham, and chose to use Abraham's family to be the instrument of his salvation plan for humanity. Abraham was not chosen because he was a perfect man; in fact, his life demonstrated some great flaws. But he also demonstrated great faith in God and His promises.¹

We know him as Abraham with a wife named Sarah. However, before he became known as Abraham, his name was Abram. The lesson today deals with the time in his life that he was Abram and his wife was Sarai.

When God changed a person's name and gave him a new name, it was usually to establish a new identity. God changed Abram's name, meaning "high father," to "Abraham," meaning "father of a multitude" (*Genesis 17:5*). At the same time, God changed Abraham's wife's name from "Sarai," meaning "my princess," to "Sarah," meaning "mother of nations" (*Genesis 17:15*). This name change took place when God gave Abraham the covenant of circumcision. God also reaffirmed His promise to give Abraham a son, specifically through Sarah, and told him to name his son Isaac, meaning "laughter."²

Abram grew up in Ur, which was a cultural community where his family lived. He left Ur, not to better his life but to obey God. It is the obedience of Abram that allowed God to show grace that would build a nation and people of God for all generations.

¹ *Chronological Life Application Study Bible*, Carol Stream: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 2012, p. 30.

² Gotquestions.com.

GRACE

TO ALL

In Genesis 12, God made some massive promises to this elderly, pagan man from Ur. God told Abram that He was building something special through him. He said that Abram was going to get new land, have a new lineage, and become a great nation that would bless the entire world. Unfortunately, none of those things happened immediately. Ten years have passed between chapters 12 and 15. At this point in the story, Abram has no promised land, no lineage, and certainly no nation to call his own.

READ: Genesis 12:2-5; 15:1-6

POINTS TO PONDER

1. GOD GIVES US GRACE IN OUR SUFFERING

Throughout scripture God made His presence known in big and small ways. Whether it was by a pillar of fire or a still small voice, the presence of God is a reminder of His grace towards us. God's solution to Abram's problems is to grace him with His presence again. This is because God's powerful presence has a way of restoring and renewing our hearts.

In Genesis 15:1, God says, "I am your shield." He reminds Abram that He is there with him and will continue to protect him in this season of waiting. God is offering **immediate grace** in the valley. He sees Abram's weaknesses but says that He is there to make him strong.

God promises to meet us in our weakness and sustain us in the valley. Isaiah 41:10, "*Fear not, for I am with you; Be not dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you, Yes, I will help you, I will uphold you with My righteous right hand.*"

Second, God says, "I am your exceedingly great reward." God reminds

Abram that He is not only his protection but also his reward. God is effectually saying, “hang in there, I’ve got something great waiting for you!” God is reminding him that all of the things He promised in Chapter 12 will still come to fruition. Abram is just struggling to keep his eye on the prize since he is tired of the valley.

As good as God’s pep-talk is, Abram is still dejected. He hears God reaffirm His promises, but he is still troubled by his present circumstances.



How have you experienced God’s grace in the valley of circumstances?

2. GOD GIVES US GRACE IN OUR DOUBTING

God tells Abram that he will indeed have an heir from his own lineage. There will be no need for an adopted son or servant. But then God displays His amazing grace and patience to Abram. Instead of leaving it at that authoritative message, God helps Abram understand by taking him for a walk outside. He invites him outside at night so that he can show him something that will alleviate his doubts: the stars.

The stars communicate how BIG our God is. As Creator of those stars (*Genesis 1:16*), God challenges Abram to try to count them. Abram is overwhelmed in the moment by the power and majesty of the sky before him.

The stars also communicate how BIG God’s plan is for Abram. God had told Abram that all the earth would be blessed through him (*Genesis 12:3*). He’s reminding him of that promise when He says that his descendants will outnumber those stars.

God is trying to show him the scope of the finish line. He is saying one

day, every person who walks in faith with our Triune God will trace his or her origin back to Abram. We are told Abram's eyes and heart are awakened to this monumental reality in Genesis 15:6.



How has God worked in your life with regard to Abraham's lineage of faith?

3. GOD DECLARES US RIGHTEOUS BY GRACE, _____ THROUGH FAITH

Abram placed his faith in God and His perfect redemptive plan. Because of that declaration of faith, God declared him righteous. Why would God do that? Because our faith is the thing that pleases God the most (*Hebrews 11:6*). He is looking for our trust and our love. This comes through a faith-based relationship with Him. When we respond in that way, God credits us as righteous and holy.

This is amazing because Abram was a pagan man with plenty of unrighteousness in his heart. But when he placed his faith in God, the Lord no longer saw him as a sinner destined to death. He saw him as righteous and destined for eternity with Him. This same offer is available for you and me today. It does not matter what sins have entangled your life. Through Jesus Christ, there is an offer of grace to all through faith in Him.



Have you been declared righteous by grace through faith? If so, write a few details explaining.

HOW HIS PLAN SHAPES OUR PURPOSE

We live in a culture of wanting and expecting everything to happen quickly. When we get impatient over a microwave cooking dinner in two minutes, there is an issue. And I say that as a confessional.

God's timing is perfect, which means His timing is not always our timing. He is perfect and we are not.

The story of Abram reminds us that God has a purpose for each of our lives. His Plan, Our Purpose is our theme this year. God's plan was to use Abram to build a nation. It did not happen overnight or in a course of weeks or even months. But it was years in the making, and the nation that Abram gave birth to still exists today. God fulfilled His promise by showing grace to Abram even after Abram doubted and took matters into his own hands.

God's grace is one of patience, forgiveness, redemption, and righteousness. The good news today is that salvation is available to all, just as it was to Abram, by grace, and through faith.



———— *COMING UP NEXT:*
THE STORY OF **DELIVERANCE**

THE STORY OF DELIVERANCE



At the beginning of Exodus, God's people are not in a position of influence and power like they were at the end of Genesis. They have been oppressed for 430 years by cruel Egyptian taskmasters. However, Exodus is the story of God's deliverance of the Israelites from Pharaoh's grip. It is written by its main character, Moses, whose own birth and rescue were nothing short of miraculous (*Exodus 2:1-10*). Exodus is the archetypal story of deliverance revealed throughout the Old Testament.

The story of Israel's salvation has everything that anyone could ever want in an adventure story; a cruel villain (Pharaoh), an unlikely hero (Moses), fantastic disasters (the plagues), a spectacular deliverance (crossing the Red Sea), a long journey (through the wilderness), a mountaintop experience (where Moses receives the Ten Commandments), and a grand finale (when God comes down to fill the tabernacle with His glory)."¹

The story of deliverance began as the people of God cried out. They were ready for a change, they were tired of being in bondage, and they were ready to move forward. But to move forward, they had to be willing to turn to God.

EXODUS 2:23 *Now it came about in the course of those many days that the king of Egypt died. And the sons of Israel sighed because of the bondage, and they cried out; and their cry for help because of their bondage rose up to God.²⁴ So God heard their groaning;*

*and God remembered His covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.
25 God saw the sons of Israel, and God took notice of them.*

The story of deliverance takes shape when God heard; God remembered; God took notice. God's people can find themselves in seemingly insurmountable circumstances from which they need deliverance too, like health crises, unemployment, and the war against temptation. Exodus gives God's people confidence that He can deliver us and set us free. As we look at Exodus we will learn who our deliverer is, what we need deliverance from, and how we are delivered.

Over the next four weeks, we will look at this story of deliverance as we examine passages from the book of Exodus. We will see how God's plan shapes the purpose of His people as they journey from their past into their present, and as they move forward into their future.

We each face different seasons of our lives when we are in Egypt, or the wilderness or on the cusp of the Promised Land. We can trust that God has His reasons for allowing each season. A difficult season is not a deviation of God's plan. It is an invitation to exercise the muscles of our faith in Him. He hears our every murmur, knows our every fear and provides for our every need. God desires to open our eyes to His deep, tender heart for us and His eager, active hand in our lives.

Feb 1/2	Deliverance from the Past - Exodus 3
Feb 8/9	Deliverance for the Future - Exodus 12
Feb 15/16	Deliverance for Today - Exodus 16
Feb 22/23	Deliverance from Ourselves - Exodus 20

¹ *The Literary Study Bible*, p. 78.

DELIVERANCE

FROM THE PAST

DATE

February 1 & 2

WEEK

1 of 4

KEY VERSE

Exodus 3:7-8a

LESSON OUTLINE

1. Who Is Delivering Us?
2. From What Are We Being Delivered?
3. How Are We Being Delivered?

THINGS TO KNOW

- Exodus: "A going out" or "a departure" ¹
- Moses: The writer of Exodus whose name means to "draw out"
- Yada: "acknowledge;" to be aware and moved into action
- Bēriyth: covenant, a sacred agreement between God and a person or group of people
- YAHWEH: "I AM WHO I AM;" the most holy name of God
- Holy: separate, distinct, alone

AND THE LORD SAID: "I HAVE SURELY SEEN THE OPPRESSION OF MY PEOPLE WHO ARE IN EGYPT, AND HAVE HEARD THEIR CRY BECAUSE OF THEIR TASKMASTERS, FOR I KNOW THEIR SORROWS. SO I HAVE COME DOWN TO DELIVER THEM OUT OF THE HAND OF THE EGYPTIANS."

EXODUS 3:7-8A

SETTING THE STAGE



Some days are difficult. We may face overwhelming tasks at work, challenges at home, or problems with our health. But three words have the power to change our day. They transform a day of hardship or monotony into a day of hope and expectation. The three words are “out for delivery!”

There is nothing like receiving a notification on your phone that your Amazon package will be waiting for you when you get home. Maybe it is a new phone case or a pair of shoes or an Instant Pot. It does not matter. It is “out for delivery,” and now you have a little pep in your step the rest of the day.

Yet as exciting as these three words are, they do not compare to the ultimate story of delivery in the book of Exodus.

God’s people have been oppressed for 430 years by cruel Egyptian taskmasters. Exodus is a story of God’s deliverance of the Israelites from Pharaoh’s grip. It is written by its main character, Moses, whose birth and rescue story is miraculous in and of itself! (*Exodus 2:1-10*). Exodus is the archetypal story of deliverance revealed throughout the Old Testament.

Today, God’s people can find themselves in seemingly insurmountable circumstances from which they need deliverance, too, like health crises, unemployment, and the war against temptation. Exodus gives God’s people confidence that He can deliver us and set us free. As we look at Exodus we will learn who our deliverer is, what we need deliverance from, and how we are delivered.

READ: Exodus 2:23-25; 3:7-14

DELIVERANCE

FROM THE PAST

POINTS TO PONDER

1. WHO IS DELIVERING US? _____

We often look for deliverance in the things of the world. We search for temporary relief in the approval of people, the accumulation of wealth, or our own morality. But all of these things are bandages that merely cover our circumstances temporarily. They do not bring any true, deep relief and healing in our lives.

The people of Israel found that God was the only One who could bring deliverance to their lives. When we look at the text, we can make some fascinating observations about the identity of our Deliverer.

Our Deliverer hears us.

During their agony and turmoil, the Israelites cried out to God. But we know from Exodus 2:24 that their groanings and prayers were not in vain.

God heard them.

The hope that we have as the people of God is that He hears us. He bends His ear to the groanings of His people. When we walk through adversity and cry out to God, our Deliverer listens to us, hears our struggling, and attends to our desires to be set free.

Our Deliverer is faithful and loves us.

God did not forget about the Israelites because He is faithful to His Word. He always accomplishes what He promises. We may feel that God has forgotten us in different seasons in life, but we can rest in knowing that nothing slips the mind of God. He always remembers us.

Our Deliverer acts.

In Exodus 2:25, God “*acknowledged them*,” which means more than simple awareness. He sits on the Throne of Heaven and was aware of the plight of the Hebrews before they ever stumbled into it.

God did not passively sit on His hands. God moved on behalf of His people and set into motion His plan of deliverance.

Our Deliverer is holy.

As God speaks to Moses, He conveys the reverence that all of us should have as we approach Him. He tells Moses to take off his shoes, for the place where he stands is holy ground. God establishes Himself before Moses as holy.

It is of utmost importance that we recognize God’s holiness. The word holy means to be separate, distinct, and alone. There is no one like our holy God. He has the power to create, work miracles, forgive, and heal.

Our Deliverer is I AM.

As God commissions Moses to free the people of Egypt, Moses asks who he should say is sending him. God responds by providing His Divine Name.

The holiest name of God is YAHWEH, which means, “*I AM WHO I AM*.” It points to His self-sufficiency, self-existence, and eternity. He is the One who is and will be.

I AM...

YAHWEH Jireh

The LORD Will Provide

YAHWEH Rapha

The LORD Who Heals You

YAHWEH Nissi

The LORD Is My Banner

YAHWEH Sabaoth

The LORD of Hosts

YAHWEH Raah

The LORD Is My Shepherd

YAHWEH Mekoddishkem

The LORD Who Sanctifies You

YAHWEH Shammah

The LORD Is There

YAHWEH Shalom

The LORD Is Peace



Which of these names of God are most real to you in this season of life? Why?

2. FROM WHAT ARE WE BEING DELIVERED? _____

In Exodus, the people of Israel are being delivered by God from their slavery in Egypt. While the slavery of the Israelites to the Egyptians was not a result of any specific sin, Scripture uses this paradigm of slavery and delivery quite frequently to illustrate the freedom from the bondage of sin. In fact, Jesus said in John 8:34: *“Most assuredly, I say to you, whoever commits sin is a slave of sin.”* Sin is a harsher taskmaster than any Egyptian could ever be.

Jesus has offered us freedom. Moses’s calling was to lead the Israelites out from the oppression of the Egyptians – but the people had to choose to follow Moses to leave the reign of Pharaoh. Jesus’ calling is to lead us out of the prison of selfishness and sin – but we must choose to follow Him into freedom.



How has Jesus delivered you into freedom?

3. HOW ARE WE BEING DELIVERED? _____

Moses was assigned what seemed to be an impossible task: He was to lead all of Israel out of slavery and into the Promised Land.

God made a promise to Moses, *“I will certainly be with you.”* Deliverance is only possible because God has promised His presence. And we see

that God fulfilled His guarantee. God was with Moses on every step of the journey and in every meeting with Pharaoh. God was present with Moses on the edge of the Red Sea and in every mile in the wilderness.



In what difficult circumstance has God made His presence known to you? How?

HOW HIS PLAN SHAPES OUR PURPOSE

The story of Exodus is the story of the deliverance of God's people. For generations, the only thing the people of God knew was a life of slavery, bondage and oppression. They needed to be delivered from their past. As we seek deliverance from seemingly insurmountable circumstances in our own lives, we find great assurance in three truths.

- Our Deliverer is our holy God, YAHWEH. He hears us, is faithful and loves us, and acts on our behalf.
- Our Deliverer can lead us out of bondage. He sets us free from slavery or any dire circumstance in which we find ourselves.
- Our Deliverer promises His presence. Among Jesus' last words before he ascended to Heaven were, *"I am with you always, even to the end of the age"* (Matthew 28:20 NKJV).

God will guide us through the wilderness of life and part the waters of impossible situations for us. He is faithful to walk with us, just as He did for the Israelites. The deliverance from the past gives us confidence as God's people that He can deliver us today.

DELIVERANCE

FOR THE FUTURE

DATE

February 8 & 9

WEEK

2 of 4

KEY VERSE

Exodus 12:13

LESSON OUTLINE

1. A Substitute
2. The Symbol
3. A Signpost

THINGS TO KNOW

- Plague: Latin word for "mighty blow."

NOW THE BLOOD SHALL BE
A SIGN FOR YOU ON THE
HOUSES WHERE YOU ARE. AND
WHEN I SEE THE BLOOD, I WILL
PASS OVER YOU; AND THE
PLAGUE SHALL NOT BE ON
YOU TO DESTROY YOU WHEN
I STRIKE THE LAND OF EGYPT.

EXODUS 12:13

SETTING THE STAGE



The first day at a new job. A bended knee and a trembling hand holding a ring box. The first time holding your newborn child. An unexpected call from the doctor. Some days mark us forever. They change who we are and how we see the world.

Such days are burned into our memory. When we think back, the smells still linger in our noses, and the tastes still hover on our tongues. These vivid memories seem so palpable. Life-changing days like these will remain etched into our minds, forever shaping us.

In chapter 12 of Exodus, the Israelites are on the cusp of a life-changing day that would be filled with sensory overload. There would be simultaneous rejoicing and devastation, feasting and mourning, joy and sorrow, and forgiveness and judgment.

In our Scripture today, we arrive at the life-changing day: the Passover. The Passover was the day that the Israelites were freed from bondage to the Egyptians. It would serve as an Independence Day for the Israelites, changing the course of their history. In fact, this day was so monumental that God ordered that the Passover would start their calendar year. It was symbolic of the fresh start and fresh life that God was granting to the people of Israel (*Exodus 12:1-2*).

The Passover was the last of the Ten Plagues that God sent to the Egyptians. The purpose of the plagues was to display God's authority. The word "plague" is the Latin word for "mighty blow." The mighty blows that God dealt the Egyptians included afflicting them with boils and lice, killing their fish, livestock, and crops, and causing a thick darkness to come across the land.

The tenth plague was by far the deadliest and most devastating. God would sweep over the land of Egypt, visiting every home and taking the life of every firstborn male – unless the house was covered by the blood of an innocent lamb. *Continued on page 42 >*

DELIVERANCE

FOR THE FUTURE

Setting the Stage, continued > Today, we will look at the Passover and learn about the substitute of the lamb, the symbol of the blood, and the signpost of the event.

READ: Exodus 12:1-13; 23:28

POINTS TO PONDER

1. A SUBSTITUTE

The Passover was intended to showcase God's supremacy over all of the Egyptians' false gods. But the judgment of the Passover was not just for the Egyptians. It was also for the Israelites. The day would serve to distinguish the people of God from those who worshipped other gods. It would identify the Israelites as God's chosen and protected people. The Passover would occur to everyone who dwelt in the land of Egyptians. Both the Egyptians and the Israelites were going to be visited by God that day because all people are ultimately judged by God.

Every Israelite household was instructed to take a year-old male lamb on the tenth day of the month and slaughter it on the fourteenth day. The purpose of the lamb was to serve as a substitute. Instead of their first-born son passing away, the lamb would die in his place.

However, God made it clear that not just any male lamb would do. He provided specific qualifications for this substitute: the lamb was to be one year old. It was to be free from blemish or defect. These are no small details.

Impending judgment hung over the head of all those residing in Egypt that evening. Death was on the doorstep of every house in Egypt. Behind the

cover of a young, perfect lamb, they would be shielded from the wrath of God and instead receive the mercy of God.



Why do you think God was so specific about the substitute?

2. THE SYMBOL

We see symbols on a national level. The bald eagle, the Statue of Liberty, and the American flag are symbols to many of hope, freedom, and an opportunity to have a better life.

In Exodus 12, we learn that the blood of the young, perfect lamb is an important symbol.

God gave additional instructions to His people about animal sacrifice. The Israelites were told to take the blood and spread it over the doorposts of their homes. The blood was a symbol that identified the people of God. It indicated that those inside the home believed God would keep His word. The painting of each doorframe represented their faith and obedience to God. God explained that when He visited the land of Egypt later that night, He would “pass over” the homes where there was blood. When God saw the blood, He saw the substitute. The symbol of the shed blood on the door was an external demonstration of an internal commitment to trust God.

In the next set of instructions from God, we see that the Israelites were directed to participate in a Passover meal that would also be very symbolic (*Exodus 12:8-11*).

Like the instructions regarding the sacrificial animal and its blood, the Israelites received detailed stipulations about the meal that would follow the Passover. God wanted them to eat the meal with a belt on their waists and shoes on their feet so that they could leave in a hurry. It was a reminder to the people of Israel that they were to be ready to follow God. They could be called to make their exodus out of Egypt at any moment.

This highly symbolic Passover meal would endure for generations. Every year, when the Israelites would eat this meal, the smells and tastes would bring them back to the night that changed the history of their nation. They would recall the sacrificial lamb. Ultimately, the Passover Meal would serve as a reminder of the deliverance they could experience.



What are some symbols that cause you to remember God's faithfulness, love and sacrifice?

3. A SIGNPOST

The Passover proved to be a remarkable event for the Israelites who heeded God's instructions.

However, as remarkable as the Passover was as Independence Day for the Israelites, it pales in comparison to the ultimate deliverance that God had in mind for all of His people. The bigger purpose of that historic day in Egypt was to serve as a signpost pointing to Jesus Christ and the Gospel. In 1 Corinthians, the Apostle Paul makes the connection that what we see in Exodus is a shadow of what was to come. And, that what was demonstrated on the cross was the substance.

1 CORINTHIANS. 5:7B *For indeed Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us.*

God's instructions for the lamb pointed to the day when Jesus Himself would be slain as the ultimate, sacrificial Lamb in place of God's people.

Every element of the Passover pointed to the Gospel, including God's instruction to paint the blood of the lamb across doorposts. God would later instruct His people to identify themselves and exercise their faith by painting Jesus' blood across their hearts.

The past picture of the Passover points to the future plan of God in Jesus Christ.



How can your life serve as a signpost to others, pointing them to the cross of Christ?

HOW HIS PLAN SHAPES OUR PURPOSE

Although the Passover occurred thousands of years ago, the day points to our ultimate deliverance through Jesus Christ. In Exodus, the Passover lamb saved the Israelites, an event that led them on their journey to the Promised Land. Today, Jesus saves us and leads us toward the promised land of Heaven.

Like the Israelites, all of us are in danger of experiencing the wrath of God's judgment. We all are sinful, and because of our sin, we deserve death and Hell (*Romans 3:23, 6:23*). Tony Merida gives us more insight into the need for a perfect sacrifice: "This need for a perfect sacrifice reminds us of our own state. We, being corrupted by our sin, cannot save ourselves. Our good works are like the blemished lamb – unworthy before a holy God. We need One who serves as a substitute on our behalf. Jesus is the lamb for the household of God. Only through faith in Him are our sins covered. He alone is our hope."¹

Jesus Christ is the fulfillment of the Passover Lamb whose blood was poured out on the cross for us. We can trust in Jesus as the perfect, unblemished substitute that stands in our place. We are invited by God to escape judgment and find mercy through the blood of Jesus. It is His desire that we flee the bitter bonds of sin. We can experience deliverance from our past – and deliverance from all of the things that will ensnare us in the future – through a better Lamb.

When we apply the blood of Jesus to our lives, we will escape God's judgment. God will "pass over" us, and we will be spared eternal death. Instead of receiving what we deserve, we will be given the gift of eternal life (*John 3:16*).

¹ Tony Merida, David Platt, and Daniel L. Akin, *Exalting Jesus in Exodus*, Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2014.

We follow the signpost of Passover to the cross. Our story as believers in Jesus Christ is the story of the Passover. It is the story of sacrifice. It is the story of blood. It is the story of faith, and it is a story of deliverance. The death of the Passover lamb changed the history of the Israelites. Jesus' death changes everything for our future. One day, we will arrive in Heaven, the land flowing with milk and honey, and all of God's people will sing, "*Worthy is the Lamb!*" (*Revelation 5:12*).

DELIVERANCE

FOR TODAY

DATE

February 15 & 16

WEEK

3 of 4

KEY VERSE

Exodus 16:11-12

LESSON OUTLINE

1. The Temptation to Look Back
2. The Faith to Look Up
3. The Patience to Look Forward

THINGS TO KNOW

- Manna: miraculous bread from heaven; literally means, "What is it?"
- Omer: an ancient Israelite unit of dry measure equal to about nine cups

AND THE LORD SPOKE TO MOSES,
SAYING, "I HAVE HEARD THE COMPLAINTS
OF THE CHILDREN OF ISRAEL. SPEAK TO
THEM, SAYING, 'AT TWILIGHT YOU SHALL
EAT MEAT, AND IN THE MORNING YOU
SHALL BE FILLED WITH BREAD.
AND YOU SHALL KNOW THAT I AM
THE LORD YOUR GOD.'"

EXODUS 16:11-12

SETTING THE STAGE



On January 1, 1863, President Abraham Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation, dismantling the institution of slavery and setting free all American slaves. Deliverance from oppression was – and is – to be celebrated. However, there was an unintended consequence. Slaves did not know where to go or what to do next.

Many slaves chose to stay with their masters simply because it was all they knew. Under their masters, slaves retained some level of certainty. At least they had food and shelter. Freedom and individuality might mean a better life, but there was no guarantee. The journey would involve new challenges and uncertainties. Those who stepped into freedom decided it would all be worth it.

We will see today that the Israelites found themselves in a similar situation. Over the last two weeks, we have followed the story of how God miraculously freed them from slavery and led them in their exodus out of Egypt. Now we will find out what happens next in their journey.

Like the American slaves, the Israelites did not immediately find themselves in the Promised Land. They faced new challenges that they had not anticipated. Without homes or resources, they found themselves wandering in uncertainty through the wilderness. At least in their slavery, they had some degree of security and stability. But now, in their independence, they struggled with how their immediate needs would be satisfied in a land of scarcity and desolation.

It seemed that God had abandoned the Israelites. But God had a glorious purpose for bringing His people into the wilderness instead of immediately into the Promised Land. As we join the Israelites in the wilderness, we will observe that the journey involves the temptation to look back, the faith to look up, and the patience to look forward. What might seem like a story of the people’s daily grumbling is actually a story about God’s daily grace.¹

¹ Peter Enns *The NIV Application Commentary: Exodus*, Zondervan: Grand Rapids, MI, iBooks p. 838.

DELIVERANCE

FOR TODAY

READ: Exodus 16:1-35

POINTS TO PONDER

1. THE TEMPTATION TO LOOK BACK _____

This week we will spend some time walking alongside the Israelites, observing how they handled their journey from slavery in Egypt to freedom in the Promised Land.

The wilderness made for a miserable trek. As the desert took its toll on the nation of Israel, the people were starving and parched. The desolate desert did not have enough natural resources to sustain a nation of 2 million and counting. The Israelites grumbled and cried out to God on account of their thirst and hunger.

Feeling an acute sense of uncertainty and insecurity with their basic needs, they did the unthinkable: They missed Egypt. They remembered the “pots of meat” and “bread to the full.” They missed the slight degree of certainty and security they had as slaves. Their lack of trust in God distorted their memory of the past so that it seemed better than it actually was.

They remembered Egypt through rose-colored glasses, forgetting it was an objectively horrible place.

This is Satan’s strategy. He wants us to view God through our circumstances, which creates a small, pigeonholed view of God and a too-big view of our circumstances. But God seeks to do the reverse: He wants us to view our circumstances through our view of God, producing a big view of God and a much smaller view of our circumstances.



How have you looked at your circumstances past or present through rose-colored glasses?

2. THE FAITH TO LOOK UP

God heard the cries of His people. He provided water for the Israelites when they had none (*Exodus 15:22-27*), and then He rained down bread from heaven, *manna*, so that they would not starve.

God wanted the Israelites to trust and depend on Him to meet their every need. In providing manna, He desired to show off His faithfulness if they would only wait, trust, and obey in their circumstance. However, there was a catch. Even more fascinating than *what* God provided is *how* He provided it. Moses explained to God's people that God intended His daily provision of *manna* to rot by the end of each day.

The reason that God set such a fast expiration on the *manna* is that He desired to grow the muscle of Israel's faith. God caused the *manna* to rot by the end of each day to combat the temptation to disbelieve in His ability to provide. He did not want His people to become self-reliant. He wanted to teach Israel that He would provide enough for them every single day.

Their daily *manna* became more than just daily bread. It became a daily exercise of faith.



How has God provided “daily bread” for you?

3. THE PATIENCE TO LOOK FORWARD _____

After 40 years of wandering, the Israelites reached the Promised Land. God had kept His promise and had never wavered in His plan to bring them to Canaan. Even when God’s people did not know where they were going or what they were to do next, God kept the Promised Land in His sight. He made sure of their triumph.

But before the Israelites were to inherit the Promised Land, God wanted to give them something even better: a faith that knew and trusted the Promiser. He certainly cared that the Israelites had food for their physical sustenance, but more than that, He cared about their spiritual sustenance.

By walking with Israel to the border of the Promised Land, we see that God’s people can trust that He knows where He is leading us, even when we cannot see the destination ahead. And we can trust His heart, even if we have to endure the wilderness to get to our destination.



How has a wilderness experience increased your trust in God?

HOW HIS PLAN SHAPES OUR PURPOSE

Regardless of the circumstances in which we find ourselves, we can learn a lot from the story of the Israelites. As we walk through our own stories, Exodus 16 shows us the futility of looking at the past through rose-colored glasses. God's people can walk toward an uncertain future with confidence, knowing and having faith in our great Provider, resisting the temptation from Satan to long for the past. As John Piper once said, "Stop defining and limiting your future in terms of your past. Start defining it in terms of your God."²

We see this daily provision and daily grace not just in Exodus but woven throughout the Bible. Jesus is called the very "Bread of Life" (*John 6:35*). He is the daily bread that we need. He is where spiritual sustenance and abundance is found. Be encouraged from these words: *May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit (Romans 15:13).*

In the Lord's Prayer, again we see Jesus invoke God's daily provision for the Israelites in the wilderness when He prays, Give us today our daily bread (*Matthew 6:11*). After the Lord's Prayer, He continues, "Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble" (*Matthew 6:34*). Sufficient for the day is its own trouble, but the converse is equally true: sufficient for today are God's new mercies. In fact, one of the greatest promises of scripture is that God's mercies are new every morning, just like the manna that was new every morning for the Israelites. *Continued on page 54 >*

² www.desiringgod.org

HOW HIS PLAN SHAPES OUR PURPOSE *continued*

LAMENTATIONS 3:21-24 *But this I call to mind, and therefore I have hope: the steadfast love of the LORD never ceases; his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness. “The LORD is my portion,” says my soul, “therefore, I will hope in him.”*

We can trust that God has His reasons for allowing each season. A difficult season is not a deviation of God’s plan. It is an invitation to exercise the muscles of our faith in Him. He hears our every murmur, knows our every fear, and provides for our every need. God desires to open our eyes to His deep, tender heart for us and His eager, active hand in our lives. As we trust in Him, He will fill His believers with abundance. It is both a promise and a provision. May we rely on His Truth not for yesterday in seasons of harvest, but for today in seasons of drought and tomorrow in seasons of growth.

BUT THIS I CALL TO MIND,
AND THEREFORE I HAVE
HOPE: THE STEADFAST
LOVE OF THE LORD NEVER
CEASES; HIS MERCIES
NEVER COME TO AN END;
THEY ARE NEW EVERY
MORNING; GREAT IS YOUR
FAITHFULNESS. "THE LORD
IS MY PORTION," SAYS MY
SOUL, "THEREFORE, I WILL
HOPE IN HIM."

L A M E N T A T I O N S 3 : 2 1 - 2 4

DELIVERANCE

FROM OURSELVES

DATE

February 22 & 23

WEEK

4 of 4

KEY VERSE

Exodus 20:1-3

LESSON OUTLINE

1. The Framework of the Law
2. The Format of the Law
3. The Fulfillment of the Law

THINGS TO KNOW

- **LORD:** Translated from the Hebrew name of God, **YAHWEH**, communicating God's personal, relational, covenant-making nature

AND GOD SPOKE ALL THESE WORDS, SAYING, "I AM THE LORD YOUR GOD, WHO BROUGHT YOU OUT OF THE LAND OF EGYPT, OUT OF THE HOUSE OF SLAVERY. YOU SHALL HAVE NO OTHER GODS BEFORE ME."

EXODUS 20:1-3

SETTING THE STAGE



Exodus 20 recounts one of the most familiar texts in the entire Bible: the Ten Commandments. Most people – Christian or not, church-going or not – are generally familiar with or have heard of the Ten Commandments. It is one of the oldest moral, ethical, and legal documents in all of human history. It is not only very old; its scope is also very wide.

The Ten Commandments can be found upon the walls of schoolrooms, courthouses, and non-profits alike. Most people would agree that these commandments outline and uphold certain moral principles, decencies, and expectations for members of a society to flourish. The Ten Commandments outline basic humanitarian laws that help individuals know the difference between right and wrong, good and bad, helpful and harmful.

However, while many people might generally be familiar with the content of the Ten Commandments, most are not as familiar with the context in which the Ten Commandments were given. The Ten Commandments were given by God to Israel after it became an independent nation. Before Israel arrived at the Promised Land, God met with Israel's leader, Moses, on Mount Sinai and gave him the Ten Commandments that would serve as the legal structure for the new nation.

In Exodus 20, we will examine the Ten Commandments and learn that they are not simply laws to live up to or to be condemned by. They are guidelines that help frame what our lives look like if we have truly grasped the grace and love of God for us in Jesus Christ. We will take a look at God's framework for the law, the format of the law, and the perfect fulfillment of the law.

DELIVERANCE

FROM OURSELVES

READ: Exodus 20:1-21; Matthew 22:36-40

POINTS TO PONDER

1. THE FRAMEWORK OF THE LAW

When we look at the Ten Commandments, it is easy to skim right through the first two introductory verses and head straight for the first commandment in verse 3. The first two verses in Exodus are perhaps the most overlooked, yet they are the most important in the entire chapter. It sets the framework for the entire Ten Commandments.

EXODUS 20:1-2 *And God spoke all these words, saying, ² “I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.”*

- **Who He Is**

God begins by powerfully communicating who He is: “*I am the LORD your God.*” The name that He chooses to describe Himself is LORD, or in Hebrew, YAHWEH.

YAHWEH, or LORD, is the name of God that communicates His personal, covenant-making nature. It means that when God gives the law, He is not approaching His people like a detached, demanding deity. It means He is a personal God of love and grace who acts on behalf of the people He loves. God’s law is an expression of His love.

Dr. Young uses an equation to illustrate how the love of God and the law of God work together as necessities. He says, “rules without a relationship equals rebellion.”

Rules – Relationship = Rebellion

Where there are only rules, laws, and expectations, we can expect rebellion. Relationship plus rules usually result in restoration.

Relationship + Rules = Restoration

Rules have new meaning when they are framed in the context of relationship. This is the framework of the Ten Commandments and the Gospel of God's love for us.

- **What He Has Done**

There is another important observation in Exodus 20:2. He declares what He has done, and then He reveals how His people should live in light of that.

When we receive God's love and assurance before the law, our approach to the law is compelled by the motive of gratitude, not from fear or pride.

This Christian view of law stands distinctive from all other religious systems of law because it connects God's love for us with God's law for us. Christianity contextualizes all law within the framework of having been redeemed, delivered, forgiven, and loved – eternally, intimately, personally, and unconditionally.

Deliverance is not the reward for having obeyed the law; it is the power given in order to obey the law. We are saved and delivered by the work and perfect righteousness of Jesus Christ in our place.



Why is it so important to understand God's love for us?

2. THE FORMAT OF THE LAW

Just as He was intentional in establishing His framework in verse 2, we see that He is intentional with the format in which the Ten Commandments are given.

The Ten Commandments are not listed in random, arbitrary order. There are a structure and a method in how they are given. The first three commandments address how we are to personally relate to God. They have a vertical dimension.

The first three commandments provide instruction on our relations with God. The first commandment prohibits other gods, establishing the sanctity of ultimate allegiance to the one true God. The second commandment forbids graven images, establishing the sanctity of God's image. The third commandment bans taking His name in vain, establishing the sanctity of God's authority.

The fourth commandment is different. It concerns both God and ourselves, so it has both a vertical and horizontal dimension.

The fourth commandment communicates the sanctity of time by honoring the Sabbath day of rest. It is practical instruction on living out the first three commandments.

The next set of commandments, the fifth through the tenth commandment, concern how we relate to others. They involve a horizontal dimension.

The fifth commandment establishes the sacredness of parental authority by honoring parents. The remaining commandments establish the sanctity of human life (sixth commandment), sanctity of marriage (seventh commandment), sanctity of property (eighth commandment), sanctity of truth (ninth commandment), and sanctity of motives (tenth commandment).¹

God gives the law in order to legislate the upholding of goodness and righteousness among His people. The Ten Commandments flow methodically from the first set of three commandments (how individuals relate to God) to the fourth commandment (how individuals relate to both God and themselves) to the last set of six commandments (how individuals relate to others.)

Instead of reading the Ten Commandments negatively about what not to

¹ Notes on the Ten Commandments, taken from Dr. Daniel R. Heimbach's class. "Introduction of Christian Ethics," Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, Wake Forest, NC.

do, focusing on what is **not** required of us, what if we read them positively about what we should do, focusing on what is required of us?

When we read the Ten Commandments positively instead of negatively, we realize a couple things. First, we begin to grasp the true height of the law. Secondly, when we look at the law positively, we can sense the true heart of the law.



How does the vertical dimension of the Ten Commandments impact the horizontal relationships in your life?

3. THE FULFILLMENT OF THE LAW

Many Bible scholars believe that there are 613 unique commandments in the Old Testament, with the Ten Commandments serving as the foundational legal document that supports all the others. The Pharisees asked Jesus how one should differentiate and wisely follow all these laws. Jesus recognized that there are many laws throughout the Bible, but He said they all serve to accomplish two main things found in Matthew 22:36-40.

Although Jesus is not mentioned in Exodus 20, the Ten Commandments resonate with the person and work of Jesus Christ. He loved God with all His heart, and He loved others as He loved Himself.

The personal, relational, covenant-making YAHWEH who delivered the Israelites out of slavery in Egypt is the same YAHWEH who gave the Ten Commandments as an expression of His love. He sent Jesus to deliver His people out of sin and death.

It has been said that the same God who makes the demands of us, meets the demands for us.



How are you fulfilling Matthew 22:36-40 in your life?

HOW HIS PLAN SHAPES OUR PURPOSE

How do we as believers personally fulfill the law in our lives?

We begin by accepting the fact that we fall short of the law and have not fulfilled it—nor will we ever fulfill the law. Jesus has fulfilled it for us. As we reflect on His grace, we begin to follow the law by responding in humble, grateful obedience in light of what He has already done for us.

God is not after obedience for obedience's sake. He is after a different kind of obedience – one characterized by love, not fear; one defined by gratefulness, not drudgery. God does not simply want our behavioral compliance. He wants our hearts transformed.

God's story of deliverance is not just about the Israelites. It is about us too. He came into my story and your story to deliver us from our sin and our death – and from the intense pressure to keep performing. In Jesus Christ, He stepped into our stories and performed in our place. He fulfilled all the laws and expectations that we could not fulfill and failed to fulfill. And then He delivered us from our sin and death by dying in our place for the sin that we committed. In Jesus, God has delivered us not only from being our very worst, but also from the pressure to be our very best.

Like the Israelites, we are freed from our greatest enemies and oppressors. We have been delivered. Therefore, let us obey and follow the One who has delivered us and wants only what is best for us.

"TEACHER, WHICH IS THE GREAT COMMANDMENT IN THE LAW?" AND [JESUS] SAID TO HIM, "YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND. THIS IS THE GREAT AND FIRST COMMANDMENT. AND A SECOND IS LIKE IT: YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF. ON THESE TWO COMMANDMENTS DEPEND ALL THE LAW AND THE PROPHETS."

MATTHEW 22:36-40



———— *COMING UP NEXT:*
THE STORY OF **PROMISE**

THE STORY OF PROMISE



Have you ever noticed that endings bring new beginnings? We have all had those “ending” moments in life that come in many ways: job loss, relocation, death of a loved one, divorce. Some endings are easier than others, some come as expected while others in unexpected ways. But one thing stands true no matter how the ending comes about, endings serve as a catalyst for new beginnings. Our choices in the face of new beginnings impact our future endings, just like they did for the Israelites in the days of old.

Over the next 5 weeks we will look at the Story of Promise, examining passages from Joshua, 1 and 2 Samuel and 1 Kings, that tell the next part of the story of God’s plan to fulfill His promise to redeem and restore His people. With each step of the journey, we see endings, new beginnings and good and bad choices made by His covenant people. Yet, God’s faithfulness to His promises remains unwavering through it all.

The book of Joshua tells us how God – in His time and in His way – fulfilled the promise of the land in the Abrahamic covenant by taking the Israelites across the Jordan River to a new beginning in Canaan, thus ending their time of 40 years in the wilderness. Under the leadership of Joshua, God fulfilled His promise through the conquest of the Canaanites and the allocation of the land amongst the twelve tribes of Israel. Once in the land, Joshua

and the people of God had to make a choice on how they would live their lives before a “*living God*” who delivered them to the land of promise.

1 and 2 Samuel and 1 Kings give us insight on endings and new beginnings as we look at the life of King David, the Davidic covenant and God’s faithfulness in fulfilling His promise to provide a King for the nation.

God’s promise to David started when David was a young teenager out in the field tending sheep. David was not on anyone’s radar as a potential leader. He was the youngest of the sons of Jesse. He was not trained in any special skill. He did not have an education that would lead to a prominent job or responsibility. Yet, God saw something in David that was special. God looked at the heart of David and saw a King. The promise God made to David at such a young age never waived, though there were many obstacles and challenges along the way. David was not perfect, but he was always repentant and willing to lay his heart before God in confession and obedience. In David’s life and lineage we will see God’s promise made, fulfilled and affirmed.

Join us for the next 5 weeks as we step into His Story, The Story of Promise!

Feb 29/Mar 1	Promise Kept - Joshua 3
Mar 7/8	Promise Committed - Joshua 24
Mar 14/15	Promise Made - 1 Samuel 16
Mar 21/22	Promise Fulfilled - 2 Samuel 7
Mar 28/29	Promise Affirmed - 1 Kings 11

PROMISE

KEPT

DATE

February 29 & March 1

WEEK

1 of 5

KEY VERSE

Joshua 3:5

LESSON OUTLINE

1. Set Your Eyes On Him
2. Set Yourself Apart
3. Step Out In Faith
4. Step Into the Promise

THINGS TO KNOW

- Joshua was Moses' assistant in Exodus.
- Joshua was a good leader of the people because he was a great follower of God.

THEN JOSHUA SAID TO THE PEOPLE, "CONSECRATE YOURSELVES, FOR TOMORROW THE LORD WILL DO WONDERS AMONG YOU."

J O S H U A 3 : 5

SETTING THE STAGE



From the beginning of creation, we were designed to live as God's people in God's land under God's righteous rule. Beginning in Genesis 3, man chose his own way over God's way and Adam and Eve were expelled from the Garden of Eden; but, they were given a promise that a descendant would be born who would bring an end to the curse. From Genesis 3 through the end of Revelation we see the story, His Story, unfold. The story of God working out His plan to redeem and restore His people.

God would accomplish His plan from a small tract of land bridged between two continents. From this small area of the world, God's covenant blessing would extend worldwide.

Beginning with Abraham in Genesis 12, this Kingdom Promise of people, land, and blessing was given by the Lord to His servants (Genesis 12, 13, 15; Exodus 3).

READ: Genesis 12:1-3; 13:14-17; 15:13-16; Exodus 3:7-8

As we saw in the Story of Deliverance, at the Red Sea, the Lord separated His people from their old life as they crossed over into new territory. At Mount Sinai, He brought them into a covenant relationship with Himself. But because of their unbelief and rebellion, that generation would not enter the Promised Land but wander in the wilderness for 40 years. As we begin the book of Joshua we see a new generation of Israelites poised at the edge of the Jordan River, preparing to cross into their new beginning and take possession of the land. The Promise is about to be fulfilled.

Joshua is first introduced to us as Moses' assistant in Exodus. In Joshua 1 we see he is now the leader of the people as the Lord now speaks to him the promise of old. *Continued on page 68 >*

PROMISE

K E P T

Setting the Stage, continued > God kept His promise of people and blessing to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Moses. And now, He will use Joshua to lead the Israelites in taking possession of the land. In the verses above, the Lord affirms that it is time for Joshua to step out in faith, step into His purpose, and lead the Israelites into the Promised Land. To take the first step toward a new beginning, Joshua believed the Word of God and he trusted the promises of God. Joshua's belief determined his behavior.

READ: Joshua 1:1-17

POINTS TO PONDER

1. SET YOUR EYES ON HIM

The people were to remain 2,000 cubits, about 3,000 feet behind so that ALL could see the ark. When God told them "follow the ark," He was telling them, "Follow Me." Even today we need to make sure there are no obstacles or distractions that prevent us from following God, keeping our eyes on Him.

The ark symbolizes God's presence with His people. He tells them, take the ark, with the priests leading the way. I am with you. God is letting them know that victory would come at the river and far beyond as they focused on and followed Him.

When we set our eyes on Him, we can rest in His presence and easily take the next step, even when it is a way we have never passed before.



How have obstacles or people prevented you from keeping your eyes on God?

2. SET YOURSELF APART

“Consecrate yourselves, for tomorrow the LORD will do wonders among you,” was both an order and a promise.

Joshua was making sure the Israelites’ hearts were ready for the next step through consecration. This process of bathing and changing clothes is symbolic of preparing for a new beginning. We are to set ourselves apart **from** sin and apart **to** God, giving ourselves fully to Him.

Joshua led a surrendered life. His example set the stage for the Israelites to lead a surrendered life as well.



What are some ways you can consecrate yourself before the Lord?

3. STEP OUT IN FAITH ---

It was the responsibility of the priests to carry the ark of the covenant and go before the people as they marched. They were to lead by stepping out in faith, trusting God and relying on His faithfulness.

Joshua's authority came from the Lord. The Israelites would face many challenges ahead and would need a strong servant leader to guide them through the days ahead.

Living faith always leads to action and requires the first step. Joshua reminds the people that they serve a living God who is able to do abundantly more than they can even imagine.

Joshua reminded God's people of His Word and encouraged them to trust and obey. He lived his life in the shadow of God's Word. Joshua was a good leader because he was a great follower of God.



How has the Word of God encouraged you?

4. STEP INTO THE PROMISE ---

Most of the year, the Jordan River was about a hundred feet wide, but during flood season the river would overflow its banks and expand to about a mile wide.¹ For three days they were camped beside it, watching the impassable waters, hearing the rush of the river all hours of the day

¹ Warren Wiersbe, *The Wiersbe Bible Commentary, Old Testament*, p. 391.

HOW HIS PLAN SHAPES OUR PURPOSE

With one small step of faith, God did for the Israelites what they could not do for themselves. And He continued to assist as they fought battle after battle to take the Promised Land. Oh, there were defeats along the way, but the promise of the land was fulfilled. Under Joshua, God delivered the land into the hands of His people as they trusted Him and obeyed. God calls us to trust and obey. To step out in faith, trusting Him to go before us, to come behind us and to lead the way. God's Word is sure. The Jordan is behind us and Canaan is before us. What awaits ahead if only we will take that next step of faith into the promise of His inheritance?

So often we become complacent because of the familiar. We want something new, something different. However, we get scared or nervous; not trusting ourselves or perhaps even God in the process. We want to change but the familiar is what we know, even though it may not be best.

The first step is always the hardest. The first step is often a bit shaky. If you have ever seen a little baby trying to take the first step, it is not always a pretty sight. There is some wobbling that takes place. There is some pausing that takes place. There is also some falling down that takes place. Yet, the baby keeps striving to take that first step, which leads to the second step, which leads to walking and eventually running.

We are still only a few months into the new year. A year in which we are focusing our influence. A year where God may be speaking to you in taking a first step to a new beginning. Do not let fear or doubt stand in your way. Be in prayer to see how God is leading. And perhaps God is going to use you in the life of someone else to help them in their new beginning. God fulfilled His promise to His people after 430 years of slavery and another 40 years in the wilderness. The promise fulfilled may not always be swift, but it always happens in God's timing. It starts with the first step; is it time for you to get your toes wet?

PROMISE

COMMITTED

DATE

March 7 & 8

WEEK

2 of 5

KEY VERSES

Joshua 21:45 & Joshua 24:15

LESSON OUTLINE

1. S - Surrender
2. E - Exalt God Only
3. R - Remember
4. V - Veracity - Serve in Truth and Sincerity
5. E - Engage - Hear God's Voice and Obey

THINGS TO KNOW

- The Canaanites consisted of the following people groups, sometimes referred to as the "ites": Hivites, Gergashites, Jebusites, Amorites, Hittites, Perizzites and more.

NONE OF THE GOOD
PROMISES THE LORD HAD
MADE TO THE HOUSE OF
ISRAEL FAILED. EVERYTHING
WAS FULFILLED.

J O S H U A 2 1 : 4 5

SETTING THE STAGE



The book of Joshua tells us how God – in His time and in His way – fulfilled the promise of the land in the Abrahamic covenant. Under the leadership of Joshua, God fulfilled His promise to give them land through the conquest of Canaan and the allocation of the land amongst the twelve tribes of Israel.

Last week we looked at Joshua 3 and how they were called to step out in faith and step into the promise of the land and cross the Jordan River. From Chapters 3 to 23, the Israelites engage in battles with the Canaanites who inhabit the land and by God’s hand ultimately take possession of the land. In each battle, we see God’s faithfulness and Israel’s success when they follow His commands. Likewise, we also see the failure of Israel when they do not. Why did God seek to drive out the “ites” of the land? The culture of the Canaanites had become extremely morally corrupt, including child sacrifice. God did not want that influence on His chosen people. These stories are unique to this time in history, unique to the Israelites and limited to those possessing the Promised Land at that time.

READ: Joshua 21:44-45; 24:1-28

PROMISE

COMMITTED

POINTS TO PONDER

God was committed to His promise. In Chapter 21:44-45 we see the key text of the book. God delivered their enemies to them. Everything He had promised concerning the land had been fulfilled. So, in Chapter 23-24, we see Joshua's final words to the people, calling them to respond to the fulfillment of God's ancient promise to Abraham.

Each day we are confronted with countless choices. Some have minimal consequences, while other decisions can be immediately life-changing. At the end of the day and the end of our lives, it is important to remember that we are a product of the choices we make. Each decision helps to define who we are, whose we are, and the impact we have on others. As believers, our destiny is not a matter of chance, it is a matter of choice.

In Joshua Chapter 24, in his final words to the Israelites, Joshua calls for them to commit to a choice telling them, "*choose this day whom you will serve.*" It defines who they are, whose they are and their ultimate destiny. And, contrary to popular opinion, this is not a one-time decision, but rather involves a daily commitment of choosing whom they will serve.

The people respond to Joshua's question with a resounding YES, not realizing it is not something they can do in their own strength.

What does it mean to choose to "serve the Lord?" Though the details may look different today than they did during Joshua's time, the principles remain the same. Using SERVE as an acronym, let's take a look at what Joshua chapter 24 tells us about how to SERVE:

1. S - SURRENDER

Though the people spoke their affirmation with a resounding yes, Joshua knows this cannot be merely a decision of the mind. It must also be a

decision of the heart. Because of sin, man is not capable of perfectly serving God in his own power and strength, it requires divine intervention.

To serve the Lord requires you to wholly surrender to Him each and every day. It cannot be just part of you that surrenders nor can it be only on Sundays and Wednesdays. Surrender is exchanging our self-dependency for God-dependency. Yielding to God. This is not an act of weakness, rather it is a step of strength because it is surrendering to the authority of someone greater, stronger, wiser and more capable than us.



How can you surrender today?

2. E - EXALT GOD ONLY

Look again at Joshua's words to the Israelites in verses 20-23.

Many of the people the Israelites encountered in Canaan believed in regional or limited gods. For example, they believed one of their gods was in control of the Jordan River and protected them from invaders. This is part of the reason why God's miraculous act in drying it up for the Israelites to cross had such a huge impact on the Canaanites. (*see Joshua 5:1*)

Throughout the Bible, we see the greatest temptation for the other nations and God's chosen people was not to simply reject YAHWEH outright but to add Him to their worship of other gods. To add Him alongside Baal, Asherah and others.

We may not have personal names or statues of little gods in our society today, but we all are equally as guilty of allowing God to be in charge of some parts of our lives but not others, or allowing the important spiritual things to rule us on Sundays but other things to rule us Monday - Saturday. To serve Him we must exalt Him only.



How can you exalt God today?

3. R - REMEMBER

In serving God, it is essential to remember all that He has done. His Word recounts His grace, deliverance, and promises and actions on our behalf since the beginning of time. Studying His Word embeds these stories in our minds so that we can remember and recount them to others.

At any point in time, we are one generation away from not remembering the work which the Lord has done for His people. To serve we need to remember and to recount to our children and grandchildren all that the Lord has done in our lives and the lives of those who have gone before us.



Remember and write down three things God has done for you to show grace, deliverance and promise.

4. V - VERACITY - SERVE IN TRUTH AND SINCERITY

The Dictionary defines veracity as “habitual observance of truth ...”¹ The synonyms listed are truthfulness, sincerity, authenticity, integrity, trustworthiness. Serving the Lord in truth and sincerity means serving Him for His glory, not our own. Serving to honor Him, not to honor ourselves

¹ Dictionary.com/veracity

or to pat ourselves on the back. Joshua exemplified this type of service throughout his lifetime.

This principle, like the others, is as true for us today as it was for the Israelites. God calls us to serve Him in sincerity and in truth, standing upon His Word, boldly declaring our faith as His servant, and walking in His ways.



How can you show veracity to God today?

5. E - ENGAGE- HEAR GOD'S VOICE AND OBEY _____

It is easy for God's voice to get muffled. Our ears tune in to secular noise so easily that we tune God out subconsciously. It takes intentional engagement to hear and obey. As Chuck Swindoll says, "thinking right always precedes acting right."² Serving requires engaging the heart and the mind to hear from the Lord, then carrying out His commands.



How can you engage with God today?

² Chuck Swindoll, *Improving Your Serve*, Nashville: Word Publishing, 1981.

HOW HIS PLAN SHAPES OUR PURPOSE

God gave the land He had promised to the nation of Israel. Joshua did his best to lead and guide them in taking possession of the land. Yet, the people allowed some inhabitants to remain despite the commands of the Lord. Ultimately, the Canaanite people groups became a damaging influence on Israel.

In Joshua's lifetime, the Israelites honored the commitment they made at Shechem that day to serve the Lord but then fell away from the Lord after his death. The good news for us is that because of the birth, life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. (*Romans 8:37*)

Serving the Lord does not just happen by accident; it only happens with intentionality. You can choose how to live your life. You can choose what to make your priority. You can choose when to make a change. It always comes down to choice. And once you make that choice you have to decide if you are committed to following through. Joshua was committed to his choice of serving the Lord. Joshua was committed to his choice of leading the people of God. Joshua was committed to his choice of making a difference in the lives of others.

We can choose to commit to who we will serve. We can commit to stand with Joshua and say, *As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.* Remember, it is a daily choice.

"NOW THEREFORE,
PUT AWAY THE FOREIGN
GODS WHICH ARE
IN YOUR MIDST, AND
INCLINE YOUR HEARTS
TO THE LORD, THE GOD
OF ISRAEL." THE PEOPLE
SAID TO JOSHUA, "WE
WILL SERVE THE LORD
OUR GOD AND WE WILL
OBEY HIS VOICE."

J O S H U A 2 4 : 2 3

PROMISE

M A D E

DATE

March 14 & 15

WEEK

3 of 5

KEY VERSE

1 Samuel 16:7

LESSON OUTLINE

1. Do Not Stay In the Endings of Life
2. New Beginnings Start with Going
3. New Beginnings Do Not Always Look the Way We Think They Should

THINGS TO KNOW

- David (“beloved”) was the eighth child in his family.
- David was from the tribe of Judah. His lineage would lead to the birth of Jesus Christ.

BUT THE LORD SAID TO SAMUEL,
“DO NOT LOOK ON HIS APPEARANCE
OR ON THE HEIGHT OF HIS STATURE,
BECAUSE I HAVE REJECTED HIM. FOR
THE LORD SEES NOT AS MAN SEES: MAN
LOOKS ON THE OUTWARD APPEARANCE,
BUT THE LORD LOOKS ON THE HEART.”

1 S A M U E L 1 6 : 7

SETTING THE STAGE



Have you ever noticed that endings always bring new beginnings? Some endings are easier than others and some come as expected while others are unexpected. Whatever the case, we have all experienced endings that were the catalyst to new beginnings. As we study 1 Samuel 16 the nation of Israel by way of King Saul had just experienced an ending of sorts. King Saul openly disobeyed God, building a literal wall between himself and God, and himself and God's prophet, Samuel. In Samuel 15, God rejects Saul as the King, setting up a tragic ending for Saul and for Israel (*see 1 Samuel 15:16-26*).

This caused anxiety for God's chosen people of Israel as Saul continued to rule until his death, though rejected by God as king. The rest of 1 Samuel chronicles the deterioration of King Saul and the development of King David, as Saul's rule comes to an end.

But endings bring new beginnings and in 1 Samuel 16 the nation of Israel is given hope for a new beginning as young David is anointed as King of Israel. Though the Spirit of the Lord came on him that day (*1 Samuel 16:13*), his reign would not begin for several years. God is faithful to keep His promises and He promised to raise up a king for His people, Israel. Throughout history, Christians have struggled to turn loose of things from the past and move forward into the future God has purposed for us. In this lesson we will look specifically at 1 Samuel 16 and see how we can embrace new beginnings as God leads.

PROMISE

M A D E

READ: 1 Samuel 16:1-13

POINTS TO PONDER

1. DO NOT STAY IN THE ENDINGS OF LIFE

David was chosen by God from eternity past to be the ruler of Israel. The rejection of Saul did not force the LORD to a new course of action. Rather, God's action followed His omniscient plan as He used Saul's disobedience as the human occasion for implementing His higher plan. God, in the superiority of His own wisdom, raised up a king who would fulfill His perfect will.

This ending for the nation of Israel was not easy. Samuel was in mourning (*1 Samuel 16:1*) and was clearly grieved by what had taken place. But God admonishes Samuel to mourn no longer.

Like Samuel, we too must be careful not to stay in the endings that take place in our lives. We should process them and move forward in a healthy way; but, to stay in the endings will rob us of the new beginnings that God will bring.



Are there any areas of your life that are robbing you of a new beginning?

2. NEW BEGINNINGS START WITH GOING _____

As Samuel grieves, notice the Lord tells him to “Go.” In other words, take action. For some of us, the biggest barrier in moving from an ending to a beginning is simply taking the first step. Samuel has questions and is probably a bit cautious in doing what the Lord has instructed. God unfolds His plan and Samuel is saying, “Wait, what? You want me to go where?” Here is the secret: when God brings you to a new beginning you will rarely be able to play it safe. It is in these times we must trust God over our feelings. As Paul told the Corinthians, we are to “*walk by faith, not by sight*” (2 Corinthians 5:7).

Faith is simply taking God at His word.

Practically, we must remember that we are a part of God’s plan and make sure that we are not simply trying to make Him a part of our plan. It is His plan, our purpose.



In what way is God calling you to take action?

3. NEW BEGINNINGS DO NOT ALWAYS LOOK _____ THE WAY WE THINK THEY SHOULD

Samuel’s purpose was to anoint the next king of Israel- a new beginning indeed! Seven of Jesse’s sons were lined up for Samuel to look at and the Lord, through Samuel, rejects them all. They all had great outward characteristics, but this key verse in 1 Samuel 16 holds as true today as it did then: “*For the LORD sees not as man sees: man looks on the outward appearance, but the LORD looks on the heart*” (v. 7). This must have shocked Samuel and Jesse. They had an idea of what was going to happen, but their plan was not God’s plan.

David, the youngest of Jesse's boys, was out back with the sheep. Kings were often described as shepherds both in Israel and in the ancient Near East. Hence the irony here is that the one who had not been permitted by his father to attend the festivities with Samuel was engaged in duties which symbolize metaphorically his great future. Nobody expected God's man to be David.

So many times, in life we have an idea of how things should be, but God does not operate that way. Many times, the new beginnings that God brings us look nothing like we imagined, but they are exactly what we need.

After looking at Jesse's seven sons, Samuel at last found the man of God's choice, a man after God's own heart (*1 Samuel 13:14*). God did use David to bring a new beginning to Israel, both governmentally and spiritually.

Surely, no one would have ever expected this new beginning to start with an 11-year-old shepherd. Most times when God does something it is rarely in a way we could have thought or imagined. Our new beginnings may not always be what we want, but with God as the author, they will be exactly what we need when we need them.



In what way has God surprised you with a new beginning?

HOW HIS PLAN SHAPES OUR PURPOSE

So often we think we know what is best for our lives to the exclusion of God. We might subconsciously think God is too big to care or too big to know what we need. We tend to marginalize some decisions and overemphasize others. Regardless of the size of the decision, as Christ-followers we need to be willing not to stay in the endings of life. There are some things that come to an end for a very specific purpose. We must be willing and ready to step forward, and “Go” as the Lord leads. Often the road the Lord leads is not what we expect. There are curves along the way, even potholes that catch us off guard. The life of David had lots of curves and potholes some self-inflicted others not. David’s life was a rollercoaster of a journey, yet God had a plan and David had a purpose. God even used those detours along the way to shape David into a man after God’s own heart.

It is probably safe to say that none of us will be anointed as a king. But each of us as Christ-followers have the Holy Spirit. And perhaps it is time for you to allow the Spirit of the Lord to rush upon you in a fresh way and move you forward. Never underestimate what God wants to accomplish in your life. David was the youngest boy out in the field taking care of sheep yet God chose him. God is in the life-changing business. Remember the words of the Lord found in Isaiah:

ISAIAH 55:8 *“For My thoughts are not your thoughts, Nor are your ways My ways,” declares the LORD. ⁹ “For as the heavens are higher than the earth, So are My ways higher than your ways And My thoughts than your thoughts.”*

PROMISE

FULFILLED

DATE

March 21 & 22

WEEK

4 of 5

KEY VERSE

2 Samuel 7:8

LESSON OUTLINE

1. The Covenant's Explanation
2. The Covenant's Establishment
3. The Covenant's Meaning Today

THINGS TO KNOW

- In Hebrew, the word for house (bayith), can also mean palace.
- In Hebrew, the word for temple and house is the same word for dynasty.

NOW, THEREFORE, THUS YOU SHALL SAY TO MY SERVANT DAVID, 'THUS SAYS THE LORD OF HOSTS, I TOOK YOU FROM THE PASTURE, FROM FOLLOWING THE SHEEP, THAT YOU SHOULD BE PRINCE OVER MY PEOPLE ISRAEL.'

2 SAMUEL 7:8 (ESV)

SETTING THE STAGE



The establishment of the house of David is an integral part of God's master plan to fulfill the promise made in Genesis to defeat the enemy and crush the head of the serpent. At this point in God's plan, He has brought His people out of Egypt and has given them a good land. He has driven out their enemies, making His presence through guidance and assistance in their battles. But because of their sinfulness in the days of the Judges, God was angered and delivered them into the hands of their enemies. And then, Psalm 78 tells us that God came to their rescue, established sanctuary and remedied their sin. He paved the way for righteousness in setting up His servant David as the shepherd of Israel, and as the Servant King on the throne.

The Davidic Covenant represents one of the most significant moments in His Story and in defining His Plan-Our Purpose as the people of God. Psalm 78, verses 67-72, makes it clear that the placement of David on the throne was of major significance in God's redemptive purpose and was essential to the establishment of a godly rule in Israel. *Continued on page 90 >*

PSALM 78:67-72

*He rejected the tent of Joseph;
he did not choose the tribe of Ephraim,
⁶⁸ but he chose the tribe of Judah,
Mount Zion, which he loves.
⁶⁹ He built his sanctuary like the high heavens,
like the earth, which he has founded forever.
⁷⁰ He chose David his servant
and took him from the sheepfolds;
⁷¹ from following the nursing ewes he brought him
to shepherd Jacob his people,
Israel his inheritance.
⁷² With upright heart he shepherded them
and guided them with his skillful hand.*

PROMISE

F U L F I L L E D

Setting the Stage, continued > The succession of the Davidic kings under the Old Covenant was a pre-illustration of the unbroken eternal reign of the Lord Jesus, who, even now, reigns at the right hand in heaven. Let's take a look at the Davidic Covenant, its explanation and its meaning for us today.

The Davidic Covenant - A Summary

The Davidic Covenant is a covenant that took place between King David and God, when King David made plans to build God a house of cedar.

The Davidic Covenant is an unconditional covenant, meaning its fulfillment does not depend on David's actions, or the actions of any of the members of his household. Both David and Solomon committed grievous sins (2 *Samuel* 11:1-27; 1 *Kings* 11:4-8), and though these sins were displeasing and hurtful to God, He would still honor His promise to establish David's house eternally. God had purposed to do it, and He would accomplish His promise, despite the sinful actions of men (2 *Timothy* 2:13).

Jesus Christ was called the Son of David, referring to the everlasting kingship of David's house, according to the Davidic Covenant. The promise that David's house and throne would be established eternally is a prophecy concerning the coming Messiah, specifically, that He would come from the house and lineage of David (*Matthew* 21:9).

Today as we look at God's covenant with David we will see:

1. The covenant's explanation.
2. The covenant's establishment.
3. The covenant's meaning today.

POINTS TO PONDER

1. THE COVENANT'S EXPLANATION ---

David pours the thoughts of his heart out to his faithful prophet Nathan. He says, *“See now, I dwell in a house of cedar, but the ark of God dwells within tent curtains.”* David sensed the incongruity of his living in an impressive palace while the Ark of God was still in a tent. David’s own humility and his love for the Lord moved him with the desire to bring about a change in that situation.

In 2 Samuel 7:6, the Lord reminds David of an important spiritual truth. He says, *“For I have not dwelt in a house since the day I brought up the sons of Israel from Egypt, even to this day; but I have been moving about in a tent, even in a tabernacle.”*

Stop for a moment and think how profound those words are.

First, they point to God’s willingness to identify with His people. If His people must travel in the wilderness in tents, God is going to be there with them.

Secondly, these words emphasize God’s continual presence with His people. He is not distant or unconcerned. But He is near. He is in the midst of His people.

In 2 Samuel 7:8-17 the covenant which God inaugurates with David is explained and established. God has been with David, He has given him victory over His enemies. God is the one who has made David great, He is the one who will continue to make David great.

Furthermore, God says in verse 11 that He will establish His people in their own land, and He will give them rest from their enemies. And ultimately, that the Lord Himself will build David a house.

The Lord was not speaking of building David a house of cedar. He was speaking of building David a dynasty.



How does God show Himself to be near you?

2. THE COVENANT'S ESTABLISHMENT

In 2 Samuel 7:12-17 we have the formal inauguration of God's covenant with David, though the word covenant is not found here. Other passages explicitly state that this was a covenant inauguration. For instance, in Psalm 89:

PSALM 89:3-4 (ESV) *I have made a covenant with My chosen, I have sworn to David, My servant, your seed will I establish forever and build up your throne to all generations.*

The promise was not that the lineage of David would reign for a long time, but that it would reign forever. That very fact leads the prophets of the Old Testament to say that this Davidic promise would only be fulfilled in the Messiah. That, of course, is exactly how the New Testament interprets it. This reign is ultimately fulfilled in the reign of the son of David, Jesus Christ and His eternal messianic rule. This promise finds its ultimate fulfillment in the reign of Christ.



If God called a young shepherd to be king, how can God use you?

3. THE COVENANT'S MEANING TODAY ---

The mission of the church today is to submit ourselves to the Son of David who now rules invisibly from heaven until He puts every enemy under His feet. And, our mission is to announce the good news to people in every neighborhood and every nation that they can be happy subjects of Christ's kingdom forever if they transfer their allegiance from the kingdom of this world to the kingdom of Christ.

To put it another way, personal holiness means learning the attitudes and customs of a new kingdom: the kingdom of Christ. And personal evangelism means telling people that the rightful king of the world against whom they have rebelled is willing to grant amnesty to all who return and live under His rule.



How can you focus your influence this week to tell people about Jesus, the Son of David?

HOW HIS PLAN SHAPES OUR PURPOSE

Look at Isaiah 55:1-3. The point of this invitation is that the very sovereignty, wisdom and love of God which assured David of an eternal kingdom can also assure you of God's eternal kindness as a part of that kingdom. Isaiah 55:1-3 says, *Continued on page 94* >

HOW HIS PLAN SHAPES OUR PURPOSE *continued*

ISAIAH 55:1-3 (NIV) *“Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost.*

² Why spend money on what is not bread, and your labor on what does not satisfy? Listen, listen to me, and eat what is good, and you will delight in the richest of fare. ³ Give ear and come to me; listen, that you may live. I will make an everlasting covenant with you, my faithful love promised to David.”

The very mercy and faithfulness that guarantees David an eternal kingdom can guarantee you all the joy and righteousness and peace of that kingdom. It is a promise made by God. God is saying to you this morning: “if you will come to me empty-handed and hungry, willing to receive what I give, then I will write for myself in your presence a job description and bind myself with an oath to treat you forever with the same mercy and faithfulness that I have demonstrated in my covenant with David.”

Hear the entreaty of the Lord Jesus Himself in the last chapter of the Bible:

REVELATION 22:16 (ESV) *I, Jesus, have sent my angel to testify to you about these things for the churches. I am the root and the descendant of David, the bright morning star.*

Come to the Son of David, come to the King of Kings, and He will sign with His own blood your personal copy of the job description He has written for Himself- to be God to you. And He will give it to you as an eternal covenant, never to turn away from doing you good.

The choice is yours. What will you do with God’s covenant promise?

I, JESUS, HAVE SENT MY
ANGEL TO TESTIFY TO
YOU ABOUT THESE
THINGS FOR THE
CHURCHES. I AM
THE ROOT AND THE
DESCENDANT OF
DAVID, THE BRIGHT
MORNING STAR.

REVELATION 22:16 (ESV)

PROMISE

A F F I R M E D

DATE

March 28 & 29

WEEK

5 of 5

KEY VERSE

1 Kings 11:9-10

LESSON OUTLINE

1. Solomon Focused on the Wrong Things.
2. Solomon Tuned God Out.
3. Solomon Trusted Himself Instead of God.
4. Solomon Refused to Listen to People Around Him.

THINGS TO KNOW

- Solomon was a prolific writer, composing 1,005 songs and 3,000 proverbs.

AND THE LORD WAS ANGRY WITH SOLOMON, BECAUSE HIS HEART HAD TURNED AWAY FROM THE LORD, THE GOD OF ISRAEL, WHO HAD APPEARED TO HIM TWICE AND HAD COMMANDED HIM CONCERNING THIS THING, THAT HE SHOULD NOT GO AFTER OTHER GODS. BUT HE DID NOT KEEP WHAT THE LORD COMMANDED.

1 KINGS 11:9-10

SETTING THE STAGE



For 33 years David aggressively guided God's united people to greatness, forging a powerful empire. As David grew older, his sons disputed over the succession. But God had revealed to David that He had chosen Solomon to succeed him (see *1 Chronicles 22:9-10*).

David had shared this revelation with Bathsheba, Solomon's mother (*1 Kings 1:13, 17*). He had even announced it to the nation (*1 Chronicles 22:5; 29:1*). Still, Solomon was not the oldest of David's living sons. There were older brothers who understandably disputed his right to the throne.

Finally, one of David's older surviving sons, Adonijah, took steps to gain the succession. Nathan the prophet and Bathsheba insisted that David act. David did. He made Solomon coregent. When Adonijah heard, his supporters deserted him and the young man rushed to the altar of sacrifice to claim sanctuary. His life was spared, and Solomon was secure on the throne.

The story of Solomon is, in many ways, a wonderful success story. He is the wisest man who ever lived. His wealth and power were known to all who lived in Israel and most of those who lived beyond its borders. Solomon was a prolific writer, composing 1,005 songs and 3,000 proverbs. In spite of all this, Solomon's life ended as a disaster. His many foreign wives succeeded in turning his heart from the Lord, which cost Solomon's son much of his kingdom and divided Israel for centuries to come. The lessons we learn from Solomon are largely negative lessons-how not to make the same mistakes Solomon did.

PROMISE

A F F I R M E D

READ: 1 Kings 11:1-43

P O I N T S T O P O N D E R

1 Kings 11 clearly catalogs the sinful shortcomings of Solomon, but it also highlights the faithful promises of God. God gave Solomon unusual wisdom, incredible wealth, and great opportunities, but in his older years, he turned from the Lord, made foolish decisions, and did not end well. “*A man’s own folly ruins his life*” (*Proverbs 19:3*). Solomon wrote those words and probably believed them, but he did not heed them.

It is not difficult to trace the steps in Solomon’s downward path. Let’s take a look:

1. SOLOMON FOCUSED ON THE WRONG THINGS

The danger of marrying pagan unbelievers is spelled out in v. 2, which is a quotation from Deuteronomy 7:4: “*they will turn away your heart after their gods.*” That is exactly what happened to Solomon (v. 3, 4, 9).

Solomon’s compromise was not a sudden thing, for he gradually descended into his idolatry. First, he permitted his wives to worship their own gods; then he tolerated their idolatry and even built shrines for them. Eventually, Solomon began to participate in pagan practices with his wives. His sensual love for his many wives was more compelling than his spiritual love for the Lord, the God of Israel.

This is an important reminder for us: sin starts small and then grows. What are the seemingly small sins in our lives that have the potential to grow out of control? If it could happen to the wisest man in the Bible, it can surely happen to you and me.



What is something in your life you focus on that might be a "wrong thing?"

2. SOLOMON TUNED GOD OUT

God was angry with Solomon. Twice before, God had appeared to him and warned him of the dangers of disobedience (*1 Kings 11:9-10*). God told Solomon that his persistent disobedience would cost him most of his kingdom. For the sake of David, God would put off judgment on Solomon's house until after his death.

Were it not for God's covenant with David and His love for Jerusalem, the city where His temple stood, He would have taken the entire kingdom away from Solomon's descendants. God promised David a dynasty that would not end, and therefore He kept one of David's descendants on the throne in Jerusalem until the city was taken by the Babylonians and destroyed. Of course, the ultimate fulfillment of that covenant promise is in Jesus Christ (*Luke 1:32-33, 69; Acts 2:29-36; Psalm 89:34-37*). God's name was upon the temple (*1 Kings 8:43*), so He preserved Jerusalem, and God's covenant was with David, so He preserved David's dynasty. Such is the grace of God, affirming His promise.

In the midst of great sin, it is easy to become blinded to reality. When we stop listening to God, we will lose the sense of conviction that comes from following Christ.

When we stop listening to God, we will start resisting God. This is exactly what happened to Solomon as recorded in *1 Kings 11:14-25*.



How can you best tune in to God?

3. SOLOMON TRUSTED HIMSELF INSTEAD OF HIS GOD

Anytime we get into this kind of sinful action in life- where we are openly sinning and not fully trusting God - there will be consequences. Those consequences were brutal for Solomon.

God did bring about certain consequences during Solomon's lifetime. He raised up adversaries who opposed Solomon.

We must remember that choices always have consequences. Equally as important is that forgiveness does not erase consequences.

This is so clear with Solomon, but even more so in our lives and in the lives of people we know and love.



How has God forgiven you, yet you still had to deal with the consequences?

4. SOLOMON REFUSED TO LISTEN TO PEOPLE AROUND HIM

1 Kings 11:26-43 capture a long warning from God to Jeroboam (one of Solomon's key leaders) by way of Ahijah.

Ahijah dramatized his message by tearing Jeroboam's new garment into twelve parts and giving him ten of them. This was God's way of saying that Jeroboam would become king of the ten northern tribes of Israel. Ahijah explained why two tribes were still reserved for the house of David and also why Solomon's son was being given only those two tribes. Solomon had sinned greatly by introducing idolatry into the land, a sin that would eventually destroy the nation and lead them into captivity.

It was for David's sake that God protected Judah and Jerusalem.

One cannot read the story of Solomon without asking the question, "How is it possible for a man who was so wise to become so foolish?" As we have spent the last 3 weeks studying David and Solomon, let me suggest that the key may be found in the contrasts between Solomon and his father, David.

There was one crucial difference between David and Solomon. David, though not perfect, had a heart for God. He became the standard by which all subsequent kings were measured. Solomon had a more intellectual relationship with God. He was more detached, more philosophical about his relationship with God. It was an "upper story faith," rather than an intimate, daily, passionate relationship with God.

It is wonderful for us to pursue truth (biblical or natural), but it is no substitute for simple childlike faith in God. Let us give serious thought to those things which caused both David and Solomon to fall.

Let us learn from their experiences so that we need not learn from our own.



Are you more like Solomon (intellectual), David (heartfelt) or both in your relationship with God? Why?

HOW HIS PLAN SHAPES OUR PURPOSE

Let us turn from mere men and their failures to the impeccable Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. Consider the fact that Israel's two greatest kings fell; they fell far short of the standard God had set for the Messiah. If God's promises to David – promises of an eternal kingdom through the offspring of David – are to be fulfilled, it will not be by mere men, no matter how great they may be. Israel wanted a king, and they got one, and then another, and another...The only king who will ever fulfill God's promises and our hopes is God Himself. God fulfilled His promises to David in the person of Jesus Christ.

There are times when we feel so defeated in our circumstances, or that we messed up so badly that there is no hope of a positive outcome. It is in the midst of these difficulties that we can rely on God's promises. Throughout His Story, we have seen God be faithful in the midst of unfaithfulness. God has been gracious in the midst of rejection. God wants to love you in a way that is truly life-changing regardless of what you have done or not done, good or bad. Be confident in what God wants to accomplish in your life through Jesus Christ. As a Christ-follower, you are part of the family of God. God is not going to give up on you, nor turn his back on you. God is going to complete that which He started in your life.



———— *COMING UP NEXT:*
THE STORY OF **FAITH**

