



the**GOSPEL**PROJECT
FOR STUDENTS

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THE GOSPEL PROJECT FOR STUDENTS
DAILY DISCIPLESHIP GUIDE

VOLUME 6

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THE KING'S FOOD

week 35 | 1 session | 1



CHRIST CONNECTION

Christ promised to send a king who he returned to his throne in heaven (John 14:18-17). He gave the king power to feed, satisfy and deliver, giving us guidance and wisdom so that we can live in a way that pleases the Lord.

[illegible]

Intended for group and personal use, this section contains the main point of the session, questions to interact with as a group, and the key components found in the Leader Guide—Christ Connection, Theology Connection, and Cultural Connection.



The **Christ Connection** specifically points out how the Scripture passage for that session points to Jesus, connecting the dots and helping you understand how the books of the Bible fit together.

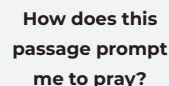
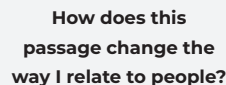
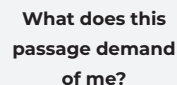
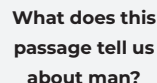
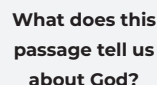
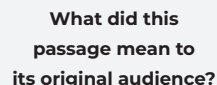
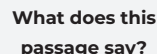


The **Theology Connection** contains an important biblical doctrine for each lesson. Each of these doctrines directly relates to the Bible study material. Knowing these doctrines will help you be more grounded in what Christianity teaches and celebrates and better equipped to explain to others what you actually believe.



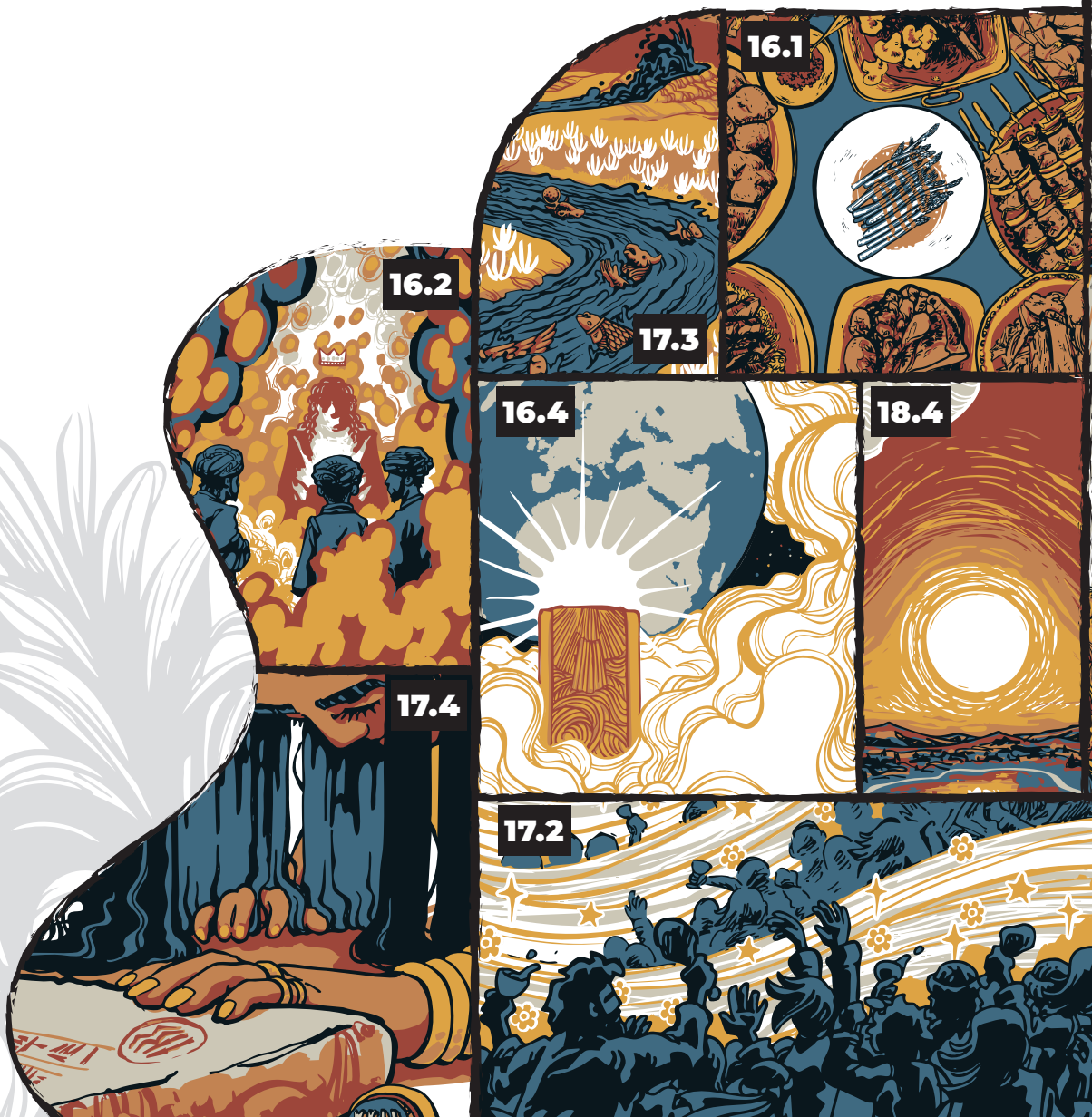
The **Head/Heart/Hands** questions are designed to show how God's story connects with our own. We'll see how Scripture challenges the ways we think, feel, and live. While this certainly happens on an individual level, we do want to stress to you that this calling and mission to live differently is something all Christians share and pursue.

In addition to the group portions of this study, the **Daily Discipleship Guide** also includes five days of devotions following each session. As we journey through the storyline of Scripture over the course of three years, we won't have time to cover some sections of the Bible. These devotions will help with that, filling in the gaps in the biblical storyline and allowing more opportunities to cover biblical themes and insights not discussed during group time. These devotions help you know how to read and interpret the Bible for yourself. Symbols for the Seven Arrows reading method are provided at the beginning of each week's devotions as a reminder of common questions to ask about Scripture as you read each day. The devotion pages are perforated so that you can take them home with you.



VOLUME 6 | ESV

PROPHETS AND PROVISION



16.1 THE KING'S FOOD

17.3 YOUR KING IS COMING

16.2 OUT OF THE FIRE

17.4 IF IT PLEASES THE KING

16.3 INTO THE LIONS' DEN

18.1 FROM THE MOUNDS OF RUBBLE

16.4 AN EVERLASTING DOMINION

18.2 ALL WHO COULD LISTEN

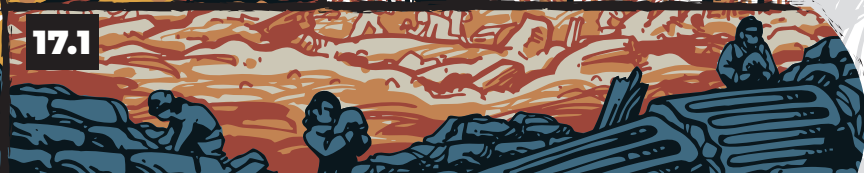
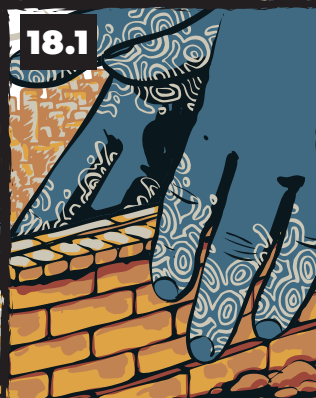
17.1 GATHERED AS ONE

18.3 SACKCLOTH AND DUST

17.2 REBUILDING THE TEMPLE

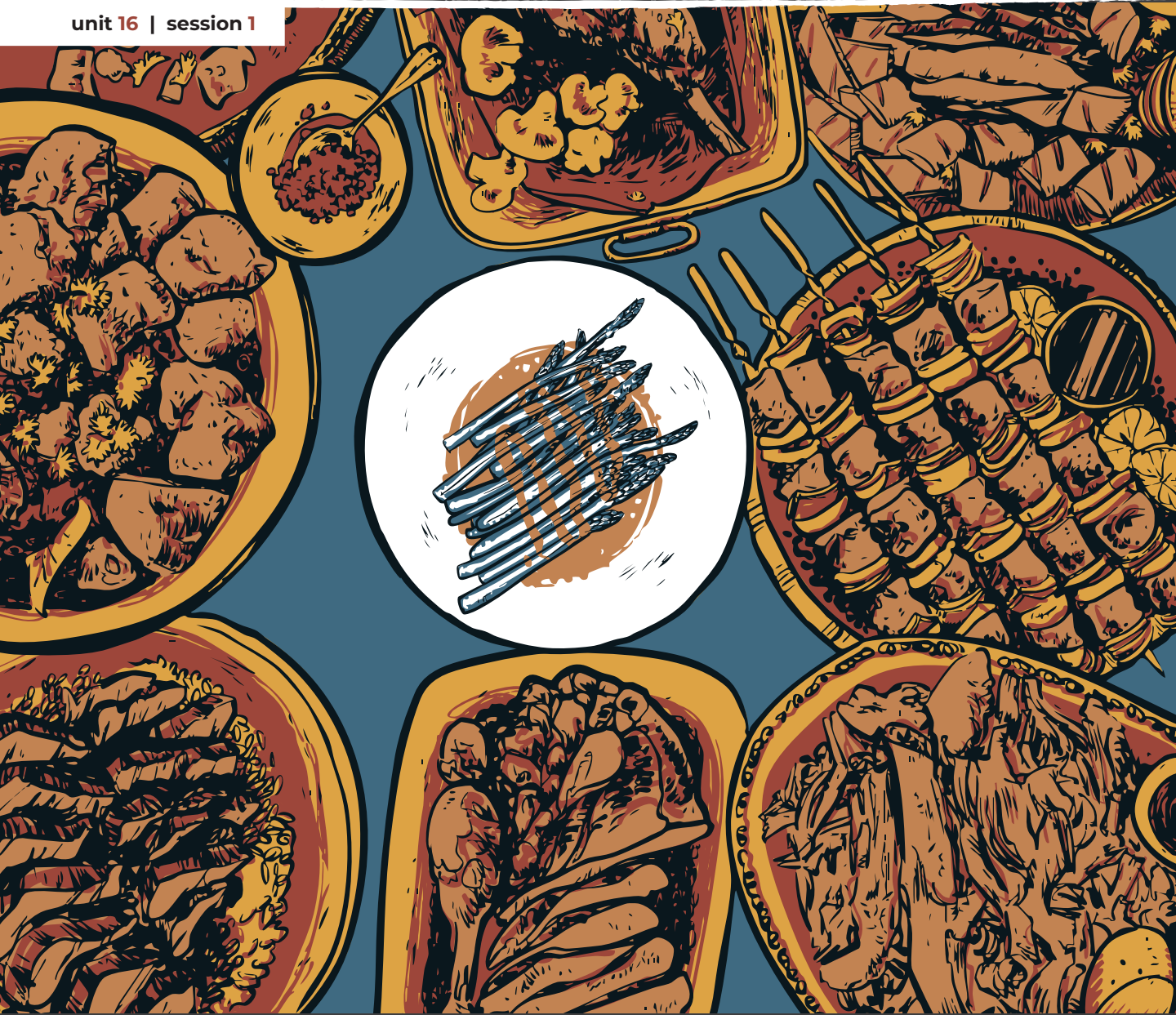
18.4 THE DAY IS COMING

18.5 THE TRUE LIGHT



THE KING'S *food*

unit 16 | session 1



CHRIST CONNECTION

Christ promised to send a Helper when He returned to His throne in heaven (John 14:16-17). He sent the Holy Spirit to dwell within all believers, giving us guidance and wisdom so that we can live in a way that pleases the Lord.

THRIVING IN BABYLON

This week, we're covering the passages and main points below. But we encourage you to dig in and read all of the content on this timeline.

Daniel 1-2

WE MUST HOLD TIGHTLY TO OUR CONVICTIONS

DANIEL 1:1-14

1 In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim king of Judah, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came to Jerusalem and besieged it. 2 And the Lord gave Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand, with some of the vessels of the house of God. And he brought them to the land of Shinar, to the house of his god, and placed the vessels in the treasury of his god. 3 Then the king commanded Ashpenaz, his chief eunuch, to bring some of the people of Israel, both of the royal family and of the nobility, 4 youths without blemish, of good appearance and skillful in all wisdom, endowed with knowledge, understanding learning, and competent to stand in the king's palace, and to teach them the literature and language of the Chaldeans. 5 The king assigned them a daily portion of the food that the king ate, and of the wine that he drank. They were to be educated for three years, and at the end of that time they were to stand before the king. 6 Among these were Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah of the tribe of Judah. 7 And the chief of the eunuchs gave them names: Daniel he called Belteshazzar, Hananiah he called Shadrach, Mishael he called Meshach, and Azariah he called Abednego. 8 But Daniel resolved that he would not defile himself with the king's food, or with the wine that he drank. Therefore he asked the chief of the eunuchs to allow him not to defile himself. 9 And God gave Daniel favor and compassion in the sight of the chief of the eunuchs, 10 and the chief of the eunuchs said to Daniel, "I fear my lord the king, who assigned your food and your drink; for why should he see that you were in worse condition than the youths who are of your own age? So you would endanger my head with the king." 11 Then Daniel said to the steward whom the chief of the eunuchs had assigned over Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, 12 "Test your servants for ten days; let us be given vegetables to eat and water to drink. 13 Then let our appearance and the appearance of the youths who eat the king's food be observed by you, and deal with your servants according to what you see." 14 So he listened to them in this matter, and tested them for ten days.

GOD REWARDS FAITHFULNESS

DANIEL 1:15-21

15 At the end of ten days it was seen that they were better in appearance and fatter in flesh than all the youths who ate the king's food. 16 So the steward took away their food and the wine they were to drink, and gave them vegetables. 17 As for these four youths, God gave them learning and skill in all literature and wisdom, and Daniel had understanding in all visions and dreams. 18 At the end of the time, when the king had commanded that they should be brought in, the chief of the eunuchs brought them in before Nebuchadnezzar. 19 And the king spoke with them, and among all of them none was found like Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah. Therefore they stood before the king. 20 And in every matter of wisdom and understanding about which the king inquired of them, he found them ten times better than all the magicians and enchanters that were in all his kingdom. 21 And Daniel was there until the first year of King Cyrus.

MAIN POINT.

Even when culture tries to label us, God defines our identity.



THEOLOGY CONNECTION

JUSTIFICATION AND WORKS

Justification is not the result of human effort or good works but comes through faith in the righteousness of Christ. Although good works do not lead to justification, justification leads to good works in the life of a believer (Eph. 2:10). Faith without works is dead (James 2:17). While good works do not establish justification, they do verify a genuine faith and make our justification evident to others.

DISCUSSION

WE MUST HOLD TIGHTLY TO OUR CONVICTIONS

DANIEL 1:1-14

- Why would Daniel and his friends reject the king's food?
- Why is it important to determine to remain faithful before the temptation or trial?
- Why is the men receiving Babylonian names significant? How does culture try to rename us or push us to conform?

GOD REWARDS FAITHFULNESS

DANIEL 1:15-21

- How were Daniel and his friends thriving? What does this show you about how to thrive here?
- Does God really expect us to be faithful in "Babylon"—in culture or tough situations? Why?
- What can we do when we want to compromise and accept the "king's food"?



IN WHAT AREA OF YOUR LIFE WOULD IT BE EASIER TO COMPROMISE—TO HAVE THE "KING'S FOOD"? WHERE DO YOU STRUGGLE TO BE FAITHFUL?

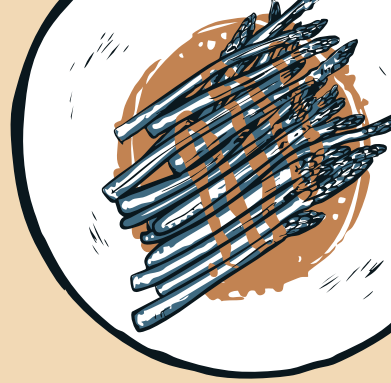
CULTURAL CONNECTION

Many of us might say we want to make an impact on the world. We want our lives to matter—to make a difference. Jesus charged us to live in such a way that our presence changes the environment around us. He expressed the concept like this: Live like lights in a dark world; be like salt, preserving life around you (Matt. 5:13-16). But in reality, many of us aren't making a difference. Why? We can't make a difference in our culture because we're not willing to be different from our culture. We are wrapped up in what's popular or acceptable, and instead of shining like lights and taking a stand, we blend in with the world. We're afraid of being different. We're afraid of speaking out. Our fears of being gossiped about, being laughed at, and losing friends are often enough to make us sit down and remain silent about our faith—enough to make us compromise our convictions, how we know God calls us to live. At the end of our lives, we won't regret living like light and salt, but we will regret the moments we wasted conforming to this world.



DAY ONE

2 KINGS 24:8-14; 25:8-15



Daniel saw it happen firsthand: Jerusalem—the city of David, the city of the kings, the city where God dwelt—was in ruins. King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon burned down the temple of God, the king’s palace, and all the great houses of Jerusalem. The beautiful city of Jerusalem became a garbage heap in Nebuchadnezzar’s destruction. After being deported to Babylon, Daniel might naturally feel discouraged. When Nebuchadnezzar asked Daniel to submit to his customs and eat his food, Daniel might have understandably feared this mighty king and submitted to his commands. Instead of giving in to fear, Daniel remembered that Judah’s exile was “as the LORD had foretold” (2 Kings 24:13). Mighty Nebuchadnezzar was simply a part of God’s plan to bring about His people’s repentance. Daniel knew that giving in to fear and submitting to Nebuchadnezzar would simply repeat the cycle of sin. The only way to break this cycle was through fearing and worshiping the Creator, not the creature. Instead of giving in to fear, Daniel had faith in God and refused to submit to Nebuchadnezzar’s command.

Like Daniel, we often face the same dilemma each day: to bow in fear to the ruler of this world (Eph. 2:2) or to have faith in Christ. Maybe we are pressured into gossiping at school so that we can fit in. Maybe we are tempted to make an inappropriate post on social media because it’s the “cool thing to do.” Regardless of the situation, we cannot allow our circumstances to diminish our faith. Instead, we must remember and trust in the promises of God’s Word to provide us victory over Satan’s power. We must lean on the grace of Christ and imitate our Savior, who defeated the temptations of the devil with the sharp sword of the Word of God (Matt. 4:1-12) and ultimately defeated sin through His death and resurrection.

- **WHAT SPECIFIC SITUATIONS ARE YOU CURRENTLY FACING TO BOW IN FEAR TO WHAT YOU KNOW IS WRONG?**
- **HOW COULD REMEMBERING GOD’S PROMISES IN THESE SITUATIONS HELP YOU STAY FAITHFUL TO CHRIST?**

PRAY

FATHER, THANK YOU FOR YOUR PROMISES, WHICH WILL REMAIN REGARDLESS OF THE SITUATIONS I MAY FACE. PLEASE HELP ME NOT TO FEAR POWERS THAT MAY COME AGAINST ME BUT TO REMEMBER YOUR PROMISES AND HAVE FAITH IN YOUR WORD.



DAY TWO

COLOSSIANS 2:8

In Daniel 1:8, Daniel determined not to be defiled by Babylonian culture (the king's food). Nebuchadnezzar sought to fully assimilate his captives into Babylonian life, aiming to make them forget their homeland and identity. Yet, Daniel refused to allow this. He didn't surrender to the indulgent pleasures of the culture that could tempt him to forget the Lord. He maintained his identity as a child of God and an Israelite even while living as a captive in Babylon. Paul gave a similar command to the church at Colossae in Colossians 2:8. He urged believers not to become captive to the worldly philosophies of their day. Instead, they were to seek wisdom and discover their identity in Christ.

This verse has many applications for our lives today as exiles in a foreign land. Culture offers us the "king's food" of gaining possessions, seeking popularity and fame, indulging in bodily sin and immorality, and "living your truth." However, as children of God who have been bought by the blood of Christ, we must remember who we are and whose we are. We cannot find our identity in who the world tells us we are but in who Christ says we are: "God's chosen ones, holy and beloved" (Col. 3:12). Friendship with the world is hostility with God (James 4:4), and if we are going to be faithful to Christ, then we can't surrender to the customs of our culture. We must depend on the power of the Holy Spirit to help us "put to death the deeds of the body" (Rom. 8:13) and determine not to defile ourselves with worldly delicacies. Then, we shine the light of Christ before "a crooked and twisted generation" (Phil. 2:15), allowing God to use our witness to bring others to Jesus.

- **WHY WAS EATING THE KING'S FOOD CROSSING THE LINE?**
- **WHAT LINES HAVE YOU "DRAWN IN THE SAND" TO MAINTAIN FAITHFULNESS AND HOLINESS TO THE LORD? LIST SOME WAYS TO REMEMBER YOUR IDENTITY IN CHRIST TO HELP KEEP YOURSELF "UNSTAINED FROM THE WORLD" (JAMES 1:27).**

PRAY

FATHER, FORGIVE ME FOR THE TIMES I HAVE
DEFILED MYSELF THROUGH BELIEVING THE LIES OF
MY CULTURE. HELP ME TO REMEMBER MY IDENTITY
IN CHRIST AND DELIGHT IN YOU RATHER THAN IN
THE DELICACIES OF MY CULTURE.



DAY THREE

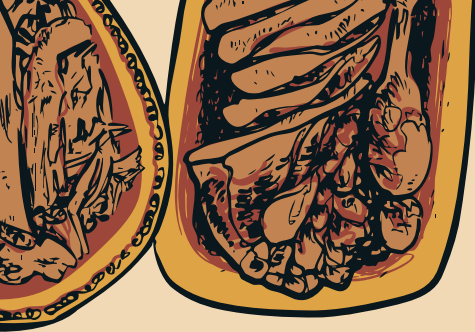
1 PETER 5:8-10

While in exile in Babylon, Daniel didn't allow his circumstances to justify compromise and remained alert to temptation. In the first century, Peter wrote to Jewish Christians who were also exiles in a foreign land. They were tempted to give up their faith so they could be free from persecution. Peter commanded them to "Be sober-minded; be watchful" because their enemy prowled around like a roaring lion seeking to kill them (1 Pet. 5:8). If we are to remain faithful to God like Daniel, we must also follow the command Peter gave to the churches who were in exile. To "be sober-minded" means to be self-controlled and aware. We must be filled with and controlled by the Spirit to have a single-minded devotion to Jesus. Being sober-minded will alert us to the deception our enemy may throw our way. But how do we stay "sober-minded and watchful" when we're bombarded by the lies of our culture? How do we keep from being blinded and swept up by what's "normal"? We resist the enemy's lies by knowing truth, by remaining "firm in your faith" (1 Pet. 5:9). To stand firm, we must constantly immerse ourselves in Scripture through Bible study, Scripture memory, and meditation to help us remember God's promises. We can also look to other believers to encourage us to persevere, knowing we aren't alone in our struggles against temptation. We must remember that our strength isn't what helps us stand firm; we stand firm by relying on Jesus, the One in whom we've placed our faith. The grace of God will strengthen and support us (v. 10). When we put on the armor of God each day (Eph. 6:12-18), Christ will give us the victory in our daily battles over sin and show us a way out (1 Cor. 10:13)!

- **HOW ARE YOU USING YOUR CIRCUMSTANCES TO JUSTIFY SINNING AND COMPROMISING IN YOUR WALK WITH JESUS?**
- **JESUS USED THE WORD TO DEFEAT SATAN'S LIES (MATT. 4:1-12). WHAT SCRIPTURES ARE YOU CURRENTLY MEMORIZING? HOW COULD MEMORIZING SCRIPTURE HELP YOU STAY ALERT TO THE SATAN'S SCHEMES?**

PRAY

FATHER, PLEASE FORGIVE ME FOR THE TIMES I'VE COMPROMISED MY FAITH IN YOU. THANK YOU FOR THE BLOOD OF JESUS, WHICH CLEANSSES ME FROM ALL SIN. HELP ME TO MEDITATE ON YOUR WORD TO STAY ALERT AND NOT FALL FOR THE DEVIL'S LIES.



DAY FOUR

ROMANS 12:2

Where we invest our time, talents, and treasures shapes who we are. For instance, if we dedicate time to training for a sport, our bodies will adapt and strengthen. If we pour our creative talents into art and music, those arts will influence our desires. If we spend all our money on video games, we'll see the next game upgrade as our greatest treasure. Daniel was offered pleasure, prestige, and power by the most powerful king of his time. Yet, he remained strong in the face of temptation. He knew that participating in these practices meant conforming to the Babylonian way of life and turning away from the Lord. Because God's Word had transformed Daniel's mind through his reading and meditation, he knew the will of God; he knew God's ways were good, pleasing, and perfect.

We must ask, "Is my life conforming to God's will and His Word or the world?" Jesus said we're "not of the world" (John 17:14-16); God's Word instructs us not to love the world or the things in the world (1 John 2:15-17). Instead, we should delight in the law of the Lord. When we allow God's Word to renew and transform our minds, then we are led by the Spirit to live as His children. As we grow closer to the Lord through knowing the Word, the world's temptations become less appealing because our hearts are continually captivated by Christ. So, don't conform to this world, but be transformed daily by the Spirit through the Word of God!

- **WRITE DOWN HOW YOU USE YOUR FREE TIME IN A TYPICAL WEEK. BASED ON HOW YOU USE YOUR TIME, IS YOUR LIFE CONFORMING TO GOD'S WORD OR TO THE WORLD?**
- **WHY DO WE STRUGGLE TO SEE GOD'S WILL AS "GOOD AND ACCEPTABLE AND PERFECT" INSTEAD OF A LIST OF RULES? HOW CAN READING AND MEDITATING ON SCRIPTURE DAILY HELP US KNOW GOD AND BELIEVE HIS WILL IS BEST?**

PRAY

FATHER, PLEASE SHOW ME THE AREAS OF MY LIFE THAT ARE CONFORMING TO THE WORLD. PLEASE HELP ME TO REPENT AND, BY THE SPIRIT, TO CONFORM TO YOUR WAYS THROUGH YOUR WORD.



DAY FIVE

HEBREWS 12:1-2

Daniel's faithfulness to the Lord wasn't a one-time occurrence. Daniel 6:28 says that Daniel prospered during the reigns of King Nebuchadnezzar, King Darius, and King Cyrus. This amounts to over seventy years of faithfulness to God! Daniel didn't simply have faith in God but persevered in his faith. Daniel's faith endured because he hoped in God's promise that the Messiah would come to establish His kingdom and reign forever. Daniel had a vision of this Son of Man in Daniel 7:13-14.

Jesus fulfilled this vision as He testified during His trial that He was the "Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power and coming on the clouds of heaven" (Matt. 26:64). Like Daniel, to persevere in our faith, we must keep our eyes fixed on Jesus, who is "the founder and perfecter of our faith" (Heb. 12:2). To fix our eyes on Jesus, we must lay aside every hindrance and sin that would ensnare us (Heb. 12:1). Holding on to our sin is like carrying a heavy backpack while trying to run a race. We can't endure to the end and keep our eyes on the finish line with extra weight dragging us down. Instead, we must repent by removing the "weight" of our gossip, selfishness, pride, sexual immorality, and envy from our backs. Jesus went before us, clearing the path for us to run in victory. Since He completed the race for us through His life, death, and resurrection, by faith, He grants us the grace to endure and finish our race, where we will join Him in glory. Fixing our eyes on Christ helps us endure to the end.

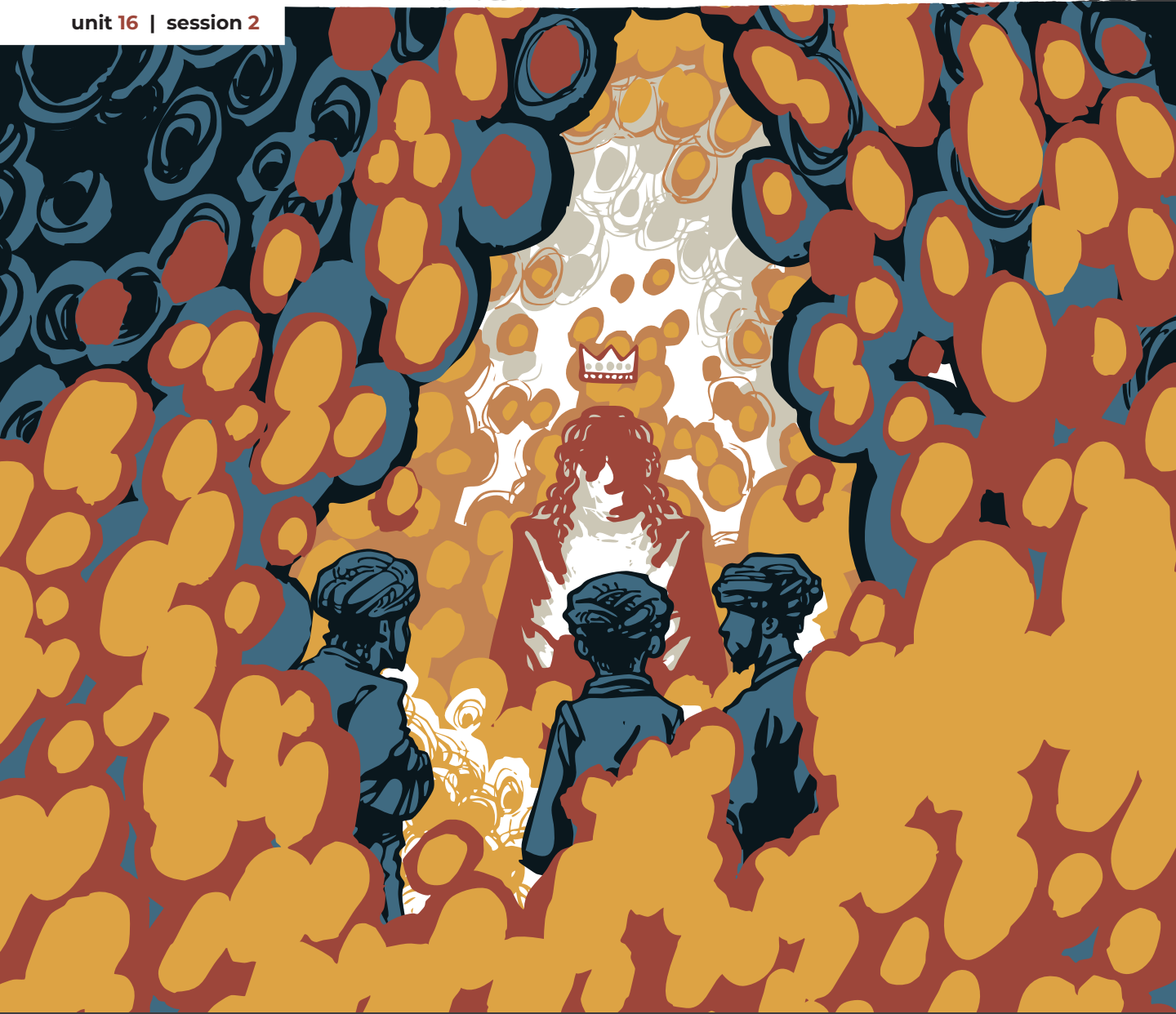
- **WHAT SINS ARE WEIGHING YOU DOWN AND PREVENTING YOU FROM KEEPING YOUR EYES ON JESUS? HOW CAN YOU LAY THEM ASIDE (V. 2)?**
- **HOW CAN REMEMBERING THAT JESUS WENT BEFORE YOU AS THE "FOUNDER AND PERFECTER" OF YOUR FAITH HELP YOU ENDURE WHEN THE RACE GETS DIFFICULT?**

PRAY

**FATHER, THANK YOU FOR JESUS BEING THE
FOUNDER AND PERFECTER OF MY FAITH. PLEASE
HELP ME KEEP MY EYES ON HIM SO I CAN ENDURE
AND REMAIN FAITHFUL TO YOU FOR ALL MY LIFE.**

OUT OF *THE FIRE*

unit 16 | session 2



CHRIST CONNECTION

The same God who was all-powerful, faithful, and present with Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego in the flames will also deliver us through His Son—who is with us in the fiery trials of life and who saves us from the punishment for our sin.

EVEN IF . . .

This week, we're covering the passages and main points below. But we encourage you to dig in and read all of the content on this timeline.

Daniel 3-4

FAITHFULNESS WILL COST US

DANIEL 3:4-6,14-18

4 And the herald proclaimed aloud, "You are commanded, O peoples, nations, and languages, 5 that when you hear the sound of the horn, pipe, lyre, trigon, harp, bagpipe, and every kind of music, you are to fall down and worship the golden image that King Nebuchadnezzar has set up. 6 And whoever does not fall down and worship shall immediately be cast into a burning fiery furnace." . . . 14 Nebuchadnezzar answered and said to them, "Is it true, O Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, that you do not serve my gods or worship the golden image that I have set up? 15 Now if you are ready when you hear the sound of the horn, pipe, lyre, trigon, harp, bagpipe, and every kind of music, to fall down and worship the image that I have made, well and good. But if you do not worship, you shall immediately be cast into a burning fiery furnace. And who is the god who will deliver you out of my hands?" 16 Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego answered and said to the king, "O Nebuchadnezzar, we have no need to answer you in this matter. 17 If this be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of your hand, O king. 18 But if not, be it known to you, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the golden image that you have set up."

FAITHFULNESS POINTS PEOPLE TO JESUS

DANIEL 3:24-29

24 Then King Nebuchadnezzar was astonished and rose up in haste. He declared to his counselors, "Did we not cast three men bound into the fire?" They answered and said to the king, "True, O king." 25 He answered and said, "But I see four men unbound, walking in the midst of the fire, and they are not hurt; and the appearance of the fourth is like a son of the gods." 26 Then Nebuchadnezzar came near to the door of the burning fiery furnace; he declared, "Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, servants of the Most High God, come out, and come here!" Then Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego came out from the fire. 27 And the satraps, the prefects, the governors, and the king's counselors gathered together and saw that the fire had not had any power over the bodies of those men. The hair of their heads was not singed, their cloaks were not harmed, and no smell of fire had come upon them. 28 Nebuchadnezzar answered and said, "Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, who has sent his angel and delivered his servants, who trusted in him, and set aside the king's command, and yielded up their bodies rather than serve and worship any god except their own God. 29 Therefore I make a decree: Any people, nation, or language that speaks anything against the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego shall be torn limb from limb, and their houses laid in ruins, for there is no other god who is able to rescue in this way."

MAIN POINT.

Even when our faithfulness is risky, God is able to deliver us.



THEOLOGY CONNECTION SANCTIFICATION

Sanctification is the process, beginning in regeneration, by which the believer is set apart to God's purposes and is enabled to progress toward moral and spiritual maturity through the presence and power of the Holy Spirit dwelling in him or her. Growth in grace should continue throughout the believer's life.

DISCUSSION

FAITHFULNESS WILL COST US

DANIEL 3:4-6,14-18

- Nebuchadnezzar knew the Hebrew men worshiped God, so what was his problem with them?
- What did the men believe about God? How do our beliefs about God affect our willingness to stand?
- Why do we doubt God if He allows us to remain in the fire—struggles, pain, or suffering? How can we trust Him even if (v.18) we suffer?

FAITHFULNESS POINTS PEOPLE TO JESUS

DANIEL 4:24-29

- How did God use the men's faithfulness? When have you seen God use yours or someone else's?
- Who is the fourth man in the fire (v. 25)?
- Where do you see evidence in the passage that Nebuchadnezzar's heart hadn't changed?



READ 3:19-23. HOW CAN YOU STAND FOR GOD WHEN YOU ALSO STAND TO LOSE SOMETHING IN THE PROCESS?

CULTURAL CONNECTION

Why does it matter that you have a right understanding of who God is? For instance, if you simply believe He is real, He created all things, and He sent Jesus to save us from our sin, then isn't that enough? First, these are important foundational truths for sure. But, if this is all you know about God, then you may be vulnerable when life hurts. In fact, the reason so many believers fail to stand boldly is because they know so little about God beyond these basic truths. Here's why it's so important to have a good understanding of God's character: When you know God and understand His good character, then you'll never imagine not trusting Him. When you know God intimately, then you'll live boldly and courageously. Why? Because His character is unchanging. He is steady, unchanged by your circumstances. When you know Him—really know Him—you'll be able to endure pain and loss yet remain faithful. Your circumstances, even when they hurt, will only drive you toward God and not away from Him. The best part? You get to know Him. You could spend the rest of your life getting to know Him and still have more to discover. Do the work. Discover God through His Word, and never stop.



DAY ONE

MATTHEW 10:16-22

Do you think only some Christians will face persecution or every follower of Jesus? Jesus told His disciples that everyone will hate them because of Him (Matt. 10:22). But why? Why would we be hated for following Jesus and telling others about him? Daniel 3 provides insight into why people hate us when we seek to live faithfully for Jesus. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were persecuted because they refused to acknowledge Nebuchadnezzar as a god. Nebuchadnezzar's issue wasn't that they worshiped the Lord, but that they worshiped the Lord alone and no one else. For the same reason, the disciples faced persecution for following Jesus.

People are often okay with "private religion." However, when we proclaim the truth that Jesus is the only way of salvation, people may accuse us of being unloving, narrow-minded bigots or radicals. The New Testament treats persecution as a regular occurrence for followers of Jesus, using the word "persecute" fifty-two times in connection with believers.¹ Paul even said that all people who want to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted (2 Tim. 3:12). Paul's statement raises a question: Can we live a godly life and not face any form of persecution? The answer seems to be no. If we've never faced any form of persecution for our faith in Christ, we may not be living boldly for Christ. The world may not hate us because our lives don't look any different (John 15:18-19). Resolve today to be holy and set apart from the world in your speech, actions, and thoughts. Know that at times, your friends, family, and others will hate you because of Jesus, but also know that the Holy Spirit is with you, helping you to remain faithful.

- **WHAT DOES IT LOOK LIKE TO BE PERSECUTED AS A STUDENT WHO FOLLOWS JESUS?**
- **WHY DOES LIVING A GODLY LIFE LEAD TO PERSECUTION? IS IT POSSIBLE TO WALK FAITHFULLY WITH JESUS AND NEVER BE PERSECUTED? WHY OR WHY NOT?**

PRAY

**FATHER, HELP ME NOT TO ALLOW A FEAR OF
PERSECUTION STOP ME FROM LIVING FOR YOU.
PLEASE STRENGTHEN ME BY THE GRACE OF CHRIST
TO BE A BOLD WITNESS FOR YOUR GLORY.**



DAY TWO

MATTHEW 10:26-31

Jesus promised that His disciples would be persecuted (Matt. 10:23-25). No disciple is above his or her teacher. So, if they called Jesus the “prince of demons,” what will they call us? Yet, Jesus knows our weakness and understands that we need encouragement to bear this burden. That is why Jesus is so amazing. He is our great High Priest who can sympathize with, or understand, our weakness. He provides mercy and grace for us to endure times of suffering and persecution for His sake. Jesus tells us not to fear those who will persecute us because their power is nothing compared to the mighty hand of God. People who persecute us can only end our earthly lives, but they have no power to destroy our souls; their power is temporary.

Jesus said the cure for fearing people is to fear the Lord. This does not mean we are afraid of God like we are of spiders or heights. Fearing the Lord is a holy reverence—a holy respect—and honor for the Lord. We love God so much that we don’t want to dishonor Him; rather, we aim to please Him in all we say and do. We fear God because we know that He loves and cares for us. Jesus explained that if the Father cares for a small sparrow, then how much more does He care for human beings made in His own image (Matt. 6:26)? We don’t need to fear our persecutors because they can do nothing without receiving permission from our loving heavenly Father. We can rest in Christ, knowing our suffering is for the gospel and for God’s glory.

- **WHY IS IT COMFORTING TO KNOW NOTHING WILL HAPPEN TO US UNLESS GOD ALLOWS IT?**
- **WHY DOES JESUS TELL US TO FEAR GOD? HOW ARE FEAR AND LOVE CONNECTED? WHAT DOES IT LOOK LIKE TO WALK IN THE FEAR OF THE LORD EACH DAY?**

PRAY

FATHER, I PRAISE YOU BECAUSE YOU ARE IN CONTROL OF ALL THINGS. THANK YOU FOR CARING FOR ME AND FOR NEVER FORSAKING ME. PLEASE HELP ME OVERCOME MY FEAR OF WHAT PEOPLE CAN DO TO ME, KNOWING YOU ARE ALWAYS WITH ME.



DAY THREE

MATTHEW 10:32-39

What if you had the opportunity to receive \$1 million? Would you take it? It sounds like a no-brainer, right? However, to receive \$1 million, you must give up all your earthly relationships and confine yourself to a house for the rest of your life. What would you do? Although \$1 million is a huge sum, many of us would likely decline the offer. Why? Because we recognize the value of human relationships with our family, friends, and future spouse. Given the treasure of these relationships, we'd be willing to skip \$1 million because it isn't worth the loss. Similarly, when we choose to follow Jesus and our lives are transformed by the gospel, we're willing to acknowledge Him before others through both our words and actions. We won't fear the persecution we might face or the losses we could endure because our treasure is Jesus, and abundant life is in Him. Jesus said that if we try to save or find our life, we will lose it. If we decide to live for ourselves by seeking our purpose, value, and identity in possessions, popularity, dating relationships, sports, or academic success, we will lose our souls for eternity. However, when we see Jesus as the treasure and our only means of salvation from sin, we'll willingly let go of temporary pleasures to gain the eternal treasure of Jesus.

Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego understood this principle and were willing to give up their lives to acknowledge Yahweh before King Nebuchadnezzar. They refused to bow to the gold statue because they knew that true gold is found in following God. What about you? Are you willing to die to yourself? Are you willing to let go of earthly pleasures to find your life in Christ? Who is your treasure?

- **HOW ARE YOU ACKNOWLEDGING CHRIST WITH YOUR WORDS AND YOUR WORKS BEFORE OTHERS?**
- **WHAT ARE YOU TEMPTED TO "FIND YOUR LIFE IN" OTHER THAN JESUS? HOW CAN SEEING JESUS AS THE TREASURE HELP YOU LOOSEN YOUR GRIP ON THESE THINGS?**

PRAY

**FATHER, PLEASE FORGIVE ME FOR THE TIMES I
HAVEN'T LIVED LIKE JESUS IS THE TREASURE.
PLEASE REVEAL YOUR GLORY TO ME THROUGH
CHRIST, SO I CAN HAVE THE BOLDNESS TO
PROCLAIM JESUS TO MY FRIENDS.**



DAY FOUR

1 PETER 3:8-17

Growing up, we often believe that if we do the right thing and treat others with kindness, then we'll be rewarded and make many friends. While this may be true at times, Peter, writing to the exiles in Asia, stated that we can still suffer as Christians even when we do what is right: "Now who is there to harm you if you are zealous for what is good? But even if you should suffer for righteousness' sake, you will be blessed" (1 Pet. 3:13-14). Even when we suffer for walking in God's will and remaining faithful to Him, we shouldn't be discouraged because Peter said we are blessed. Being "blessed" means we are "highly favored by God." Even though the world may not honor our faithfulness, God won't overlook it. We know that we will receive our eternal reward in heaven for the faithfulness we demonstrate on earth.

Therefore, we must "suffer well" and not respond with evil when we are persecuted. When we defend our faith with gentleness and respect, we will put to shame those who are persecuting us (Rom. 12:20). Some Christians believe that the safest place we can be is at the center of God's will. However, the Bible teaches the exact opposite. Sometimes, the most dangerous times in our lives are when we are in the center of God's will (1 Pet. 3:17; Phil. 1:29; 1 Thess. 3:13-14). For example, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were in the center of God's will, walking faithfully with Him, yet they were thrown into the furnace! Faithfulness to God won't make us immune to suffering, but we must remember that we are blessed when we suffer for Jesus, and He will be with us to strengthen us in our suffering.

- **HOW HAS THIS PASSAGE CHALLENGED YOUR UNDERSTANDING OF SUFFERING AND PERSECUTION?**
- **WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO "HONOR CHRIST THE LORD AS HOLY" IN YOUR HEART? WHY IS TREASURING JESUS NECESSARY TO HELP YOU RESPOND FAITHFULLY IN SUFFERING?**

PRAY

FATHER, PLEASE HELP ME TO HONOR JESUS AS HOLY AND TO TREASURE HIM IN MY HEART SO THAT I MAY RESPOND TO MY PERSECUTORS WITH GENTLENESS AND RESPECT. EMPOWER ME TO GIVE A DEFENSE FOR MY FAITH TO MY FRIENDS AND FAMILY.





DAY FIVE

DANIEL 3:25

Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego had been faithful to the Lord and hadn't bowed down to the golden statue. Yet, they still faced death in the white-hot flames of a furnace. You may be thinking, "Where is God in all this?" Yet, a pagan king's description reveals that God was there the whole time! Miraculously, Nebuchadnezzar saw a fourth man in the fire and described him as "a son of the gods." So, who was this fourth man in the fire?

Nebuchadnezzar didn't serve Yahweh, but he believed many gods existed. Nebuchadnezzar believed he saw a divine being, calling him God's angel in verse 28. Throughout the Old Testament, God appeared to His people in physical form. The theological term for these appearances is theophany (theo: God, phaino: to appear). One of the most frequent occurrences of a theophany is when God appears through the Angel of the Lord (Gen. 16:7; 17:1). This angel, however, was described as separate from God yet also acknowledged and worshiped as God. Therefore, many scholars believe that the Angel of the Lord was Jesus, appearing to people before His incarnation, or birth. What does this mean? God is not unaware of the trials and sufferings we face; He joins us and is with us in our trials. Maybe you've struggled with feeling like your faithfulness has only led to suffering, loneliness, or pain. Just as a loving father would never leave his children when they were in danger, in Christ, God will always be with us. If He sends us, then He goes with us. We can trust Him and remain faithful to Him even if doing so leads to suffering; if we face the flames, we will never face them alone.

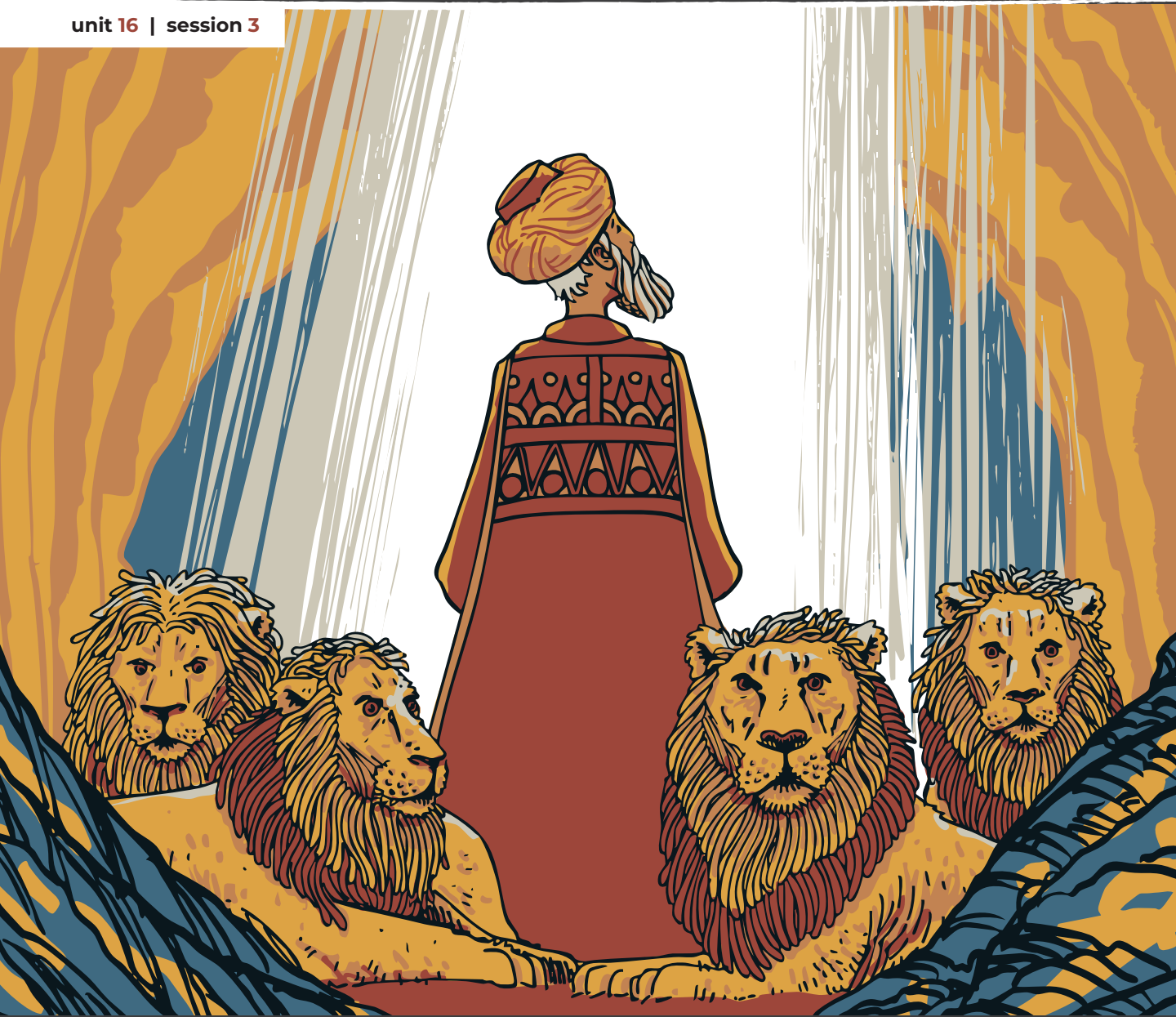
- **WHAT DOES DANIEL 3:25 TEACH YOU ABOUT THE CHARACTER OF GOD? DOES THIS HELP YOU BE MORE WILLING TO SUFFER FOR JESUS? WHY OR WHY NOT?**
- **DOES GOD ALWAYS PROMISE TO DELIVER US FROM SUFFERING AND PERSECUTION? WHY OR WHY NOT? IF NOT, WHAT DOES GOD ALWAYS PROMISE BASED ON DANIEL 3:25?**

PRAY

FATHER, YOU SENT YOUR SON TO BE WITH AND DELIVER YOUR SERVANTS FROM THE FURNACE. HELP ME TO TRUST YOU AND REMEMBER THAT JESUS WILL ALWAYS BE WITH ME EVEN IN MY DARKEST MOMENTS OF SUFFERING.

INTO THE *LIONS' DEN*

unit 16 | session 3



CHRIST CONNECTION

Daniel faithfully trusted and obeyed God even at risk of his life. God rescued Daniel from death and used him to advance His kingdom. Like Daniel, Jesus faithfully trusted and obeyed God, but unlike Daniel, Jesus was not spared from death. Jesus died and was resurrected to establish the kingdom of God.

TRUSTING FOR DELIVERANCE

This week, we're covering the passages and main points below. But we encourage you to dig in and read all of the content on this timeline.

Daniel 5–6

LIVING BY FAITH SETS US APART FROM THE WORLD

DANIEL 6:7-18

7 All the high officials of the kingdom, the prefects and the satraps, the counselors and the governors are agreed that the king should establish an ordinance and enforce an injunction, that whoever makes petition to any god or man for thirty days, except to you, O king, shall be cast into the den of lions. 8 Now, O king, establish the injunction and sign the document, so that it cannot be changed, according to the law of the Medes and the Persians, which cannot be revoked." 9 Therefore King Darius signed the document and injunction. 10 When Daniel knew that the document had been signed, he went to his house where he had windows in his upper chamber open toward Jerusalem. He got down on his knees three times a day and prayed and gave thanks before his God, as he had done previously. 11 Then these men came by agreement and found Daniel making petition and plea before his God. 12 Then they came near and said before the king, concerning the injunction, "O king! Did you not sign an injunction, that anyone who makes petition to any god or man within thirty days except to you, O king, shall be cast into the den of lions?" The king answered and said, "The thing stands fast, according to the law of the Medes and Persians, which cannot be revoked." 13 Then they answered and said before the king, "Daniel, who is one of the exiles from Judah, pays no attention to you, O king, or the injunction you have signed, but makes his petition three times a day." 14 Then the king, when he heard these words, was much distressed and set his mind to deliver Daniel. And he labored till the sun went down to rescue him. 15 Then these men came by agreement to the king and said to the king, "Know, O king, that it is a law of the Medes and Persians that no injunction or ordinance that the king establishes can be changed." 16 Then the king commanded, and Daniel was brought and cast into the den of lions. The king declared to Daniel, "May your God, whom you serve continually, deliver you!" 17 And a stone was brought and laid on the mouth of the den, and the king sealed it with his own signet and with the signet of his lords, that nothing might be changed concerning Daniel. 18 Then the king went to his palace and spent the night fasting; no diversions were brought to him, and sleep fled from him.

GOD IS OUR HOPE IN SUFFERING

DANIEL 6:19-24

19 Then, at break of day, the king arose and went in haste to the den of lions. 20 As he came near to the den where Daniel was, he cried out in a tone of anguish. The king declared to Daniel, "O Daniel, servant of the living God, has your God, whom you serve continually, been able to deliver you from the lions?" 21 Then Daniel said to the king, "O king, live forever! 22 My God sent his angel and shut the lions' mouths, and they have not harmed me, because I was found blameless before him; and also before you, O king, I have done no harm." 23 Then the king was exceedingly glad, and commanded that Daniel be taken up out of the den. So Daniel was taken up out of the den, and no kind of harm was found on him, because he had trusted in his God. 24 And the king commanded, and those men who had maliciously accused Daniel were brought and cast into the den of lions—they, their children, and their wives. And before they reached the bottom of the den, the lions overpowered them and broke all their bones in pieces.

MAIN POINT.

Even when we suffer for our faith, God remains with us.



THEOLOGY CONNECTION

GOD IS OMNIPRESENT

God's omnipresence refers to His presence in all time and all places simultaneously. Because God exists apart from and outside of time and space, He is not limited by their constraints (1 Kings 8:27; Acts 17:24). He is present with us wherever we are and sees all that occurs; nothing escapes His attention (Ps. 33:14; 139:7-10; Isa. 57:15; Jer. 23:23-24; Matt. 18:20). God's omnipresence is a deterrent for sin and a source of great comfort and hope for believers.

DISCUSSION

LIVING BY FAITH SETS US APART FROM THE WORLD

DANIEL 6:7-18

- What is self-discipline? Why is it difficult for us?
- ♥ • Can we really be godly in today's sinful culture? How did Daniel's life show us this is possible?
- ✝ • Jesus promised His followers would face opposition and suffering (John 16:33). What does it say if we never suffer—if our actions, words, or views never offend an ungodly culture?

GOD IS OUR HOPE IN SUFFERING

DANIEL 6:19-24

- What are some ways Daniel could've tried to fight this battle himself instead of trusting in God?
- 📖 • What situations cause people to doubt God is with them? What does it feel like for God to be with us?
- 🧠 • Daniel was unharmed because He trusted God (v. 23)? Why do we struggle to do so?



ASSESS YOUR SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINE: HOW IS THE WAY YOU'RE LIVING NOW PREPARING YOU EITHER TO STAND OR TO FALL WHEN YOU FACE OPPOSITION?

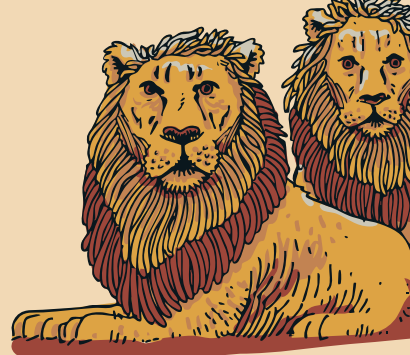
CULTURAL CONNECTION

What do we do if rules or laws contradict God's Word? If you've ever been caught between the two, then you likely felt confused. Which way do we go when a school rule goes against God's Word? What can we do if our coaches or our parents—who may be unbelievers—place expectations on us that contradict the way God wants us to live? First, know you aren't alone; many believers walk a similar path. The pressure we experience from worldly authority feels overwhelming because the consequences are often immediate. The simple, yet difficult answer: God's Word is first. Always. Even when it's hard. Even if we're the only one. Scripture clearly says we should obey authority because God allowed it to be put in place (Rom. 13:1-7). But when authority asks us to do something God has forbidden or demands that we stop doing something God has commanded, we must follow the Lord (Acts 5:27-29). We shine as lights in a dark world when we obey authority, but we submit to God's authority before any other.



DAY ONE

1 PETER 2:11-12



As an exile in Babylon, Daniel remained faithful to God. His character was flawless, and Belshazzar and Darius were impressed with his wisdom and “excellent spirit” (5:12). In light of Daniel’s holy character, the king placed him in control of his kingdom. Daniel’s godly influence reached both the royal family and the ordinary people. Through Daniel’s pursuit of holiness in a pagan land, God demonstrated that He is the one true God.

Like Daniel, as exiles in our world, Peter calls us to live holy lives and forsake sinful desires. Since we are God’s children, we must strive to imitate our Father and be holy as He is holy. When we “keep [our] conduct among the Gentiles (unbelievers) honorable,” even when we are mistreated, unbelievers will see our good works and glorify God. What kind of reputation do you have among unbelievers in your school, sports team, or drama club? Is your character admirable enough that even if they reject your faith in Jesus, they respect you as a person due to your purity and kindness? As Christians, we should strive to put away sinful desires because we desire to please the Lord and glorify His name. Yet, we must also be motivated to put away sinful desires and walk in step with the truth of the gospel so that we can display the greatness of our God to the lost world around us. Our words and our walk may be the only “Bible” unbelievers read. May we live holy lives so that God can use us to make His name famous in a lost world.

- **WHAT SPECIFIC SINFUL DESIRES DO YOU NEED TO WALK AWAY FROM OR FIGHT AGAINST? HOW CAN YOU?**
- **IF YOUR STUDENT PASTOR ASKED SOME OF YOUR FRIENDS THEIR UNDERSTANDING OF THE GOSPEL BASED ON THE WAY YOU LIVE, WHAT WOULD THEY SAY? HOW CAN YOU LIVE A LIFE THAT ACCURATELY REPRESENTS THE GOSPEL BEFORE THEM?**

PRAY

FATHER, PLEASE FORGIVE ME FOR THE TIMES I
DIDN'T WALK FAITHFULLY AROUND MY FRIENDS.
PLEASE HELP ME TO WALK BY YOUR SPIRIT SO
OTHERS CAN SEE YOUR GREATNESS AND PLACE
THEIR FAITH IN JESUS.



DAY TWO

EXODUS 14:14

Throughout Scripture, the Israelites faced trouble and were significantly outmatched by their enemies, but God didn't tell them to "try harder;" instead, God instructed them to trust in Him because He would fight for them (Ex. 14:25; Deut. 1:30; 3:22; Josh. 10:14; 2 Chron. 20:29; Isa. 30:15). One of those stories is found in Exodus 14. God had just demonstrated His mighty power in delivering the Israelites from four hundred years of slavery to the Egyptians through ten miraculous plagues. The people were traveling through the desert on their way to the promised land when they came to the Red Sea. Not only was the sea blocking their path, but the Egyptians pursued them to take them back as slaves. The Israelites shook in terror and questioned why God would bring them out to die in the wilderness. Yet, Moses responded, telling the people not to fear or fight back but to stand firm in their faith. All they must do is "be silent" and rest in God. He would fight for them and give them the victory.

Like Israel and Daniel, we must remain faithful to God, despite the pursuit of our enemies, and know that He will fight our battles for us. The Lord is our mighty warrior, and through Christ's death and resurrection, He has already defeated our greatest enemies: sin, Satan, and death. When we face opposition, we often want to fight back by spreading lies and gossip or by defending ourselves. But we can "be still, and know that [He is] God." (Ps. 46:10). He is our mighty warrior; He will fight our battles for us and grant us victory in Jesus!

- **WHAT WOULD IT LOOK LIKE FOR YOU TO "BE STILL" AND TRUST IN GOD TO FIGHT YOUR BATTLES?**
- **HOW DOES KNOWING GOD IS THE ONE WHO FIGHTS YOUR BATTLES GIVE YOU PEACE AND ENCOURAGEMENT TO STAY FAITHFUL TO HIM?**

PRAY

FATHER, I KNOW JESUS IS A MIGHTY WARRIOR, WHO DEFEATED ALL MY ENEMIES ON THE CROSS. HELP ME TO STOP FIGHTING MY BATTLES AND TO TRUST IN YOUR STRENGTH TO GIVE ME THE VICTORY.



DAY THREE

EPHESIANS 6:12

Daniel faced false accusations from the king's administrators. Even after the king announced an edict to throw him into the lions' den, Daniel didn't view them as his enemies. Instead, Satan's evil influence and the sinful desires of the people's hearts were responsible for seeking to kill and destroy Daniel. This is why, as we learned yesterday, Daniel didn't try to fight back but trusted in the Lord to deliver him from the lions if it was His will to do so.

We easily believe that people are our enemies when they slander us and persecute us for following Jesus. Yet, Paul explained that our struggle is not against people but against the powers of darkness. The list he provided refers to all the evil spiritual forces, which includes Satan, demons, and the wicked world system in which we live. To have victory over our enemies, we must recognize who our true adversaries are so that we can fight them with the appropriate weapons. Paul stated in verses 13-18 that since our enemies are the spiritual forces of evil, we must fight them with the armor of God. We must defeat Satan's lies with the truth of God's Word around our waist. We must combat wicked deeds with Christ's righteousness on our chest. We must protect ourselves from false beliefs with the shield of faith, the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit. Essentially, to defeat Satan, we must "put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires" (Rom. 13:14). Stop seeing people as the enemy. Instead, love and pray for them, and wage war against Satan and your sin, your true enemies, with the armor of God.

- **WHY DO WE OFTEN STRUGGLE TO SEE OUR SIN AND SATAN AS THE REAL ENEMIES?**
- **WHY IS IT DANGEROUS TO MISIDENTIFY THE ENEMY IN YOUR LIFE? WHAT CAN YOU DO TO PREVENT THIS FROM HAPPENING? HOW CAN YOUR CHURCH OR GROUP HELP?**

PRAY

FATHER, PLEASE HELP ME TO REMEMBER WHO MY REAL ENEMIES ARE. HELP ME TO PUT ON THE ARMOR OF GOD SO THAT I CAN FIGHT AGAINST SIN AND DARKNESS, NOT WITH MY FLESH BUT WITH YOUR TRUTH.



DAY FOUR

HEBREWS 10:32-39

Like Daniel in Babylon, the Hebrews to whom the author wrote his letter also faced persecution for following Jesus. They were tempted to revert back to Judaism from Christianity so that the persecution would stop. The author of Hebrews reminded them that Jesus is greater and salvation is found only in Him. The author reassured them of their faith and called them to persevere. He reminded them that in “a little while, and the coming one will come and will not delay.” The author cited Isaiah 26:20 and Habakkuk 2:3-4 to remind the Hebrews that Jesus will return to deliver them from their enemies and judge the wicked. By quoting Habakkuk 2:3-4, the author urged the Hebrews to maintain their faith in Christ and draw near to him, even when it seemed like the enemy had prevailed and hope was lost (Hab. 3:17-19).

When we face opposition to our faith, we have two options for response: Draw near to Christ (vv. 19-25) or draw back from Him. The author contrasts those who have faith with those who draw back. Those who draw back place their trust and find their hope in other things, such as friends’ opinions, popularity, athletic success, college scholarships, and greater influence on social media. But the author warns that seeking rescue and salvation from these things will only lead to disappointment. Instead, based on the blood of Jesus that has made a way for us to enter God’s presence, we must draw near to God in faith and hold on to our confession of hope without wavering, since He who promised is faithful (Heb. 10:22-23). Even though we can’t see it, our deliverance is coming, and Jesus, our mighty warrior, will see us through.

- **WHY IS GOD’S FAITHFULNESS A MAIN THEME IN THE BIBLE?**
- **HOW CAN GOD’S FAITHFULNESS TO HIS PROMISES HELP YOU PERSEVERE IN YOUR FAITH WHEN YOU EXPERIENCE TRIALS, PERSECUTION, AND SETBACKS?**

PRAY

FATHER, I PRAISE YOU FOR YOUR FAITHFULNESS TO YOUR PROMISES. PLEASE HELP ME DRAW NEAR TO YOU. KEEP ME FROM TURNING AWAY FROM YOU AND FROM PLACING MY TRUST IN OTHER THINGS. PLEASE KEEP ME FROM STUMBLING.



DAY FIVE

PHILIPPIANS 3:7-11

What do you treasure most in your life? What do you guard and protect? Daniel was willing to give his life for God because Yahweh was his treasure. For Daniel, offering his life wasn't a sacrifice; rather, he embraced the presence of God if he was killed for bowing to the Lord in prayer. Daniel's actions are truly remarkable when we consider all the power, possessions, and prestige he held as the chief officer in Babylon. But Daniel regarded it all as loss compared to knowing God. In chapter 3, Paul repeats the same idea to the Philippians. After outlining his prestigious background in Judaism (vv. 1-6), Paul said his achievements were dung compared to the surpassing value of knowing Christ. Yes, you heard him correctly. Paul declared that his worldly possessions and achievements were like human waste compared to seeing and knowing his Savior.

What about you? Do you consider your relationships with your friends, athletic and academic success, phone, video games, and social media followers a loss compared to Christ? Or is Jesus second to these things? Jesus's sacrifice saved us from our sin and made us right with God; all things pale in comparison to our salvation and our imperishable inheritance through faith in Jesus. When we see Jesus as our treasure, suffering or losing worldly success and possessions is worth it. Enduring the fellowship of His sufferings when we are persecuted helps us to experience Christ more deeply. This strengthened relationship with Jesus then propels us to pursue the prize promised by God—eternal peace in His presence.

- **IN YOUR OWN LIFE, WHAT WOULD IT LOOK LIKE TO COUNT ALL THINGS AS LOSS COMPARED TO KNOWING JESUS?**
- **HOW DOES OUR SUFFERING HELP US IDENTIFY MORE WITH CHRIST IN HIS SUFFERING?**

PRAY

JESUS, PLEASE HELP ME TO SEE YOU AS MY LIFE'S TREASURE. FORGIVE ME FOR PLACING HIGHER VALUE ON WORLDLY SUCCESS AND POSSESSIONS. HELP ME TO FORGET WHAT'S BEHIND AND TO PURSUE YOU AS THE GREATEST TREASURE.

AN EVERLASTING *DOMINION*

unit 16 | session 4



CHRIST CONNECTION

Daniel saw the coming of the Son of Man who would be given dominion over an everlasting kingdom of every people, nation, and language. Jesus is the Son of Man, the King of kings, who purchased a people for God through His life, death, and resurrection.

EVERLASTING KINGDOM

This week, we're covering the passages and main points below. But we encourage you to dig in and read all of the content on this timeline.

Daniel 7-12

WORLDLY KINGDOMS ARE TEMPORARY

DANIEL 7:1-8

1 In the first year of Belshazzar king of Babylon, Daniel saw a dream and visions of his head as he lay in his bed. Then he wrote down the dream and told the sum of the matter. 2 Daniel declared, "I saw in my vision by night, and behold, the four winds of heaven were stirring up the great sea. 3 And four great beasts came up out of the sea, different from one another. 4 The first was like a lion and had eagles' wings. Then as I looked its wings were plucked off, and it was lifted up from the ground and made to stand on two feet like a man, and the mind of a man was given to it. 5 And behold, another beast, a second one, like a bear. It was raised up on one side. It had three ribs in its mouth between its teeth; and it was told, 'Arise, devour much flesh.' 6 After this I looked, and behold, another, like a leopard, with four wings of a bird on its back. And the beast had four heads, and dominion was given to it. 7 After this I saw in the night visions, and behold, a fourth beast, terrifying and dreadful and exceedingly strong. It had great iron teeth; it devoured and broke in pieces and stamped what was left with its feet. It was different from all the beasts that were before it, and it had ten horns. 8 I considered the horns, and behold, there came up among them another horn, a little one, before which three of the first horns were plucked up by the roots. And behold, in this horn were eyes like the eyes of a man, and a mouth speaking great things.

GOD'S KINGDOM IS EVERLASTING

DANIEL 7:9-14

9 "As I looked, thrones were placed, and the Ancient of Days took his seat; his clothing was white as snow, and the hair of his head like pure wool; his throne was fiery flames; its wheels were burning fire. 10 A stream of fire issued and came out from before him; a thousand thousands served him, and ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him; the court sat in judgment, and the books were opened. 11 "I looked then because of the sound of the great words that the horn was speaking. And as I looked, the beast was killed, and its body destroyed and given over to be burned with fire. 12 As for the rest of the beasts, their dominion was taken away, but their lives were prolonged for a season and a time. 13 "I saw in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man, and he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him. 14 And to him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed.

MAIN POINT.

Even when worldly kingdoms fall, God's kingdom lasts forever.



THEOLOGY CONNECTION

SPECIAL REVELATION

Special revelation refers to God's revealing Himself to humanity through historical events, His Word, and through Jesus Christ. Through special revelation, human beings learn about God's character, His will, His purpose for creation, and His plan of redemption. Special revelation shows us the nature and character of God, and because God has revealed Himself in this way, we can know Him—through a saving relationship with Him in the person and work of Jesus Christ.

DISCUSSION

WORLDLY KINGDOMS ARE TEMPORARY

DANIEL 7:1-8



- What could the beasts represent?
- How would you describe the world in this text? Do you ever feel like God doesn't have control over our world today?
- What do your worldly kingdoms look like? Why is it dangerous to pour ourselves into building them?

GOD'S KINGDOM IS EVERLASTING

DANIEL 7:9-14



- What is the "Ancient of Days" like? Who is He?
- Read Matthew 24:29-31 and Philipians 2:9-11. Who is the "one like a son of man"? What connections do you see to Daniel's vision?
- Read verses 15-27. What do you think God wanted the exiles (and us) to know from this vision?



HOW CAN DANIEL'S VISION ENCOURAGE YOU WHEN YOUR WORLD FEELS CHAOTIC, UNSTEADY, OR WRECKED?

CULTURAL CONNECTION

Do you ever wonder why God allows evil rulers to rule? Since God has authority over everything, why doesn't He just prevent evil people from having any power in this world? It's okay to ask this question. Honestly, asking this question shows that you recognize God is good, and what you're wrestling with is mostly the problem of evil. No ruler has authority without God giving it (Rom. 13:1). At times, God has allowed evil rulers to act as judgment against His people for their sin—like the kings we've been reading about in Daniel. We don't always know why God allows evil humans to take power, but we do know that our good God works all things for His glory and for our ultimate good—the good of the gospel (Rom. 8:28). We also know that God holds those evil leaders accountable and judges them for their sins. They may have the temporary opportunity to lead immorally and cruelly, but their kingdoms will fall; they will give an account for their sin.



DAY ONE

1 JOHN 2:15-17



In Daniel 7, Daniel described a vision of four major kingdoms that would rise during and after his time. Although all these kingdoms will be powerful, they ultimately will not endure. One day, the Son of Man will come to destroy these kingdoms and establish His kingdom forever.

The apostle John explored this theme in his first letter. In chapter 2, he urged the church not to love the world or the things in it. He described the things in the world as “the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride of life.” These three descriptions can be summed up as anything that would draw us away from loving God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength.

John told us not to love these things for two reasons. First, like the kingdoms in Daniel’s day, the things of the world will pass away. The romantic relationships we desire will eventually end. The money we work for will dissolve, our clothes and shoes will wear out and deteriorate, our physical beauty and strength will fade, and our trophies will gather dust. However, those who have called on Jesus for salvation and surrendered to Him will endure forever. Second, we shouldn’t love the things of the world because they aren’t from God. Our heavenly Father is the giver of all good things (James 1:17). The good things that the world offers are counterfeits, fakes. The acceptance of friends, academic and athletic accolades, followers on social medias, and a new pair of shoes may be appealing, but they are nothing compared to enjoying a relationship with God.

- **WHAT “THINGS IN THIS WORLD” ARE YOU TEMPTED TO LOVE MORE THAN GOD? HOW CAN YOU SURRENDER THEM?**
- **WHAT NEEDS TO CHANGE IN YOUR LIFE SO THAT YOU’RE INVESTING IN THE ETERNAL KINGDOM OF GOD?**

PRAY

FATHER, YOUR KINGDOM IS ETERNAL. PLEASE HELP ME TO INVEST MY LIFE IN YOUR KINGDOM AND NOT IN THE DESIRES OF MY FLESH OR IN POSSESSIONS THAT WILL PASS AWAY.



DAY TWO

MATTHEW 6:19-21

In Matthew 6:19-21, Jesus commanded us not to store up earthly treasures that fade away but to focus on heavenly treasures that will last forever. But what exactly are these heavenly treasures? In the context of this passage, Jesus had just spoken about praying, giving, and fasting. Spiritual disciplines like these, along with Scripture reading, are heavenly treasures that will not fade away. During our earthly lives, we can invest in eternity in two major ways: the Word of God and people's souls. Paul taught that godliness is profitable for all things because it holds a reward for this world and the world to come (1 Tim. 4:6-7). By practicing godly habits like Bible reading, Scripture memory and meditation, prayer, and evangelism, we allow the Spirit to work in our lives to shape us more into Christ's image. As a student, this looks like daily spending time reading God's Word, meeting with friends before school to pray, getting involved in a discipleship group at your church, and being intentional about having gospel conversations with your friends at school. We will reap an eternal reward for discipling others. The people we invest in will then make disciples too, growing God's kingdom!

Jesus said that where our treasure is, our heart will be also. Our treasure can be measured by how we use our free time and what we spend our money on. If we love Jesus above all else, then what we do on the weekends and how we use our allowance or earnings from work will show it. So, do you spend your free time more in God's Word or on social media? Do you invest your money more in clothes or in Christ and His church? Where you invest your time and money is where your heart will be also.

- **WHAT ARE THE IDOLS IN YOUR HEART PREVENTING YOU FROM TREASURING JESUS?**
- **ASSESS YOUR FREE TIME ON THE WEEKENDS. WHAT ARE YOU INVESTING YOUR TIME IN? WHAT NEEDS TO CHANGE?**

PRAY

**FATHER, PLEASE FORGIVE ME FOR STORING UP
EARTHLY TREASURES. HELP ME TO INVEST MY LIFE
IN YOUR WORD AND THE LIVES OF OTHERS SO THAT
I CAN GLORIFY YOUR NAME AND REAP AN ETERNAL
REWARD THAT WILL NEVER PASS AWAY.**



DAY THREE

PSALM 103:15-22

The closing chapters of Daniel offer visions of the future. These visions can be difficult to comprehend and even frightening to read. However, one theme throughout these chapters is the solid foundation of God's kingdom enduring forever.

In Psalm 103, the psalmist described the eternal nature of God's kingdom (v. 19). God has established His throne in the heavens, and His kingdom rules over all. One reason God's kingdom will never end is that God Himself is eternal. God has no beginning and no end; He has always existed. In contrast to God, who is infinite and uncreated, we are finite, created beings. The psalmist compared us to the grass that is here today and gone tomorrow. Our lives are like a vapor or a mist in the timeline of eternity. The kingdoms of this world will eventually fall because they are ruled by finite—limited—people who will ultimately die.

This is why God reminded Daniel of His eternal nature in chapters 7–12. God conveyed that as powerful as these kingdoms were, they would fall because their rulers were finite, created beings. However, Yahweh's kingdom is eternal and will never end. The beautiful truth about God's eternal nature is that His attributes will persist forever. Verse 17 proclaims that God's faithful love will endure for eternity for those who fear Him. God's love for His people will remain steadfast and unending. What comfort this brings to all those who take refuge in Him! We should respond in praise like the psalmist in verses 20-22, rejoicing that His kingdom will endure forever, and His faithful love towards us will never run out!

- **HOW DOES GOD'S ETERNAL NATURE COMFORT YOU WHEN YOU RECEIVE BAD NEWS OR WHEN LIFE DOESN'T MAKE SENSE?**
- **OUR SOCIETY PROMOTES THE IDEA OF MAKING HUMANITY LIMITLESS. WHY IS IT ACTUALLY GOOD THAT GOD MADE US FINITE AND DEPENDENT WITH LIMITATIONS?**

PRAY

LORD, I PRAISE YOU. YOUR FAITHFUL LOVE IS FROM ETERNITY TO ETERNITY. PLEASE HELP ME BY YOUR SPIRIT TO FEAR YOU AND WALK IN YOUR WAYS. I'M HONORED TO SERVE YOU HERE.



DAY FOUR

REVELATION 19:11-16

What is your view of Jesus? Do you just see Him as the baby in the manger at Christmas or as a friend you can turn to when you're in trouble? Or do you recognize Him as the holy One, the King of kings, and Lord of lords? We often struggle to worship, adore, and walk in obedience to Christ because we forget His majesty and glory.

Revelation 19:11-16 displays the full glory of the Son of God. John saw a vision of Jesus coming out of heaven on a white horse, symbolizing His victory. His name is Faithful and True because He fulfilled every promise of God the Father (2 Cor. 1:20). His eyes were like flames of fire, accenting His perfect purity and power. Many crowns were on His head, communicating that He alone is the one true King. Jesus's robe was dipped in blood, indicating that He will slay all His enemies through the power of His Word, a sharp sword. He controls all the angel armies of heaven and will pour out His just and holy wrath against all evil and wickedness until all things are placed under His feet.

This is our King, the Lion of the tribe of Judah. The kings of this world are nothing compared to Jesus. Therefore, we must pledge our allegiance not to worldly kings, but to King Jesus, the ruler of heaven and earth. We will not fear earthly kings, kingdoms, or people when we fear and respect the Lord. We will willingly give up our comforts, possessions, and even our lives for Jesus when we have a clear understanding of His glory and majesty. This is what empowered Daniel to live faithfully, and we must do the same.

- **WHAT FALSE PICTURES OF JESUS INFLUENCE US TO VIEW HIM IN A LOWER POSITION THAN HE IS?**
- **HOW DOES HAVING A WRONG VIEW OF JESUS AFFECT OUR OBEDIENCE TO HIM?**

PRAY

LORD JESUS, YOU ARE THE KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS. PLEASE FORGIVE ME FOR FORGETTING HOW GLORIOUS YOU ARE. HELP ME TO SEE YOUR MAJESTY DAILY SO I CAN OBEY YOUR COMMANDS.



DAY FIVE

PSALM 90:1-4

In Daniel's vision of the Son of Man in chapter 7, he described God as the Ancient of Days, which conveys God's eternal nature. The psalmist echoed this theme, stating that God has been God from eternity past and will continue to be God in eternity future. When we hear the word eternity, we often think of it only in terms of the future. However, God is the Ancient of Days, indicating that His existence extends back—before time began! Unlike all created things, God has no origin or starting point. He exists outside of space and time as we understand it. God has no past or future; instead, He perceives everything all at once. God does not gain knowledge; He isn't surprised by anything; He knows all things simultaneously. These truths are almost impossible for our human minds to comprehend!

God's eternity should comfort us when the kingdoms of this world appear to be winning. When laws promote unbiblical views of marriage, human life, and civil rights, we can trust that these issues are not outside God's control; He isn't surprised by anything. Before time began, the Ancient of Days planned to redeem humanity from their sin through the Son of Man, Jesus Christ. We've studied how God used Cyrus to bring about His judgment and restoration of Israel in rebuilding the temple (2 Chron. 36:22-23); surely He can also use all present-day rulers and leaders for His purposes. We can trust Him completely because He holds all things together (Col. 1:17). God knows your past, and He knows your future. Therefore, when anxiety attacks you, trust in your omniscient God, who knows all things, and give Him your worries, for He cares for you and will strengthen you (1 Pet. 5:6-10).

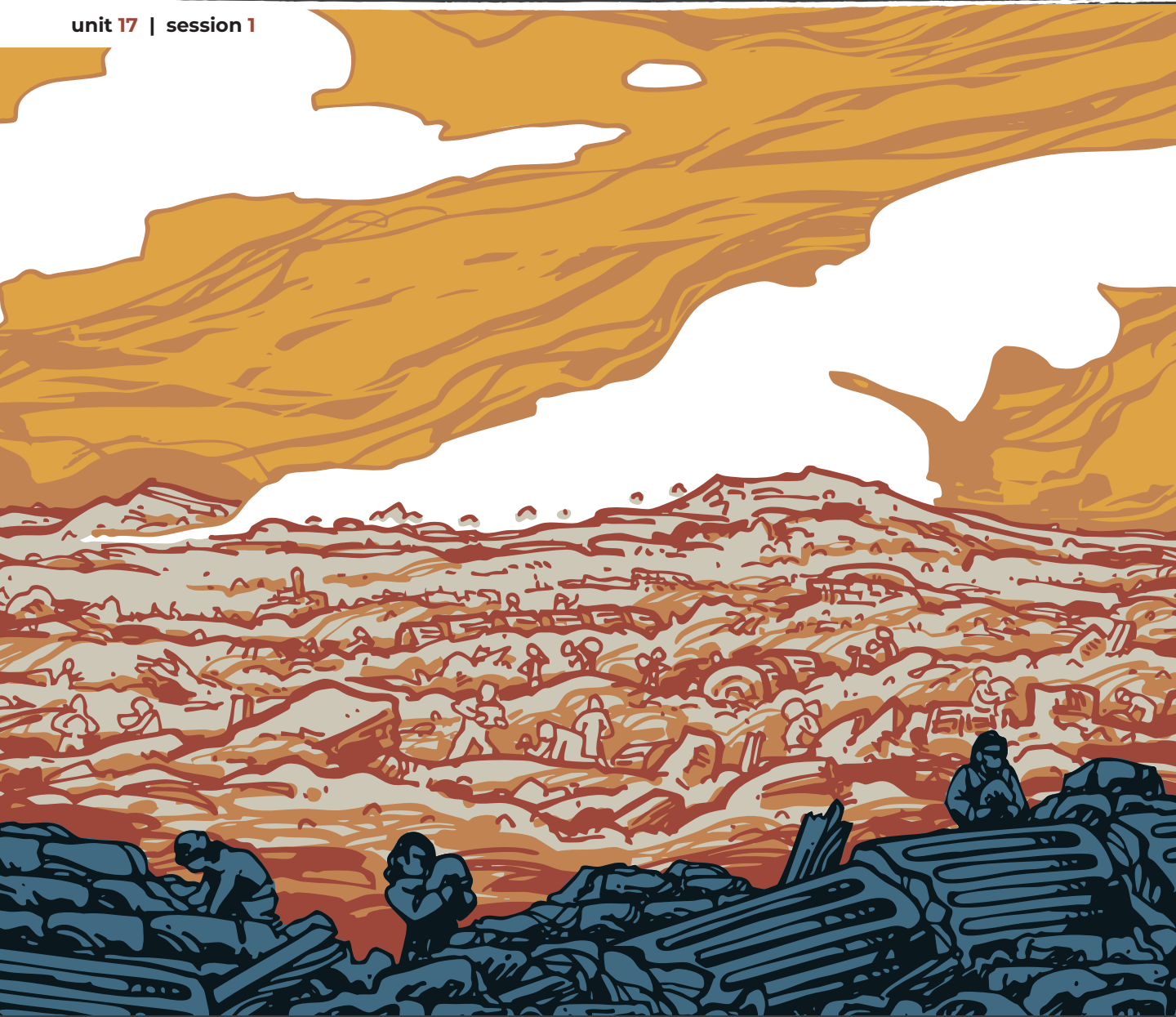
- **HOW DOES KNOWING THAT GOD HAS ALWAYS EXISTED COMFORT YOU IN AREAS OF YOUR LIFE THAT CAUSE ANXIETY?**
- **WHAT DOES IT LOOK LIKE TO GIVE YOUR ANXIETIES TO THE LORD DAILY? HOW SHOULD KNOWING YOUR ETERNITY IS SECURE AFFECT YOUR LIFE NOW?**

PRAY

LORD, YOU KNOW MY PAST AND FUTURE. YOU HAVE ALWAYS EXISTED AND ALWAYS WILL. HELP ME TO BE IN AWE OF YOU AND TO GIVE MY WORRIES TO YOU, KNOWING YOU ARE SOVEREIGN OVER MY LIFE.

GATHERED AS ONE

unit 17 | session 1



CHRIST CONNECTION

God kept His promise to bring His people out of exile from Babylon and restore their freedom to worship Him. Since Adam and Eve's first sin, all humans have been exiled from God and are in need of deliverance. Jesus came to end this exile, bring His people home, and restore our freedom to worship God.

RETURNING HOME

This week, we're covering the passages and main points below. But we encourage you to dig in and read all of the content on this timeline.

Ezra 1-3

GOD IS FAITHFUL TO HIS PROMISES

EZRA 1:1-8

1 In the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, that the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah might be fulfilled, the LORD stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, so that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom and also put it in writing: 2 “Thus says Cyrus king of Persia: The LORD, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth, and he has charged me to build him a house at Jerusalem, which is in Judah. 3 Whoever is among you of all his people, may his God be with him, and let him go up to Jerusalem, which is in Judah, and rebuild the house of the LORD, the God of Israel—he is the God who is in Jerusalem. 4 And let each survivor, in whatever place he sojourns, be assisted by the men of his place with silver and gold, with goods and with beasts, besides freewill offerings for the house of God that is in Jerusalem.” 5 Then rose up the heads of the fathers’ houses of Judah and Benjamin, and the priests and the Levites, everyone whose spirit God had stirred to go up to rebuild the house of the LORD that is in Jerusalem. 6 And all who were about them aided them with vessels of silver, with gold, with goods, with beasts, and with costly wares, besides all that was freely offered. 7 Cyrus the king also brought out the vessels of the house of the LORD that Nebuchadnezzar had carried away from Jerusalem and placed in the house of his gods. 8 Cyrus king of Persia brought these out in the charge of Mithredath the treasurer, who counted them out to Sheshbazzar the prince of Judah.

GOD RESTORES BROKENNESS

EZRA 3:1-6,10-13

1 When the seventh month came, and the children of Israel were in the towns, the people gathered as one man to Jerusalem. 2 Then arose Jeshua the son of Jozadak, with his fellow priests, and Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel with his kinsmen, and they built the altar of the God of Israel, to offer burnt offerings on it, as it is written in the Law of Moses the man of God. 3 They set the altar in its place, for fear was on them because of the peoples of the lands, and they offered burnt offerings on it to the LORD, burnt offerings morning and evening. 4 And they kept the Feast of Booths, as it is written, and offered the daily burnt offerings by number according to the rule, as each day required, 5 and after that the regular burnt offerings, the offerings at the new moon and at all the appointed feasts of the LORD, and the offerings of everyone who made a freewill offering to the LORD. 6 From the first day of the seventh month they began to offer burnt offerings to the LORD. But the foundation of the temple of the LORD was not yet laid. . . . 10 And when the builders laid the foundation of the temple of the LORD, the priests in their vestments came forward with trumpets, and the Levites, the sons of Asaph, with cymbals, to praise the LORD, according to the directions of David king of Israel. 11 And they sang responsively, praising and giving thanks to the LORD, “For he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever toward Israel.” And all the people shouted with a great shout when they praised the LORD, because the foundation of the house of the LORD was laid. 12 But many of the priests and Levites and heads of fathers’ houses, old men who had seen the first house, wept with a loud voice when they saw the foundation of this house being laid, though many shouted aloud for joy, 13 so that the people could not distinguish the sound of the joyful shout from the sound of the people’s weeping, for the people shouted with a great shout, and the sound was heard far away.

MAIN POINT.

God meets us in our brokenness and restores us.



THEOLOGY CONNECTION

COOPERATION

Members of New Testament churches should cooperate with one another in carrying forward the missionary, educational, and compassion ministries for the growth of Christ's kingdom. Christian unity in the New Testament sense is spiritual harmony and voluntary cooperation for common ends by various groups of Christ's people.

DISCUSSION

GOD IS FAITHFUL TO HIS PROMISES

EZRA 1:1-8

- Can God work through unbelievers? How does He do this today?
- Read Jeremiah 27:21-22. How did God fulfill His Word? What does this help you realize about Him?
- Read Jeremiah 29:10-14. Why do you think God chose to stir Cyrus's heart to fulfill this promise instead of releasing His people by some other way?

GOD RESTORES BROKENNESS

EZRA 3:1-6, 10-13

- ♥ • What did the people rebuild first? What do you think this symbolized for them? For us?
- ✝ • Why do you think the older generation wept over the temple foundation while others rejoiced?
- 📖 • What can we learn about community and worship through the people's actions?



THE PEOPLE DIDN'T JUST RETURN "HOME," THEY RETURNED TO GOD. HOW CAN WE TAKE STEPS TO RETURN WHEN WE EXPERIENCE DISTANCE WITH GOD BECAUSE OF OUR SIN?

CULTURAL CONNECTION

How much does where you're from impact your identity? How much do your family, friends, and activities shape you? Do you ever wonder if you'd be the same person if you lived in a different place, with a different family, or in different circumstances? Considering how much external factors affect our identity helps us discover who we are. God formed Israel for Himself. Israel's identity was supposed to be in the Lord—in living distinctly from the rest of the world by following God's law. Instead, the people often ignored their God-given identity and chose to imitate pagan nations surrounding them. After living for seventy years exiled in Babylon, many of them may have struggled with their identity. If they were born in Babylon, were they Israelites still? Were they also Babylonian? Who were they, really? Maybe you've asked this question too. Here's the truth: God created you. He delights in you. You are your truest self when you live out your identity as God's child—as a follower of Jesus living by God's Word. Circumstances change, but your identity never does when you root it in the Lord.



DAY ONE

JEREMIAH 25:1-14

Our plans have this tendency to fall apart, don't they? From big plans to small, human beings don't truly have control over the way things go in life. In Jeremiah 25:1-14, God spoke through Jeremiah to lay out what the next seven decades would look like for the people of Israel. They had sinned—big time—and they were going to spend seventy years in exile from Israel as a consequence for their sin.

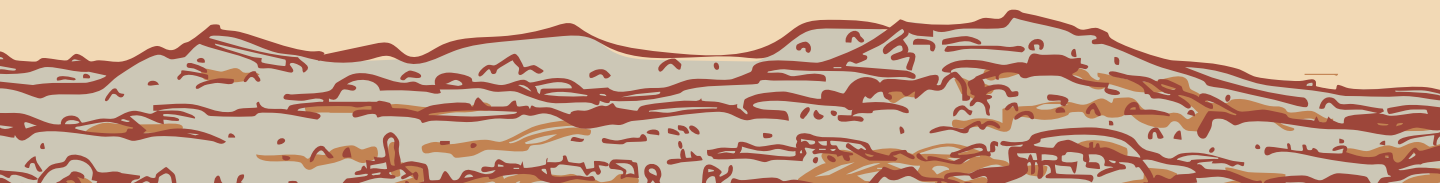
This probably wasn't how the Israelites had seen their lives going, but the Lord had a perfect plan the whole time. God planned for the people of Babylon to take over Israel, and He planned for Babylon to receive consequences for their sin as well. The future that the Lord laid out may have seemed a bleak, but God carried out His Word. In our first session on the book of Ezra, we learned about the Israelites' return from the very exile that God promised in this passage. Everything happened like God said it would!

When you think about your own life, the future may look a little scary. You might be worried that your plans will fall apart. The Lord has a greater plan for you, and for the world, and His plan always comes true. The Israelites probably weren't thrilled about the plan God had for them in the exile, but these consequences were ultimately for the good of the people. They would learn the devastating effects of sinning and turning away from the Lord. God was going to return them to their land and eventually bring ultimate redemption through His Son! What does this teach us? We can trust in the plans of the Lord and His providence over our lives.

- **WHEN WAS A TIME THAT YOUR PLANS FELL APART, BUT THINGS TURNED OUT BETTER THAN YOU HAD HOPED?**
- **HOW CAN YOU GROW IN YOUR TRUST FOR GOD'S PLANS FOR YOUR LIFE?**

PRAY

**LORD, THANK YOU FOR ALWAYS HAVING THE
PERFECT PLAN FOR THE WORLD AND ALLOWING US
TO BE A PART OF THAT PLAN. HELP ME TO TRUST IN
YOUR POWER AND YOUR PLANS FOR MY LIFE.**





DAY TWO

JEREMIAH 29:10-14

Jeremiah 29:11 is a Bible verse that people use a lot today. You may see it at graduation parties or on signs in people's homes—and for good reason! It's a great verse! But it becomes even more meaningful when we understand the context in which it was written.

The prophet Jeremiah wrote a letter to the people of Israel while they were in exile in Babylon. They were far from home, discouraged, and unsure about what their lives were going to look like from that point forward. The Lord spoke through Jeremiah to remind the people that the exile was not random but was a result of their sin and idolatry. God didn't leave the Israelites discouraged though; He explained that they would be able to return home and that He would restore their land. More than just their physical restoration, God promised that they would find the Lord and be heard by Him if they would only seek Him and cry out to Him.

God does have great plans for where we will live and what we will do, just like He did for the Israelites, but He has even more important plans for our hearts. When our sin requires consequences or we turn from following God, He keeps His promises and desires to bring us back to Himself. Even in the middle of sending the Israelites away because of their repeated disobedience towards Him, the Lord showed incredible mercy towards them and encouraged the people that the exile wouldn't last forever. Because we will sin and fall short of God's plans for us, the Lord will discipline us, but He will do so out of love. And He won't leave us there forever. God has good plans for us and hears our cries for help; He works to restore us to a right relationship with Him.

- **HOW DOES KNOWING THE CONTEXT OF JEREMIAH 29:11 CHANGE THE MEANING OF THE VERSE?**
- **WHAT DO WE LEARN ABOUT GOD'S CHARACTER FROM THIS PASSAGE?**

PRAY

LORD, HELP ME TO TRUST YOU EVEN IN TIMES OF DISCIPLINE BECAUSE YOU ALWAYS HAVE GOOD INTENTIONS FOR ME. HELP ME TO REPENT FROM SIN AND FOLLOW THE PLANS YOU HAVE FOR ME.



DAY THREE

HAGGAI 1:1-8

In the book of Haggai, some of the Israelites have been allowed to return to their homeland and were readjusting to life in Israel. Remember, they were exiled because they were worshiping other gods and continuously sinning against the Lord. They had returned, but their focus was still on other things besides God! The people focused on building their own homes and lives before rebuilding the temple where they were to worship God and make sacrifices for their sin.

God spoke through the prophet Haggai and commanded the people to begin rebuilding the temple right away. The people needed to make the Lord their first priority before making their own lives comfortable because He deserved their focus and their worship. The Israelites may not have been praying to idols like they were before the exile, but they were placing other things, like comfort, before God. Our idols don't tend to look like other gods or physical statues like in ancient Israel. But we fall prey to the same temptation as the Israelites in this passage—the temptation to put ourselves before the Lord. Maybe you give up your quiet time to have more time to study or to talk to your friends. Maybe you're trying to seek a path in life that will bring you the most comfort instead of what is most glorifying to the Lord. Some of these things aren't bad by themselves! Focusing on school or trying to be successful is good and can honor God. But if we're placing good things before worshiping and obeying God, then we have some changes to make. We have to get our priorities straight. The Lord is abundantly clear that He made us to glorify Him, and this should be the focus of our lives in everything we do.

- **WHAT ARE YOU PRIORITIZING OVER GLORIFYING GOD AND OVER YOUR RELATIONSHIP WITH HIM?**
- **HOW CAN YOU REVOLVE YOUR LIFE AROUND WORSHIPING GOD INSTEAD OF MAKING IT A PART OF YOUR LIFE?**

PRAY

**LORD, HELP ME TO REMEMBER THAT GLORIFYING
YOU IS THE MOST IMPORTANT THING IN MY
LIFE. HELP ME TO GIVE UP THINGS THAT ARE
DISTRACTING ME FROM YOU AND TO ALWAYS SET MY
EYES ON YOU.**



DAY FOUR

HEBREWS 10:1-10

Have you ever had such a big mess in your house that you didn't know where to start cleaning? That feeling of chaos and being overwhelmed might be what the Israelites felt when they returned to a broken Jerusalem. The temple had been destroyed and rebuilding would require a lot of hard work. When we studied Ezra 3 at the beginning of this week, we read that the first thing the Israelites rebuilt was the altar—even before laying the foundation for the temple. This may seem out of order, but for these people living under the law God gave them through Moses, the ability to make sacrifices was the most important thing. Why? Sacrifices atoned for their sins, temporarily cleansing them and bringing them back into right relationship with God. For seventy years, after the temple was destroyed and the people were exiled, the people hadn't been able to make sacrifices for their sins. So, we can see why they needed to rebuild the altar before they even rebuilt the temple! The people wanted to worship in the way God commanded. They understood the impact of sin on their relationship with the Lord.

In Hebrews 10, we learn that animal sacrifices were never enough to truly cover all of the sins of the people. However, like the author of Hebrews explains, Christ's death on the cross acted as the perfect, permanent sacrifice for our sins. While the blood of animals was only able to atone for sin temporarily, Jesus's blood is able to atone for our sins forever. If you have placed your faith in Jesus, your sins have been washed away by the blood of Christ, and you have been brought into right relationship with the Lord.

- **WHAT DOES JESUS'S PERFECT AND PERMANENT SACRIFICE HELP YOU UNDERSTAND ABOUT YOUR STANDING WITH GOD, EVEN WHEN YOU STILL SIN?**
- **WHEN HAVE YOU FELT LIKE YOU NEEDED TO EARN GOD'S FORGIVENESS? WHY IS IT SOMETIMES HARD TO BELIEVE THAT JESUS'S DEATH WAS ENOUGH TO ATONE FOR US?**

PRAY

LORD, THANK YOU FOR SACRIFICING YOUR SON SO THAT MY SIN COULD BE FORGIVEN FOREVER. HELP ME TO TRUST YOUR FORGIVENESS AND WORSHIP YOU FOR THE GRACE YOU HAVE SHOWN ME.





DAY FIVE

HAGGAI 2:1-9

Earlier this week, we read about the building of the new temple's foundation. The people who had seen the first temple before it was destroyed were disappointed in what they saw being built; they were grieved because it didn't live up to the first one. In this passage, the Lord spoke through the prophet Haggai and told the people He knew they were disappointed in the new temple they were seeing. However, He called the people to be strong and to carry on their work because His Spirit was with them. More than that, the Lord promised that the glory to come in the future would be better than anything the people of Israel could ever imagine.

We might often be disappointed in the way things have turned out in our lives; we may not understand how the Lord is working. We might be tempted to think that He is doing a greater work in the lives of others or that we lack something—that God is withholding good things from us. However, as believers, our hope and joy are not in what we can see in this world. Our hope is in the second coming of Christ, in the promise that we will spend eternity in the presence of God. Even in times that you feel disappointed in this life, you can turn that over to the Lord and remind yourself of the perfect goodness you will experience for all eternity. In the new heavens and the new earth, we won't feel like we're lacking or compare ourselves to each other because we will have all that we could ever need in the Lord.

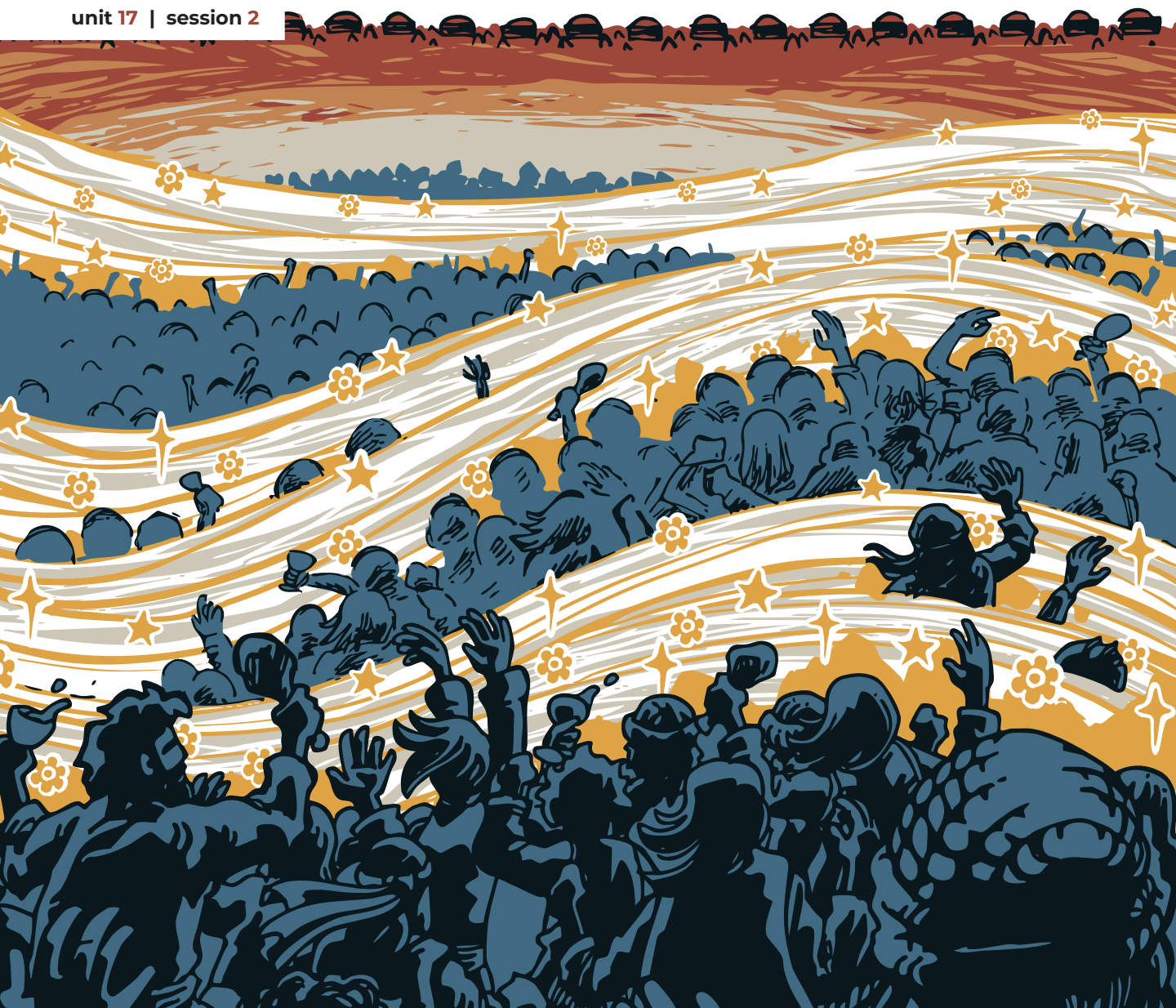
- **WHERE DO YOU FEEL DISAPPOINTMENT IN YOUR LIFE OR LIKE GOD IS WITHHOLDING SOMETHING FROM YOU?**
- **HOW CAN YOU REMIND YOURSELF OF THE HOPE YOU HAVE IN JESUS'S SECOND COMING?**

PRAY

LORD, THANK YOU FOR THE PROMISE I HAVE OF ETERNITY WITH YOU AND THE HOPE YOU BRING TO MY LIFE. HELP ME TO FLEE FROM COMPARISON OR DISAPPOINTMENT AND RUN TO THE JOY I CAN FIND ONLY IN YOU.

REBUILDING THE *TEMPLE*

unit 17 | session 2



CHRIST CONNECTION

God's people rebuilt the temple so they would have a place to worship God. Years later, God sent His Son, Jesus, to be with His people. Jesus provided something better than the temple; He gave us Himself.

REBUILDING FROM THE RUINS

This week, we're covering the passages and main points below. But we encourage you to dig in and read all of the content on this timeline.

Ezra 4–6; Haggai 1–2

GOD WORKS THROUGH US FOR HIS NAME

EZRA 6:6-12

6 Now therefore, Tattenai, governor of the province Beyond the River, Shethar-bozenai, and your associates the governors who are in the province Beyond the River, keep away. 7 Let the work on this house of God alone. Let the governor of the Jews and the elders of the Jews rebuild this house of God on its site. 8 Moreover, I make a decree regarding what you shall do for these elders of the Jews for the rebuilding of this house of God. The cost is to be paid to these men in full and without delay from the royal revenue, the tribute of the province from Beyond the River. 9 And whatever is needed—bulls, rams, or sheep for burnt offerings to the God of heaven, wheat, salt, wine, or oil, as the priests at Jerusalem require—let that be given to them day by day without fail, 10 that they may offer pleasing sacrifices to the God of heaven and pray for the life of the king and his sons. 11 Also I make a decree that if anyone alters this edict, a beam shall be pulled out of his house, and he shall be impaled on it, and his house shall be made a dunghill. 12 May the God who has caused his name to dwell there overthrow any king or people who shall put out a hand to alter this, or to destroy this house of God that is in Jerusalem. I Darius make a decree; let it be done with all diligence.

WORSHIP REQUIRES PREPARATION

EZRA 6:16-22

16 And the people of Israel, the priests and the Levites, and the rest of the returned exiles, celebrated the dedication of this house of God with joy. 17 They offered at the dedication of this house of God 100 bulls, 200 rams, 400 lambs, and as a sin offering for all Israel 12 male goats, according to the number of the tribes of Israel. 18 And they set the priests in their divisions and the Levites in their divisions, for the service of God at Jerusalem, as it is written in the Book of Moses. 19 On the fourteenth day of the first month, the returned exiles kept the Passover. 20 For the priests and the Levites had purified themselves together; all of them were clean. So they slaughtered the Passover lamb for all the returned exiles, for their fellow priests, and for themselves. 21 It was eaten by the people of Israel who had returned from exile, and also by every one who had joined them and separated himself from the uncleanness of the peoples of the land to worship the LORD, the God of Israel. 22 And they kept the Feast of Unleavened Bread seven days with joy, for the LORD had made them joyful and had turned the heart of the king of Assyria to them, so that he aided them in the work of the house of God, the God of Israel.

MAIN POINT.

God works for our good and for His glory.



THEOLOGY CONNECTION

GOD IS FAITHFUL

God's faithfulness means He keeps His word and always fulfills His promises (1 Cor. 1:9; 2 Tim. 2:13; 1 Pet. 4:19). God's faithfulness is demonstrated in His fulfillment of the promises He made to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. The apostle Paul linked the attribute of "faithful" to God's coming through on His word in 1 Thessalonians 5:24. We reflect God by keeping the promises we make to Him and to others.

DISCUSSION

GOD WORKS THROUGH US FOR HIS NAME

EZRA 6:6-12



- Where do you see God's work in King Darius's response?
- If you came back to rebuild, what kind of help would you ask for? How did a Persian king know what the Jews needed to worship God?
- Why did God bring His people home? Think deeply here. What is the greatest reason to bring them home?

WORSHIP REQUIRES PREPARATION

EZRA 6:16-22

- What happens to our traditions over time? Why did the people need to get this Passover right?
- How do you think the people felt taking part in Passover for the first time?
- How can we prepare to worship God? What difference could this make for us?



WHY DID THE PEOPLE'S OBEDIENCE TO GOD'S COMMANDS MATTER GREATLY IN THIS PASSAGE? WHY DOES OURS MATTER TOO?

CULTURAL CONNECTION

Do you ever feel like you're in a rebuilding phase? Maybe parts of your life feel like ruins and rubble—a relationship with a parent or a friend, your reputation, your grades. What once stood strong fell apart. Maybe your relationship with God needs rebuilding. Your relationship was once like a strong building, but over time, the building began to sway; then, it cracked and fell. Maybe you're at the beginning of your walk with God, trying to figure out how to start building. Whether you're a new believer or not, you'll likely experience a time when you need to rebuild. The history of God's people is full of rebuilding periods. In those periods, we see that successfully rebuilding began with repentance and worship. Every time. In the end, the physical structures they rebuilt, like the temple or the city, mattered greatly, but what mattered more was the people returning to the Lord in their hearts. Rebuilding begins internally. If you begin anywhere else—with works, with checklists, with outward appearances—then you'll likely crumble again. Build on the foundation of repentance and worship; allow internal work to produce change.



DAY ONE

ISAIAH 65:17-25

Think about something you spent a long time waiting for, and think about the joy and relief you felt when what you had waited for finally came. The people of Israel had waited for seventy years in exile and another fifty years after for the temple to be rebuilt so they could worship God rightly. In Ezra 6, we saw that they did some serious rejoicing after it was finished!

However, the Israelites' rejoicing was still incomplete. Before the exile even began, the Lord spoke through the prophet Isaiah and gave a glimpse of the perfect kingdom to come in the future. The Israelites rejoiced in the rebuilding of the temple because they could worship God properly again, but better things were still to come. About 500 years after this rebuilding, Jesus came to the earth to live, to die, and to be resurrected so that those who believe in Him can be forgiven of sin and spend eternity in the presence of God. As believers, we get to rejoice in this reality now—the reality that we are able to be in right relationship with God and have the Holy Spirit in us because of Jesus's sacrifice! But, more is still to come! The passage in Isaiah foreshadows a time in the future when Jesus will return and His kingdom will be established fully in the new heavens and new earth. All sin, shame, and pain will be gone, and believers will spend all eternity with God. Think about how much greater our rejoicing will be on that day! For today, we celebrate the saving work of Jesus, we share the gospel, and we eagerly wait for the day to come when both the kingdom and our joy will be complete!

- **HOW COULD DAILY REMINDING YOURSELF OF THE PERFECT KINGDOM TO COME HELP YOU HAVE HOPE WHEN STRUGGLING WITH DISAPPOINTMENT OR PAIN?**
- **HOW DOES KNOWING THAT GOD FULFILLED HIS PROMISES TO THE ISRAELITES HELP YOU TO TRUST IN THE PROMISE OF ETERNITY WITH HIM?**

PRAY

LORD, THANK YOU FOR THE CHANCE TO REJOICE IN JESUS'S SACRIFICE. HELP ME TO SHARE MY HOPE OF SPENDING ETERNITY WITH YOU IN THE NEW HEAVENS AND NEW EARTH WITH OTHERS.



DAY TWO

EZRA 7:8-10; 9:1-3

The people of Israel were finally home in their land. They had rebuilt the temple and were able to worship properly again. Unfortunately, what we see in the story is that the people never truly stopped committing the sins that had sent them into exile. Even after experiencing the consequences of their sin, and the grace of the Lord to allow them to return, their hearts were prone to sin, and they disobeyed God. Ezra, one of the priests of Israel, had committed his life to teaching the people the law and calling them to obey God. Ezra was devastated when he heard about Israel's sin because of how far they had strayed from God's will.

Do you ever feel like you keep making the same mistake again and again? Israel returned to sin over and over again, and so has every person who has ever lived other than Jesus. Jesus sacrificed Himself because of humanity's continued pattern of sin, but those who believe in Him are cleansed of sin and guilt once and for all. As believers who have a relationship with Christ, we still continue to sin throughout our lives. We won't be made sinless until we are in eternity, but how we react to our sin matters. Consider how you react when the Holy Spirit reveals patterns of sin in your life. The people of Israel chose to ignore the severity of their sin and continued to live in it, no matter the consequences. But Ezra, who felt real sorrow and grief over the sin around him and inside his heart, desired change. When God reveals your sin, what do you do to stop the cycle instead of numbing out or ignoring it? For example, what do you do to stop gossiping, using profanity, or dishonoring God on your phone? May we seek to repent of our sin and follow Ezra's example as we understand the weight of our sin.

- **WHAT DOES ISRAEL'S REPEATED SIN TELL US ABOUT HUMAN NATURE AND OUR NEED FOR JESUS?**
- **HOW DO YOU NORMALLY RESPOND TO SIN? DO YOU IGNORE IT OR TRY TO JUSTIFY IT? HOW CAN YOU RESPOND WITH SORROW AND SEEK REPENTANCE?**

PRAY

**LORD, HELP ME TO RECOGNIZE MY SIN AND TO
GRIEVE OVER IT. HELP ME TO REPENT OF SIN AND
TO LOVE YOUR WORD SO THAT I CAN STRIVE TO BE
MORE LIKE CHRIST.**



DAY THREE

EZRA 9:4-15; 10:1-4

The Israelites had been living in sin, and when the priest Ezra found out, he was deeply upset and grieved by their sin. His immediate response was to take time to fast and pray to the Lord, confessing the sins of his people. Ezra did not make excuses for the people or even ask the Lord to spare them from His anger, but he simply confessed the depth of their sin to the Lord. Part of why Ezra was so upset was because Israel had repeated this sin since they first came to the promised land under Joshua's leadership. Israel's story was one of disobedience to God, and Ezra struggled to see the people unchanged.

Thinking that the Israelites are foolish is easy for us. We think we would never live in or repeat sin the way they did. Unfortunately, we see that sin has been a fundamental part of humanity since the fall in Genesis 3, when sin entered the world through Adam and Eve. We must follow the example set by Ezra and the people as they worked to respond to this sin! They immediately confessed their disobedience and separated themselves from the people they were sinning with. Since we are prone to sinning and disobeying God, we should address our sin as soon as we recognize it and actively work to prevent ourselves from committing that sin again. We may need to remove temptation from our lives or even walk away from relationships that drag us down. We can't allow sin to continue to grow in our lives, and we can't justify or excuse our sin. The Lord alone sanctifies us, or makes us clean, but we must respond by taking steps to remove sin from our lives. When you find yourself stuck and struggling in sin, cry out to God and ask Him to help you to be more like His Son.

- **WHY IS RESPONDING TO SIN IMMEDIATELY BETTER THAN WAITING OR ATTEMPTING TO IGNORE IT?**
- **WHY IS SEPARATING YOURSELF FROM SIN NECESSARY, LIKE THE ISRAELITES SEPARATING THEMSELVES? WHAT OR WHO DO YOU NEED TO SEPARATE YOURSELF FROM TO STOP A CYCLE OF SIN?**

PRAY

**LORD, HELP ME TO TURN TO YOU WHEN I AM STUCK
IN SIN INSTEAD OF IGNORING MY DISOBEDIENCE.
THANK YOU FOR THE GRACE YOU HAVE SHOWN ME
OVER AND OVER, EVEN WHEN I AM STUCK IN CYCLES
OF SIN.**



DAY FOUR

NEHEMIAH 8:13-18

The book of Nehemiah, which comes right after the book of Ezra, continues the story of Jerusalem's restoration and God's work to bring the people of Israel back to obedience through people like Ezra, Nehemiah, and Haggai. After the walls of the city were rebuilt, Ezra began to teach the Word of God to the people to help them know how to follow the Lord. While he was teaching, the people learned that they were supposed to celebrate the Feast of Booths during that time of year. For the people of Israel, feasts and festivals helped them remember ways that God had provided for their ancestors and been faithful to them throughout history. The people began to celebrate the feast and remembered how God provided for Israel while they wandered in the wilderness after God freed them from Egyptian slavery.

We are prone to forgetting, aren't we? We forget small things—like where we put our keys or why we walked into a room—but we also have a tendency to forget the important things. The people of Israel might not have forgotten that the Exodus happened, but they had not taken the time to reflect on the faithfulness of God in caring for His people during that time. In the same way, we need to remember all the ways God has been faithful to us. You probably aren't going to stay in a tent for a week like the Israelites did during the Feast of Booths, but you can keep a journal of the ways the Lord has answered prayers. You can take time every day to reflect on how the Lord provided for you in big and small ways. Remembering how God has been faithful encourages us to be more faithful to Him.

- **WHAT PROBLEMS CAN COME FROM FORGETTING THE WAYS GOD HAS BEEN FAITHFUL TO US? WHY DO WE SO EASILY FORGET GOD'S FAITHFULNESS?**
- **HOW CAN YOU PRACTICE REFLECTING DAILY ON THE LORD'S FAITHFULNESS IN YOUR LIFE?**

PRAY

LORD, THANK YOU FOR YOUR CONSTANT FAITHFULNESS IN MY LIFE. HELP ME TO REMEMBER YOUR GOODNESS AND TURN TO YOU EVEN IN DIFFICULT TIMES. MAY MY LIFE REFLECT YOUR LOVE MORE AND MORE EVERY DAY.



DAY FIVE

NEHEMIAH 9:32-38

Most of us have probably experienced a time when we knew we deserved our punishment for something we did wrong. Maybe you even got a lesser punishment than what you were expecting or should have received. In this passage in Nehemiah, the people of Israel had just spent time recounting their history—all the moments God was faithful and all the moments they were sinful. Not to spoil the story, but God was (and is) always faithful, and the people of Israel always ended up sinning (just like us). They acknowledged that they deserved the consequence they received—being exiled to another land—and they actually admitted that the Lord was just, or right, for punishing them. The people reminded themselves of the Lord's righteousness and goodness even though life was difficult for them in Israel still.

Admitting that we're wrong isn't easy for most of us; even more difficult is admitting that we deserve to face big consequences. However, we should take a moment to learn from Israel here. They acknowledged their sin and the Lord's justice in punishing them, but they also acknowledged God's righteousness and steadfast love. In the face of our own sin, we should confess our wrongdoing and proclaim the Lord's goodness even when consequences loom. Reminding ourselves that God loves us despite our sin should drive us to worship and obedience. The people of Israel took time to renew their covenant with God, recommitting themselves to follow His Word. When we sin, we should confess it, praise the Lord for His faithfulness and kindness to forgive us, and seek to repent and obey. Israel knew that God's discipline was a sign of His great love for them, and the same is true in our lives today.

- **HOW DOES GOD DISCIPLINING HIS CHILDREN REFLECT HIS LOVE FOR THEM? WHY DO WE OFTEN MISTAKE HIS DISCIPLINE AS GOD BEING HARSH OR UNKIND TO US?**
- **IS ADMITTING WHEN YOU'VE BEEN WRONG DIFFICULT FOR YOU? HOW COULD THIS IMPACT YOUR OBEDIENCE TO GOD?**

PRAY

GOD, THANK YOU FOR YOUR JUSTICE AND YOUR STEADFAST LOVE FOR ME EVEN WHEN I SIN AGAINST YOU. HELP ME TO RESPOND TO YOUR FORGIVENESS WITH WORSHIP AND OBEDIENCE.

unit 17 | session 3



Zechariah prophesied about the Messiah, saying He would be a humble King who would build a new and better kingdom. Jesus is the Messiah King. Those who trust in Him are forgiven of their sin and welcomed into His kingdom.

RESTORED AND REFINED

This week, we're covering the passages and main points below. But we encourage you to dig in and read all of the content on this timeline.

Zechariah

OUR KING IS COMING

ZECHARIAH 9:9-12

9 Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your king is coming to you; righteous and having salvation is he, humble and mounted on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey. 10 I will cut off the chariot from Ephraim and the war horse from Jerusalem; and the battle bow shall be cut off, and he shall speak peace to the nations; his rule shall be from sea to sea, and from the River to the ends of the earth. 11 As for you also, because of the blood of my covenant with you, I will set your prisoners free from the waterless pit. 12 Return to your stronghold, O prisoners of hope; today I declare that I will restore to you double.

OUR KING WILL RESTORE US

ZECHARIAH 13:1-2,9

1 "On that day there shall be a fountain opened for the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, to cleanse them from sin and uncleanness. 2 "And on that day, declares the LORD of hosts, I will cut off the names of the idols from the land, so that they shall be remembered no more. And also I will remove from the land the prophets and the spirit of uncleanness. . . . 9 And I will put this third into the fire, and refine them as one refines silver, and test them as gold is tested. They will call upon my name, and I will answer them. I will say, 'They are my people'; and they will say, 'The LORD is my God.'"

MAIN POINT.

God calls us to live like His promises are real.



THEOLOGY CONNECTION

THE SCRIPTURES

All Scripture is a testimony to Christ, who is Himself the focus of divine revelation.

DISCUSSION

OUR KING IS COMING

ZECHARIAH 9:9-12

- ✝ • What do you think ancient kings were like? How do they compare with the king in this text?
- 📖 • What causes us to doubt the Bible? Read Matthew 21:1-6. How does this passage help us trust God's Word?
- 🧠 • Why do you think God wanted His people to hear about a future king? Why is Zechariah's prophesy helpful for us to hear even now?

OUR KING WILL RESTORE US

ZECHARIAH 13:1-2,9

- What is this image of a fountain (v. 1)? Read Jeremiah 2:13. How can we apply both passages?
- What would it be like to live in a world without distractions leading us away from God?
- ♥ • What does it mean to be refined? Why and how does God refine His people (us)?



HOW SHOULD BELIEVING GOD'S PROMISES ABOUT HEAVEN AND JUDGMENT AFFECT OUR CHOICES, MINDSETS, AND PRIORITIES NOW?

CULTURAL CONNECTION

Think about your relationship with God: When do you grow closer to Him? When do you pull away? Sometimes, we experience spiritual growth during seasons of joy, when life is good; sometimes, we become spiritually lazy and forget to depend on God when life is good. But what about when life hurts? When you walk through painful seasons of heartache, stress, disappointment, sickness, or loss, do you forget what you believe about God—what Scripture teaches about Him? About eternity? If so, you're not alone. Many of us walk through these times as if we have no hope. We hyperfocus on what hurts and on what's difficult, forgetting God's promises rather than clinging to them. But what if we changed all that? What if when we experience the darkest seasons of life, we run to God and walk closely beside Him? What if instead of pulling away, we cling to our assurance of eternity with God—free of pain, sin, and sorrow? What if we lived like God's promises are real? It would change everything.



DAY ONE

ZECHARIAH 3

Have you ever felt like someone judged you for the way you dressed? Or felt like you weren't good enough to stand in someone's presence or to enter certain rooms? The Lord gave Zechariah, a prophet to the Israelites when they first returned from the exile, a series of visions to show the people what the kingdom of God would look like someday. Some of the visions' imagery is very interesting (and even strange!), but the vision in Zechariah 3 is fairly clear. The vision was of Joshua, the high priest and one of the leaders helping to rebuild the temple, in filthy clothes standing before the Lord. Can you imagine how it would feel to stand in front of the King of the universe in dirty clothes? Having your imperfections and mistakes laid out before God would bring a lot of shame! Even worse, Satan was there too, waiting to accuse Joshua. The beautiful, unexpected twist in the vision was that God didn't shame Joshua or send him away for being filthy. The Lord removed his filth, giving him new clothes so he could stand before God. In the vision, God promised Joshua that if he followed the law and walked with God, then he would rule over the temple with power granted by God. Regardless, God promised a day when He would remove His people's sin entirely and replace it with robes of righteousness.

Do you sense the incredible hope and joy in this passage? Without Jesus, we stand before God covered in the filth of our sin and shame. Satan stands to accuse us, whispering lies of shame and guilt. However, when we place our faith in Jesus, God only sees His Son when He looks at us. Our old sin and guilt are taken off of us, and we are made new. How? Because Jesus took all of it on His shoulders and carried it when He carried our cross. All our shame is gone by the grace of God and because of His great love for us!

- **HOW HAS THE LORD FREED YOU FROM SHAME? WHY SHOULD THIS RADICALLY CHANGE HOW YOU LIVE EACH DAY?**
- **HOW DOES YOUR LIFE SHOW THAT YOU'VE BEEN MADE NEW?**

PRAY

GOD, THANK YOU FOR REMOVING MY SIN AND SHAME SO THAT I CAN STAND BEFORE YOU UNASHAMED AND UNAFRAID. HELP ME TO FOLLOW YOU CLOSELY BECAUSE OF YOUR GREAT LOVE FOR ME.



DAY TWO

ISAIAH 11:1-10

God's Word is full of important promises to His people. One of God's most significant promises was that someone from David's family line would be on the throne forever (2 Sam. 7:16). God's people knew this promise, but after returning from exile, they couldn't see how God could carry it out. In today's passage, Isaiah presented an image of the stump of Jesse. Think of a tree stump. Do you expect much growth from them? Probably not. In fact, usually trees are cut down into stumps to prevent them from growing—a lot like what other nations did to Israel and to David's line. From a worldly perspective, the nation had been cut down, and since it was still under Persia's control, the chance of God fulfilling this promise seemed low. But here's the truth: We must remember that God ordained their cutting down. He was sovereign over it.

Think about Zechariah's vision from yesterday. From a human perspective, Joshua should've been cast out of the king's presence because of his sin and uncleanness. However, the Lord did something unexpected, unimaginable: He cleansed Joshua and made him new. Isaiah 11 teaches that God was going to do something unexpected again by bringing a shoot, a tiny branch of new growth, from the stump of Jesse (David's line). What does this mean? Even though all that remained of Judah was a stump, God would keep His promise through a tiny shoot—a remnant branch of David's family line. The Lord fulfilled this promise through Jesus, a descendant of David! Ultimately, God will fulfill the promise of all His children being gathered when Jesus returns. The people of Israel were able to hope in the future Messiah during the exile, and in the same way, we can hope in Jesus's return during hard times in our lives. We can trust God to bring life and meaning even when all we see is a stump. Our God never fails, and He never breaks His promises to us!

- **WHERE DO YOU LOOK FOR HOPE DURING DARK TIMES?**
- **WHAT SITUATION IN YOUR LIFE FEELS A LOT LIKE A STUMP, LIKE NOTHING GOOD CAN COME FROM IT? HOW CAN YOU TRUST IN GOD'S ABILITY TO BRING MEANING TO THIS AREA?**

PRAY

LORD, THANK YOU FOR ALWAYS FULFILLING YOUR PROMISES AND GIVING YOUR CHILDREN HOPE. HELP ME TURN TO YOU IN DIFFICULT TIMES AND LEAN ON YOUR FAITHFULNESS.



DAY THREE

REVELATION 22:12-16

Today's passage, some of the very last verses in the Bible, parallels Zechariah's vision (from two days ago). In the same way that Joshua's robes were washed clean in Zechariah's vision, believers are washed clean and brought into the city of God. The image from Isaiah that we studied yesterday comes up too! Jesus explained that He is the shoot from Jesse's stump (Isa. 11:1) and David's descendant, and therefore, He is the fulfillment of the promise in Isaiah's prophecy (v. 16). In these four verses, the Lord reveals how He will bring believers into eternal life and fulfill the promises He has made since the beginning in Genesis.

When we think about Jesus returning, we may struggle even imagining what the new heaven and new earth will be like. Sin and brokenness are so ingrained in our world that complete freedom from them feels impossible. Sometimes, being unable to imagine this reality of freedom causes us to doubt God or to become lazy in our walk with Him; we don't see the purpose in living faithfully or obediently when we're uncertain of future redemption. In that struggle and doubt, we must recall God's perfect faithfulness throughout history; we can look back to move forward in hope. Leaning into God's faithfulness in the past can help us walk in obedience. God fulfilled the promise in Isaiah of a Messiah, and He will fulfill the promise of redeeming the world and bringing believers into eternity. We can't know if Jesus will return in our lifetime, but this hope in God's faithfulness should drive the way we live. Obeying the Lord, sharing the gospel, and growing in our relationship with Him will always be worth it because He is good and has promised to make all things right one day.

- **DO YOU EVER STRUGGLE WITH DOUBT? HOW DOES DOUBT IMPACT THE WAY YOU LIVE AND ROB YOU OF JOY?**
- **DOES YOUR LIFE REFLECT THAT YOU'VE PLACED YOUR HOPE IN JESUS'S RETURN? WHY OR WHY NOT?**

PRAY

**GOD, HELP ME ALWAYS TO HOPE IN YOUR PROMISES
AND IN MY ETERNITY WITH YOU. HELP ME TO
WORK THROUGH ANY DOUBTS I MAY HAVE BY
TURNING TO YOU AND REMINDING MYSELF OF YOUR
FAITHFULNESS IN THE PAST.**



DAY FOUR

MATTHEW 21:1-10

One of the coolest things is when TV shows or movies call back to some small detail from earlier, showing why it mattered. Something that seemed minor or unimportant turns out to be relevant and exciting, and real fans pick up on these details. Reading the Bible from cover to cover works a lot like this! For example, the prophecy from Zechariah 9 that we talked about in our lesson may seem unimportant or maybe a little strange, but when you reach this passage in Matthew 21, you see how God threads all events together to accomplish His plans for redeeming the world. The Lord fulfills all His promises even down to Jesus's riding into Jerusalem on a donkey!

Jesus entering Jerusalem on a donkey might seem a little random, but this action tells us so much about Jesus's character. Most kings would make a grand entrance and draw a lot of attention to themselves to show their power and status—to prove they were higher than the people and worthy of being served. Our King Jesus rode into Jerusalem on a donkey—not a very regal or powerful animals but symbols of peace and humility. Jesus riding into Jerusalem on a donkey displayed how very different He was from earthly rulers. Though He is absolutely higher than us, He lowered Himself to identify with us. He is our Prince of Peace and humble Savior. The Creator and King of the universe came in the form of a man and humbled Himself, even in His entrance to Jerusalem—His holy city, to die for the sins of the world. Just like the people of Israel in this moment, we should worship our King. Our King doesn't hold His power over us or cause strife, but He loves us deeply and brings peace and mercy to all who believe. Our lives should be an act of worship to this King, the One who deserves all glory and honor.

- **WHY IS JESUS'S HUMILITY SO IMPORTANT?**
- **HOW DOES UNDERSTANDING JESUS'S HUMILITY CHANGE WHAT IT MEANS FOR YOU TO "LIVE LIKE JESUS"?**

PRAY

**LORD, THANK YOU FOR THE MERCY YOU SHOW ME.
HELP ME TO SEEK TO BE HUMBLE AND MERCIFUL
AND TO ALWAYS WORSHIP YOU FOR THE WAY YOU
HAVE LOVED YOUR PEOPLE.**



DAY FIVE

1 CORINTHIANS 6:9-11; REVELATION 1:5-6

You might have had a moment in life when your struggles and sins felt overwhelming or inescapable no matter what you tried. The people of Israel could only pay for their sin through the sacrifice of animals. The blood of the animals was a temporary atonement for their sin, so the people had to place their hope in the coming Messiah and the salvation He would bring. Zechariah 13:1 says, “On that day there shall be a fountain opened for the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, to cleanse them from sin and uncleanness.” God promised that a day would come when all of His children would be able to wash away their sin. These passages in 1 Corinthians and Revelation show us that Jesus’s life, death, and resurrection make it possible for God’s people to be washed clean.

An old hymn written in 1772 talks about this fountain promised by the Lord. The people of Israel didn’t know what the fountain would be when God made the promise, but we do: Jesus’s blood is the fountain that washes us clean. A lyric in the hymn says, “There is a fountain filled with blood, drawn from Immanuel’s veins; and sinners plunged beneath that flood lose all their guilty stains.”² The lyrics may seem strange at first glance, but the image is incredibly beautiful. The fountain God promised to wash the sins away from His children would be filled with Jesus’s blood, spilled for us out of obedience to the Father and out of His great love for us. Jesus didn’t just sacrifice some of His time or energy; He gave His life so we can have a relationship with the Lord and spend eternity in His presence. Praise the Lord for the fountain filled with the blood of Christ!

- **WHY IS BLOOD THE REQUIRED PAYMENT FOR SIN?**
- **HOW DOES IT MAKE YOU FEEL THAT JESUS SACRIFICED HIS BLOOD FOR SINNERS TO BE MADE CLEAN? WHAT DIFFERENCE SHOULD THIS MAKE IN YOUR LIFE?**

PRAY

**GOD, THANK YOU FOR THE BLOOD OF CHRIST THAT
COVERS OUR SIN. HELP ME NOT TO FORGET YOUR
SACRIFICE AND WORSHIP YOU EVERY MOMENT.**

IF IT PLEASES *THE KING*

unit 17 | session 4



CHRIST CONNECTION

While the situation seemed hopeless for Esther's people, the Jews, God was totally in control and had a plan to save them. Humanity's situation may have appeared hopeless because of the depth of our sin, but God always had a plan for our salvation: the sacrifice of His Son, Jesus.

BEHIND THE SCENES

This week, we're covering the passages and main points below. But we encourage you to dig in and read all of the content on this timeline.

Esther

GOD IS WITH US

ESTHER 3:7-10,12-13

7 In the first month, which is the month of Nisan, in the twelfth year of King Ahasuerus, they cast Pur (that is, they cast lots) before Haman day after day; and they cast it month after month till the twelfth month, which is the month of Adar. 8 Then Haman said to King Ahasuerus, "There is a certain people scattered abroad and dispersed among the peoples in all the provinces of your kingdom. Their laws are different from those of every other people, and they do not keep the king's laws, so that it is not to the king's profit to tolerate them. 9 If it please the king, let it be decreed that they be destroyed, and I will pay 10,000 talents of silver into the hands of those who have charge of the king's business, that they may put it into the king's treasuries." 10 So the king took his signet ring from his hand and gave it to Haman the Agagite, the son of Hammedatha, the enemy of the Jews. . . . 12 Then the king's scribes were summoned on the thirteenth day of the first month, and an edict, according to all that Haman commanded, was written to the king's satraps and to the governors over all the provinces and to the officials of all the peoples, to every province in its own script and every people in its own language. It was written in the name of King Ahasuerus and sealed with the king's signet ring. 13 Letters were sent by couriers to all the king's provinces with instruction to destroy, to kill, and to annihilate all Jews, young and old, women and children, in one day, the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, which is the month of Adar, and to plunder their goods.

GOD IS WORKING FOR US

ESTHER 8:5-8,11-12,17

5 And she said, "If it please the king, and if I have found favor in his sight, and if the thing seems right before the king, and I am pleasing in his eyes, let an order be written to revoke the letters devised by Haman the Agagite, the son of Hammedatha, which he wrote to destroy the Jews who are in all the provinces of the king. 6 For how can I bear to see the calamity that is coming to my people? Or how can I bear to see the destruction of my kindred?" 7 Then King Ahasuerus said to Queen Esther and to Mordecai the Jew, "Behold, I have given Esther the house of Haman, and they have hanged him on the gallows, because he intended to lay hands on the Jews. 8 But you may write as you please with regard to the Jews, in the name of the king, and seal it with the king's ring, for an edict written in the name of the king and sealed with the king's ring cannot be revoked." . . . 11 [Letters were sent] saying that the king allowed the Jews who were in every city to gather and defend their lives, to destroy, to kill, and to annihilate any armed force of any people or province that might attack them, children and women included, and to plunder their goods, 12 on one day throughout all the provinces of King Ahasuerus, on the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, which is the month of Adar. . . . 17 And in every province and in every city, wherever the king's command and his edict reached, there was gladness and joy among the Jews, a feast and a holiday. And many from the peoples of the country declared themselves Jews, for fear of the Jews had fallen on them.

MAIN POINT.

Though we can't always see Him moving, we can trust God is with us and working for us.



THEOLOGY CONNECTION


GOD'S PLAN AND HUMAN ACTION

God's sovereignty over all of life encompasses the free actions of human beings. Proverbs 19:21 says, "Many are the plans in the mind of a man, but it is the purpose of the LORD that will stand." In ways we are unable to comprehend fully, the Lord's plan goes forward through the choices of human beings. Even freely chosen sinful actions are factored into God's overarching plan, as is the case with the crucifixion of Jesus—an event both purposed by God yet also carried out by the wicked decisions of human beings (Acts 2:23). Knowing that God is working all things for the good of those who love Him (Rom. 8:28), we trust in His promise to fulfill His plan, even when we do not understand our present circumstances.

DISCUSSION




GOD IS WITH US

ESTHER 3:7-10,12-13

- Have you ever been in the right place at the right time? What about in the wrong place at the wrong time? Explain.
- Why is this conflict bigger than just Haman versus the Jews? Who did the conflict affect?
-  • The king announced the Jews' destruction on the evening before Passover. Why was this significant? How do you think the Jews felt?

GOD IS WORKING FOR US

ESTHER 8:5-8,11-12,17

-  • As a Jew, Esther was in the minority in Persia. When have you felt this way as a believer in our culture?
-  • Do you think God uses all the parts of our story? How can this help you to honor him in all seasons?
-  • The new edict gave the Jews a chance of victory. How do we have more than a chance of victory in Jesus?



WHAT WOULD CHANGE IF YOU TRUSTED GOD WAS WORKING IN THE GOOD AND BAD SITUATIONS OF YOUR LIFE?

CULTURAL CONNECTION

Many of us want to know why life happens the way it does—why bad things happen, why our lives are the way they are, why we suffer. This desire to know isn't new; Adam and Eve wrestled too, and the serpent used the desire against them, baiting them with a promise that eating the fruit would give them knowledge—God's knowledge (Gen. 3:5). But God had commanded them not to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Why? Because doing so would lead to death. Here's the truth: In our humanity, we aren't capable of understanding all things. God didn't design us to carry that weight. Instead, He designed us to walk with Him by faith, to trust in His knowledge and understanding (Prov. 3:5-6). So, what do we do when we can't see where God is leading us, when we don't understand? How can we believe God is at work, in control, and moving when we can't see evidence? We walk with Him anyway. We trust in God's vision and knowledge anyway, rather than our own. He'll never lead us to places He won't go with us. And His presence with us is all we need.



DAY ONE

ESTHER 4



In this week's lesson, you learned about Haman's plan to destroy the Jews and how God used Esther and Mordecai to save His people. Since we know how the story ended for Esther, losing sight of how intense and dangerous this situation was for her is easy. In chapter 4, Mordecai encouraged Esther to use the position God had given her to help save the people. Esther was scared at first because the king had the power to put her to death if he was displeased with her. Mordecai reminded Esther that if she didn't take this opportunity, the Lord would use someone else to save His people and fulfill His plans. Esther showed incredible boldness and selflessness by putting her life on the line to save her people.

This exact situation probably won't happen to any of us, but we can learn so much from Esther's story. You may not be asked by the Lord to risk your physical life to fulfill His plan and share the gospel, but He will ask you to make sacrifices for the kingdom—sacrifices of time, popularity, success, worldly possessions and praise, and persecution. To be deterred by fear of failure or rejection is normal, but serving the Lord even when it requires sacrifice is a gift. God has given us the opportunity to be a part of taking the gospel to the world, and we should love the people around us enough to take risks to reach them with the good news. Serving God is a joy, and serving the people around us so that they might be brought into God's family is an honor. The Lord will accomplish His plan regardless of our obedience, but He lovingly calls us to be a part of it, and we should seek to serve Him at every opportunity!

- **WHAT FEARS DO YOU HAVE THAT MIGHT KEEP YOU FROM DOING WHAT GOD HAS CALLED YOU TO DO?**
- **HOW CAN YOU BOLDLY AND SELFLESSLY SERVE THE LORD RIGHT NOW—IN YOUR FAMILY, AT YOUR SCHOOL, IN YOUR FRIEND GROUP, ON YOUR TEAM, AND SO ON?**

PRAY

LORD, THANK YOU FOR THE OPPORTUNITY TO BE A PART OF YOUR REDEMPTION PLAN FOR THE WORLD. HELP ME TO BE BOLD AND TO SERVE THOSE AROUND ME AS IF I'M SERVING YOU.



DAY TWO

PSALM 83

At some point in your life, you've likely felt like something unfair happened to you. Maybe it was how someone treated you, and you may have wanted to find a way to pay them back for what they did. As we've seen in the last few weeks, a lot of nations fought against Israel throughout their history. In Psalm 83, Asaph cried out to God while suffering at the hands of enemies. A lot of people would have cried out for revenge or vengeance, but Asaph cried out for protection and for God to move. On an even deeper level, he cried out for God to move against his enemies so that they would realize the power of God and turn to Him in worship!

We likely don't have many physical enemies seeking to hurt or work against us, but we do see significant injustice and cruelty in the world. At times, this suffering and evil can be overwhelming, and your instinct might be to desire or seek revenge. Seeking justice for yourself and taking matters into your own hands instead of seeking the Lord and His guidance would be incredibly easy—and tempting. In those moments, we should seek to follow Asaph's example in this psalm. When we experience injustice or cruelty, we can cry out to the Lord to move and make Himself known to those perpetrating evil. Ultimately, our role in this world is to share the gospel and this includes sharing with people who act against God's commands. This doesn't mean that God won't call us to act against injustice and take a stand in some way, but our heart should always be for people to know God and not to get revenge for our suffering. We cry out to the Lord and trust Him to guide us and to bring ultimate justice to the world.

- **HOW DO YOU USUALLY RESPOND TO INJUSTICE OR CRUELTY IN YOUR LIFE OR IN THE LIVES OF THOSE AROUND YOU?**
- **HOW DOES KNOWING GOD WILL ULTIMATELY BRING JUSTICE CHANGE HOW WE LIVE? HOW COULD IT CHANGE THE WAY YOU REACT TO YOUR ENEMIES?**

PRAY

LORD, THANK YOU FOR BEING A GOD OF JUSTICE AND FOR CARING DEEPLY FOR ALL THOSE IN THE WORLD. HELP US TO CRY OUT TO YOU IN THE FACE OF EVIL AND TO SEEK JUSTICE BY YOUR GUIDANCE.



DAY THREE

PSALM 40

If you haven't realized this already, life isn't always easy. But you probably know this already. Tragedies happen and things go wrong every day because we live in a world broken by sin. In Psalm 40, King David praised God for how He provided for him and brought him out of a difficult time. The imagery of how God had cared for David is beautiful, but the psalm starts with David saying that he waited patiently for the Lord. You will have times in life when you may cry out to God for help yet feel like He is ignoring you. However, we know from the truths throughout Scripture that God will always provide for His children, and we sometimes need to wait patiently for Him to move. This doesn't mean our lives will be perfect or easy in every way, but we will have everything we need and God will move to help us during time of distress.

You may struggle to admit to others when you're struggling because you don't want to seem weak. Especially when it comes to our walk with the Lord, admitting that we need help and can't do it all by ourselves can be difficult, but we know that God is powerful and perfect. He is ready to help us by being our peace and our security in the middle of trouble. David set an example for us to cry out to God and confess our deep need for Him. The Lord knows our weaknesses and struggles, and He desires for us to come to Him with all of our needs. The Lord is our Helper and Deliverer (v. 17). We can trust God with our problems and weaknesses instead of working to hide them from Him and from others.

- **IS ADMITTING YOUR WEAKNESSES TO THE LORD DIFFICULT FOR YOU? WHY? HOW CAN YOU PRACTICE GOING TO GOD WITH YOUR STRUGGLES?**
- **HOW HAS GOD PROVIDED FOR YOU IN A TIME OF DIFFICULTY OR WEAKNESS?**

PRAY

GOD, THANK YOU FOR YOUR CONSTANT CARE FOR ME AND FOR YOUR PROVISION IN MY LIFE. HELP ME TO WAIT PATIENTLY FOR YOU TO MOVE AND TO TURN TO YOU IN ALL OF MY STRUGGLES.



DAY FOUR

PSALM 34:15-18

Imagine standing in front of the ocean or the Grand Canyon or something so big that you can't help but realize how small you are. Sometimes when we think about God, we end up feeling the same way—like God is so big and we're small and unimportant. Surely our daily lives and struggles aren't significant to Him? The truth is that these feelings couldn't be more wrong. We can't allow feeling this way to draw us away from seeking God's help and care in our times of need. In reality, Satan desires for us to believe these lies and to react by not going to God. Let's agree to recognize these lies and refuse to believe the "father of lies" (John 8:44).

This passage in Psalm 34 teaches us the exact opposite of Satan's lies: God is near to us in our pain and desires to walk us through our struggles. We may not always see exactly how He is moving, but Scripture tells us that God is never far from us. Think about Esther's story! God may not have been mentioned explicitly, but He was working all things out for the good of His people in big ways that they couldn't see. He is doing the same for your life, and you can place your trust in Him because of His proven faithfulness throughout all of history. In your struggles, pain, and sin, your Creator and Father walks every step with you, carrying you through and teaching you to depend on Him for strength. We will suffer in this world. But we never have to suffer without hope! We get to choose hope. Our God will carry us through every day on earth and bring us into the joy of eternity in His presence.

- **HAVE YOU EVER FELT LIKE GOD WAS DISTANT IN YOUR STRUGGLES? HOW DID YOU WORK THROUGH IT OR HOW CAN YOU WORK THROUGH IT NOW?**
- **WHERE DO YOU NEED TO CHOOSE HOPE? HOW DOES GOD'S WORK BEHIND THE SCENES IN ESTHER'S STORY GIVE YOU HOPE IN YOUR OWN STORY—IN PLACES YOU CAN'T SEE GOD'S WORK?**

PRAY

LORD, THANK YOU FOR CARING SO DEEPLY FOR MY STRUGGLES. HELP ME NEVER TO LOSE SIGHT OF YOUR LOVE FOR ME AND YOUR CONSTANT PROVISION IN MY LIFE.





DAY FIVE

ACTS 2:22-24

In the last few weeks, we've studied the people of Israel after they returned from exile, but this is just a small part of their story. They had many struggles and setbacks throughout their story, like Haman seeking to destroy the Jews and Satan constantly working to prevent the people from following God. In fact, Satan has been at work since the time of Adam and Eve to deter humans from following their Creator. However, the Lord has been at work for even longer—always. He has complete control over how human history unfolds, and His plan will always come to pass. The first glimpse of God's promise to redeem the world through Christ is in Genesis 3, and in Acts 2, Peter explained how it was fulfilled. Regardless of Satan's work or humanity's evil plans, God succeeded in bringing redemption to the world.

When it feels like our lives are falling apart, we can look to this truth and be reminded that God is in control over every detail. From huge decisions to the tiniest moments, the Lord will ensure that He is glorified and that things are working together to fulfill His promises. God cares deeply about the details of our lives and uses those who believe in Him to reach the world with the gospel. You can find peace in recognizing that your life is not in your hands and that you can lean on God to guide you every step of the way. This truth should impact the way we make decisions and live out our faith! When we turn to the Lord for every decision, our lives should reflect Christ more and more.

- **HOW DOES SEEING THAT GOD HAD A PLAN TO SAVE YOU BEFORE TIME EVEN BEGAN HELP YOU UNDERSTAND HIS LOVE?**
- **WHAT ARE PRACTICAL WAYS YOU CAN TRUST THE LORD TO GUIDE YOUR LIFE?**

PRAY

**GOD, THANK YOU FOR YOUR PLAN OF REDEMPTION
AND HOW YOU HAVE WORKED IT OUT FROM THE
BEGINNING OF TIME. MAY I NEVER LOSE SIGHT OF
YOUR PROVIDENCE AND CARE IN MY LIFE.**

FROM THE MOUNDS *OF RUBBLE*

unit 18 | session 1



CHRIST CONNECTION

God's enemies tried to stop His people, but they still rebuilt the wall. God's enemies tried to stop Jesus by killing Him, but God planned for Jesus's death and resurrection to be the only way for people to be saved.

POWER TO PERSEVERE

This week, we're covering the passages and main points below. But we encourage you to dig in and read all of the content on this timeline.

Nehemiah 1–6

GOD EXCHANGES OUR DISCOURAGEMENT FOR PERSEVERANCE

NEHEMIAH 4:1-14

1 Now when Sanballat heard that we were building the wall, he was angry and greatly enraged, and he jeered at the Jews. 2 And he said in the presence of his brothers and of the army of Samaria, "What are these feeble Jews doing? Will they restore it for themselves? Will they sacrifice? Will they finish up in a day? Will they revive the stones out of the heaps of rubbish, and burned ones at that?" 3 Tobiah the Ammonite was beside him, and he said, "Yes, what they are building—if a fox goes up on it he will break down their stone wall!" 4 Hear, O our God, for we are despised. Turn back their taunt on their own heads and give them up to be plundered in a land where they are captives. 5 Do not cover their guilt, and let not their sin be blotted out from your sight, for they have provoked you to anger in the presence of the builders. 6 So we built the wall. And all the wall was joined together to half its height, for the people had a mind to work. 7 But when Sanballat and Tobiah and the Arabs and the Ammonites and the Ashdodites heard that the repairing of the walls of Jerusalem was going forward and that the breaches were beginning to be closed, they were very angry. 8 And they all plotted together to come and fight against Jerusalem and to cause confusion in it. 9 And we prayed to our God and set a guard as a protection against them day and night. 10 In Judah it was said, "The strength of those who bear the burdens is failing. There is too much rubble. By ourselves we will not be able to rebuild the wall." 11 And our enemies said, "They will not know or see till we come among them and kill them and stop the work." 12 At that time the Jews who lived near them came from all directions and said to us ten times, "You must return to us." 13 So in the lowest parts of the space behind the wall, in open places, I stationed the people by their clans, with their swords, their spears, and their bows. 14 And I looked and arose and said to the nobles and to the officials and to the rest of the people, "Do not be afraid of them. Remember the Lord, who is great and awesome, and fight for your brothers, your sons, your daughters, your wives, and your homes."

GOD'S POWER DOES THE WORK IN US

NEHEMIAH 6:15-16

15 So the wall was finished on the twenty-fifth day of the month Elul, in fifty-two days. 16 And when all our enemies heard of it, all the nations around us were afraid and fell greatly in their own esteem, for they perceived that this work had been accomplished with the help of our God.

MAIN POINT.

God gives us everything we need to live for Him.



THEOLOGY CONNECTION




GOD IS IMMANENT

When we say that God is immanent, we mean that God is personable and relatable to those made in His image, while remaining completely distinct and unique from all of His creation. It means that God is not a distant deity, who only sits on His heavenly throne with no interaction, but instead, He is a personal God who created people in His image to be in personal relationship with Him.

DISCUSSION


GOD EXCHANGES OUR DISCOURAGEMENT FOR PERSEVERANCE

NEHEMIAH 4:1-14

-  • When you're struggling, who's the first person you turn to? Why do we struggle to go to God first?
-  • How does culture mock believers? How should we react?
-  • Read Nehemiah 1:5. What did Nehemiah believe about God? How did those beliefs help him persevere? As believers today, why do we struggle to persevere?

GOD'S POWER DOES THE WORK IN US

NEHEMIAH 6:15-16

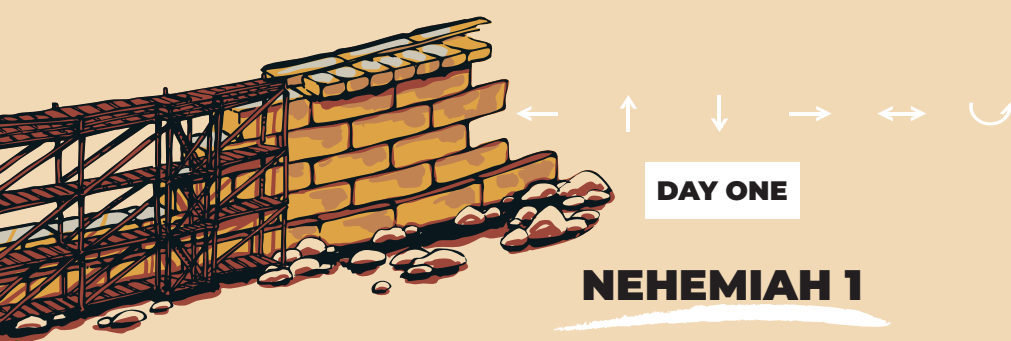
- Why do we want recognition and praise so badly? How does our culture make this tougher?
-  • People knew God accomplished the rebuilding of the wall. Is the way you live an undeniable example of God's work? Why should it be?



HOW ARE YOU LETTING FEAR OF BEING LEFT OUT OR REJECTED DISCOURAGE YOU FROM LIVING BOLDLY FOR JESUS? WHAT WOULD HELP YOU PERSEVERE?

CULTURAL CONNECTION

Sometimes, life feels like it's crumbling all around us, like a war zone. Circumstances we couldn't control smashed everything to pieces. When we look around, all we see are ruins and rubble where strong towers and bridges once stood. And in these times, we may feel like we'll never be able to rebuild. The destruction feels too deep, too permanent. Maybe life crumbled when you heard the word "cancer" spoken over someone you loved. Maybe your parents divorced. Maybe your sibling or friend died in a car crash. Maybe you tried alcohol or drugs for the first time and can't walk away. Maybe you compromised godly standards for purity. The truth is that life does crumble sometimes. It breaks and crashes down. And the other truth is that even in your best efforts, you can't rebuild what broke—not on your own. But God can. God responds when you turn to Him, when you hand Him the pieces of what's left, when you repent. He rebuilds you and restores you (1 Pet. 5:10). He makes you new.



In this introduction to Nehemiah, we learn a lot about Nehemiah's character. He was a man of God, an exile, and a cupbearer to the king of Persia. When news arrived, he learned that the people left back in Jerusalem were in trouble. The wall and gates of the city had been destroyed, and the people's protection had been eliminated with them. Nehemiah mourned at the news. He grieved because God's enemies had prevailed. He was full of sorrow for the suffering and pain back in his homeland. But, he immediately turned to the Lord, interceding for the people and their suffering. Notice the intensity of Nehemiah's prayer. He began by acknowledging God's greatness, faithfulness, and mercy. He didn't shy away from confessing the sins of his people, including himself and his father's house. He highlighted God's promises, reminding Him of His word given to Moses.

Nehemiah's prayer is a powerful example for us. When we face discouraging news or feel burdened by the brokenness around us, our first response should be to turn to God in prayer. Like Nehemiah, we can approach God with honesty, acknowledging both His power and our failings. We can hold on to His promises and intercede for those who are suffering. This chapter sets the stage for Nehemiah's courageous actions. His deep sorrow and fervent prayer weren't just emotional outbursts; they were the spark that made him determined to rebuild. May we, like Nehemiah, allow our hearts to be moved by the needs around us and be inspired to action through the power of prayer. Remember that even in the face of overwhelming challenges, God is faithful, and our prayers can be the first step towards restoration.

- **HAVE YOU EVER FELT BURDENED FOR A SITUATION OR A GROUP OF PEOPLE, EVEN WHEN YOU WEREN'T DIRECTLY IMPACTED? WHAT WAS THAT LIKE?**
- **WHAT CAN WE LEARN FROM NEHEMIAH'S PRAYER ABOUT GOING TO GOD FOR HELP OR GUIDANCE ABOUT A PROBLEM?**

PRAY

**GOD, OPEN OUR EYES TO SEE THE BROKENNESS
AROUND US AND THEN TO BRING OUR BURDENS TO
YOU. GIVE US THE COURAGE TO ACT WHEN YOU CALL
US TO.**



DAY TWO

ISAIAH 41:10-13

In this week's passage, Nehemiah had been given a massive task: rebuilding the ruined walls of Jerusalem, a project that must have felt impossible. As the people started rebuilding, they faced intense opposition and threats from enemies. Later, in Nehemiah 6, we learn they completed the wall in 52 days! The task was so incredible that the enemies of Jerusalem were astonished and intimidated. They lost their confidence because they recognized that they couldn't go up against God or His people. God had protected them, fought for them, and completed the task.

Isaiah 41:10-13 reflects the mighty warrior God we see in Nehemiah. We don't have to face difficult tasks alone. We don't have to fear those who oppose us. Why? Because God is with us, strengthening us when we lose our determination, helping us navigate tricky situations, and holding on to us when we feel like letting go. The remedy for fear isn't just trying harder not to be scared; it's remembering that God is with you and He is your God. His presence is enough. And He isn't just present; He's actively involved! When you feel weak, He strengthens. When you need a hand, He helps. When you feel like falling, He holds you up with His powerful, righteous hand. God promises this about anything that comes against you—doubts, anxiety, temptations, unfair situations. God promises to deal with those things, making them “as nothing.” You don't have to fight those battles alone. He's not just holding your hand; He's grasping it in a firm, loving grip and whispering, “Don't be afraid, I will help you.”

- **HOW SHOULD GOD'S PRESENCE WITH YOU CHANGE HOW YOU FACE CHALLENGES?**
- **IN WHAT SPECIFIC AREAS OF YOUR LIFE (SCHOOL, FRIENDSHIPS, DECISIONS) DO YOU NEED GOD'S STRENGTH AND HELP RIGHT NOW?**

PRAY

LORD, THANK YOU FOR HOLDING MY HAND AND PROMISING TO BE WITH ME ALWAYS. HELP ME TO REMEMBER YOUR POWERFUL PRESENCE WHEN FEAR TRIES TO CREEP IN. STRENGTHEN ME, HELP ME, AND GUIDE ME THROUGH EVERY CHALLENGE.



DAY THREE

PHILIPPIANS 1:27-30

Paul tells the Philippian church (and us) to live your life “worthy of the gospel of Christ.” This isn’t about being perfect but about your actions matching your beliefs. Let’s be honest: One of the biggest reasons people give for not following Jesus is that they’ve seen us live as hypocrites. We’re all guilty. If you say you follow Jesus, does your life show it? Do you choose kindness over gossip, honesty over cheating, and compassion over judgment? Do you stand firmly with other believers, united in your purpose to share Jesus? Paul says to live this way without fearing those who oppose you. In school, online, or even in some family situations, living for Christ brings pushback. People might make fun of you, exclude you, dislike you, or just not understand you. But Paul says, don’t back down. Your courage in these moments is a powerful testimony to God’s work in you, which is maybe the most challenging part. Paul says it’s “granted to you that for the sake of Christ you should not only believe in him but also suffer for his sake.” Wait, suffer? As a privilege? Yes! When you face tough times for choosing Jesus, you’re actually participating in what Jesus Himself went through. You’re joining a long line of faithful people, including Paul and Nehemiah, who endured struggles for the gospel. It means your faith is real, and it connects you deeply to Christ’s own journey.

Living out your faith in a way that truly reflects the gospel takes courage, especially when it’s unpopular. But remember, you’re not doing it alone. Jesus is with you, and standing firm for Him is an incredible privilege that builds your faith and points others to Him.

- **WHAT DOES IT MEAN FOR YOU TO LIVE YOUR LIFE “WORTHY OF THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST” IN YOUR DAILY LIFE, AT SCHOOL, OR WITH FRIENDS?**
- **WHY DO YOU THINK PAUL CALLS SUFFERING FOR CHRIST A PRIVILEGE? HOW DO YOU FEEL ABOUT THIS TRUTH?**

PRAY

LORD JESUS, THANK YOU FOR THE GOSPEL AND THE PRIVILEGE OF LIVING FOR YOU. GIVE ME THE COURAGE TO STAND FIRM, TO UNITE WITH OTHER BELIEVERS, AND TO LIVE IN A WAY THAT TRULY REFLECTS YOUR LOVE, EVEN WHEN IT’S TOUGH.



DAY FOUR

HEBREWS 13:5B-6

Life can have so many ups and downs, changes, and worries about the future. Feeling anxious or alone sometimes is normal. But today's verses from Hebrews offer an incredible promise that can totally change how you face those fears: God is always with you. God will never leave or abandon you. He is with you in every moment—when you're crushing it, when you mess up big time, when you're lonely, when you're overwhelmed. He won't ever walk away, give up on you, or decide you're not worth His time. People might let you down, friendships might shift, plans might fall apart, but God's commitment to you is rock-solid and unchanging. He's not just there; He's for you.

If the Lord is your Helper, He's on your side—actively working in your life, guiding you, strengthening you, and providing for you. You don't have to be just not scared. You can actually have a deep inner peace and a courage that comes from knowing who walks with you. What others think, what someone might say, whether you'll succeed or fail, whether you'll fit in—none of this matters. When God is your constant Helper, human opinions and pressures lose their power over you.

So when anxieties creep in, or you face a situation that makes you nervous, remember these verses. God is your constant Companion and powerful Helper. With Him by your side, you can truly face anything.

- **WHAT ARE SOME SPECIFIC WORRIES OR FEARS YOU FACE THAT YOU THINK THIS VERSE DIRECTLY SPEAKS TO?**
- **IF GOD PROMISES, "I WILL NEVER LEAVE YOU NOR FORSAKE YOU," HOW DOES KNOWING THIS CHANGE YOUR PERSPECTIVE ON CHALLENGES OR TIMES WHEN YOU FEEL ALONE?**

PRAY

FATHER, THANK YOU FOR THE INCREDIBLE PROMISE
THAT YOU WILL NEVER LEAVE OR ABANDON
ME. HELP ME TO TRULY BELIEVE THAT YOU ARE
MY HELPER SO I CAN LIVE WITH COURAGE AND
WITHOUT FEAR.



DAY FIVE

2 TIMOTHY 1:7

Have you ever felt really scared about something? Maybe it was speaking in front of the class, trying out for a team, or even just having a tough conversation with a parent or a friend. It's totally normal to feel that way. We often wish we were braver, right? In 2 Timothy 1:7, Paul tells us exactly what God hasn't given us and what He has. He hasn't given us a spirit of fear because fear isn't from Him. When we feel overwhelmed by anxiety or doubt, that's not God's doing. Instead, God has given us a spirit of power. Think about that! This isn't your own strength but God's strength working through you. He gives you the power to overcome challenges, to stand up for what's right, and to live out your faith even when it's tough.

God's love even empowers us to do good: to be kind, to forgive, and to show compassion even when it's difficult. God's love isn't weak; it's strong and active. Finally, He's given us a spirit of sound judgment; this means having a disciplined, self-controlled mind—one that can think clearly, make wise choices even when you're tempted, and not be swayed by every negative thought or peer pressure. It's about having peace and clarity, not chaos and confusion. And where does this Spirit come from? God, Himself. Through the Holy Spirit, His power, love, and sound judgment live in us. This truth should excite us and prompt us to live boldly and unafraid! So, the next time you feel that grip of fear, remember this verse. You don't have to rely on just your own bravery. You have access to God's incredible power, love, and judgment.

- **HOW DO YOU THINK HAVING A SPIRIT “OF POWER AND LOVE AND SELF-CONTROL” COULD CHANGE HOW YOU APPROACH CHALLENGES IN YOUR LIFE?**
- **WHAT'S ONE PRACTICAL STEP YOU CAN TAKE THIS WEEK TO LEAN INTO GOD'S SPIRIT OF POWER, LOVE, OR SOUND JUDGMENT IN A DIFFICULT SITUATION?**

PRAY

GOD, THANK YOU FOR NOT GIVING ME A SPIRIT OF FEAR. I PRAY THAT YOU WOULD FILL ME WITH YOUR SPIRIT OF POWER, LOVE, AND SOUND JUDGMENT TODAY AND EVERY DAY. HELP ME TO WALK CONFIDENTLY IN THE GIFTS YOU HAVE GIVEN ME.

ALL WHO *COULD* LISTEN

unit 18 | session 2



CHRIST CONNECTION

Ezra taught God's law, and the people recognized their sin. Jesus came to die for our sin and give us power to turn away from sin. Through faith in Jesus, our hearts are changed so we can love and obey God.

TRANSFORMED BY THE WORD

This week, we're covering the passages and main points below. But we encourage you to dig in and read all of the content on this timeline.

Nehemiah 8

GOD'S LAW BRINGS GRIEF

NEHEMIAH 8:1-9

1 And all the people gathered as one man into the square before the Water Gate. And they told Ezra the scribe to bring the Book of the Law of Moses that the LORD had commanded Israel. 2 So Ezra the priest brought the Law before the assembly, both men and women and all who could understand what they heard, on the first day of the seventh month. 3 And he read from it facing the square before the Water Gate from early morning until midday, in the presence of the men and the women and those who could understand. And the ears of all the people were attentive to the Book of the Law. 4 And Ezra the scribe stood on a wooden platform that they had made for the purpose. And beside him stood Mattithiah, Shema, Anaiah, Uriah, Hilkiah, and Maaseiah on his right hand, and Pedaiah, Mishael, Malchijah, Hashum, Hashbaddanah, Zechariah, and Meshullam on his left hand. 5 And Ezra opened the book in the sight of all the people, for he was above all the people, and as he opened it all the people stood. 6 And Ezra blessed the LORD, the great God, and all the people answered, "Amen, Amen," lifting up their hands. And they bowed their heads and worshiped the LORD with their faces to the ground. 7 Also Jeshua, Bani, Sherebiah, Jamin, Akkub, Shabbethai, Hodiah, Maaseiah, Kelita, Azariah, Jozabad, Hanan, Pelaiah, the Levites, helped the people to understand the Law, while the people remained in their places. 8 They read from the book, from the Law of God, clearly, and they gave the sense, so that the people understood the reading. 9 And Nehemiah, who was the governor, and Ezra the priest and scribe, and the Levites who taught the people said to all the people, "This day is holy to the LORD your God; do not mourn or weep." For all the people wept as they heard the words of the Law.

GOD'S LAW BRINGS JOY

NEHEMIAH 8:10-12

10 Then he said to them, "Go your way. Eat the fat and drink sweet wine and send portions to anyone who has nothing ready, for this day is holy to our LORD. And do not be grieved, for the joy of the LORD is your strength." 11 So the Levites calmed all the people, saying, "Be quiet, for this day is holy; do not be grieved." 12 And all the people went their way to eat and drink and to send portions and to make great rejoicing, because they had understood the words that were declared to them.

MAIN POINT.

Our lives reveal our greatest treasure.






THEOLOGY CONNECTION SANCTIFICATION

After we are justified by faith, declared to be in right standing with God through the righteousness of Christ, we undergo a lifetime of sanctification, where we are continually made more like Christ through the work of the Holy Spirit (Gal. 5:16-26; 2 Thess. 2:13). Scripture speaks of sanctification as a present position (we have already been sanctified) and as a continuing process. Sanctification affects the whole person, transforming one's heart, mind, and character to reflect Jesus.

DISCUSSION


GOD'S LAW BRINGS GRIEF

NEHEMIAH 8:1-9

-  • Besides the temple and city wall, what else was being rebuilt?
-  • Why is culture (believers too) often unbothered by sin? When is the last time you wept over yours?
-  • Why do you think the people valued God's Word so deeply? Why is it easy for us to take it lightly or ignore it?

GOD'S LAW BRINGS JOY

NEHEMIAH 8:10-12

- What is joy? Read Proverbs 17:22. What does joy do for us? How has joy strengthened you or someone else when life was tough?
-  • What is the difference in hearing God's Word and understanding it?
- What does the command to rejoice reveal about God's desire for us once we've repented of sin?



WHAT AREAS OF YOUR LIFE SHOW THAT GOD'S WORD MATTERS TO YOU? ARE THERE AREAS THAT SAY OTHERWISE? WHAT STOPS YOU FROM TREASURING THE WORD?

CULTURAL CONNECTION

What's your greatest treasure? Think outside of material possessions. What do you consider most valuable in your life? Many of us might say we treasure our family members more than anything else. Maybe you treasure your friendships. How do you know what you treasure the most in life? You can tell what is of greatest value by looking at where you invest your time and energy. Your priorities reveal your greatest treasure. Jesus even taught that our hearts belong to what we treasure (Matt. 6:21). If we say we treasure God, then not only do our hearts belong to Him, but our priorities reflect that He matters. Our time and energy are spent in an effort to know Him and make Him known. So, examine your heart. What does your heart belong to? Though we may say we treasure Jesus, our lives say something else. Our priorities reveal that what we treasure most is self—our time, our comforts, our desires. What would it look like for your life to reflect that Jesus matters more than anything else—that He alone is your treasure?



DAY ONE

PSALM 119:105

Have you ever tried to walk through a dark room without turning on the light? Navigating it without bumping into anything or tripping over something would be nearly impossible. But what if someone handed you a flashlight? Then you could move confidently through the room, avoiding any missteps or falls. Our passage today describes God's Word as exactly that—a light to guide our path so we don't misstep or fall.

From our passage earlier this week, when the Israelites heard the Word of God and had it explained to them, they fell to the ground on their faces and worshiped God. God's Word brought them out of spiritual darkness and they were overwhelmed by what they saw. They had been starved for His Word while in exile, and hearing it was like opening a floodgate.

We so easily take for granted that we have God's Word at our fingertips, readily available to us at any given moment. But do we allow God's Word to illuminate our lives and reveal our sins? Do we allow His truths to consume our thoughts—to affect us so deeply that we fall to the ground and worship? We might say we believe God's Word is our light, but our actions often tell a different story—like having the flashlight but keeping it turned off and in our pockets. To truly reflect God's Word, we have to open it, read it, meditate on it, and live it out. It's an active process of letting His truth guide every single step. When we do, our lives become a testament to His light, showing others the way too.

- **HOW COULD SOMEONE TELL, JUST BY OBSERVING YOUR LIFE, THAT YOU VALUE GOD'S WORD?**
- **WHAT'S ONE AREA OF YOUR LIFE WHERE YOU FEEL LIKE YOU NEED GOD'S WORD TO BE A "LAMP" OR "LIGHT" RIGHT NOW?**

PRAY

FATHER, THANK YOU FOR YOUR WORD, WHICH IS A
LAMP FOR MY FEET AND A LIGHT ON MY PATH. HELP
ME NOT JUST TO READ IT BUT TO TRULY LIVE IT OUT.
MAY MY LIFE REFLECT YOUR TRUTH AND LIGHT TO
EVERYONE AROUND ME.





DAY TWO

JOSHUA 1:8

Joshua had a big task ahead of him. Moses—who led the Israelites out of Egypt, who presented God’s commandments to them, who led them for forty years through the wilderness—was dead. As the new leader of the Israelites, God tasked Joshua to lead them into the promised land. No pressure, right? Joshua had a huge responsibility. But God gave him some crucial advice in Joshua 1:8: “Read, meditate, and observe My Word, and you will be successful.”

God didn’t say: “Read it a few times for a few minutes and think about it every now and then.” No, Joshua was to saturate himself with it, speak about it, share it, let it influence his conversations. The truths of the Bible should be so ingrained in us that they naturally come out in how we talk and interact with others. Meditating on God’s Word means to really think about it and chew on it, letting it sink deep into our minds and hearts. It’s not just checking off a box for quiet time; it’s allowing God’s truth to shape our thoughts and perspectives throughout our entire day. And then? We’re supposed to live it. This is where our lives really start to reflect whether or not we truly treasure God’s Word. It’s one thing to know what the Bible says; it’s another to actually apply it. When you choose kindness over gossip, purity over impurity, forgiveness over holding a grudge, honesty over a small lie—that’s God’s Word living through you. That’s your life reflecting His truth.

Joshua was pretty successful. He led the Israelites through many battles into the promised land and lived to be 110 years old. And at the end of his life, while others did not, he still chose the Lord; he still treasured God’s truth (24:14). May this be said of us one day too.

- **WHAT’S ONE PRACTICAL WAY YOU CAN “MEDITATE” ON GOD’S WORD THROUGHOUT YOUR DAY, EVEN IF YOU’RE BUSY?**
- **WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO YOU TO “REFLECT” GOD’S WORD TO OTHERS? DOES YOUR LIFE DO THIS?**

PRAY

LORD, THANK YOU FOR YOUR LIVING WORD. HELP ME TO NOT JUST READ IT BUT TO TRULY MEDITATE ON IT AND LET IT SHAPE EVERY PART OF MY LIFE. MAY MY ACTIONS AND WORDS ALWAYS REFLECT YOUR TRUTH AND BRING GLORY TO YOUR NAME.



DAY THREE

JAMES 1:22-25

How many times a day do you think you look at your reflection in a mirror, window, or other shiny surface? Probably several times a day. Our culture is fairly obsessed with looks; we often don't realize how much emphasis we place on them too. We look for what needs fixing or adjusting, and then we go about our day. But what if, after looking, we immediately forgot what we looked like? That would be pretty unhelpful!

James 1:22-25 gives us a powerful analogy about looking in a mirror. Here, God's Word is the mirror. When we read the Bible or hear God's Word in a sermon, we see who we are in light of God's truth. Scripture reveals areas where we need to grow, attitudes we need to change, and actions we need to take. It shows us what a Christ-like life looks like. The problem, James explained, is that if we just listen and don't act on what we learn, we fool ourselves. Simply knowing what's right is not enough. If we treasure God's Word, we don't just know it; we do it! Treasuring God's Word means letting what we hear and read transform our hearts—how we live! If God's Word tells us to be kind, then our lives should reflect kindness. If it tells us to forgive, then we should actively practice forgiveness. The Bible isn't just about following rules; it's about embracing the "perfect law, the law of liberty." When we truly live out God's Word, we experience the real blessing and freedom that comes from walking in His ways instead of being enslaved to the sinful desires of this world. God's Word shows us how to live as freed people. So, when you open your Bible, don't just read it. Look closely. See yourself in its truth. And then, intentionally choose to live it out. Be a reflection of God's amazing Word!

- **WHAT'S A SPECIFIC EXAMPLE OF SOMETHING YOU'VE LEARNED FROM GOD'S WORD RECENTLY THAT YOU'VE TRIED TO APPLY?**
- **WHY IS ACTIVELY LIVING OUT GOD'S WORD THE WAY TO "FREEDOM," AS JAMES MENTIONS? WHY DO WE OFTEN VIEW GOD'S WORD AS A LIST OF RULES INSTEAD?**

PRAY

LORD, THANK YOU FOR YOUR WORD. HELP ME NOT JUST BE A HEARER BUT ALSO A DOER OF YOUR WORD. MAY MY LIFE TRULY REFLECT YOUR TRUTH AND BRING YOU GLORY.



DAY FOUR

MATTHEW 7:24-27

Today's passage comes straight from Jesus. He told a parable (a simple story with a spiritual lesson) about two builders. One built his house on a rock and one on the sand. Storms blew in and the house on the rock survived while the house built on the sand collapsed. So what was He really talking about here? Jesus wasn't handing out architectural advice on how to build a sandcastle. He was talking about how to build our lives. He was telling us that the way we respond to His words—what we do with what we hear from the Bible—is like choosing the foundation for our lives.

Wise builders hear Jesus's words and put them into practice. They actively apply them to their lives. And then when the storms of life come, they won't collapse because their foundation—Jesus's words—is solid. Sturdy. Incapable of shifting. However, if they choose to be foolish builders—hearing Jesus's words without acting on them—the storms of life will overwhelm and destroy their shaky foundation. These people might know what the Bible says, but they don't let it shape their actions or decisions; they don't let it take root. And they will crumble when sickness or death or disappointment makes its way into their lives.

So, how are you building your life? Are you just hearing God's Word, or are you truly building your life on its strong foundation? Let's be wise builders and let God's truth shape who we are and what we do.

- **WHAT "STORMS" DO STUDENTS COMMONLY FACE TODAY THAT CAN SHAKE A PERSON'S "FOUNDATION"?**
- **WHO ARE SOME OF THE "WISE BUILDERS" IN YOUR LIFE? WHEN THEY'VE FACED STORMS, HOW DID YOU KNOW THEIR FOUNDATION WAS SOLID?**

PRAY

HEAVENLY FATHER, HELP ME NOT JUST TO HEAR YOUR TRUTH BUT TO ACTIVELY BUILD MY LIFE ON IT EACH DAY. MAY MY LIFE REFLECT THE STRONG FOUNDATION OF YOUR LOVE AND WISDOM.



DAY FIVE

PSALM 1:1-3

Imagine a strong, healthy tree, whose roots reach deep down into the ground, drawing up all the good nutrients it needs. It stands tall, with green leaves, and regularly produces fruit. Even when things get tough—a drought, a big storm—this tree just keeps on thriving. Now, picture a scraggly, weak sapling trying to grow in really poor soil, maybe even next to a busy road where it gets thrown around. It struggles to survive, and it rarely, if ever, produces fruit. Which tree do you want to be?

Psalm 1:1-3 paints a picture similar to these trees, but the psalmist is talking about us—how our lives reflect where we choose to “plant” ourselves. This passage shows us two paths. The first path involves going along with “the wicked”—negative influences, worldly opinions, people who mock what’s good and pull you away from your relationship with Jesus. If we spend our time in that “soil,” our lives won’t be spiritually productive or fruitful. But the second path, the blessed path, is about delighting in God’s Word. “Delighting” means loving it, finding joy in it, and making it a priority. It’s not just about reading it quickly but meditating on it day and night—really consuming it and applying it to our lives. When we do this, we become like that strong tree, planted by flowing streams. God’s Word is that living water, constantly nourishing us. When you consistently soak in God’s truth, your life will reflect it. You’ll bear fruit (Gal. 5:22-23). You won’t “wither” when difficulties come because you’re rooted deeply in something eternal. Living a life rooted in God’s Word means your actions, your choices, and your character will shine differently, showing the world that your delight is in Jesus.

- **HOW DOES “DELIGHTING” IN GOD’S WORD DIFFER FROM JUST READING IT? WHAT MIGHT MEDITATING ON IT DAY AND NIGHT PRACTICALLY LOOK LIKE FOR YOU?**
- **WHAT KIND OF SPIRITUAL “FRUIT” DO YOU HOPE TO SEE IN YOUR LIFE AS YOU GROW CLOSER TO GOD THROUGH HIS WORD?**

PRAY

**LORD, THANK YOU FOR YOUR LIVING WORD THAT
NOURISHES MY SOUL. HELP ME TO DELIGHT IN YOUR
WORD AND TO MEDITATE ON IT DAILY.**

SACKCLOTH AND DUST

unit 18 | session 3



CHRIST CONNECTION

God's people remembered all He had done and promised to be faithful. God is gracious and compassionate. All along, God has been faithful to people who are unfaithful. We experience God's grace and compassion in Jesus, who gave His life so we can receive mercy and life forever.

GIFT OF WORSHIP

This week, we're covering the passages and main points below. But we encourage you to dig in and read all of the content on this timeline.

Nehemiah 9–11

CONFESSION PROMPTS WORSHIP

NEHEMIAH 9:1-3,26-29,33-38

1 Now on the twenty-fourth day of this month the people of Israel were assembled with fasting and in sackcloth, and with earth on their heads. 2 And the Israelites separated themselves from all foreigners and stood and confessed their sins and the iniquities of their fathers. 3 And they stood up in their place and read from the Book of the Law of the LORD their God for a quarter of the day; for another quarter of it they made confession and worshiped the LORD their God. . . . 26 Nevertheless, they were disobedient and rebelled against you and cast your law behind their back and killed your prophets, who had warned them in order to turn them back to you, and they committed great blasphemies. 27 Therefore you gave them into the hand of their enemies, who made them suffer. And in the time of their suffering they cried out to you and you heard them from heaven, and according to your great mercies you gave them saviors who saved them from the hand of their enemies. 28 But after they had rest they did evil again before you, and you abandoned them to the hand of their enemies, so that they had dominion over them. Yet when they turned and cried to you, you heard from heaven, and many times you delivered them according to your mercies. 29 And you warned them in order to turn them back to your law. Yet they acted presumptuously and did not obey your commandments, but sinned against your rules, which if a person does them, he shall live by them, and they turned a stubborn shoulder and stiffened their neck and would not obey. . . . 33 Yet you have been righteous in all that has come upon us, for you have dealt faithfully and we have acted wickedly. 34 Our kings, our princes, our priests, and our fathers have not kept your law or paid attention to your commandments and your warnings that you gave them. 35 Even in their own kingdom, and amid your great goodness that you gave them, and in the large and rich land that you set before them, they did not serve you or turn from their wicked works. 36 Behold, we are slaves this day; in the land that you gave to our fathers to enjoy its fruit and its good gifts, behold, we are slaves. 37 And its rich yield goes to the kings whom you have set over us because of our sins. They rule over our bodies and over our livestock as they please, and we are in great distress. 38 Because of all this we make a firm covenant in writing; on the sealed document are the names of our princes, our Levites, and our priests.

WORSHIP PROMPTS COMMITMENT

NEHEMIAH 10:28-29

28 The rest of the people, the priests, the Levites, the gatekeepers, the singers, the temple servants, and all who have separated themselves from the peoples of the lands to the Law of God, their wives, their sons, their daughters, all who have knowledge and understanding, 29 join with their brothers, their nobles, and enter into a curse and an oath to walk in God's Law that was given by Moses the servant of God, and to observe and do all the commandments of the LORD our Lord and his rules and his statutes.

MAIN POINT.

Confessing our sin frees us;
worshipping God changes us.



THEOLOGY CONNECTION



WORSHIP

While many reduce worship to an event or the singing of worship songs, worship is first and foremost something of the heart and extends to all areas of life. The aim and focus of worship is God, giving Him the praise and adoration He deserves. Worship should be carried out not only at a personal level within a Christian's life but also in joining with other Christians in the corporate act of worship and stewarding our gifts for the glory of God. Corporate worship serves to uplift and strengthen other Christians, but it also serves as a witness to nonbelievers of the greatness of God.

DISCUSSION



CONFESSION PROMPTS WORSHIP

NEHEMIAH 9:1-3,26-29,33-38

- How do you react when someone calls you out? Instead of becoming defensive, how can we think differently about conviction?
-  • Why did remembering their history prompt the people to confess their sin? Why did it result in worship?
-  • What does it show about God that He kept rescuing His people when they kept turning from Him? How do we get caught up in the same cycle?

WORSHIP PROMPTS COMMITMENT

NEHEMIAH 10:28-29

-  • Do you more easily obey people you trust? How might this apply to obeying God?
-  • Why do we easily make promises to God at camps or other events yet struggle to follow through? What needs to change?
- How could writing down their oath (9:38) make the people accountable? How can we create accountability for ourselves today?



DO YOU FEEL LIKE GOD GETS TIRED OF FORGIVING YOU FOR THE SAME SINS? HOW DOES THE PASSAGE REASSURE YOU?

CULTURAL CONNECTION

Who helps you to be a better version of yourself? Who brings out your best qualities by motivating you and inspiring you? Whose commitment to Jesus influences you to desire a closer walk with Him? These are the people who call us up to a higher standard than what we'd settle for on our own. They call us out too, helping us see where we've allowed sin to creep into our lives. Here's the deal: Worship makes us better. That may sound odd because worship isn't a person, but worship places us in God's holy presence. We can't come away unchanged. Now, God is with us at all times, but when we worship God in spirit and in truth (John 4:24), we intentionally lift up God's name, draw closer to His heart, and position ourselves to hear His voice more clearly. Worship is an invitation for the Holy Spirit to expose our rough edges, and through the power of conviction, to smooth them. And we're better because we're made more like Jesus in the process.



DAY ONE

PSALM 32:3-5



Have you ever kept a secret, especially something you felt guilty about? Maybe you broke something or said something hurtful, and you just hoped no one would find out. It feels heavy, right? Like a knot in your stomach or a weight on your shoulders. It might even consume your thoughts, making you irritable or distracted.

King David knew exactly what that feeling was like. In today's psalm, he powerfully described the crushing weight of unconfessed sin. His was so utterly torn apart by this sin that it physically hurt him and zapped his strength. Sin takes a physical and emotional toll on everyone. It pulls you away from God. It steals your joy. It leads to anxiety and depression. It drains your energy—like carrying a huge, invisible backpack full of rocks. Every rock is a secret sin, and the longer you carry them, the heavier they get. But David realized that the moment he stopped hiding and trying to pretend that these sins didn't exist, the heaviness was lifted. He openly confessed his sin to God, was forgiven, and was made whole again. Here's the thing: Confessing your sins isn't just about feeling better; it's about being freed. When you confess your sin to God, you're not telling Him anything He doesn't already know. You're choosing to be honest, agreeing with God about your sin, leaving behind the lie, and stepping into His grace. He is faithful and just, and He will forgive you. This freedom allows you to experience God's love fully and to feel the peace and assurance He so freely gives.

- **HAVE YOU EVER EXPERIENCED THE “HEAVY” FEELING DAVID DESCRIBES BEFORE YOU CONFESSED SOMETHING YOU FELT GUILTY ABOUT? WHAT WAS THAT LIKE?**
- **WHY IS IT SO DIFFICULT FOR US TO CONFESS OUR SINS TO GOD, WHO ALREADY KNOWS THEM? HOW DOES IT HELP TO UNDERSTAND THAT CONFESSION IS AGREEING WITH GOD ABOUT YOUR SIN?**

PRAY

HEAVENLY FATHER, THANK YOU FOR YOUR FORGIVENESS. I CONFESS THAT SOMETIMES I HOLD ON TO MY SINS, BUT I ASK FOR THE COURAGE TO BRING THEM TO YOU.



DAY TWO

PROVERBS 28:13

Yesterday, we talked about how heavy secret sins are, but when we confess our sins to God, who already knows what they are, He takes the heaviness from us. Today's passage reinforces this message. When we don't confess our sins and keep them concealed in the dark, we're burdened and "will not prosper." What does that mean? It means we don't flourish; we don't truly thrive. Our hidden sin becomes like a poison, affecting our peace, our relationships, and our connection with God. It creates a wall, a barrier, and we can't fully experience God's blessings or true freedom when we're holding on to our sins. It's like trying to run a race with a heavy backpack on—you're just not going to perform your best.

But here's the good news. We are promised incredible freedom in the second part of the verse: "He who confesses and forsakes them will obtain mercy." We must openly admit what we've done and call it what it is: sin. "Forsakes" means to turn away from the sin, to decide you're not going to keep doing it. This isn't just an apology; it's a genuine change of heart and a change in direction.

When you do these things, God promises "mercy." Mercy is getting what you don't deserve—His compassion, His forgiveness, and a fresh start. Confession isn't about God trying to punish you. Hear that again: Confession isn't punishment! It's God offering you a way to be truly free, to lighten your load, and to restore your relationship with Him. It takes courage to confess our sin, but the freedom and peace that follow are worth it every single time.

- **WHAT DO YOU THINK IT TRULY MEANS TO "FORSAKE" A SIN, BEYOND JUST SAYING YOU'RE SORRY?**
- **WHY DO YOU THINK CONFESSING OUR SINS TO GOD (AND SOMETIMES TO OTHERS) BRINGS "MERCY" AND MAKES US "PROSPER"?**

PRAY

GOD, THANK YOU FOR THE PROMISE OF FREEDOM THROUGH CONFESSION. SHOW ME YOUR MERCY AND PEACE AS I SEEK TO WALK IN YOUR TRUTH. HELP ME TO CONFESS MY HIDDEN SIN.



DAY THREE

1 JOHN 1:8-10

Let's be real—no one is perfect, even though many people try to act as if they are. And today's passage tells us that if we pretend we don't sin, we're basically fooling ourselves. It's like wearing a mask, trying to convince everyone (and maybe even ourselves) that we're something that we're not. But masks get heavy. They keep us from true connection with God and others. They're barriers, building walls of guilt and shame.

But verse 9? This is where the freedom comes in! "Confess" means to agree with God about our sin. It's throwing off that mask, admitting what we've done, and laying it all out before Him.

And what does God do when we do that? He's faithful—He keeps His promises. He's righteous—He makes things right. He forgives us completely, wiping the slate clean. Not only that, but He purifies us from all unrighteousness. It's like a spiritual scrubbing, leaving us clean and fresh. That heavy feeling? Gone. The guilt? Lifted. The shame? Replaced with peace. And though our sinful choices may result in consequences, when we confess them to God, we aren't condemned by them.

Trying to deny our sin (v. 10) isn't just fooling ourselves; it's calling God a liar. His Word clearly states that we are all sinners in need of grace. Embracing that truth and stepping into confession is the doorway to incredible freedom and to a restored relationship with God. You don't have to carry the burden of hidden sin; you can stop pretending and find freedom in His forgiveness today.

- **WHAT DOES IT MEAN THAT GOD IS "FAITHFUL AND JUST" WHEN IT COMES TO FORGIVING OUR SINS?**
- **WHAT ARE SOME OTHER WAYS CONFESSING SIN MIGHT FREE US IN OUR RELATIONSHIPS WITH GOD AND WITH OTHERS?**

PRAY

**GOD, THANK YOU FOR THE INCREDIBLE FREEDOM
FOUND IN CONFESSING MY SINS. FORGIVE ME WHEN
I FALL SHORT.**



DAY FOUR

2 CORINTHIANS 3:12-18

Have you ever looked at something really bright, like the sun, but then had to look away because it was just too intense? Or maybe you've tried to see through a foggy window? It's hard to get a clear picture, right? In 2 Corinthians 3, Paul talks about something similar. He brings up Moses, who had to put a veil over his face after being with God because his face was literally glowing from being in God's presence! But Paul explained that this glory faded, and the veil kept people from truly seeing. Unlike Moses, we don't need a veil. Through Jesus, the "veil" that separated us from God's full glory has been taken away. We can look directly at the Lord's glory—not just a temporary glow, but the full, awesome, radiant glory of God. How? Through Jesus! His character perfectly reflects God's character and His glory!

When we genuinely worship God, something incredible happens. We are "being transformed into the same image." We are being changed into His likeness. This isn't a one-time event; it's a process known as sanctification. The more we gaze at who God is, the more we start to reflect His character. Have you ever noticed that when you spend a lot of time with someone, you start to pick up their habits? But with God, it's deeper. It's a spiritual transformation, making us more like Jesus Himself. When you worship, remember you're not just singing songs or saying words. You're opening yourself up to God's glorious presence, allowing Him to change you from the inside out and make you more and more like His Son—incredible transformation!

- **CAN YOU THINK OF A TIME WHEN WORSHIP OR PRAYER CHANGED YOUR ATTITUDE OR PERSPECTIVE ABOUT SOMETHING OR SOMEONE?**
- **WHAT SPECIFIC DETAILS OF JESUS'S CHARACTER (LIKE LOVE, PATIENCE, OR SELF-CONTROL) DO YOU WANT TO SEE "INCREASE" IN YOUR OWN LIFE?**

PRAY

JESUS, THANK YOU THAT I CAN COME BEFORE YOU WITH AN UNVEILED FACE. TRANSFORM ME EVERY DAY TO BE MORE AND MORE LIKE YOU, AND TRANSFORM ME FROM THE INSIDE OUT.





DAY FIVE

PSALM 34:1-5

You know those days when everything just feels off? Maybe you woke up on the wrong side of the bed, or something frustrating happened at school, or you just generally feel down. It's easy to let those feelings dictate our whole day. But what if you could shift your perspective and brighten things up, even when circumstances are tough?

Psalm 34:1-5 gives us a powerful clue. In the first verse, David wrote, "I will bless the LORD at all times," emphasis on *all*! Not just when things are going your way or when you feel good about how life is going. *ALL* times! But it doesn't come naturally. It's a daily choice to actively praise God, no matter what. When we choose to praise Him, even when we don't feel like it, something shifts inside us. When David said, "My soul makes its boast in the LORD," he meant he would boast about God—His goodness, His power, His faithfulness. When you focus on God and His greatness, your problems start to shrink. They don't disappear, but your perspective on them changes because you realize that the God who created the universe, who loves you unconditionally, is bigger than anything you're facing. And the result? "The humble hear and [are] glad." Your worship isn't just for you! It encourages others who are also struggling. When people see you praising God through your difficulties, it gives them hope that God can do the same for them. Finally, David says in verse 5, "Those who look to him are radiant, and their faces shall never be ashamed." When we turn our eyes to God in worship, He lifts us up. The worries, the anxieties, the shame we might feel about our mistakes or insecurities start to fade. Instead, we become "radiant," glowing with His presence and peace. Worship truly changes us from the inside out, making us shine with His light.

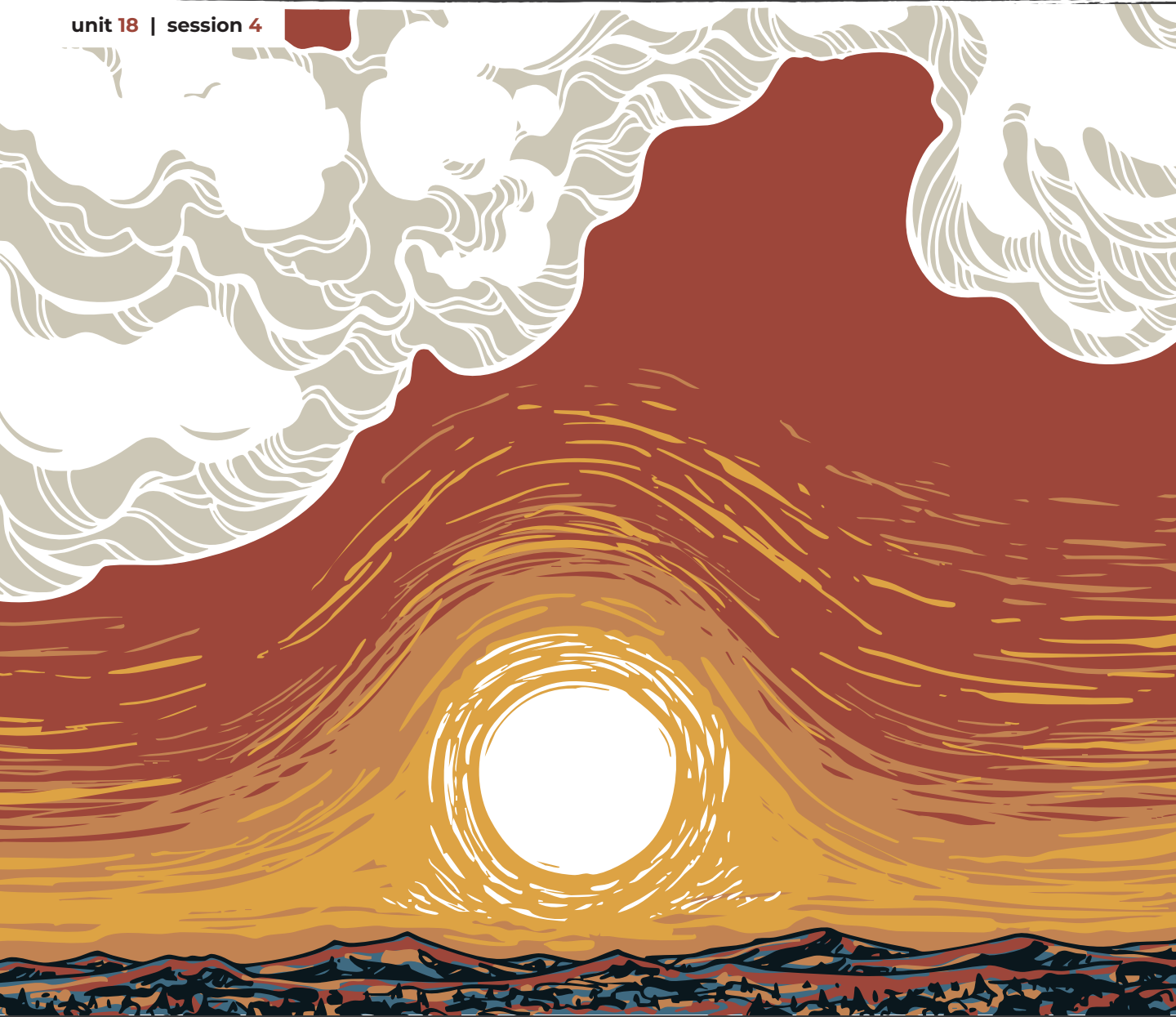
- **HOW DOES BOASTING ABOUT GOD CHANGE YOUR MOOD OR PERSPECTIVE ON A DIFFICULT DAY?**
- **HOW CAN YOUR PERSONAL WORSHIP ENCOURAGE SOMEONE ELSE WHO IS STRUGGLING?**

PRAY

LORD, HELP ME TO CHOOSE TO BLESS YOU AT ALL TIMES AND TO LET MY SOUL BOAST IN YOUR GOODNESS. TRANSFORM MY HEART THROUGH WORSHIPING YOU SO I MAY BE RADIANT WITH YOUR PRESENCE.

THE DAY IS *IS COMING*

unit 18 | session 4



CHRIST CONNECTION

Through Malachi, God promised a Messenger—Jesus—who would purify His people. Through His blood and sacrifice, Jesus purifies us, making us right with God because of His righteousness.

REMEMBERING THE PAST

This week, we're covering the passages and main points below. But we encourage you to dig in and read all of the content on this timeline.

Malachi

GOD WILL PURIFY HIS PEOPLE

MALACHI 3:1-6

1 "Behold, I send my messenger, and he will prepare the way before me. And the LORD whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple; and the messenger of the covenant in whom you delight, behold, he is coming, says the LORD of hosts. 2 But who can endure the day of his coming, and who can stand when he appears? For he is like a refiner's fire and like fullers' soap. 3 He will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver, and he will purify the sons of Levi and refine them like gold and silver, and they will bring offerings in righteousness to the LORD. 4 Then the offering of Judah and Jerusalem will be pleasing to the LORD as in the days of old and as in former years. 5 Then I will draw near to you for judgment. I will be a swift witness against the sorcerers, against the adulterers, against those who swear falsely, against those who oppress the hired worker in his wages, the widow and the fatherless, against those who thrust aside the sojourner, and do not fear me, says the LORD of hosts. 6 "For I the LORD do not change; therefore you, O children of Jacob, are not consumed."

GOD WILL HEAL HIS PEOPLE

MALACHI 4:1-6

1 "For behold, the day is coming, burning like an oven, when all the arrogant and all evildoers will be stubble. The day that is coming shall set them ablaze, says the LORD of hosts, so that it will leave them neither root nor branch. 2 But for you who fear my name, the sun of righteousness shall rise with healing in its wings. You shall go out leaping like calves from the stall. 3 And you shall tread down the wicked, for they will be ashes under the soles of your feet, on the day when I act, says the LORD of hosts. 4 "Remember the law of my servant Moses, the statutes and rules that I commanded him at Horeb for all Israel. 5 "Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and awesome day of the LORD comes. 6 And he will turn the hearts of fathers to their children and the hearts of children to their fathers, lest I come and strike the land with a decree of utter destruction."

MAIN POINT.

Following God means letting Him purify us.



THEOLOGY CONNECTION

IMPUTATION

When God pardoned sinners at the cross, our sins were imputed, or transferred, to Christ, who became sin on our behalf. Our sin was imputed to Christ, and Christ's righteousness was imputed to us (Rom. 5:17; 1 Cor. 1:30). When God the Father looks at those who have trusted in Christ, He does not see their sins but the righteousness of Christ as belonging to them (Rom. 4:6).

DISCUSSION

GOD WILL PURIFY HIS PEOPLE

MALACHI 3:1-6

- What are people's issues with God or reasons for unbelief today?
- Since God doesn't change (v. 6), what causes distance in our relationship with Him?
- Who are the two messengers in 3:1? Why does Malachi then ask who would be able to stand when the "Messenger of the covenant" comes?

GOD WILL HEAL HIS PEOPLE

MALACHI 4:1-6

- How is the fire's purpose in 4:1 different from the fire's purpose in 3:2-3?
- Read Verse 2. What does the Lord want us to realize about the reality of belonging to Him?
- What was God's last instruction to Israel (v. 4)? Based on their history, why would God say this?



HOW HAS GOD DIRECTED US IN THE SAME WAY HE DID ISRAEL (4:4)—TO REMEMBER? WHAT HAS HE GIVEN US TO HELP US?

CULTURAL CONNECTION

Have you ever heard the phrase, "Don't forget where you came from"? We usually say this to someone who has reached a higher status in life. What we mean is that remembering our beginning, our history, and our progress is important. We mean that looking back is valuable because we can see how far we've come. Looking back helps us to remain humble and grateful instead of becoming arrogant. In our walk with the Lord, forgetting where we came from is dangerous because we forget that we were dead in our sin and slaves to sin. We risk thinking our goodness comes from our ability instead of from knowing Jesus and being transformed by Him. But when we remember where we came from, we are filled with gratitude. We remember that we were spiritually dead and without hope. We realize that we can only boast in Jesus because without Him, we would be lost (2 Cor. 10:17).



DAY ONE

PSALM 51:10-13

Do you have a favorite shirt or clothing item? Imagine getting a huge, stubborn stain on it. You try everything to get it out, but the stain won't budge. You know it's there, it bothers you, and you can't quite feel good wearing it. Sometimes, our hearts can feel like that. We mess up, we make bad choices, and that "stain" of sin can feel heavy and impossible to remove on our own. We notice it even when no one else does.

King David knew this feeling all too well. After making some really big mistakes, he wrote Psalm 51, a raw and honest prayer for forgiveness. In verses 10-13, he cried out to God, begging for cleansing and renewal. He didn't just ask for a quick clean-up. He wanted his heart to be transformed. He wanted a true change that only comes from God.

When we follow God, we are spiritually cleansed too. When God purifies us, He doesn't just wipe away the stain; He makes our hearts new, fresh, and ready to follow Him with a "right" (firm and unwavering) spirit. He restores our joy and reminds us that we're His, and He gives us a "willing spirit"—the desire and the strength to keep following Him.

And here's the cool part: When God purifies us and restores us, it doesn't just benefit us. David said, "I will teach transgressors your ways, and sinners will return to you." Our changed lives, our renewed joy, and our willingness to follow God become a powerful testimony. When others see how God has worked in us, it points them to Him too. Letting God purify us isn't just about feeling better; it's about becoming a vessel for His grace to reach others.

- **WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO HAVE A "RIGHT SPIRIT" AND A "WILLING SPIRIT" IN YOUR DAILY LIFE?**
- **HOW CAN YOUR LIFE, AS SOMEONE PURIFIED BY GOD, POINT OTHERS TO HIM, JUST LIKE DAVID DESCRIBED?**

PRAY

GOD, CREATE IN ME A PURE HEART AND RENEW A RIGHT AND WILLING SPIRIT WITHIN ME. RESTORE THE JOY OF YOUR SALVATION SO THAT MY LIFE MAY POINT OTHERS TO YOUR AMAZING GRACE.



DAY TWO

JOHN 15:1-3

Have you ever seen a plant get pruned? It can be a little harsh. Branches that seem perfectly fine—and maybe even have some fruit on them—get cut right off. But anyone who knows gardening will tell you that pruning isn't about destroying the plant; it's about helping it to grow stronger and healthier to produce more fruit in the long run. Jesus used this exact image to explain our relationship with Him.

Jesus is the Vine, and we are the branches. And God is the ultimate gardener. This passage tells us two important things about how God works in our lives to purify us. He cuts off branches that don't bear fruit and He even prunes branches that do. So what does this mean? God will remove things in our lives that aren't helping us grow closer to Him, that are stopping us from bearing fruit. He removes these things so that we can fully thrive in Him.

But what about the branches that produce fruit? Even when we're trying our best and living for God, we might still have "dead ends" or areas that need refining. Maybe it's a tendency to gossip, a struggle with pride, or a habit of procrastination that keeps us from being fully effective for God. God, in His love, carefully prunes these areas, not to hurt us, but to purify us, so that we produce more of His character. The good news? Jesus says, "You are clean because of the word I have spoken to you." Through faith in Him, we are already declared clean. But God's purification process continues throughout our lives. It's about letting Him work in us, even when the process is painful, and trusting that those painful snips are for our ultimate growth and fruitfulness, so our lives can truly reflect Him.

- **WHAT ARE SOME AREAS THAT MAY NEED "PRUNING" IN YOUR LIFE (HABITS, ATTITUDES, INFLUENCES)?**
- **HOW DOES TRUSTING GOD AS THE "GARDENER" CHANGE YOUR PERSPECTIVE ON CHALLENGES IN YOUR LIFE?**

PRAY

HEAVENLY FATHER, THANK YOU FOR THE PRUNING
PROCESS IN MY LIFE. I KNOW IT'S FOR MY GOOD
EVEN WHEN IT'S PAINFUL. HELP ME TO BEAR MUCH
FRUIT FOR YOUR GLORY.



DAY THREE

HEBREWS 12:7-11

Nobody starts off being really good at a sport. It takes practice, conditioning, strengthening—and often a coach pushing you to get better. It can be frustrating and hard, but in time, you’re not only better, you’re stronger. And a good coach will push you to a potential that you may not even see in yourself.

Today’s passage can be a bit challenging because it talks about “discipline” and “suffering.” But it’s crucial to understand that God’s discipline is often about purification and training. Just like a good coach, God allows or brings certain difficulties into our lives, not to hurt us but to refine us, to remove the things that hold us back and help us grow.

Good parents discipline because they love their children and want them to learn right from wrong. God, our perfect Father, does it even better and with a perfect purpose—“so that we may share his holiness.” He’s working to make us more like Jesus, to develop godly character in us. This process can be painful in the moment, just like intense training is. It’s not fun to have our pride humbled, our selfishness exposed, or our comfort disrupted.

But when we allow God to purify us through these experiences, we become more righteous, more in line with His will, and experience a deep, lasting peace that isn’t dependent on our circumstances. Embracing God’s discipline means trusting His perfect love and His perfect plan to make us truly free and truly holy.

- **CAN YOU THINK BACK TO A TIME WHEN A DIFFICULT SITUATION HELPED YOU GROW OR CHANGED YOU FOR THE BETTER?**
- **WHAT’S ONE AREA OF YOUR LIFE WHERE YOU THINK GOD MIGHT BE TRYING TO “DISCIPLINE” OR REFINE YOU RIGHT NOW, AND HOW CAN YOU RESPOND BY SUBMITTING TO HIM?**

PRAY

**FATHER, THANK YOU FOR LOVING ME ENOUGH TO
REFINE ME. HELP ME TO ENDURE HARDSHIP WITH
FAITH, TRUSTING THAT YOU ARE WORKING FOR
MY GOOD.**



DAY FOUR

ROMANS 3:21-24

Do you ever feel like you have to earn your way into heaven? Like you need to be good enough or make up for certain sins? Well, it's impossible. We will never be good or pure enough on our own. But here's the good news—we don't have to be! Today's passage tells us that being "right with God"—being pure and acceptable in His eyes— isn't something we can achieve by following a bunch of rules or by our own efforts. It's a gift! Paul uses the word "righteousness," which means being declared just, holy, and innocent. We can't earn it because "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." Every single one of us falls short of God's perfect standard.

So, how do we get this righteousness? It's given "through faith in Jesus Christ." We must believe that Jesus, through His death on the cross, paid the price for our sins. When we trust in Him, God declares us righteous, not because we've earned it, but freely by His grace. Grace means undeserved favor. It's God giving us what we don't deserve because of His perfect love.

Following God, then, isn't about our efforts to purify ourselves to earn His love. It's about letting Him transform us by accepting the purification already provided through Jesus. It's about accepting His gift of grace and righteousness, which sets us free from the burden of trying to be perfect on our own—because we just can't. When we lean into this truth, our lives begin to reflect His purity, not because we're trying harder, but because we're receiving His life-changing gift.

- **WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO ACCEPT GOD'S GRACE RATHER THAN TRYING TO EARN IT?**
- **KNOWING ALL HAVE SINNED, HOW DO YOU FEEL WHEN YOU HEAR THAT RIGHTEOUSNESS IS "FREELY GIVEN" IN JESUS?**

PRAY

JESUS, THANK YOU FOR THE INCREDIBLE GIFT OF RIGHTEOUSNESS THROUGH YOU. I CONFESS THAT I OFTEN TRY TO EARN MY WAY TO YOU, BUT I RECEIVE YOUR GRACE WITH A GRATEFUL HEART.



DAY FIVE

TITUS 2:11-14

Have you ever gotten a gift that you weren't expecting—and maybe that you really didn't deserve? Maybe it was a cool new game or a chance to do something awesome—even though you hadn't really earned it. That feeling of undeserved kindness? That's a little like grace.

Titus 2:11-14 talks about something even bigger. This passage starts by saying God's grace—that undeserved kindness—has appeared. It's not hidden; it's right there, available to everyone, offering salvation. But here's the cool part: This grace doesn't just save us from something; it teaches us!

It teaches us to say “no” to things that aren't godly and to worldly desires that pull us away from God. This isn't about God being a downer or killing our vibe; it's about His grace empowering us to live a better, freer life. It teaches us to live “self-controlled, upright, and godly” lives. This means making wise choices, doing what's right, and living in a way that honors God, even when it's tough.

Why does grace do all this? Because Jesus's sacrifice was for the purpose of freeing us from all sin and making us clean, setting us apart as His cherished possession, eager to actively pursue goodness. When you commit to following Jesus, His grace doesn't just forgive your past; it actively cleanses you from the inside out. This purification empowers you to be “zealous for good works”—to naturally want to make choices that honor God and bless others.

- **WHAT DO YOU THINK PURIFICATION LOOKS LIKE IN PRACTICAL TERMS FOR STUDENTS TODAY?**
- **HOW CAN HAVING A HEART “ZEALOUS FOR GOOD WORKS” IMPACT YOUR FRIENDSHIPS, YOUR FAMILY, OR YOUR SCHOOL?**

PRAY

**LORD, CONTINUE TO PURIFY MY HEART AND MIND
BY YOUR SPIRIT. HELP ME TO BE EAGER TO DO WHAT
IS GOOD, REFLECTING YOUR LOVE AND TRUTH IN
EVERY PART OF MY LIFE.**

THE TRUE *LIGHT*

unit 18 | session 5



CHRIST CONNECTION

God spoke through Old Testament prophets, like Isaiah and Malachi, and shared His plan to send Jesus into the world to save people from sin. When the time had come, God called John to be a witness for Jesus.

TO THE LIGHT

This week, we're covering the passages and main points below. But we encourage you to dig in and read all of the content on this timeline.

Luke 1; John 1

JOHN FULFILLED A PROMISE

LUKE 1:5-17

5 In the days of Herod, king of Judea, there was a priest named Zechariah, of the division of Abijah. And he had a wife from the daughters of Aaron, and her name was Elizabeth. 6 And they were both righteous before God, walking blamelessly in all the commandments and statutes of the Lord. 7 But they had no child, because Elizabeth was barren, and both were advanced in years. 8 Now while he was serving as priest before God when his division was on duty, 9 according to the custom of the priesthood, he was chosen by lot to enter the temple of the Lord and burn incense. 10 And the whole multitude of the people were praying outside at the hour of incense. 11 And there appeared to him an angel of the Lord standing on the right side of the altar of incense. 12 And Zechariah was troubled when he saw him, and fear fell upon him. 13 But the angel said to him, "Do not be afraid, Zechariah, for your prayer has been heard, and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you shall call his name John. 14 And you will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth, 15 for he will be great before the Lord. And he must not drink wine or strong drink, and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother's womb. 16 And he will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God, 17 and he will go before him in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready for the Lord a people prepared."

THE LIGHT WAS COMING

JOHN 1:6-9

6 There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. 7 He came as a witness, to bear witness about the light, that all might believe through him. 8 He was not the light, but came to bear witness about the light. 9 The true light, which gives light to everyone, was coming into the world.

MAIN POINT.

Our lives should point to Jesus and prepare others to know Him.



THEOLOGY CONNECTION

PRAYER AND PROVIDENCE

If God is in control and already knows the future, why pray? The Bible teaches that although God has a plan for this world that He promises to fulfill, He often uses prayer to accomplish His divine purpose. Though God knows the end result, the means that lead to that end result will be accomplished through prayer. In this sense, it is true that “prayer changes things,” and it is also true that God uses prayer to change our hearts so that our will comes into conformity with His.

DISCUSSION

JOHN FULFILLED A PROMISE

LUKE 1:5-17

- Have you ever prayed for a long time for something and felt like God was silent or late?
- Why do you think God chose an older, childless couple to fulfill His promise in Malachi 4:5-6?
- Why do we often not trust God’s timing? When have you wanted God’s timing to be different?

THE LIGHT WAS COMING

JOHN 1:6-9

- What’s more common: seeking attention for ourselves or giving attention to others? Why?
- Why do we need light? What would life be like without light?
- Why would John need to announce that “the true light” was coming? What does this tell you about the condition of the world?



WHAT NEEDS TO CHANGE SO THAT YOUR LIFE POINTS TO JESUS AND PREPARES OTHERS TO SEE HIM?

CULTURAL CONNECTION

Do promises mean anything to you? If you’ve ever had someone break a promise, then you may not take them seriously. You may even put up walls of distrust, requiring people to prove themselves over time before you believe them. Kept promises build trust; broken promises damage it. When we are hurt by broken promises, we may become hesitant to believe people when they say they’ll do something or be something for us. We don’t want to risk being hurt again by allowing ourselves to believe someone else’s words. But we must realize that God isn’t like people who’ve betrayed us. He isn’t going to break a promise. He never, ever has; He never, ever will. God’s promises have either already been fulfilled in Jesus’s birth, death, and resurrection, or they’ll be revealed when Jesus returns to make all things new. If you’ve been hurt by someone, know that God deserves your trust. He won’t fail you; He won’t leave you; He has already given His Son for you. God is truth (John 14:6). He is love (1 John 4:8). His Word is sure.



DAY ONE

MATTHEW 5:14-16

Our lesson this week was about John the Baptist coming to tell the world about “the true light, which gives light to everyone”—Jesus, the promised Messiah (John 1:9). And as believers, that true Light lives in us. We reflect His light into the world. In today’s passage, Jesus told His followers to shine their light before others so that God would receive glory. Our lives are meant to be like a spotlight, visible and clear, pointing people to something bigger than ourselves. Just like a town on a hill can’t be hidden, our lives as followers of Jesus aren’t meant to be hidden either. Jesus gave a practical example: No one lights a lamp just to hide it under a basket. That would be ridiculous! The purpose of a lamp is to give light to everyone in the house. In the same way, our purpose as “light” is to shine so brightly that others can see it.

But what exactly is this “light” that Jesus is talking about? It’s not just about being a good person or having good morals. Our light is reflected in how we live—our kindness, our integrity, our compassion, our joy, our patience, our forgiveness, our holiness. It’s the way we treat friends, how we react to pressure, how we handle success and failure, and how we speak truth with love. When people see these qualities in us, it’s not so we look good. Instead, our good deeds should direct attention past us and straight to God. Our lives become a powerful testimony, making people curious about the source of our light. It prepares their hearts to know Jesus because they see a glimpse of His character and love reflected in us. So, don’t hide your light! Let your life shine brightly so others can see Jesus!

- **WHAT ARE SOME “BASKETS” (THINGS THAT HIDE YOUR LIGHT) THAT STUDENTS OFTEN DEAL WITH IN THEIR LIVES (LIKE FEAR OF JUDGMENT, PEER PRESSURE, OR APATHY)?**
- **HOW DOES IT HIT YOU TO REALIZE THAT CHOOSING TO LIVE OUT YOUR FAITH AND SHOW GOD’S LOVE PREPARES PEOPLE’S HEARTS TO BE MORE OPEN TO HEARING ABOUT JESUS?**

PRAY

**JESUS, HELP ME TO LET MY LIGHT SHINE BRIGHTLY
THROUGH MY GOOD DEEDS AND CHARACTER. MAY
MY LIFE ALWAYS POINT OTHERS TO YOU SO THEY
MAY KNOW AND GLORIFY YOU.**



DAY TWO

JOHN 13:34-35

Think about your favorite brand or sports team. They usually have a logo—something instantly recognizable that tells you who they are and what they stand for. In a way, Jesus gave His followers a “logo” too—an unmistakable mark that would show the world whose they are. Jesus gave His followers a command: “Love one another.” Seems simple, right? Well, the second part of this command is to love one another “just as I have loved you.” So how is that? Jesus loved sacrificially, unconditionally, even when people didn’t deserve it, even when it was inconvenient or painful. He loved people who didn’t love Him in return. He washed His disciples’ feet, He healed the sick, He befriended outcasts, and ultimately, He gave His life. That’s the kind of love He calls us to.

When we genuinely love one another within the church, and when we extend that same kind of selfless love to those outside of it—to our friends, our family, our classmates, even people we find difficult—it really stands out in a world that often prioritizes self-interest. When people see believers loving each other and loving the world with Jesus’s love, they see something different, supernatural even. They see a reflection of God Himself.

This kind of love is the most powerful type of evangelism. When we truly love like Jesus, people will inevitably ask, “What is it about them? Where does that come from?” And that opens the door for us to point them to the source: Jesus. Our lives become a living invitation.

- **WHY DO YOU THINK JESUS SAID “ALL PEOPLE WILL KNOW” HIM BY OUR LOVE, RATHER THAN BY OUR KNOWLEDGE OR OUR WORSHIP MUSIC?**
- **WHAT’S ONE PRACTICAL WAY YOU CAN SHOW JESUS’S LOVE TO SOMEONE THIS WEEK WHO MIGHT NOT EXPECT IT?**

PRAY

JESUS, THANK YOU FOR LOVING ME PERFECTLY.
HELP ME TO LOVE OTHERS WITH THE SAME
SELFLESS LOVE YOU SHOWED SO THAT THEY MAY
COME TO KNOW YOU.



DAY THREE

COLOSSIANS 4:5-6

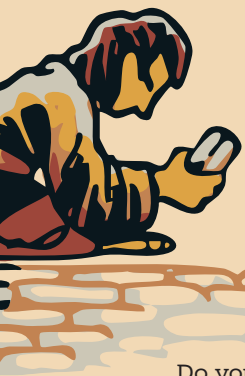
Think about someone you admire. What do you admire most about them? Often, what stands out about people is not necessarily what they do but how they do it—how they talk to people, how they serve others, how they think before they speak, how their character stands out. In a world full of quick judgments and harsh words, someone who speaks with grace, wisdom, and kindness really stands out. This is what Paul described in today’s passage. Paul told the Colossians to be wise toward outsiders—people who didn’t know Jesus. Being “wise” means being intentional and thoughtful about how we live our lives around them. Our actions speak volumes—often louder than our words. Are we kind, honest, and joyful, even when no one is looking? Are we living out the love of Christ in our daily interactions? Next, he said to make “the best use of the time.” Life throws us all sorts of moments—a casual chat in the hallway, a group project, a social media comment. These aren’t just random occurrences but chances to show Jesus to others. Paul also said: “Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt.” “Gracious” means our words should be kind, loving, and encouraging, not critical or gossipy. “Seasoned with salt” means our words should be flavorful, interesting, and make sense. Salt preserves and adds taste; our words should do the same. They should preserve truth and make the gospel appealing; they should be thoughtful and relevant, not preachy or awkward.

Why is all this important? “So that you may know how you ought to answer each person.” When your life is wise and your words are gracious and relevant, people will notice. They’ll see something different in you, and they might just ask about it. And when they do, you’ll be prepared to point them to the source of that difference: Jesus. Our lives become a living invitation, preparing hearts to hear about the incredible hope we have in Him.

- **WHAT DOES IT MEAN FOR YOUR CONVERSATION TO BE “GRACIOUS” AND “SEASONED WITH SALT”?**
- **HOW CAN LIVING OUT THESE VERSES HELP CREATE OPPORTUNITIES FOR YOU TO SHARE ABOUT JESUS?**

PRAY

HEAVENLY FATHER, HELP ME TO LIVE WISELY AND
THOUGHTFULLY IN FRONT OF OTHERS. MAY MY
CONVERSATIONS ALWAYS BE FULL OF GRACE AND
TRUTH, POINTING PEOPLE TO YOU.



DAY FOUR

2 CORINTHIANS 5:20

Do you know what an ambassador does? An ambassador for a country goes and lives in another country as a representative of his or her home country. Your job would be to officially speak for your country, to show what your nation is like, and to build good relationships. Every word you say and every action you take would reflect back on the country you represent. In today's passage, Paul tells us that we are ambassadors for Christ. We represent and work for His kingdom—in our schools, in our communities, in our friendships, on our teams, and in our groups. Through us, God appeals to the people we encounter—an invitation into His kingdom!

The goal of an ambassador is to reconcile—to bring people into a right relationship. Our mission as Christ's ambassadors is to help others "be reconciled to God." Our lives, our words, and our love should be so compelling that others want to know more about this Jesus we represent and will eventually be led to understand His message of forgiveness and new life.

So, the next time you're about to say something or make a choice or react to a situation, pause and remember: You're an ambassador. What kind of representative of God's good kingdom do you want to be?

- **WHAT DOES IT MEAN FOR GOD TO MAKE "HIS APPEAL THROUGH US"? CAN YOU THINK OF A TIME WHEN SOMEONE'S LIFE POINTED YOU CLOSER TO GOD?**
- **HOW CAN YOU ACTIVELY PREPARE YOURSELF TO POINT OTHERS TO JESUS IN YOUR SOCIAL CIRCLES AND GROUPS?**

PRAY

JESUS, HELP ME TO LIVE MY LIFE IN A WAY THAT GENUINELY REPRESENTS YOU TO EVERYONE I ENCOUNTER. EMPOWER ME BY YOUR SPIRIT TO SPEAK WITH GRACE AND TO ACT WITH LOVE SO THAT OTHERS MAY BE DRAWN TO YOU.



DAY FIVE

ACTS 1:8

When you get exciting news, what's the first thing you want to do? You want to tell everyone, right? You can't keep it in! In Acts 1:8, Jesus gave His followers a big mission: "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."

This verse is a powerful foundation for our Christian lives. First, we will receive "power." Jesus doesn't just send us out on our own strength. We are promised the Holy Spirit who will empower us! This isn't some superhero ability but a divine ability to live for the Lord, to speak for Him, and to impact the world around us. It's the power to overcome fear, to love the unlovable, and to share truth even when it's uncomfortable.

Then, He calls us "witnesses." What does a witness do? They see something, and then they tell about what they've seen. That's it. They speak what they know and have experienced. As followers of Jesus, our lives are meant to show and tell others about Him.

The "Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and ends of the earth" part? That means our mission starts right where we are—our homes, schools, neighborhoods (Jerusalem), then expands to our wider community and even globally (Judea, Samaria, and beyond). You have been empowered by the Holy Spirit to be a witness for Jesus. Let your life shine so brightly that others can't help but see Him, and then, be ready to tell them about the amazing hope you've found in Him.

- **WHAT WOULD IT LOOK LIKE FOR YOU TO BE EMPOWERED BY THE HOLY SPIRIT IN YOUR DAILY LIFE AS A STUDENT?**
- **WHAT'S ONE WAY YOU COULD BE MORE PREPARED TO "TELL" SOMEONE ABOUT THE HOPE YOU HAVE IN JESUS?**

PRAY

**JESUS, HELP ME TO BE A BOLD WITNESS FOR YOU
IN EVERY AREA OF MY LIFE. MAY I BE PREPARED
TO GIVE A REASON FOR MY HOPE SO OTHERS CAN
KNOW YOU.**



BRAND OWNER & CONTENT EDITOR

ALECIA BRYANT

Do you know that feeling you get when you've been away from your family, your pets, your people, and your stuff for too long, and you just want to be home? As believers, we should ache with this feeling at all times. Why? Because our home isn't here. God's Spirit living within us stretches and reaches for home—eternity. We're made in God's image, designed to be with Him. And though we do our best to make this earth feel like home, we're really just exiles here—foreigners who belong somewhere else, somewhere better. In this volume, we'll study Israel's exile in Babylon, an ungodly foreign nation. For seventy years, God's people faced the pressure to become Babylonian, but many of them recognized that Babylon wasn't home. They refused to be unfaithful to God, even when their lives were threatened, even when settling would've been easier. The truth is that you're living in Babylon too, in a culture pressuring you to conform. Determine in your heart to be faithful. Determine to live as a temporary citizen here. Lean in to that feeling deep inside of you that longs for more and reach toward heaven—toward home.

Alecia Bryant



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(Unit 17)

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Between wrangling her two girls and supporting her pastor husband, Angela Reed can usually be found defending the Oxford comma or happily lost in a literary world. This punctuation pundit and devoted bibliophile's passion for words began as a teenager, when she felt called to write and edit Bible studies to help others truly know and value God's Word. She earned an MDiv from New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, and she and her family live and serve in Booneville, MS.

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