



the **GOSPEL**PROJECT  
FOR STUDENTS

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**THE GOSPEL PROJECT FOR STUDENTS**  
LEADER GUIDE

**VOLUME 5**

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We believe that the Bible has God for its author; salvation for its end; and truth, without any mixture of error, for its matter and that all Scripture is totally true and trustworthy. To review Lifeway's doctrinal guideline, please visit [lifeway.com/doctrinalguideline](http://lifeway.com/doctrinalguideline).

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# PREPARATION

- Access the leader training for each session at [gospelproject.com/leader-training](https://gospelproject.com/leader-training).
- Read through the main passage and surrounding chapters of Scripture listed on the opening page of each session.
- Study the **Before You Teach** section, focusing on which aspects of the study you will cover during group time.
- Check each session for a pack item list or description.

## BEFORE YOU TEACH

These pages are designed to help leaders prepare for each session, providing content that digs deeper into the focal passages and main point emphasized throughout the session.

- **Biblical Commentary:** This content is compiled to help leaders understand how the passage connects to today's culture.
- **Theology Connection:** Each session contains a biblical doctrine that directly relates to the Bible study material.

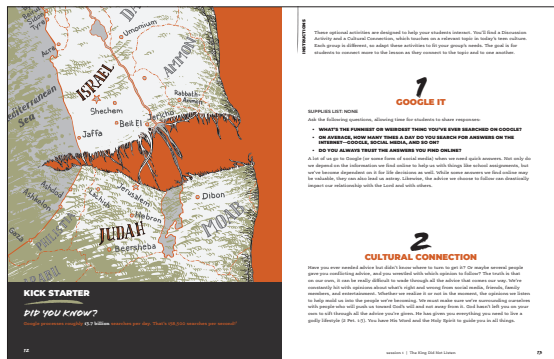


## CONTEXT

We believe Scripture should be studied within the context in which it was written. This section breaks down where the passage fits in the grand narrative of God's Word. At the beginning of each book, we highlight the author, time period, original audience, and purpose. This section also features important historical facts to help leaders and students understand the message.

## INTRO OPTIONS

- **Kickstarter:** This is the shortest option for groups which may not have time for longer activities. They rotate between “Did You Know?” facts, short polls, and Heart Checks, which refer to the previous lesson as a form of accountability.
- **Activity:** This activity is mostly discussion-based. It's designed to take up minimal time with few or no supplies.
- **Cultural Connection:** This feature helps connect the week's content to the students' culture. It will hit on real-life questions and difficult topics. It's designed to encourage deep discussion between students and leaders.



# DISCUSSION SECTION

The **Discussion** section is designed to show how God's story connects with our own stories today. Here we will see how the biblical storyline for each session challenges the way we think, feel, and live each day. While this certainly happens on an individual level, we do want to stress to students that all Christians share this calling and mission to live differently. Leaders will also find suggested answers with sentences in bold as a guide for more reluctant groups.



**CHRIST CONNECTION**

This icon indicates questions that look at how the content connects with Christ, emphasizing to students how all of Scripture points to Him.



**THEOLOGY CONNECTION**

This icon indicates questions that directly relate to the doctrine for the week. We want to encourage discussion about these doctrines to expand students' biblical worldview.



**HEAD, HEART, HANDS**

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 students that this calling and mission to live differently is something all Christians share and pursue.



## LEADER PACK

The **Leader Pack** provides additional ways to make the session interactive with One Sheets, PowerPoint templates, posters, and other additional resources to support both leader preparation and group time.



## STUDENT DEVOTIONS

Students remember thirty percent of what they hear and seventy percent of what they say and write. To get students more involved in the biblical storyline of Scripture and in their personal discipleship, we have included five days of devotions following each session in the **Daily Discipleship Guide**. As a leader, emphasize weekly how important it is for students to read these devotions and develop the spiritual discipline of being in the Word of God. These devotions will provide simple techniques for studying the Bible as illustrated by the **Seven Arrows**. The pages are perforated so that students can tear them out and take them home.

## SEVEN ARROWS



What does this passage say?



What did this passage mean to its original audience?



What does this passage tell us about God?



What does this passage tell us about man?



What does this passage demand of me?



How does this passage change the way I relate to people?



How does this passage prompt me to pray?

VOLUME 5 | ESV

# DIVISION AND DEFIANCE





**13.1** THE KING DID NOT LISTEN

**14.3** COME, LET'S RETURN TO THE LORD

**13.2** EVIL IN THE LORD'S SIGHT

**14.4** WORTHLESS IDOLS

**13.3** HOW LONG WILL YOU WAVER?

**15.1** FAITHFUL TO THE LORD

**13.4** HE HAS HUMBLLED HIMSELF

**15.2** THE DEPTHS OF THE SEA

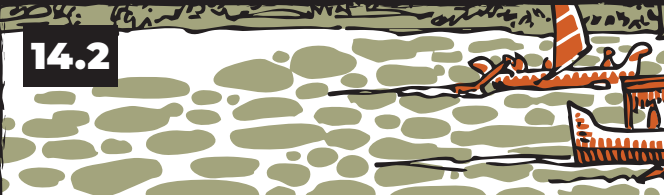
**14.1** TWO SHARES OF YOUR SPIRIT

**15.3** WRITE IT ON THEIR HEARTS

**14.2** SO GOD RELENTE

**15.4** TO BABYLON

**15.5** CAN THESE BONES LIVE?





AUTHOR & CONTENT EDITOR

**ALECIA BRYANT**

Welcome to Volume 5! Much of what we've studied in the Old Testament led to the events that took place in this part of the biblical narrative. After God freed the Hebrew people from Egyptian slavery, He made a covenant with them: He promised to be their God, and they promised to follow His commands. But Israel repeatedly broke this covenant. Like an unfaithful wife, Israel gave her heart to false gods and wandered away from the Lord. The people imitated pagan nations and committed idolatry. Rather than living in their identity as God's chosen people, Israel profaned the Lord's name among the nations and committed detestable acts. God was patient. He warned Israel and Judah through the prophets: God would allow His people to feel the consequences of idolatry. They would be conquered and exiled. Their beloved temple, which they had defiled, would crumble. The prophets cried out for the people to repent, urging them to turn back to the Lord. Though His people had wandered far from Him, God never stopped being faithful. He was prepared to heal them.

Woven throughout the prophets' warnings were promises: God wasn't going to abandon His people. He wasn't confined to the temple in Jerusalem and would go with them—even into exile. God was going to restore them and bring them home. The Lord made a new covenant with them: He would replace their hearts of stone with hearts of flesh and inscribe His Word there—deep within instead of on stone tablets. He would transform them from the inside out.

Do you see the gospel here—in exile and suffering? Do you see God's Word fulfilled? God goes with us. He warns us and calls us back to His side. He replaced our hearts of stone with His Spirit. He has changed us from the inside out!

*Alecia Bryant*



יְהוָה

**I WILL PUT MY LAW  
WITHIN THEM, AND I WILL  
WRITE IT ON THEIR HEARTS.  
AND I WILL BE THEIR GOD,  
AND THEY SHALL BE  
MY PEOPLE.**

JEREMIAH 31:33

# THE KING DID NOT LISTEN

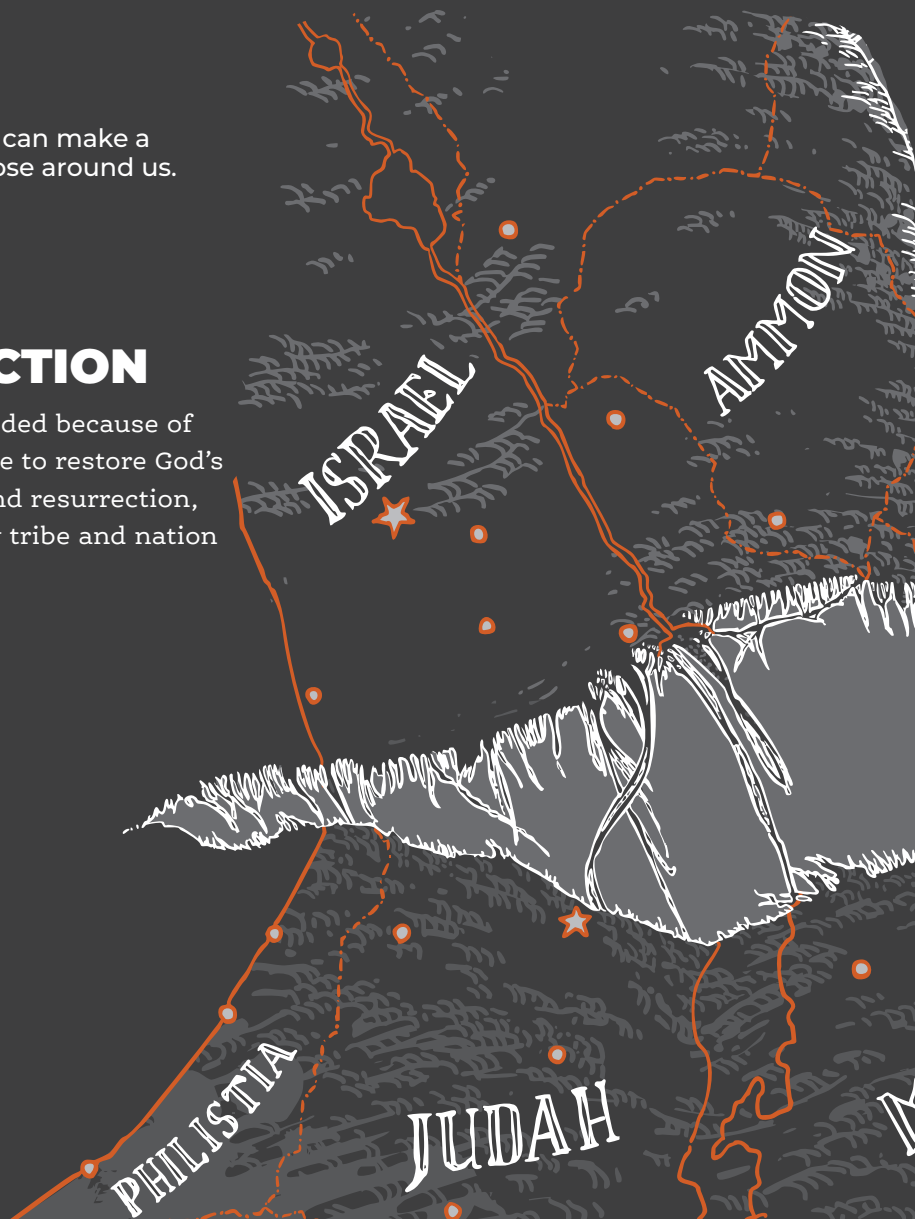
## MAIN POINT.

The advice we choose to follow can make a lasting impact on us and on those around us.



## CHRIST CONNECTION

While God's people became divided because of selfishness and sin, Christ came to restore God's kingdom. Through His death and resurrection, Jesus united people from every tribe and nation into one family.





# **TO THE RIGHT VOICES**

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

## **1 Kings 12**

### **PRIDE LEADS US TO REJECT WISDOM**

#### **1 KINGS 12:1-9**

1 Rehoboam went to Shechem, for all Israel had come to Shechem to make him king. 2 And as soon as Jeroboam the son of Nebat heard of it (for he was still in Egypt, where he had fled from King Solomon), then Jeroboam returned from Egypt. 3 And they sent and called him, and Jeroboam and all the assembly of Israel came and said to Rehoboam, 4 "Your father made our yoke heavy. Now therefore lighten the hard service of your father and his heavy yoke on us, and we will serve you." 5 He said to them, "Go away for three days, then come again to me." So the people went away. 6 Then King Rehoboam took counsel with the old men, who had stood before Solomon his father while he was yet alive, saying, "How do you advise me to answer this people?" 7 And they said to him, "If you will be a servant to this people today and serve them, and speak good words to them when you answer them, then they will be your servants forever." 8 But he abandoned the counsel that the old men gave him and took counsel with the young men who had grown up with him and stood before him. 9 And he said to them, "What do you advise that we answer this people who have said to me, 'Lighten the yoke that your father put on us'?"

### **REJECTING WISDOM LEADS TO DIVISION**

#### **1 KINGS 12:10-19**

10 And the young men who had grown up with him said to him, "Thus shall you speak to this people who said to you, 'Your father made our yoke heavy, but you lighten it for us,' thus shall you say to them, 'My little finger is thicker than my father's thighs. 11 And now, whereas my father laid on you a heavy yoke, I will add to your yoke. My father disciplined you with whips, but I will discipline you with scorpions.'" 12 So Jeroboam and all the people came to Rehoboam the third day, as the king said, "Come to me again the third day." 13 And the king answered the people harshly, and forsaking the counsel that the old men had given him, 14 he spoke to them according to the counsel of the young men, saying, "My father made your yoke heavy, but I will add to your yoke. My father disciplined you with whips, but I will discipline you with scorpions." 15 So the king did not listen to the people, for it was a turn of affairs brought about by the LORD that he might fulfill his word, which the LORD spoke by Ahijah the Shilonite to Jeroboam the son of Nebat. 16 And when all Israel saw that the king did not listen to them, the people answered the king, "What portion do we have in David? We have no inheritance in the son of Jesse. To your tents, O Israel! Look now to your own house, David." So Israel went to their tents. 17 But Rehoboam reigned over the people of Israel who lived in the cities of Judah. 18 Then King Rehoboam sent Adoram, who was taskmaster over the forced labor, and all Israel stoned him to death with stones. And King Rehoboam hurried to mount his chariot to flee to Jerusalem. 19 So Israel has been in rebellion against the house of David to this day.

# BEFORE YOU TEACH

## MAIN POINT.

The advice we choose to follow can make a lasting impact on us and on those around us.

Leaders: Many of us have experienced the outcome of rejecting wisdom. May you seek wisdom this week, modeling what it looks like to follow godly counsel.

## BIBLICAL COMMENTARY

### PRIDE LEADS US TO REJECT WISDOM

#### 1 KINGS 12:1-5

“Throughout this drama there are many exodus-like aspects. As Moses led Israel out from Egypt’s tyranny, so Jeroboam is looked to as the one who will lead Israel out from Rehoboam’s tyranny. Just as God hardened Pharaoh’s heart to accomplish His will, so Rehoboam’s hardness of heart will lead to the schism God promised.”<sup>1</sup>

### REJECTING WISDOM LEADS TO DIVISION

#### 1 KINGS 12:13-15

“This lack of judgment and its results, this ‘turn of events,’ ‘was from the Lord’ so that God’s word through Ahijah could come true. Nothing occurs here because of ‘chance.’ There is no ‘chance.’ God is sovereign. Still, Rehoboam’s decision is his own. The text maintains the tension between God’s sovereignty and human responsibility that pervades all of Scripture.”<sup>2</sup>

#### 1 KINGS 12:15

“Humanly speaking, stupidity and stubbornness of heart cause the split of the kingdom, but the author makes clear that, divinely speaking, this is the outworking of God’s purposes. . . . The point in the text is that God is keeping His word sovereignly. No human beings, regardless of how much authority they have, can compete with His rule and reign.”<sup>3</sup>

#### 1 KINGS 12:16-18

“We have the privileged vantage point of knowing that God will keep His promise (2 Sam. 7:16) despite Rehoboam’s rebellion and the kingdom’s division. Thus, in a story about God’s judgment, we also see God’s mercy peeking out behind the clouds. This theme runs throughout the Kings narrative. A lamp in Jerusalem remains until the ultimate Son of David rules.”<sup>4</sup>



# CONTEXT

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We get an important glimpse into Solomon's downfall in 1 Kings 10–11. The queen of Sheba was impressed by Solomon's wisdom; the entire world wanted an audience with Solomon (10:24). So, what happened? Solomon was unfaithful to God (11:4-6). Although God strictly forbade marriage to foreign women, Solomon disobeyed, allowing his heart to become deeply attached to women who led him to their gods. Solomon also disobeyed God's command against having multiple wives, marrying seven hundred women and taking three hundred concubines (11:3). Because he defied God's good commands, Solomon turned away from Yahweh and toward other gods. The same man who built the Lord's temple also built shrines and high places for those false gods. Solomon's fall happened with one small decision at a time. Because of Solomon's unfaithfulness, God announced that He would tear all but one tribe of the kingdom away from his son, Rehoboam, and hand it to his servant, Jeroboam (11:11-13). Solomon sought to kill Jeroboam, forcing him to flee to Egypt until Solomon's death. The struggle between Rehoboam and Jeroboam set the stage for a divided kingdom: Israel and Judah. This fragmentation only increased the people's vulnerability against their enemies and against idolatry.

## THEOLOGY CONNECTION

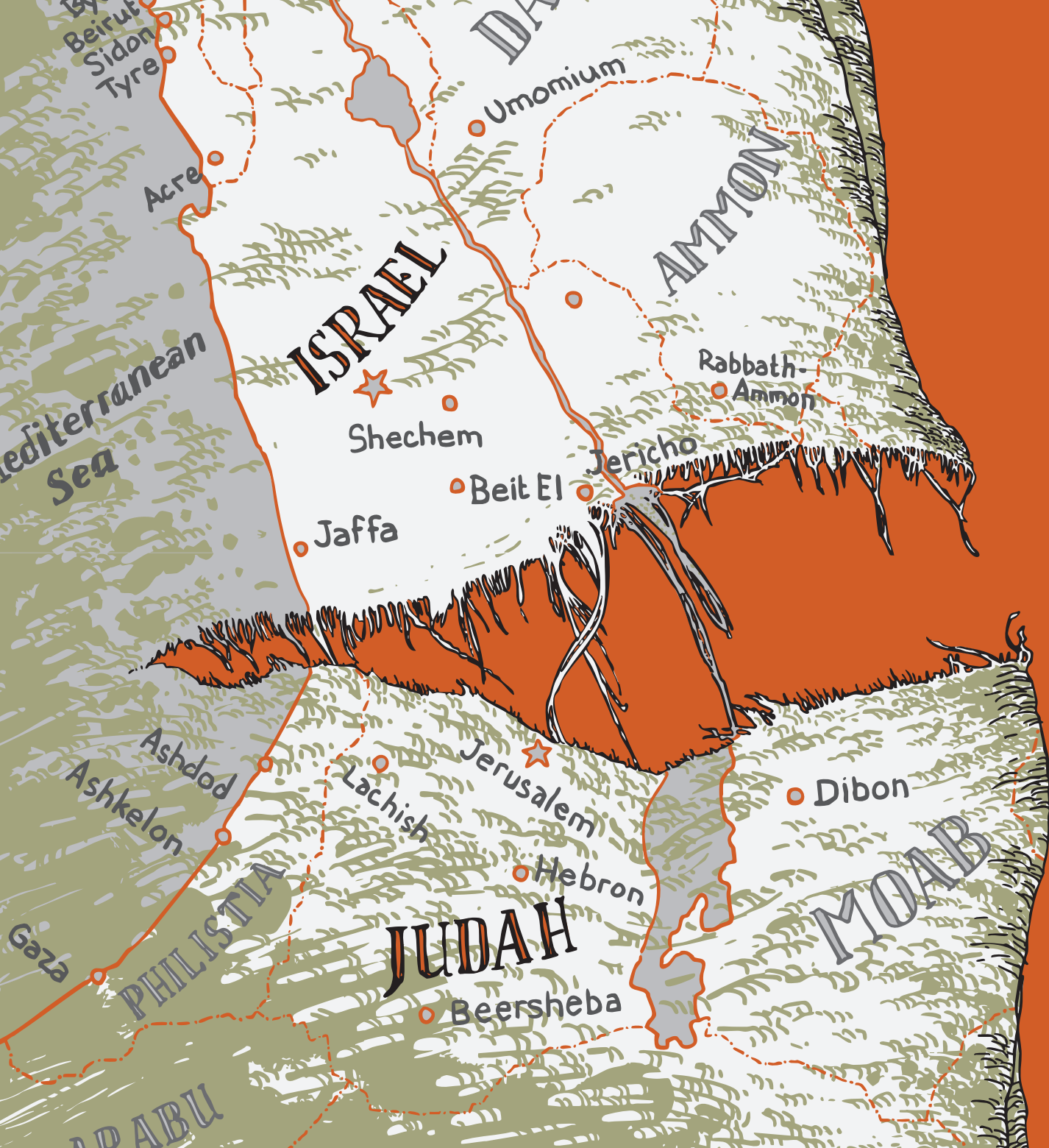
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### Discipleship

Discipleship is a process that takes place both formally and informally to affect spiritual maturity as people follow Jesus. Informal discipleship, as passages like Deuteronomy 6:4-9 suggest, happens everywhere, in every arena of life. Growing in our faith and deepening our walk with Christ is something that requires our whole life, not just the mind. Formal discipleship refers to periods of instruction. We make disciples through our words and actions, providing verbal instruction from God's Word and non-verbal examples through our lives (Acts 20:17-24).

### LEADERS' PRAYER

**LORD, HELP US TO SEEK WISDOM AND TO TURN FROM OUR PRIDE. WE WANT TO WALK WISELY EVEN WHEN IT MEANS WE MAY EXPERIENCE LOSS ACCORDING TO THE WORLD'S STANDARDS. HELP US TO CHOOSE GODLY WISDOM OVER OUR OWN SELFISH AMBITIONS.**



## KICK STARTER

### DID YOU KNOW?

Google processes roughly 13.7 billion searches per day. That's 158,500 searches per second!<sup>5</sup>



These optional activities are designed to help your students interact. You'll find a Discussion Activity and a Cultural Connection, which touches on a relevant topic in today's teen culture. Each group is different, so adapt these activities to fit your group's needs. The goal is for students to connect more to the lesson as they connect to the topic and to one another.

# 1

## GOOGLE IT

SUPPLIES LIST: NONE

Ask the following questions, allowing time for students to share responses:

- **WHAT'S THE FUNNIEST OR WEIRDEST THING YOU'VE EVER SEARCHED ON GOOGLE?**
- **ON AVERAGE, HOW MANY TIMES A DAY DO YOU SEARCH FOR ANSWERS ON THE INTERNET—GOOGLE, SOCIAL MEDIA, AND SO ON?**
- **DO YOU ALWAYS TRUST THE ANSWERS YOU FIND ONLINE?**

A lot of us go to Google (or some form of social media) when we need quick answers. Not only do we depend on the information we find online to help us with things like school assignments, but we've become dependent on it for life decisions as well. While some answers we find online may be valuable, they can also lead us astray. Likewise, the advice we choose to follow can drastically impact our relationship with the Lord and with others.

# 2

## CULTURAL CONNECTION

Have you ever needed advice but didn't know where to turn to get it? Or maybe several people gave you conflicting advice, and you wrestled with which opinion to follow? The truth is that on our own, it can be really difficult to wade through all the advice that comes our way. We're constantly hit with opinions about what's right and wrong from social media, friends, family members, and entertainment. Whether we realize it or not in the moment, the opinions we listen to help mold us into the people we're becoming. We must make sure we're surrounding ourselves with people who will push us toward God's will and not away from it. God hasn't left you on your own to sift through all the advice you're given. He has given you everything you need to live a godly lifestyle (2 Pet. 1:3). You have His Word and the Holy Spirit to guide you in all things.

# DISCUSSION

## MAIN POINT.

The advice we choose to follow can make a lasting impact on us and on those around us.

### PRIDE LEADS US TO REJECT WISDOM

#### READ 1 KINGS 12:1-9



#### WHY DOES IT MATTER WHO WE GO TO FOR ADVICE?

To be a disciple simply means to be a learner—a follower. **In many ways, the voices we listen to the most are discipling us. This is why it matters greatly where we seek advice.** If we seek input from people who are walking like the world, then we're more likely to follow worldly desires. **If we listen to people who don't follow Jesus, then we may begin to imitate them instead of the One we're called to imitate: Jesus.** This week, pay attention to the voices you're listening to. If your advice is coming from social media or ungodly people, turn your attention toward those who can give you biblical advice instead.



#### WHAT HAPPENS WHEN YOU GET ADVICE THAT DOESN'T SUPPORT WHAT YOU WANT TO DO?

Let's be honest: Many of us know who will support our selfish desires and who will challenge them. We know that one friend who will go along with our opinions or our plans. We often avoid seeking advice from others because doing so might force us to examine whether we're right or wrong. **Instead of allowing that process to take place in our hearts and our minds, we avoid it. Our motive in seeking advice is rooted more in justifying our own desires.** Hearing advice that confronts our desires is sometimes hard, but doing so helps us to test our desires and determine if we're outside of God's good will.

#### WHY DO YOU THINK REHOBAM REJECTED THE ELDERS' ADVICE?

Rehoboam became king after his father, Solomon, passed away. Solomon was the richest and wisest (and some would say the most powerful) man in the ancient world. He left big shoes to fill. Although Solomon also imposed hard labor on his people, they shared in his mission and bought into his goals. Rehoboam rejected the elders' approach to leadership; he seemed to desire ruling out of fear—more like a tyrant. Instead of listening to advice that could potentially earn the people's loyalty, Rehoboam worried it might make him appear weak. **He rejected wise advice out of pride—out of a desire to appear powerful and strong.** Sometimes we do the same thing. We worry about appearances and what others will think of us. **Instead of listening to and walking in godly wisdom, we follow our own way; our pride tells us that bending to godly advice may make us look weak, unpopular, or foolish. As we'll see with Rehoboam, doing so will never lead us down good paths.**

## REJECTING WISDOM LEADS TO DIVISION

READ 1 KINGS 12:10-19



**READ 1 KINGS 11:9-13. DID REHOBAM HAVE A CHOICE IN TODAY'S PASSAGE? WHAT DO THESE VERSES HELP YOU UNDERSTAND ABOUT GOD'S SOVEREIGNTY?**

Leaders: Consider summarizing 1 Kings 11 and sharing context about Solomon's downfall before asking this question. This is a very complex topic: God's sovereignty and human responsibility. Take it slowly, if needed. Because of Solomon's idolatry, God ordained that the kingdom would be divided; Israel (ten tribes in the north) would go to Jeroboam, and Judah (two tribes in the south) would go to Rehoboam. This outcome was both judgment for Solomon's (and Israel's) idolatry and mercy because of David's faithfulness. God was sovereign, which means He was in control over all of these events, but He didn't make Rehoboam choose unwisely. Rehoboam absolutely had a choice. God simply knew what was in Rehoboam's heart. Yet, God chose to remain faithful to the covenant He made with David. **This helps us understand that though God is sovereign—He has authority over all things—we still bear the responsibility for our choices, which He allows us to make. And when we choose wrongly, God is still present, working all things for His glory and according to His will.**

### WHAT HAPPENED AS A RESULT OF REHOBAM'S REJECTING WISE ADVICE?

Rehoboam rejected the elders' advice before he ever heard his peers' advice (v. 8). Rehoboam didn't like what the elders had to say. His heart was bent toward his own desire—for people to serve him out of fear. As a result, God stripped the kingdom from Rehoboam. **The entire nation suffered the consequences of Rehoboam and of his father, Solomon, by splitting into two kingdoms. They'd fight against one another while fighting off surrounding enemies. This division would cause years of pain, suffering, and death.**



**DO WE SEE DIVISION CAUSED BY LEADERS TODAY? HOW IS JESUS A DIFFERENT TYPE OF LEADER?**

We so often experience division at the hands of leaders, usually due to their desire for personal gain. **Instead, Jesus unites us with Himself, with one another, and with the Father. Rather than seeking His own glory, Jesus obeyed the Father's will at all times, even laying His life down for our sins. Jesus modeled servant leadership, which radically differs from worldly ideas of leadership.**

## WRAP-UP



**WHEN HAVE YOU BEEN NEGATIVELY AFFECTED BY SOMEONE'S UNWISE CHOICES? WHAT CAN YOU DO TO MAKE SURE YOUR CHOICES ARE WISE?**

Many of us have been affected by someone else's unwise choice. Maybe a parent's sinful lifestyle caused you pain. Or maybe a friend's unwise choice influenced you to reject wisdom as well. Simply put, our decision to ignore wisdom doesn't just affect us; it has an impact on those around us. Unwise choices are often easier to make; walking in wisdom requires us to set aside our pride. Doing so impacts those around us as well. **Choosing wisdom requires us to pause and ask what God wants us to do in every situation. Choosing wisdom requires us to take all of our choices to God's Word to determine if they contradict His will for us. And when they do clash, walking in wisdom means that we choose God's instruction over our own desires, over worldly advice, and over our own comfort.** When we do this, we could make a lasting impact on the people walking with us and on those watching how we live.

# EVIL IN THE LORD'S SIGHT

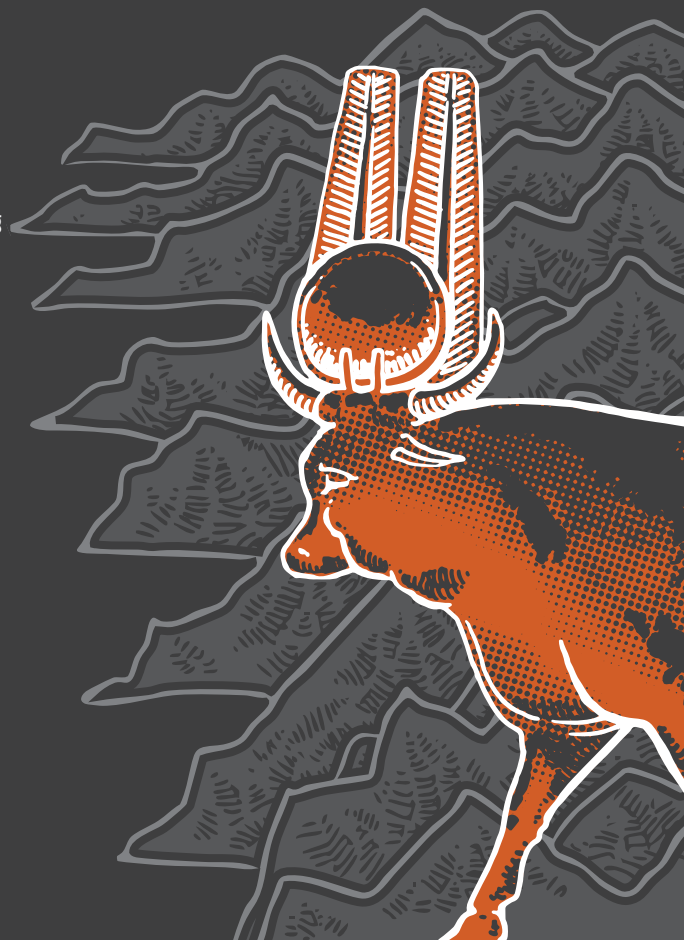
## MAIN POINT.

Idolatry leads us to imitate the world around us instead of Christ.



## CHRIST CONNECTION

The kings of Israel led the people astray. Under their leadership, Israel fell into idol worship and did what was evil in God's eyes. Christ is the King of kings, and He perfectly leads us to worship the Father.





## **BECOMING** CANAANITE

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

1 Kings 12–15

### **OUR IDOLATRY LEADS OTHERS ASTRAY**

#### **1 KINGS 12:25-33**

25 Then Jeroboam built Shechem in the hill country of Ephraim and lived there. And he went out from there and built Peniel. 26 And Jeroboam said in his heart, “Now the kingdom will turn back to the house of David. 27 If this people go up to offer sacrifices in the temple of the LORD at Jerusalem, then the heart of this people will turn again to their lord, to Rehoboam king of Judah, and they will kill me and return to Rehoboam king of Judah.” 28 So the king took counsel and made two calves of gold. And he said to the people, “You have gone up to Jerusalem long enough. Behold your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt.” 29 And he set one in Bethel, and the other he put in Dan. 30 Then this thing became a sin, for the people went as far as Dan to be before one. 31 He also made temples on high places and appointed priests from among all the people, who were not of the Levites. 32 And Jeroboam appointed a feast on the fifteenth day of the eighth month like the feast that was in Judah, and he offered sacrifices on the altar. So he did in Bethel, sacrificing to the calves that he made. And he placed in Bethel the priests of the high places that he had made. 33 He went up to the altar that he had made in Bethel on the fifteenth day in the eighth month, in the month that he had devised from his own heart. And he instituted a feast for the people of Israel and went up to the altar to make offerings.

### **IDOLATRY ROBS US OF OUR IDENTITY IN CHRIST**

#### **1 KINGS 14:21-26**

21 Now Rehoboam the son of Solomon reigned in Judah. Rehoboam was forty-one years old when he began to reign, and he reigned seventeen years in Jerusalem, the city that the LORD had chosen out of all the tribes of Israel, to put his name there. His mother's name was Naamah the Ammonite. 22 And Judah did what was evil in the sight of the LORD, and they provoked him to jealousy with their sins that they committed, more than all that their fathers had done. 23 For they also built for themselves high places and pillars and Asherim on every high hill and under every green tree, 24 and there were also male cult prostitutes in the land. They did according to all the abominations of the nations that the LORD drove out before the people of Israel. 25 In the fifth year of King Rehoboam, Shishak king of Egypt came up against Jerusalem. 26 He took away the treasures of the house of the LORD and the treasures of the king's house. He took away everything. He also took away all the shields of gold that Solomon had made.

# BEFORE YOU TEACH

## MAIN POINT.

Idolatry leads us to imitate the world around us instead of Christ.

Leaders: Guiding others in their walk with the Lord is a great responsibility. May you live in such a way that your students can imitate you as you imitate Christ (1 Cor. 11:1).

## BIBLICAL COMMENTARY

### OUR IDOLATRY LEADS OTHERS ASTRAY

#### 1 KINGS 12:25-27

“Jeroboam doesn’t trust anyone. Not only does Jeroboam distrust Rehoboam, but he also doesn’t trust the people to remain loyal to him (12:25–27). What’s worse, he doesn’t trust God, who told him he would be the king (11:31–39). To ameliorate his insecurity, he decides to ‘make’ a religion that will prevent Israel from going to Jerusalem.”<sup>6</sup>

#### 1 KINGS 12:28

“Scholars often comment on the aniconic (anti-icon) nature of Israel’s God and of his commands in the Torah: God refuses to allow anyone, ever, to make an image of the deity. This is most clearly taught in the Ten Commandments, where any image at all (whether in the heavens, or on the earth, or in the sea) is forbidden to be made (Ex. 20:4; Deut. 5:8; in both places we find these comments just before the ‘jealous God’ references). In the ultimate sense, this was perhaps the most radical teaching in the entire Old Testament, for all other religions at that time expected that images would be made to represent their deities.”<sup>7</sup>

#### 1 KINGS 12:29-32

“The use of Canaanite cult symbols led to ‘a confusion of Yahweh and Ba’al, and to the importation of pagan features into the cult of the former.’ In other words, idolatrous practices were mixed into Yahweh worship.”<sup>8</sup>

### IDOLATRY ROBS US OF OUR IDENTITY IN CHRIST

#### 1 KINGS 14:22

“Israelites are God’s people, and Yahweh is Israel’s God. For him to be jealous of this exclusive relationship is no character flaw. Instead it magnifies God’s righteousness, concern, and covenant loyalty. Anything less than this kind of justifiable protectiveness would indicate a careless attitude toward destructive behavior like idolatry and sensuality.”<sup>9</sup>

# CONTEXT



The passages today focus on the situations in Israel and Judah. The first kings of the newly split kingdom, Jeroboam and Rehoboam, led the people farther away from Yahweh and toward eventual oppression and exile. We'll see Jeroboam make two golden calves and command Israel to worship before them. Then, in 1 Kings 13–14, two prophets visited Jeroboam on two separate occasions, both with strong warnings to repent. When Jeroboam cried out for the first prophet's arrest, his hand withered. He begged the man of God to pray for his hand to be restored; God granted this request, but Jeroboam didn't repent, much like the Pharaoh in Exodus. Even though the prophet's words were fulfilled right before his eyes—and he later lost his son, Abijah, as prophesied—Jeroboam continued to enforce a blending of Canaanite religion with worship of Yahweh. Rehoboam committed similar sins against Yahweh in Judah. Both kings built shrines, constructed high places for sacrifices and worship, and raised Asherah poles, all imitating Canaanite paganism—all evidence of unfaithfulness to the Lord. These actions created a pattern for the kings who followed, a pattern God's people would follow as well.

## THEOLOGY CONNECTION

### Sin's Effects in the World

Sin does not only impact our relationship with God; it is also the root of our broken relationships with the people around us. Human sinfulness is the reason the creation groans in anticipation for redemption and deliverance from its bondage to evil powers (Rom. 8:20-22). Sin has infected and redirected the social structures of society, leading to injustice and oppression. The distorting effects of sin are visible all around us, but the good news of the gospel is that the battle against these powers will be won through the work of Christ.

### LEADERS' PRAYER

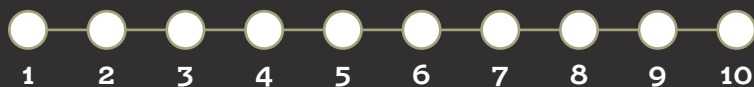
**LORD, HELP US TO REMEMBER THAT THOSE WATCHING US WILL OFTEN FOLLOW US. HELP US TO LIVE IN A SUCH A WAY THAT COMPELS OTHERS TO WORSHIP THE LORD AS WE WORSHIP THE LORD GENUINELY AND COMPLETELY.**



## KICK STARTER

### RATE IT!

Would you rather imitate others or be imitated by others (1=Copy me, 10=I'm copying you)?





These optional activities are designed to help your students interact. You'll find a Discussion Activity and a Cultural Connection, which touches on a relevant topic in today's teen culture. Each group is different, so adapt these activities to fit your group's needs. The goal is for students to connect more to the lesson as they connect to the topic and to one another.

# 1

## IMPRESSIONS

SUPPLIES LIST: NONE

Ask the following questions, allowing time for students to share responses:

- **ASK FOR VOLUNTEERS TO DO IMPRESSIONS OF FAMOUS PEOPLE. ALLOW THE GROUP TO MAKE GUESSES.**
- **HOW DID YOU KNOW WHO THEY WERE IMITATING?**
- **WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO IMITATE SOMEONE ELSE?**

Some of us easily recognized the person being imitated, but some of them may have been harder to discern. Scripture calls us to imitate Christ, but at times, we don't reflect Him very well. Other people have a difficult time seeing Jesus in us because, well, we simply don't look like Him. Today, we'll talk about the outcome of imitating the world rather than Christ.

# 2

## CULTURAL CONNECTION

Do you ever think about who you're becoming? Maybe you do, and you're proud of what you see. Maybe you're growing spiritually and making godly choices. Maybe you've walked away from sin that used to hold you hostage. You look back and see how much knowing Jesus has transformed your daily life. On the other hand, maybe you're ashamed of who you're becoming. Maybe right now, you can't believe the choices you're making. You can't believe how far you've fallen. You've chosen to imitate the world, and in doing so, you've become just like the world. And you may not know how to get back. But the truth is that God hasn't left you. You can repent and return to Him. You're not too far gone because if you're His child—if you've placed your faith in Christ for salvation—then you're still His child. You're still becoming who God has designed you to be. And because of God's loving kindness and mercy, you can choose to become like His Son.

# DISCUSSION

## MAIN POINT.

Idolatry leads us to imitate the world around us instead of Christ.

### OUR IDOLATRY LEADS OTHERS ASTRAY

#### READ 1 KINGS 12:25-33

##### READ VERSES 26-27. WHAT WAS JEROBOAM'S MOTIVE FOR SETTING UP THE GOLDEN CALVES?

Leaders: Remind students that the kingdom of Israel had split and that the ordained place of worship, Jerusalem, wasn't in Jeroboam's kingdom. Jeroboam's decision was rooted in the fear of losing power and control if his people went to Jerusalem to worship. He feared their allegiance might shift to Rehoboam. God promised a lasting kingdom to Jeroboam and placed him in power; Jeroboam just had to walk faithfully with the Lord. **Instead of trusting the Lord, Jeroboam took matters into his own hands to preserve his own power. He chose personal good over obedience.**



##### WHAT IS IDOLATRY? HOW CAN BEING SELF-FOCUSED LEAD US TO IDOLATRY?

Idolatry is the worship of an image other than God. **In other words, it's worshipping a counterfeit rather than worshipping the only One worthy, the one true God.** In this passage, Jeroboam set up golden calves in an effort to protect himself. He placed self above the Lord. We often do the same. We place our popularity, our desires, our interests, our relationships, even our hopes and dreams, above the Lord. We give our devotion and adoration to these things instead of giving them to God alone. **Like Jeroboam, we fear losing what matters to us; this often leads us to worship things which aren't worthy of worship at all.**

##### WHY DO YOU THINK AN ENTIRE NATION *FOLLOWED* JEROBOAM'S COMMAND TO WORSHIP GOLDEN CALVES? WHAT ARE THE "GOLDEN CALVES" IN OUR CULTURE—THINGS THAT STEAL OUR WORSHIP?

Jeroboam was king, so of course he had influence over the people—a people from a lineage littered with idolatry and accustomed to following false gods. In fact, this wasn't the first time Israel had bowed before a golden calf (Ex. 32:1-4). The tribes in Israel faced societal pressure, political pressure, and peer pressure. They feared the consequences of not adhering to Jeroboam's command. We know a little bit about influence, don't we? We constantly face pressure to follow someone or something. **Today, we fear being left out, misunderstood, or mocked. And rather than standing against the pressure, we often follow culture and bow before its idols—things like social media, sports, self-image, popularity, relationships.** We do what it takes to preserve these things instead of obeying the Lord. We give them our time and our devotion. **In the words of Aaron (Ex. 32:4) and Jeroboam (1 Kings 12:28): Here are our gods.**

## IDOLATRY ROBS US OF OUR IDENTITY IN CHRIST

READ 1 KINGS 14:21-26



### WHY IS IT IMPORTANT TO THINK CAREFULLY ABOUT WHO YOU'RE FOLLOWING?

A little background: Rehoboam was Solomon's son—Solomon, David's son, disobeyed God by marrying foreign women. Those women worshiped false gods, and in verse 21, we're reminded that Rehoboam's mother was an Ammonite. Do you see the trickle effect at work here? **Solomon disobeyed God and followed his sinful desires; he followed his wives' false gods; his children then did the same.** Who we follow matters greatly. **When we follow Christ, He always leads us to the Father. He also points us toward faithful obedience. He is the only One we should follow in all things.**



### WHAT DID IMITATING PAGAN NATIONS COST GOD'S PEOPLE? WHAT DOES IT COST US TO FOLLOW THE WORLD?

The king of Egypt took everything; his men ransacked the temple treasury. Part of Israel's inheritance was stolen, and in many ways, it reflected how much their identity had begun to reflect pagan nations instead of Yahweh. **Compromise always comes at a cost.** We serve King Jesus, who gives life, but idols and false gods only take. They only rob. When Judah chose to serve them, they opened the door to oppression by other countries, which God warned would happen. **When we choose to sin and serve ourselves, we also open ourselves to oppression at the hands of our sin. Sin takes, enslaves, robs, and destroys.** But we can choose another way! We can choose to imitate our Savior instead of the world around us.



### HOW DOES GOD FEEL ABOUT THE NATION'S ACTIONS (V. 22)? WHAT DOES THIS HELP YOU SEE ABOUT HIM?

Judah's evil actions as a nation provoked God to jealous anger. But we must have a right understanding of God's ability to feel these emotions in a righteous manner—perfectly. **God is jealous for what is His.** He set Israel apart as His people, and He was dedicated to loving them and protecting them as His own. At the same time, God was angry about their choice to worship lesser things. He was angry they broke covenant with Him for counterfeit gods. God was angry that His people chose to imitate pagan nations instead of walking faithfully with Him. In doing so, they became just like them. **God is jealous for us. He is dedicated to us. He calls us to follow Him wholly, not partially, and He will never be satisfied with anything less.**

## WRAP-UP



### WHO ARE YOU IMITATING: CHRIST OR THE WORLD?

We have to ask ourselves this difficult question and take time to assess our answer (2 Cor. 13:5; 2 Pet. 1:10-11). Giving the "right" answer and moving on is easy. But do our lives reflect Christ? Are we humble? Do we love people? Are we seeking holiness, even at the cost of our popularity? Are our words godly? Do they encourage and build up, or do they tear down? Does how we spend our time reflect that Jesus is our priority? Do our relationships honor Jesus? Does the way we treat our parents honor Him? Does the content we watch and listen to make us more like Him? Does our behavior on our phones reflect God's heart—both when it's seen by others and when it's done privately? When we answer these questions honestly, we'll see who we're imitating. We will discover where we've found our identity. **If our answers show that we're more like the world around us, then we have the choice: We can choose life or we can serve things that make us spiritually lifeless.**

# HOW LONG WILL YOU WAVER?

## MAIN POINT.

When we confront our idols, we'll see they are powerless to save us.



## CHRIST CONNECTION

Christ, like Elijah, confronted the religious leaders who were leading people astray. He boldly proclaimed the truth of the gospel and called people to repentance. Christ is the only way to the Father and the only way to salvation.



# WAVERING WORSHIP

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

## 1 Kings 18–19

### WE MUST CHOOSE THE LORD

#### 1 KINGS 18:20-26

20 So Ahab sent to all the people of Israel and gathered the prophets together at Mount Carmel. 21 And Elijah came near to all the people and said, "How long will you go limping between two different opinions? If the LORD is God, follow him; but if Baal, then follow him." And the people did not answer him a word. 22 Then Elijah said to the people, "I, even I only, am left a prophet of the LORD, but Baal's prophets are 450 men. 23 Let two bulls be given to us, and let them choose one bull for themselves and cut it in pieces and lay it on the wood, but put no fire to it. And I will prepare the other bull and lay it on the wood and put no fire to it. 24 And you call upon the name of your god, and I will call upon the name of the LORD, and the God who answers by fire, he is God." And all the people answered, "It is well spoken." 25 Then Elijah said to the prophets of Baal, "Choose for yourselves one bull and prepare it first, for you are many, and call upon the name of your god, but put no fire to it." 26 And they took the bull that was given them, and they prepared it and called upon the name of Baal from morning until noon, saying, "O Baal, answer us!" But there was no voice, and no one answered. And they limped around the altar that they had made.

### ONLY GOD IS POWERFUL TO SAVE

#### 1 KINGS 18:30-39

30 Then Elijah said to all the people, "Come near to me." And all the people came near to him. And he repaired the altar of the LORD that had been thrown down. 31 Elijah took twelve stones, according to the number of the tribes of the sons of Jacob, to whom the word of the LORD came, saying, "Israel shall be your name," 32 and with the stones he built an altar in the name of the LORD. And he made a trench about the altar, as great as would contain two seahs of seed. 33 And he put the wood in order and cut the bull in pieces and laid it on the wood. And he said, "Fill four jars with water and pour it on the burnt offering and on the wood." 34 And he said, "Do it a second time." And they did it a second time. And he said, "Do it a third time." And they did it a third time. 35 And the water ran around the altar and filled the trench also with water. 36 And at the time of the offering of the oblation, Elijah the prophet came near and said, "O LORD, God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, let it be known this day that you are God in Israel, and that I am your servant, and that I have done all these things at your word. 37 Answer me, O LORD, answer me, that this people may know that you, O LORD, are God, and that you have turned their hearts back." 38 Then the fire of the LORD fell and consumed the burnt offering and the wood and the stones and the dust, and licked up the water that was in the trench. 39 And when all the people saw it, they fell on their faces and said, "The LORD, he is God; the LORD, he is God."



# BEFORE YOU TEACH

## MAIN POINT.

When we confront our idols, we'll see they are powerless to save us.

Leaders: As you prepare to teach, examine your own life for areas in which you “go limping between two different opinions” (1 Kings 18:21). Then, boldly choose Christ over this world.

## BIBLICAL COMMENTARY

### WE MUST CHOOSE THE LORD

#### 1 KINGS 18:21

“Without question Elijah is one of the most distinctive and diversely talented individuals in the Bible. He is prophet, preacher, political reformer, and miracle worker all at the same time. At the heart of this multifaceted person, though, rests one overriding conviction. Elijah hates Baalism as much as Jezebel loves the cult, and he desires to magnify Yahweh over Baal and defeat the interloping religion once and for all. He makes it his mission to teach that Yahweh lives, that Baal does not exist, and that ethical standards flow from a commitment to the living God.”<sup>10</sup>

#### 1 KINGS 18:20-26

“Baalism existed as a religion for several centuries in various ancient Near Eastern countries. Its prominence in Canaan and Phoenicia is especially important for understanding 1, 2 Kings, since it is from those cultures that the major influence on Israel and Judah came. M. Smith concludes that ‘the Phoenician baal of Ahab and Jezebel was a storm-god. The extrabiblical evidence indicates that the baal of Carmel and Baal Shamem were also storm gods.’ Thus, Baal worshipers believed that their god made rain, which is a quite important detail in an agricultural community. Elijah apparently prays for a drought to prove that Yahweh, not Baal, is in charge of crop-enriching rains.”<sup>11</sup>

### ONLY GOD IS POWERFUL TO SAVE

#### 1 KINGS 18:37-39

“This story shows us not only God’s power in answering prayer but also God’s grace for inviting us to approach Him through blood. Praise God, today we get to approach Him through a better means . . . by the perfect sacrifice of the spotless Lamb of God, Jesus Christ. God reconciles sinful rebels to Himself, forgives their sin, and invites them to call on Him by the blood of Jesus.”<sup>12</sup>

# CONTEXT

Today's passage centers on a monumental standoff in the biblical narrative: Yahweh (the Hebrew name for God, which means "I AM") versus Baal. After the kingdom split in two, the kings ruling Israel and Judah continued to perpetrate the problem of idolatry. Heavily influenced by his wife Jezebel, a Phoenician princess and a devout follower of Baal, King Ahab of Israel allowed Baalism to run rampant. Baalism was the worship of different pagan deities, depending on the region. Baal, a storm god, was mostly associated with fertility and required detestable practices, such as prostitution and child sacrifice. Instead of simply tolerating Jezebel's worship of this false god, Ahab promoted it; he embraced it. He even had shrines to Baal installed in Israel's holy places. Hundreds of Baal's priests oversaw the religion, but even worse, many of the Lord's priests offered allegiance to both God and Baal, committing syncretism—a blending of two religions. Enter Elijah, the bold prophet of God who would challenge Ahab and Baalism in an effort to shake Israel out of idolatrous rebellion.

## THEOLOGY CONNECTION

### Faith

Biblical faith is the resting, or trusting, in Christ alone for salvation (John 3:16-21). More than being simply a mental agreement of historical facts, genuine faith begins with a recognition and confession of the truth of the gospel (1 John 4:13-16), followed by a receiving of Christ as Lord and Savior of one's life (John 1:10-13). Biblical faith is not blind faith—it rests on the historical life, death, and resurrection of Christ.

### LEADERS' PRAYER

**LORD, WE OFTEN WAVER BETWEEN ALLEGIANCE TO YOU AND ALLEGIANCE TO THE WORLD. HELP US TO SHOW OUR STUDENTS WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE TO BE DEVOTED WHOLLY TO YOU. WE KNOW THAT OUR OWN WAVERING AFFECTS THOSE AROUND US, AND WE WANT TO FOLLOW YOU BOLDLY.**



## KICK STARTER

### ♡ HEART CHECK

Last week, we talked about the importance of examining the people we follow. Did you notice any moments last week when you followed worldly influences instead of godly influences?

These optional activities are designed to help your students interact. You'll find a Discussion Activity and a Cultural Connection, which touches on a relevant topic in today's teen culture. Each group is different, so adapt these activities to fit your group's needs. The goal is for students to connect more to the lesson as they connect to the topic and to one another.

# 1

## RIVALS AND UNDERDOGS

SUPPLIES LIST: NONE

Ask the following questions, allowing time for students to share responses:

- **WHAT'S AN UNDERDOG?**
- **WHO ARE SOME FAMOUS UNDERDOGS (FICTIONAL OR REAL LIFE) AND THEIR RIVALS?**
- **WHY DO WE OFTEN CHEER FOR THE UNDERDOG?**

A lot of us like to root for the underdogs. We experience adrenaline and joy when low-ranking teams defeat other teams that should've crushed them. We like to see others defy odds because maybe it encourages us that we can defy odds too. Today, we're going to read about a standoff on Mount Carmel, as Elijah challenged the prophets of Baal. While Elijah may appear like an underdog, he couldn't be farther from it with the Lord's guidance.

# 2

## CULTURAL CONNECTION

Have you ever worked really hard to get someone's attention? Maybe it was a guy or a girl you liked, or maybe it was a coach. For some of us, it may have even been a parent whom we felt didn't notice us. It's tiring, though—striving to make someone notice you. Sometimes, we even do the same thing with God. We may think we need to check all the right boxes—like attending church, praying, reading our Bibles, or making godly decisions—for God to notice us or for Him to care about us. Now, are all of these wise decisions? Yes! They're spiritual disciplines which position us to know God and to hear God's voice. If we love God, then we will desire to do these things and more. But they don't earn His attention. His attention is already on you and has been since before He created you (Ps. 139:1-16). He knows you. He even knows your heart and your motives. The God of heaven and earth sees you, and you don't have to strive for His attention.

# DISCUSSION

## MAIN POINT.

When we confront our idols, we'll see they are powerless to save us.

### WE MUST CHOOSE THE LORD

READ 1 KINGS 18:20-26

#### WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO WAVER? WHY DO WE STRUGGLE WITH WAVERING BETWEEN GOD AND THE WORLD?

Wavering means to go back and forth between two things or to be undecided. Let's keep in mind: Israel suffered from a three-year drought. Could this be part of what pushed them toward the storm god, Baal? God hadn't helped them, so they looked elsewhere—to a god which emptily promised rain and fertile land? They wavered between the one true God and a false one. **We often waver when we feel like God isn't hearing us or helping us.** We turn to other people, status, sports, money, and so on as we search for comfort or identity. We make them our gods, but they can't give us what we need.



#### WHY DO YOU THINK THE PEOPLE WERE SILENT IN RESPONSE TO ELIJAH'S QUESTION (V. 21)?

Elijah boldly challenged Israel to make a choice, but they didn't respond. They stood in silence because their hearts weren't repentant. Their lack of choice was a choice—the choice to remain lukewarm, to continue wavering. They knew who God was; they knew about the nation's history with Him. **But there is a difference in knowing of God and following Him—a difference in hearing about Him and being committed to Him.** Israel chose to be noncommittal, and often, our silence reveals we've made the same choice: We want God plus the things of this world.



#### WHY DIDN'T BAAL ANSWER (V. 26)? WHAT DOES THIS SHOW YOU ABOUT PUTTING FAITH IN THE WRONG THINGS?

Can you imagine how the people felt when they were met with silence from their "god"? They threw themselves into getting Baal's attention; they prayed for hours and danced and made sacrifices, but none of these things worked. They placed their faith in a false god, one that could never answer because Baal wasn't alive. How often do we put our faith in the wrong things too? We throw everything we have into gaining attention and popularity, into relationships, success, talents, physical beauty, or strength. We make these things our gods. **But false gods can't answer us or save us. They can't keep their promises.** They only lead to disappointment and emptiness—the results of putting our faith in the things of this world. **Here's the deal: We can't place our faith in God and something else. We can't fully trust the Lord if we are also trusting in anything else. We serve the one and only God—our living God who hears us and answers us and works for our good!** We must place all of our faith in Him alone and turn from anything counterfeit that's stealing our devotion.



## ONLY GOD IS POWERFUL TO SAVE

READ 1 KINGS 18:30-39

### WHY DO YOU THINK ELIJAH USED SO MUCH WATER?

Leaders: Before asking this question, explain that this story occurred in the middle of a three-year drought and famine (1 Kings 17:1). Elijah poured an abundance of water on the altar during a time when water was scarce! Imagine the statement this made. He went above and beyond what he asked of Baal's prophets. **Elijah's actions would only cement Baal's inability to answer and God's complete power over all creation.** Although Baal was hailed as the storm god, he could never help Israel out of a drought. Elijah's use of water in excess would help dispel any claims that the miracle on Mount Carmel was accidental.



### DID ELIJAH SEEM WORRIED THAT GOD WOULDN'T ANSWER HIM? HOW DOES CHRIST GIVE US THE SAME SECURITY?

Elijah had complete faith in the only One who could answer his prayer. His simple prayer, as a contrast to Baal's prophets' elaborate and lengthy prayers, went straight to the Father's ears. Elijah trusted in God's voice, which had led him to this moment, and he trusted God would receive glory from exposing false gods. **In Christ, we have an even better security. Because of His shed blood, we can boldly approach the Lord knowing He hears us (Heb. 4:16).** We can wholeheartedly place our faith in Him. Just as God alone could send fire on Mount Carmel, Christ alone provides salvation from sin through His work on the cross.



### WHAT DID THE PEOPLE REALIZE WHEN THE FIRE FELL? WHAT DID IT CAUSE THEM TO DO?

God sent a fire down that completely consumed the sacrifice and everything around it. Israel was confronted with the truth that Baal was no god but an idol only. The people immediately fell on their faces and exclaimed that the Lord is God. Notice that their first response was to position themselves before the Lord. **They bowed down, and in doing so, they elevated the Lord to His rightful place. Their position and their words matched the position of their hearts, revealing that they had finally repented.** When we recognize who God is, we have the choice either to bow in worship and elevate Him to His rightful position or to continue stubbornly worshiping idols. **Seeing the truth requires a response.**

## WRAP-UP



### ELIJAH STOOD AGAINST 850 FALSE PROPHETS. WHAT KEEPS YOU FROM STANDING FOR GOD?

Can you imagine how Elijah may have felt? He not only stood against the king and Baal's prophets, but he stood against prophets claiming to follow the Lord. Their allegiance was split between the Lord and Baal, meaning they weren't faithful to the Lord at all. Even though he was alone, Elijah stood boldly because he trusted fully in God. God had led Him to this point and had taken care of him through the famine and the drought. **As long as Elijah obeyed the Lord's voice, he was secure, even if it meant he walked alone.** It's sometimes really hard to stand when we're the only ones doing so. We can't ignore that fact. But the truth is that even when you feel like you're standing by yourself, you're not. You have the help of the Holy Spirit—the same power which raised Christ from the grave! **Walking faithfully with Christ will sometimes put us in the position to walk alone for a time.** Our friends may not follow; our family members may not follow. But God will never, ever leave you.

# HE HAS HUMBLE D HIMSELF

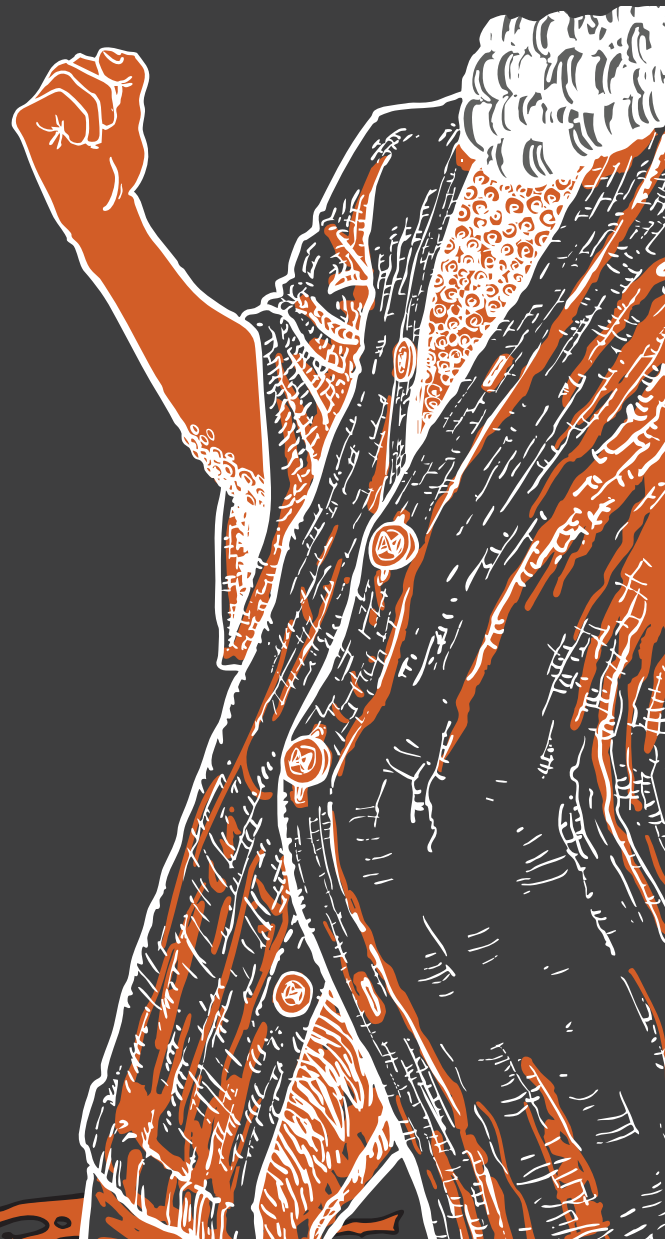
## MAIN POINT.

Humility is an important step in restoring a broken relationship with God.



## CHRIST CONNECTION

Jesus is “the way and the truth and the life” (John 14:6). Every word Jesus spoke pointed to the truth. Only through accepting Jesus’s words as truth can we experience a restored relationship with God the Father.



# **BEFORE RESTORATION**

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

**1 Kings 20–2 Kings 1**

## **THE TRUTH IS SOMETIMES OFFENSIVE**

### **1 KINGS 21:17-24**

17 Then the word of the LORD came to Elijah the Tishbite, saying, 18 “Arise, go down to meet Ahab king of Israel, who is in Samaria; behold, he is in the vineyard of Naboth, where he has gone to take possession. 19 And you shall say to him, ‘Thus says the LORD, “Have you killed and also taken possession?”’ And you shall say to him, ‘Thus says the LORD: “In the place where dogs licked up the blood of Naboth shall dogs lick your own blood.”’” 20 Ahab said to Elijah, “Have you found me, O my enemy?” He answered, “I have found you, because you have sold yourself to do what is evil in the sight of the LORD. 21 Behold, I will bring disaster upon you. I will utterly burn you up, and will cut off from Ahab every male, bond or free, in Israel. 22 And I will make your house like the house of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, and like the house of Baasha the son of Ahijah, for the anger to which you have provoked me, and because you have made Israel to sin. 23 And of Jezebel the LORD also said, ‘The dogs shall eat Jezebel within the walls of Jezreel.’ 24 Anyone belonging to Ahab who dies in the city the dogs shall eat, and anyone of his who dies in the open country the birds of the heavens shall eat.”

## **THE TRUTH HUMBLER US**

### **1 KINGS 21:25-29**

25 (There was none who sold himself to do what was evil in the sight of the LORD like Ahab, whom Jezebel his wife incited. 26 He acted very abominably in going after idols, as the Amorites had done, whom the LORD cast out before the people of Israel.) 27 And when Ahab heard those words, he tore his clothes and put sackcloth on his flesh and fasted and lay in sackcloth and went about dejectedly. 28 And the word of the LORD came to Elijah the Tishbite, saying, 29 “Have you seen how Ahab has humbled himself before me? Because he has humbled himself before me, I will not bring the disaster in his days; but in his son’s days I will bring the disaster upon his house.”

# BEFORE YOU TEACH

## MAIN POINT.

Humility is an important step in restoring a broken relationship with God.

Leaders: May you speak truth and willingly hear truth as you walk with the Lord.

## BIBLICAL COMMENTARY

### THE TRUTH IS SOMETIMES OFFENSIVE

#### 1 KINGS 21:17-19

“Naboth’s vineyard stood for something much more important than choice real estate; it was part of the family inheritance as ordained by God in the Torah. Naboth was mindful of that fact, but King Ahab and Queen Jezebel showed utter disregard for it. This provides the setting for this unforgettable narrative.”<sup>13</sup>

“The vegetable garden was a reminder of Egypt. It required human care, whereas the promised land relied on God’s care. Add to this the fact that Israel was known as a vine under God’s care (Ps. 80; Isa. 3:13–15; Mark 12:1–12; John 15:1–17), and you can see that Ahab’s desire is to turn Israel back to Egypt. Israel’s kings had already turned the people back to Egypt with their foreign wives, and here Ahab continues this trend by making this proposal. This is more than a little story about a vineyard. It’s a battle of the kingdom of God versus the kingdom of darkness.”<sup>14</sup>

### THE TRUTH HUMBLER US

#### 1 KINGS 21:27

“‘In the ancient Near East, just as in ancient Israel, the saq was worn in situations of personal mourning, as well as in those involving communal mourning. It functioned as a visible representation of distress and humiliation’ (Wolff 1977:29–30).”<sup>15</sup>

#### 1 KINGS 21:27-29

“Quite unexpectedly, Ahab humbles himself, which is his most positive act in the book. Again he does not posture like a king, but this time penitence overwhelms petulance, and he does the right thing. God forgives him and postpones the judgment on his family, which demonstrates the Lord’s overwhelming grace and mercy. It has always been the Lord’s desire to turn Ahab’s heart.”<sup>16</sup>

#### 1 KINGS 21:29

“Judgment will fall. Either Jesus takes your judgment, or you will face it. We cannot hide from God. He knows our sins—in thought, word, motive, and deed. We have one solution: we must be hidden in Christ. In Christ we are safe. In Christ we’re righteous. In Christ we’re loved. In Christ we don’t have to fear impending judgment.”<sup>17</sup>



## CONTEXT

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After the events on Mount Carmel, Elijah slaughtered Baal's prophets (1 Kings 18:40). In return, Jezebel made a vow to her gods to have Elijah killed within twenty-four hours. Though the prophet exhibited boldness on Mount Carmel, Elijah was also human; he fearfully fled for his life, left his servant behind, and wished to die before trekking another forty days into the wilderness (1 Kings 19:3-9). Even after a monumental victory against Baalism, Elijah fell into a deep darkness. He hid in a cave until the Lord drew him out and gave him a purpose: Go back the way you came and anoint Jehu as king of Israel (1 Kings 19:15-16). Elijah obeyed, and some time later God gave him yet another difficult task: Go back to Ahab (yes, the one who wants your life), and pronounce judgment for his sin. We can learn important truths through Elijah: Standing for the Lord is sometimes terrifying; God carries us and empowers us to stand; and those who violate His commands face judgment.

## THEOLOGY CONNECTION

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### Repentance

Repentance is a response to God's gracious call to salvation. It includes a genuine sorrow for one's sin (Luke 5:1-11), a turning away from one's sin toward Christ (Acts 26:15-20), and a life that reflects lasting change and transformation (Ps. 119:57-60). It is the human counterpart to God's work of regeneration; in other words, the human side of our conversion.

## LEADERS' PRAYER

**LORD, TRUTH IS OFTEN DIFFICULT TO SPEAK AND TO HEAR. WHEN YOU CALL US TO HOLD OTHERS ACCOUNTABLE, HELP US TO DO SO WITH LOVE AND BOLDNESS. WHEN OTHERS HOLD US ACCOUNTABLE, HELP US TO HEAR THE TRUTH IN LOVE.**





## KICK STARTER

### DID YOU KNOW?

According to research, people respond better to humble leaders rather than arrogant ones. Humility is actually a strength in leadership, while arrogance hinders it. Do you agree?<sup>18</sup>

These optional activities are designed to help your students interact. You'll find a Discussion Activity and a Cultural Connection, which touches on a relevant topic in today's teen culture. Each group is different, so adapt these activities to fit your group's needs. The goal is for students to connect more to the lesson as they connect to the topic and to one another.

# 1

## ARROGANT OR HUMBLE

SUPPLIES LIST: NONE

Ask the following questions, allowing time for students to share responses:

- **WHAT IS ARROGANCE? HOW IS IT DIFFERENT FROM BEING PROUD OF SOMETHING YOU'VE WORKED TO ACCOMPLISH?**
- **WHAT IS THE DANGER IN BEING ARROGANT?**
- **WHO MAKES A BETTER LEADER: AN ARROGANT PERSON OR A HUMBLE ONE? WHY?**

Arrogance is dangerous. If we're honest, many of us don't want to follow someone who thinks they're better than us. We'd rather follow someone who identifies with us. Arrogance makes it difficult for us to see our faults. We can often become arrogant in our walk with the Lord. We forget that we're completely dependent on Christ for our righteousness. Today, we'll talk about how difficult truth often humbles us.

# 2

## CULTURAL CONNECTION

Does God punish us for the sins of people who came before us? In today's passage, we see God postpone consequences for someone's sin until the next generation. But is this the case with us? First, we have to keep in mind the context for today's passage. We're dealing with the king of Israel and with a nation God had set apart for Himself to bring about the Messiah. He wouldn't allow their sin to stop His plan for bringing a Savior. What we read here isn't prescriptive—it isn't a decision for all people for all time. It applied for God's purpose at that point in history. However, all sin has consequences, and our sins do affect those coming after us. We are held accountable if we continue previous generations' sins. Our sin has a ripple effect we may never see. So here's the deal: You aren't responsible for your parents' sins. But the consequences of their sinful choices may spill over into your life. Is that always fair? No way. But sin isn't concerned with fairness. It leads to death. And it's all the more reason for us to choose the better way. God holds us accountable for our choice to continue generational sin. God's heart isn't punishment; His heart is redemption from sin and death.

# DISCUSSION

## MAIN POINT.

Humility is an important step in restoring a broken relationship with God.

### THE TRUTH IS SOMETIMES OFFENSIVE

#### READ 1 KINGS 21:17-24



**AHAB DIDN'T SEEM TO CHANGE AFTER THE EXPERIENCE AT MOUNT CARMEL. HOW IS THAT POSSIBLE?**

Leaders: Recap the events that occurred at Mount Carmel (1 Kings 18). God sent fire down and proved He alone is God. But even after witnessing this miraculous event, Ahab continued to do evil. He listened as prayers to Baal met deafening silence. He observed as God faithfully answered Elijah and as the people bowed before the Lord in repentance. But Ahab never bowed his heart on that day. He ignored truth. **Similarly, we can be spectators of God's work yet never allow truth to penetrate our hearts. We can watch as outsiders yet not experience God for ourselves.**



**HAVE YOU EVER STRUGGLED TO SPEAK TRUTH TO SOMEONE? HOW DO YOU THINK ELIJAH FELT?**

Think about it: God commanded Elijah to call out Ahab's evil ways, but God also commanded him to explain the consequences. All of Ahab's descendants, his entire household, would come to ruin in a horrific way! And God was clear about why: Ahab led Israel to sin. Elijah may have felt fearful, but he didn't seem to hesitate. God commanded him to speak bold truth, and even though it could've angered Ahab and resulted in his harm, Elijah was faithful. **We often struggle to speak hard truths to others because we fear the consequences. But we can know God is with us in these moments.**

### **WHY DO YOU THINK AHAB CALLED ELIJAH HIS ENEMY? WHY ARE WE THREATENED BY PEOPLE WHO SPEAK TRUTH TO US?**

Ahab committed idolatry and enforced it throughout Israel, putting him in direct opposition to Yahweh and to the Lord's prophets. When Elijah approached him, Ahab called him an enemy—one who threatened everything he had built and acquired, one who threatened his way of life. Perhaps Ahab knew what Elijah had to say would shine a light on the evil to which he had devoted himself. Instead of viewing Elijah as one who spoke truth, Ahab chose to be defensive and offended. We often do the same thing. **When someone calls out our sin or points out the ways we've lived hypocritically, we view them as an enemy.** We choose to be offended and go on the defense; we may even retaliate by redirecting attention to what we see wrong with that person. **In our flesh, we reject anything challenging our sinful behavior. But if we live according to the Spirit within us, then we'll see that the people holding us accountable are not our enemies.** The ones who take a risk to help us see our sin love us more than we realize.

## THE TRUTH HUMBLER US

READ 1 KINGS 21:25-29



### WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE HUMBLER? HOW DOES TRUTH OFTEN HUMBLE US?

Many of us have fallen victim to arrogance. Maybe we did something great, but instead of simply enjoying it and being reasonably proud of our accomplishment, we crossed the line and became arrogant. Arrogance may mean we view ourselves as better than others or incapable of being wrong or of falling. But hearing truth often humbles us. It brings us back to reality. **Jesus is truth. His sinlessness confronts our sin. God's Word sheds light on the areas in our lives where we're believing lies. And in those moments, we will either let the truth humble us and repent of our sin, or we'll choose to remain stubborn and refuse repentance.**



### WHAT DOES REPENTANCE LOOK LIKE?

Examine Ahab's response to Elijah's words. He tore his clothing, which was a response to grief in ancient cultures; he put on sackcloth, which expressed distress and humiliation (see commentary); and he fasted, depriving himself of food. **All of this points to a repentant heart, but true repentance produces lasting change. When we repent of our sin, we confess our sin and turn from it; we choose to walk another way.** We may feel deep, painful grief over our sin, but responding to the conviction of the Holy Spirit through repentance leads to life and freedom.

### WHAT DOES IT SHOW ABOUT GOD THAT HE HELD OFF ON PUNISHING AHAB, WHO WAS "EVIL IN THE LORD'S SIGHT"?

God would've been just in punishing Ahab for his sin and idolatry; Ahab led an entire nation further away from the Lord! He bowed to Baal and committed detestable acts in worship to him. After hearing Elijah's words, Ahab took steps of repentance. Because God is merciful and kind, He relented from immediately punishing Ahab. **Here's what we need to know about God: He is just; He can't be fooled by our pretense; He'll punish sin. But He is merciful. He is kind. He is loving.** When we humble ourselves and take genuine steps of repentance toward Him, God is poised to help us and forgive us. None of us are so far gone that God won't respond to a genuinely repentant heart. **His aim is always for us to draw near to Him, and even in punishing sin, God's aim is for us to see this truth: Sin leads to death, while the Lord offers life.**

## WRAP-UP



### ARE THERE SITUATIONS WHERE YOU NEED TO SPEAK BOLD TRUTH? WHY DON'T YOU?

The lesson this week is challenging. Elijah stood before the king of Israel and delivered really bad news: He called out Ahab's sin, his responsibility for leading the nation into sin, and the impending consequences. Elijah followed through with the task God gave him even though it was risky. God calls us to deliver difficult truth sometimes—to follow when it's risky.

**We may hesitate to hold others accountable because we fear they'll get angry or turn on us; we may fear hurting them; we may not want to risk the relationship. But we are commanded to hold our brothers and sisters accountable in a loving way—to sharpen one another (Prov. 27:17). Our approach has to be done in love; our aim must be seeing this person restored and not being "right."** If we approach others for any other reason but for God to receive glory and for them to experience restoration, then we must examine our own motives. We must remember that we aren't righteous on our own; we're only made righteous because of Christ's blood (Rom. 3:22).

# TWO SHAKES OF YOUR SPIRIT

## MAIN POINT.

The people we follow help shape us.



## CHRIST CONNECTION

Before Christ ascended into heaven, He commissioned the disciples to take the gospel to the ends of the earth, and He promised to be with them—and us—until the very end of the age (Matt. 28:16-20). We carry the gospel everywhere we go with the power of the Holy Spirit living within us.





# *FOLLOWING* AND BECOMING

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

## 2 Kings 2-6

### WE LEARN FROM THE PEOPLE WE FOLLOW

#### 2 KINGS 2:1-6

1 Now when the LORD was about to take Elijah up to heaven by a whirlwind, Elijah and Elisha were on their way from Gilgal. 2 And Elijah said to Elisha, "Please stay here, for the LORD has sent me as far as Bethel." But Elisha said, "As the LORD lives, and as you yourself live, I will not leave you." So they went down to Bethel. 3 And the sons of the prophets who were in Bethel came out to Elisha and said to him, "Do you know that today the LORD will take away your master from over you?" And he said, "Yes, I know it; keep quiet." 4 Elijah said to him, "Elisha, please stay here, for the LORD has sent me to Jericho." But he said, "As the LORD lives, and as you yourself live, I will not leave you." So they came to Jericho. 5 The sons of the prophets who were at Jericho drew near to Elisha and said to him, "Do you know that today the LORD will take away your master from over you?" And he answered, "Yes, I know it; keep quiet." 6 Then Elijah said to him, "Please stay here, for the LORD has sent me to the Jordan." But he said, "As the LORD lives, and as you yourself live, I will not leave you." So the two of them went on.

### WE CARRY WHAT WE'VE LEARNED

#### 2 KINGS 2:7-14

7 Fifty men of the sons of the prophets also went and stood at some distance from them, as they both were standing by the Jordan. 8 Then Elijah took his cloak and rolled it up and struck the water, and the water was parted to the one side and to the other, till the two of them could go over on dry ground. 9 When they had crossed, Elijah said to Elisha, "Ask what I shall do for you, before I am taken from you." And Elisha said, "Please let there be a double portion of your spirit on me." 10 And he said, "You have asked a hard thing; yet, if you see me as I am being taken from you, it shall be so for you, but if you do not see me, it shall not be so." 11 And as they still went on and talked, behold, chariots of fire and horses of fire separated the two of them. And Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven. 12 And Elisha saw it and he cried, "My father, my father! The chariots of Israel and its horsemen!" And he saw him no more. Then he took hold of his own clothes and tore them in two pieces. 13 And he took up the cloak of Elijah that had fallen from him and went back and stood on the bank of the Jordan. 14 Then he took the cloak of Elijah that had fallen from him and struck the water, saying, "Where is the LORD, the God of Elijah?" And when he had struck the water, the water was parted to the one side and to the other, and Elisha went over.

# BEFORE YOU TEACH

## MAIN POINT.

The people we follow help shape us.

Leaders: Your students watch you as you imitate Christ (1 Cor. 11:1); may what they see spur them on to imitate Christ as well.

## BIBLICAL COMMENTARY

### WE LEARN FROM THE PEOPLE WE FOLLOW

#### 2 KINGS 2:1-6

“Elijah’s more immediate purpose in moving from Gilgal to Bethel seems to be to see the ‘company of prophets’ that reside in Bethel. Next, Elijah makes a similar journey to Jericho. Though Elijah tells Elisha he may stay in Bethel (2:2 and 2:4), the younger prophet refuses, apparently because he wants to be near Elijah when his time on earth ends. Elisha’s refusal to speak of the matter apparently shows his sorrow at the prospect of losing Elijah.”<sup>1</sup>

### WE CARRY WHAT WE’VE LEARNED

#### 2 KINGS 2:9

“The request for a double portion (v. 9, ‘share’, RSV, NEB, JB), was not that he might excel his master but that he should receive the eldest son’s share according to the law (Deut. 21:17). Such a son had the responsibility to carry on the father’s name and work.”<sup>2</sup>

#### 2 KINGS 2:11

“This nondeath ‘invested him with the quality of eternal life, surpassing even Moses, the father of all prophets, who died and was buried (albeit by God himself: Deut. 34:5-6).’ Because he never dies, Elijah later becomes the symbol for great future prophets, including the forerunner of the Messiah (Mal. 4:5-6).”<sup>3</sup>

#### 2 KINGS 2:12-14

“First, Elijah points us back to Moses. Both called Israel to covenant faithfulness and then died outside the promised land, leaving behind disciples to take up the work. We now see in Elisha a new Joshua with a similar name—Joshua means ‘Yahweh is salvation’ and Elisha means ‘my God is salvation.’ Elisha comes through the Jordan to Jericho, and he comes to root out Canaanite worship. Second, Elijah points forward to John the Baptist, a prophet who would wear the same kind of clothes as Elijah. John the Baptist—crying out in the wilderness against a national power, with a woman at the center of it seeking his life—would be a forerunner of Joshua’s fulfillment, Jesus. Like Elijah, John would anoint his successor at the Jordan and see his successor as the firstborn receiving the promised inheritance. God is orchestrating a plan to save His people.”<sup>4</sup>

An illustration in the top right corner shows a group of people in white robes on a green hill. Some are standing with their arms raised in praise, while others are sitting or kneeling. The style is simple and sketchy.

# CONTEXT

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Elijah is one of the most important figures in the Old Testament. Even today, Jewish people save a seat for Elijah in the Seder meal, the Passover meal, because they believe he will return to announce the Messiah (Mal. 4:5-6). Jesus explained that John the Baptist fulfilled this prophecy, although many didn't recognize this truth (Matt. 17:10-13). Elijah also pointed back to Moses; like him, Elijah called Israel to repentance and reminded them of God's covenant. He also left behind a successor: Elisha, a new Joshua. Elijah and Moses both appeared with Jesus during the transfiguration, witnessed by Peter, James, and John (Matt. 17:2-3). Both prophets pointed to a coming prophet, one who would be much greater: Jesus.

## THEOLOGY CONNECTION

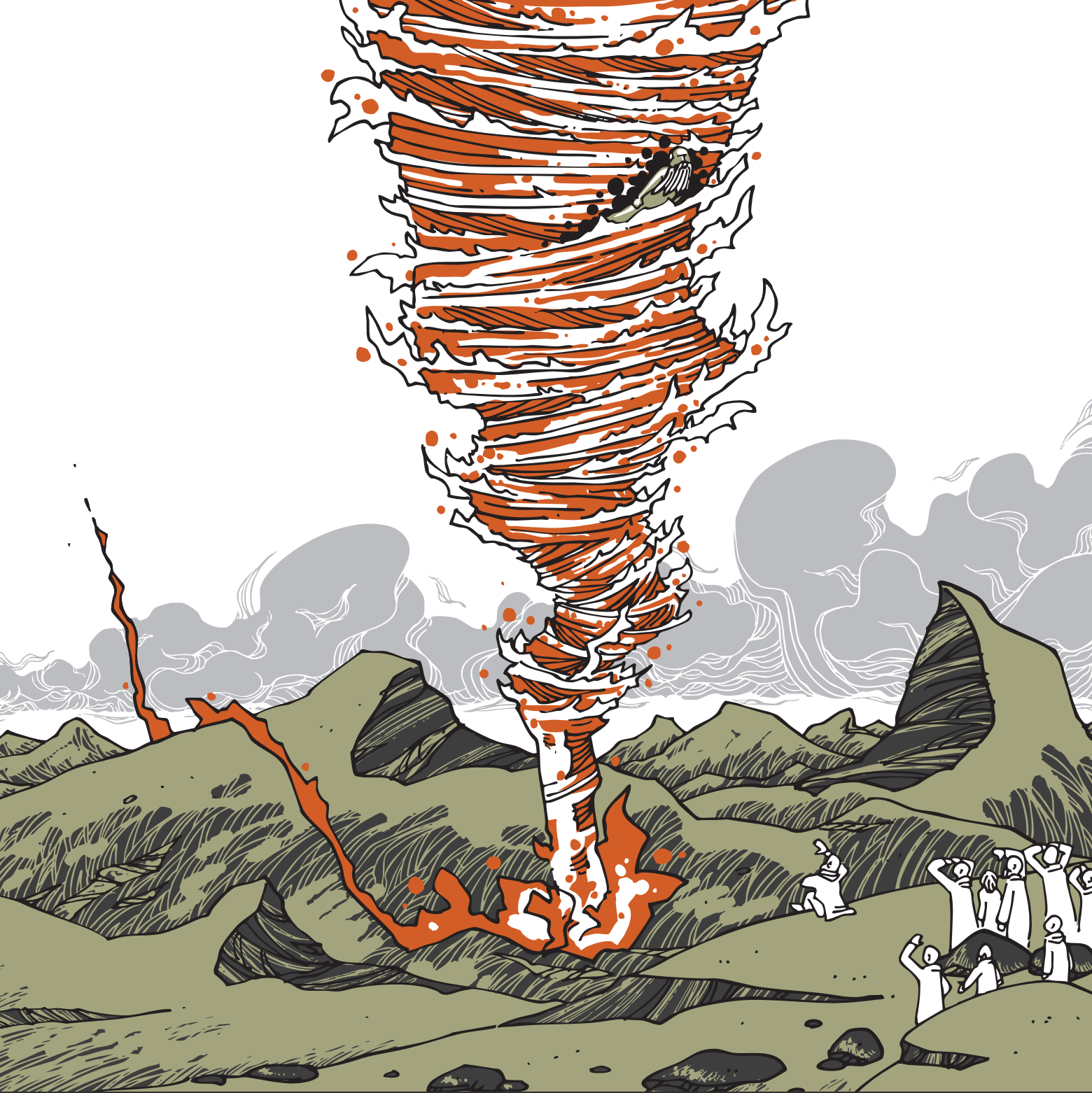
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### Evangelism

The duty and privilege of every Christian and of every church is to make disciples of all nations. The new birth of one's spirit by God's Holy Spirit means the birth of love for others. Missionary effort flows from a changed life, and in His teachings, Jesus specifically and repeatedly commanded preaching the gospel to all nations. Every child of God has the duty to share the gospel verbally and through a Christian lifestyle.

### LEADERS' PRAYER

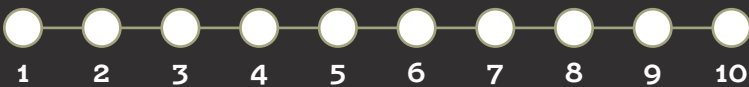
**LORD, WE DEPEND ON YOU TO SHOW US HOW TO LEAD OTHERS. WE WANT TO IMITATE YOUR SON SO THAT THE STUDENTS FOLLOWING BEHIND US WILL IMITATE HIM AS WELL. HELP US TO PAY CAREFUL ATTENTION TO THE WAY WE LIVE SO THAT OUR LIVES HONOR YOU.**



## KICK STARTER

### RATE IT!

How much do your friends shape your identity or make you who you are (1=not at all, 10=completely)?



These optional activities are designed to help your students interact. You'll find a Discussion Activity and a Cultural Connection, which touches on a relevant topic in today's teen culture. Each group is different, so adapt these activities to fit your group's needs. The goal is for students to connect more to the lesson as they connect to the topic and to one another.

# 1

## FOOTSTEPS

SUPPLIES LIST: NONE

Ask the following questions, allowing time for students to share responses:

- **WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO FOLLOW IN SOMEONE'S FOOTSTEPS?**
- **IS THERE SOMEONE YOU'VE HAD TO FOLLOW, MAYBE ON A TEAM OR IN YOUR FAMILY?**
- **IS IT ALWAYS EASY TO DO THIS? WHAT PRESSURES COME WITH IT?**

Following in someone else's footsteps means that we come behind them and take their place; we try to do what they've done and hopefully do it well—or better. Maybe we are following a senior on our baseball team or an older sibling. The pressure of living up to someone else's achievements can feel overwhelming, and we may not always get things right. Ultimately, we're called to follow in Jesus's footsteps—to live like He lived and to point others to Him. His footsteps are the ones that matter most.

# 2

## CULTURAL CONNECTION

A lot of us like to think we're independent. Our culture values individualism. We want to believe that we're who we are regardless of who we're around—that we're our own person. But the truth is that as believers, we're not our own (1 Cor. 6:19); we belong to Christ. And as part of this truth, we're also accountable to other people. What does this mean? Well, culture would say that we're free to live our own lives without worrying how it could affect others; it teaches us to do what makes us happy or what feels right and that what's right for us may not be right for others. Scripture teaches something very different: Our lives are intertwined with others. We are the "body of Christ," and each part of the body affects the rest of the body (1 Cor. 12:26-27). So, did God create us as unique individuals? Of course! But we can't buy into the mindset that other people don't help shape us or that we don't help shape other people.

# DISCUSSION

## MAIN POINT.

The people we follow help shape us.

### WE LEARN FROM THE PEOPLE WE FOLLOW

#### READ 2 KINGS 2:1-6

##### **WHY DO YOU THINK ELIJAH LED ELISHA THROUGH SEVERAL TOWNS? WHY WAS ELISHA DETERMINED TO STAY WITH HIM?**

Elijah led Elisha from Gilgal through Bethel and Jericho. The sons of the prophets lived in these towns—prophets who were trained by Elijah and living in the midst of dark, pagan cultures. **If Elisha was going to take Elijah's place, then these prophets needed to see and believe he was their God-appointed leader.** God had a purpose in leading them on this journey to the Jordan River. **Elisha was determined to remain loyal to Elijah, and in a way, this loyalty to him was also loyalty to the Lord and His work. Elisha was determined to be with Elijah until the very end.**



##### **WHY DO WE NEED SPIRITUAL MENTORS? DO YOU HAVE ONE?**

Elijah mentored Elisha for years. Elisha witnessed miracles and absorbed truth and wisdom from Elijah's words and lifestyle. Everything Elisha witnessed helped to prepare him for the task ahead—the task of leading God's people as a prophet. **The truth is that we need spiritual mentors; we need people who are ahead of us in our walk with the Lord—people who've gained wisdom through walking closely with Him.** We can gain wisdom through theirs; we can witness how God worked in their lives, and it can help prepare us for the work God wants to do in our own.

##### **WHO IS FOLLOWING YOU? WHY IS IT IMPORTANT TO THINK ABOUT WHERE YOU'RE LEADING THEM AND HOW YOU'RE SHAPING THEM?**

Whether you realize it or not, someone is following you. Maybe you don't have thousands of followers on social media, and honestly, that doesn't matter. Someone in your actual life—your daily life—is watching you. It may be someone sitting next to you in class who notices your attitude, your integrity or lack of integrity, or your language. It may be a teammate who notices the way you react to losing or how you pray before games. It may even be a younger sibling who sees the way you treat your parents or notices what you watch on television. **The bottom line is that someone is learning from you. You're passing on ideas, beliefs, and behaviors.** Are they centered on Christ? If someone followed you, much like Elisha followed Elijah, where would you lead them—toward Christ or away from Him? These are important questions we must ask ourselves and answer with honesty. After that, we must be willing to surrender any parts of our lives that don't point to Jesus.



## WE CARRY WHAT WE'VE LEARNED

READ 2 KINGS 2:7-14



### WHAT DID ELISHA DO AFTER ELIJAH WAS CARRIED AWAY? HOW COULD THIS HELP US NAVIGATE GRIEF?

Here's the deal: Elisha grieved the death of his mentor. We know this because Elisha tearing his clothing was a typical expression of grief in ancient eastern culture. Elisha was a strong man of God; he would follow in Elijah's steps as a wise and important prophet. But he still grieved. He still felt the loss and the void from Elijah's absence. **Even when we walk closely with the Lord and know eternity in heaven awaits us, we can't escape the experience of losing people we love, and with that, the grief. But like Elisha, we can carry with us what we've learned from those loved ones.**

### READ 1 KINGS 19:19. WHAT SIGNIFICANCE WAS THERE IN ELISHA PICKING UP ELIJAH'S MANTLE (2 KINGS 2:14)?

People often thought of mantles, or cloaks, as symbolic, especially for prophets. A mantle could represent the power and authority of God wrapping around them, empowering them. Previously, Elijah threw his mantle around Elisha when he called him to follow him; this action appointed Elisha as Elijah's successor. **When Elisha picked it up after Elijah's disappearance—an official “picking up of the mantle”—he stepped into Elijah's role with the power and approval of God. Elisha would now be Israel's prophet, and he would carry with him all Elijah taught him.**



### HOW CAN WE CARRY WHAT WE'VE LEARNED FROM JESUS?

Jesus spent roughly three years with His disciples. They witnessed His miracles and heard His teachings. After Jesus's resurrection, He commissioned them to go and carry what they'd learned—to carry the gospel—to the ends of the world (Matt. 28:19-20). We have this same command. **We have the amazing responsibility and honor of carrying who Christ is to others. In fact, the way we live our lives speaks of who Jesus is to us; our words and our actions teach others what we believe about God! And we have the Holy Spirit enabling us, living within us, and going before us. He wraps all around us, much like Elijah's mantle.** Here's the truth: We are responsible for what we've learned. We're called to live up to the truth we've attained (Phil. 3:16)—to live as Christ's ambassadors here.

## WRAP-UP



### WHAT DO YOU WANT YOUR LEGACY TO BE? WHAT NEEDS TO CHANGE SO THAT IT REFLECTS A LOVE OF CHRIST?

We all leave a legacy at the end of our lives. All of our minutes and days and years will add up to tell a story. If we're honest, some of us want that story to be about our worldly successes—athletic achievements, educational success, financial prosperity, popularity. **We may say we want to leave a legacy of faith that points to Jesus, but our daily lives contradict this; our daily lives lead others to see that we value the things of this world more than we'd like to admit.** As believers, our minutes, days, and years should reflect that we love Jesus more than anything else. Our legacy should lead others to Him. Maybe your priorities don't reflect this right now. Maybe what you're known for right now doesn't point to Christ. **The good news is that you can decide today to leave a better legacy. You can decide to live in a way that those following you will see Jesus's love and worth.**

# SO GOD RELENTED

## MAIN POINT.

No one is outside of God's reach.



## CHRIST CONNECTION

Jonah was a prophet who rejected God's call, ran from his enemies, and eventually obeyed grudgingly. Jesus followed God's call, loved His enemies, and obeyed joyfully (Heb. 12:2). While we were still sinners, Christ willingly died for us.



# **FOR ALL**

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

## Jonah

### **GOD IS FORGIVING**

#### **JONAH 3:1-10**

1 Then the word of the LORD came to Jonah the second time, saying, 2 “Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and call out against it the message that I tell you.” 3 So Jonah arose and went to Nineveh, according to the word of the LORD. Now Nineveh was an exceedingly great city, three days’ journey in breadth. 4 Jonah began to go into the city, going a day’s journey. And he called out, “Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!” 5 And the people of Nineveh believed God. They called for a fast and put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them to the least of them. 6 The word reached the king of Nineveh, and he arose from his throne, removed his robe, covered himself with sackcloth, and sat in ashes. 7 And he issued a proclamation and published through Nineveh, “By the decree of the king and his nobles: Let neither man nor beast, herd nor flock, taste anything. Let them not feed or drink water, 8 but let man and beast be covered with sackcloth, and let them call out mightily to God. Let everyone turn from his evil way and from the violence that is in his hands. 9 Who knows? God may turn and relent and turn from his fierce anger, so that we may not perish.” 10 When God saw what they did, how they turned from their evil way, God relented of the disaster that he had said he would do to them, and he did not do it.

### **GOD IS PATIENT**

#### **JONAH 4:1-11**

1 But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he was angry. 2 And he prayed to the LORD and said, “O LORD, is not this what I said when I was yet in my country? That is why I made haste to flee to Tarshish; for I knew that you are a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, and relenting from disaster. 3 Therefore now, O LORD, please take my life from me, for it is better for me to die than to live.” 4 And the LORD said, “Do you do well to be angry?” 5 Jonah went out of the city and sat to the east of the city and made a booth for himself there. He sat under it in the shade, till he should see what would become of the city. 6 Now the LORD God appointed a plant and made it come up over Jonah, that it might be a shade over his head, to save him from his discomfort. So Jonah was exceedingly glad because of the plant. 7 But when dawn came up the next day, God appointed a worm that attacked the plant, so that it withered. 8 When the sun rose, God appointed a scorching east wind, and the sun beat down on the head of Jonah so that he was faint. And he asked that he might die and said, “It is better for me to die than to live.” 9 But God said to Jonah, “Do you do well to be angry for the plant?” And he said, “Yes, I do well to be angry, angry enough to die.” 10 And the LORD said, “You pity the plant, for which you did not labor, nor did you make it grow, which came into being in a night and perished in a night. 11 And should not I pity Nineveh, that great city, in which there are more than 120,000 persons who do not know their right hand from their left, and also much cattle?”

# BEFORE YOU TEACH

## MAIN POINT.

No one is outside of God's reach.

Leaders: This week, may you show mercy and love to those who may seem too far gone, remembering that no one is outside of God's love or His reach.

## BIBLICAL COMMENTARY

### GOD IS FORGIVING

#### JONAH 3:1

"Jesus did not think Jonah's story was mythical. He said, 'For as Jonah was in the belly of the huge fish three days and three nights, so the Son of Man will be in the heart of the earth three days and three nights' (Matt. 12:40). Jesus could not have said 'as Jonah' if Jonah were not real. If He had used a mythical Jonah in His analogy, His audience might have thought the prediction of His own death and resurrection would also be myth rather than fact of history."<sup>5</sup>

#### JONAH 3:4

"Jonah's prophecy did not come true, but this does not make it false (Deut. 18:15–22). Most biblical prophecies, whether they spoke of coming judgment or future blessing, had a built-in conditional aspect. Such prophecies were meant to change the behavior of the audience to which they were spoken so that judgment would no longer be necessary. Often, however—as it was in the case of Nineveh—repentance was only temporary; and the judgment, postponed, eventually fell (Nahum)."<sup>6</sup>

### GOD IS PATIENT

#### JONAH 4:1-3

"Jonah did not want God to do what was right and proper according to his merciful nature. Instead of bestowing upon Nineveh the kind of grace God had granted to Israel, Jonah wished the Ninevites' destruction without any chance to repent. It is easier to assume that God is with 'us' more than he is with our foes. The natural tendency of Jonah and his readers would have been to presume that God could never be 'on the side' of the Ninevites. . . . Nineveh was the recipient of God's grace, and his precious Israel was destined to suffer at their hands."<sup>7</sup>



## CONTEXT

**Background:** Because of its short length, Jonah is part of a collection of books known as the Minor Prophets, but the message is no less important. Jonah's role as a prophet was to speak God's exact words to His people. He lived during a turbulent time for Israel—a time of disobedience before the exile, during Jeroboam II's reign, which lasted from 781–753 BC. The book's message centers on God's compassion for all people, even ones Jonah viewed as enemies. Through Jonah, God affirmed His promise that Abraham would be a blessing to all nations (Gen. 12:1-3). What a beautiful reminder that God doesn't want anyone to perish but for all to repent and be saved (2 Pet. 3:9). While Jonah's message was specifically for Nineveh, a city in Assyria, it also contains timeless truths for us: God is sovereign; He is compassionate; and He is willing to save those who call on Him in repentance. Jonah fled from God's call, but God wasn't restricted by Israel's borders. Unlike pagan gods, who people believed were bound by their national borders, God's power is boundless because He alone is God. The Lord pursued Jonah while simultaneously pursuing even His enemies with a radical message of forgiveness.

## THEOLOGY CONNECTION



### God Is Gracious

God's nature is to delight in giving favor to those who are undeserving (Eph. 2:8-9). His grace toward sinners is found most clearly in the salvation He has provided through Christ. Because of sin, humanity is undeserving of salvation—all of us have turned our backs on God, and as a result, we deserve death (Rom. 6:23). However, instead of leaving people in their sins, God has demonstrated His graciousness by providing atonement and forgiveness for our sins through the death and resurrection of Jesus (2 Cor. 5:21).

## LEADERS' PRAYER

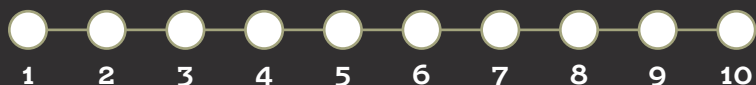
**LORD, WE DON'T DESERVE THE GRACE YOU GIVE US. INSTEAD OF WRATH, YOU OFFER FORGIVENESS AT THE EXPENSE OF YOUR SON'S LIFE. HELP US NEVER TO TAKE THIS GRACE FOR GRANTED.**



## KICK STARTER

### RATE IT!

Is there truth to this statement: Some people are just too far gone to help (1=yes, 10=not at all)?





These optional activities are designed to help your students interact. You'll find a Discussion Activity and a Cultural Connection, which touches on a relevant topic in today's teen culture. Each group is different, so adapt these activities to fit your group's needs. The goal is for students to connect more to the lesson as they connect to the topic and to one another.

# 1

## SECOND CHANCES

SUPPLIES LIST: NONE

Ask the following questions, allowing time for students to share responses:

- **WHEN HAS SOMEONE GIVEN YOU A BREAK THOUGH YOU DESERVED PUNISHMENT?**
- **HOW DOES IT FEEL WHEN THIS HAPPENS?**
- **DO YOU THINK THERE SHOULD BE A LIMIT TO HOW MANY TIMES WE'RE GIVEN ANOTHER CHANCE? WHY OR WHY NOT?**

Many of us have experienced being pardoned. Maybe we were speeding, but the officer gave us a warning instead of a ticket. Maybe we failed a test, and the teacher allowed us to retake it. Maybe we got caught gossiping about a friend, but that person forgave us. We feel relief when we're given another chance, and often, those second chances teach us a lesson. Today, we'll see how God relented from punishing the people of Nineveh and showed them mercy instead.

# 2

## CULTURAL CONNECTION

Some of us have unspoken limits when it comes to loving others. Though most of us would agree that God loves everyone, if we're honest, we don't love everyone. We don't even like everyone! So, we place conditions on sharing God's love. We're more willing to share it with people we like being around; we'll talk to people who don't make us too uncomfortable; we'll gravitate toward those who are like us or who don't offend us with their lifestyles. And this conditional attitude couldn't be further from Jesus's example. Not only did He claim with His words that God loves everyone (look no further than John 3:16), but Jesus's actions proved this to be true. Jesus—God in flesh—went to the outcasts, to the sinners, to the tax collectors, to the sick. Though He never condoned their sin, Jesus loved those whom culture (and religion) called unlovable and unworthy. His love was unconditional. Jesus imitated the Father's great love for us, and He calls us to do the same.

# DISCUSSION

## MAIN POINT.

No one is outside of God's reach.

### GOD IS FORGIVING

READ JONAH 3:1-10

#### WHAT ARE SOME REASONS WE FEEL UNCOMFORTABLE SHARING OUR FAITH?

Leaders: Consider sharing a summary of Jonah 1–2. Jonah ran from God's command to go to Nineveh, and it landed him in a lot of trouble! We often run from the command to share our faith with others too. Jonah viewed the people in Nineveh as enemies of Israel and of God. **The truth is that our sin makes us all enemies of God—all equally in need of Christ.** Like Jonah, we often rule out certain people as being worthy of God's love. We also fear being ridiculed or not fitting in. We fear losing friends or making people angry. We fear not having the right words or answers. **And like Jonah, we make excuses instead of obeying God.**



#### WHY MUST WE UNDERSTAND THE BAD NEWS (OUR SIN SEPARATES US FROM GOD FOREVER) BEFORE WE CAN TRULY UNDERSTAND THE GOSPEL?

We don't typically want to hear bad news. **But when it comes to the gospel, the good news is good because of the bad news—the reality that we're sinners who will face judgment.** It's in light of this bad news that the gospel brings hope: We can experience freedom from our sin by calling on Christ, the One who took our punishment upon His shoulders. **When sharing the gospel with others, we may be tempted to focus only on God's love, but we must also paint a clear picture of sin's consequences and our deep need for salvation.**



#### WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO SHOW SOMEONE GRACE? HOW DO WE RECEIVE GOD'S GRACE?

God relented, or held back, from punishing Nineveh because they repented. **Grace isn't just God withholding punishment for our sin; it is the kindness and blessings He gives us in its place. He doesn't just pardon us; He gives us good gifts and continually shows us love and kindness.** God's ultimate gift of grace was giving His Son as a ransom for our sin. But God also showers us with good gifts: spiritual gifts, co-inheritance with Christ, and the Holy Spirit. **All good things are part of His grace (James 1:17).** But this grace was costly; it came at the expense of Christ's blood. Dietrich Bonhoeffer explained the difference between cheap and costly grace in his book, *The Cost of Discipleship*: "Cheap grace is the preaching of forgiveness without requiring repentance, baptism without church discipline, communion without confession, absolution without personal confession. Cheap grace is grace without discipleship, grace without the cross, grace without Jesus Christ, living and incarnate. . . . Above all, it is costly because it cost God the life of his Son . . . and what has cost God much cannot be cheap for us."<sup>8</sup> **We only receive the gift of grace through confession and repentance, and it's only possible because it cost God much.**

## GOD IS PATIENT

READ JONAH 4:1-11

### WHY WAS JONAH ANGRY? WHAT DO YOU SEE ABOUT GOD THROUGH HIS INTERACTION WITH JONAH?

Assyria was one of Israel's biggest threats, and Nineveh was its capital city. Jonah couldn't get past the fact that the people of Nineveh were the enemy. And it's true: Assyria would one day attack Israel and take God's people into exile (2 Kings 17:6). The idea that God was willing to extend mercy and forgiveness to them infuriated Jonah; in his mind, these non-Israelites weren't deserving of mercy. **Jonah didn't agree with God's response.** Instead of responding to Jonah in anger, God showed him patience. The Lord continued to care for Jonah by sending a vine to cover him in the scorching heat. **He desired to teach Jonah rather than simply punish him.** God is compassionate and loving, and though we're often deserving of punishment, He shows us patience and mercy, teaching us a better way.



### WHAT LESSON DO YOU THINK GOD WANTED TO TEACH JONAH (AND US)?

Jonah didn't agree with God's response to the Ninevites' repentance. Jonah envisioned an entirely different outcome—one that involved Nineveh's punishment. **God was teaching Jonah the truth that He is God over all people, not just Israel. And His mercy is for anyone who humbles themselves and repents.** If we're honest, sometimes we don't like or agree with God's response either. We think we know best, and when His plans don't align with ours, we respond with doubt or anger, often putting distance between us and the Lord—just like Jonah, who attempted to run from God. **But in the same way that God pursued Jonah to teach him, God pursues us too.** God is moved to show us mercy, and this often involves refining us rather than simply punishing us.



### HAVE YOU EVER ASSUMED THAT SOME PEOPLE AREN'T ABLE TO BE FORGIVEN? WHY ISN'T THIS BIBLICAL?

When we think like Jonah, we ignore the entire narrative of God's Word—a narrative which shows God coming to save even the worst of us if we place our faith in Christ. **If we label anyone as being incapable of receiving forgiveness or incapable of changing, then we are limiting God's power.** The reality is that none of us are worthy of mercy. We've all sinned, and this condemns us. But in Christ, we're made worthy. We are dependent on His blood instead of our own goodness. It's the only thing we can boast in (1 Cor. 1:30-31).

session 2 | So God Relented

## WRAP-UP



### JONAH'S OBEDIENCE LED TO NINEVEH'S FORGIVENESS. SO, WHAT COULD YOUR DISOBEDIENCE COST OTHERS?

If Jonah's obedience to God's call led to Nineveh's repentance and forgiveness, then what could his disobedience have cost? Here's the truth: Our obedience matters greatly. **Our own obedience when the Holy Spirit prompts us to speak to someone, to share the gospel, or to show kindness could contribute to that person experiencing God.** We could serve as a piece in a puzzle which points them to Christ. Likewise, our disobedience could be costly. While God doesn't depend on us to save people, He does use us. We may miss God-ordained appointments with people who desperately need the hope of the gospel. **The next time you want to run from God's call to speak up, to show love, to show patience, to show mercy—even when it's to someone you think is too far gone—don't run; too much is at stake.** Walk boldly in obedience to the Lord, trusting that He can and will use you to draw others to Himself.

# COME, LET'S RETURN TO THE LORD

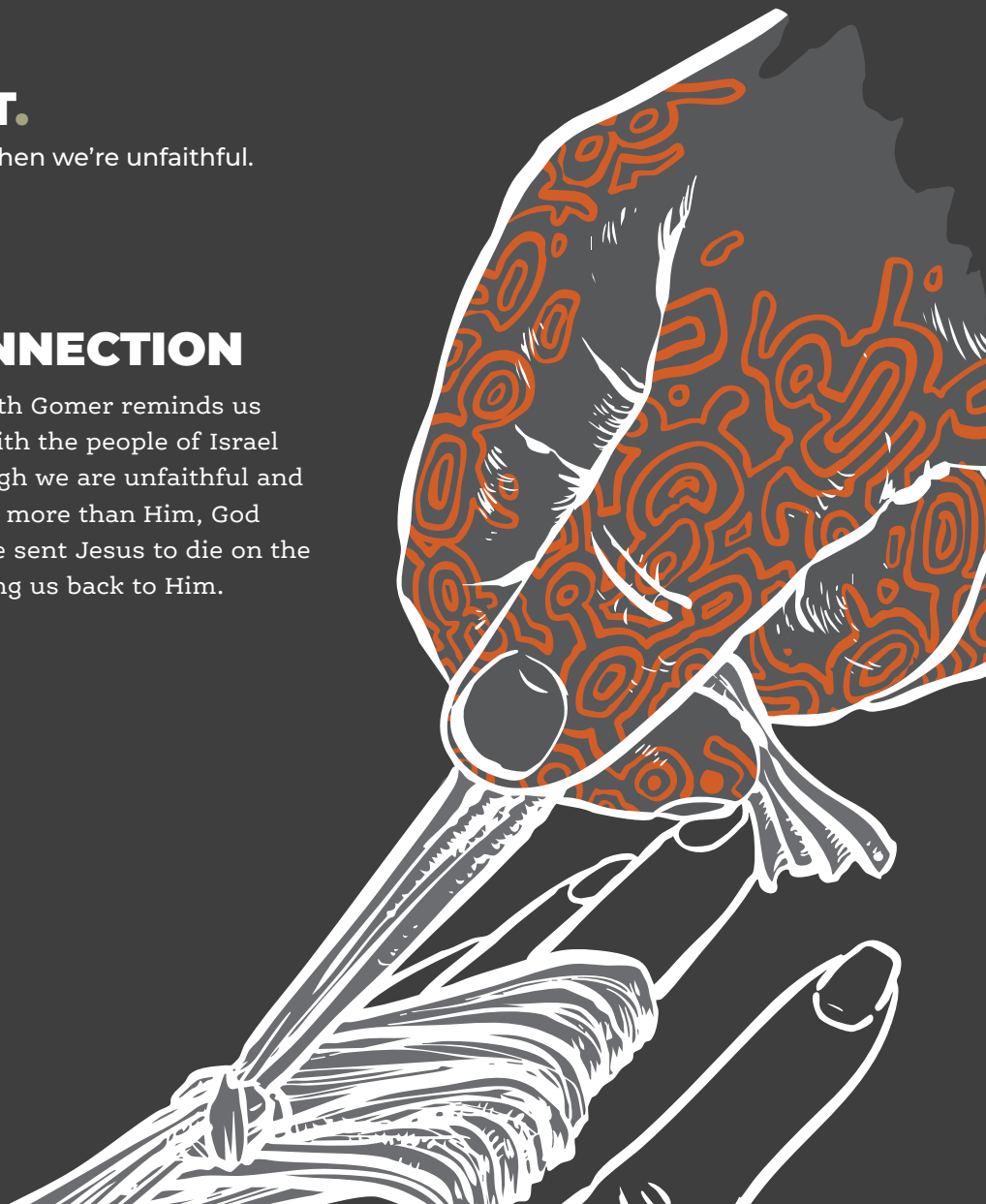
## MAIN POINT.

God pursues us even when we're unfaithful.



## CHRIST CONNECTION

Hosea's relationship with Gomer reminds us of God's relationship with the people of Israel and with us. Even though we are unfaithful and love many other things more than Him, God still loves us. God's love sent Jesus to die on the cross for our sin to bring us back to Him.



# UNWAVERING LOVE OF GOD

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

Hosea 1–14

## GOD'S LOVE IS CONSTANT

### HOSEA 1:1-3

1 The word of the LORD that came to Hosea, the son of Beeri, in the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah, and in the days of Jeroboam the son of Joash, king of Israel. 2 When the LORD first spoke through Hosea, the LORD said to Hosea, "Go, take to yourself a wife of whoredom and have children of whoredom, for the land commits great whoredom by forsaking the LORD." 3 So he went and took Gomer, the daughter of Diblaim, and she conceived and bore him a son.

### HOSEA 3:1-5

1 And the LORD said to me, "Go again, love a woman who is loved by another man and is an adulteress, even as the LORD loves the children of Israel, though they turn to other gods and love cakes of raisins." 2 So I bought her for fifteen shekels of silver and a homer and a lethech of barley. 3 And I said to her, "You must dwell as mine for many days. You shall not play the whore, or belong to another man; so will I also be to you." 4 For the children of Israel shall dwell many days without king or prince, without sacrifice or pillar, without ephod or household gods. 5 Afterward the children of Israel shall return and seek the LORD their God, and David their king, and they shall come in fear to the LORD and to his goodness in the latter days.

## GOD'S LOVE IS SURE

### HOSEA 6:1-6

1 "Come, let us return to the LORD; for he has torn us, that he may heal us; he has struck us down, and he will bind us up. 2 After two days he will revive us; on the third day he will raise us up, that we may live before him. 3 Let us know; let us press on to know the LORD; his going out is sure as the dawn; he will come to us as the showers, as the spring rains that water the earth." 4 What shall I do with you, O Ephraim? What shall I do with you, O Judah? Your love is like a morning cloud, like the dew that goes early away. 5 Therefore I have hewn them by the prophets; I have slain them by the words of my mouth, and my judgment goes forth as the light. 6 For I desire steadfast love and not sacrifice, the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings.

### HOSEA 14:1-4

1 Return, O Israel, to the LORD your God, for you have stumbled because of your iniquity. 2 Take with you words and return to the LORD; say to him, "Take away all iniquity; accept what is good, and we will pay with bulls the vows of our lips. 3 Assyria shall not save us; we will not ride on horses; and we will say no more, 'Our God,' to the work of our hands. In you the orphan finds mercy." 4 I will heal their apostasy; I will love them freely, for my anger has turned from them.



# BEFORE YOU TEACH

## MAIN POINT.

God pursues us even when we're unfaithful.

Leaders: Some of your students haven't experienced a constant, faithful love; consider it a joy that you get to show them it exists in God (1 John 4:8-10).

## BIBLICAL COMMENTARY

### GOD'S LOVE IS CONSTANT

#### HOSEA 1:1

"Hosea was the son of Beeri, who is otherwise unknown. Hosea was apparently from the Northern Kingdom, the nation to which he preached. His name means 'salvation'; it is the same name in Hebrew that Joshua originally bore (Deut. 32:44) and of Israel's last king (2 Kings 17:1)."<sup>9</sup>

#### HOSEA 3:1

"We still have to ask, however, why Hosea describes Gomer in anonymous terms . . . The answer seems to be that she has forfeited her identity through her adultery. She can no longer claim the title 'wife of Hosea' just as Israel can no longer claim the title 'people of God.' Israel in apostasy is not Israel. By analogy adultery does not enhance a person's identity; it destroys it."<sup>10</sup>

#### HOSEA 3:4-5

"What shall Yahweh do with a people who can neither repent, nor even understand the need for it, nor recognize that Baal is a lie, nor divorce themselves from their mother and her ways? He must strip Mother Israel of all she has. That is, the institutions of Israel must die. The shrines must burn, the crops must fail, the kings and army must perish, the priests and princes must fall into disgrace, and Mother Israel and her children must once again wander in the wilderness. When this happens, at last, they will see both the truth and the lies for what they are and return to Yahweh, Husband and Father. . . . By analogy Israel will be for a time without monarchy, priesthood, and idols. When her probation ends, idolatry will never return, but a purified monarchy and true worship will return (Ezek. 37:24; Mal. 3:3)."<sup>11</sup>

### GOD'S LOVE IS SURE

#### HOSEA 6:4

"Here, for the first time, we see clearly the attitude behind the sudden, often inexplicable shifts between harsh, unmerciful judgment and complete pardon in the Book of Hosea: it is the frustration of Yahweh that arises from his unwavering love and from their constant wavering and outright apostasy."<sup>12</sup>

# CONTEXT



**Background:** Hosea, another book in the Minor Prophets, was also the name of the prophet widely known for obeying God’s command to marry “a wife of whoredom” (1:2). The book’s contents split between details of Hosea’s own marriage to this unfaithful prostitute, Gomer (chaps. 1–3), and Hosea’s message to unfaithful Israel (chaps. 4–14). God often spoke of His relationship with His people like a marriage. The two narratives mirror one another; Gomer and Israel both acted as unfaithful wives to loving and faithful husbands, Hosea and Yahweh. Israel sold herself to Baal, committing **apostasy**—the act of turning away from established faith. Hosea’s faithful love toward his unfaithful wife points to God’s faithful love toward Israel, but He wouldn’t tolerate this kind of behavior forever. Hosea’s message echoed the truth that Israel would face consequences if they didn’t return to the Lord, to their real identity as His people—His bride. This beautiful theme of God’s people being His bride continues into the New Testament as well, with the church described as the bride of Christ (Eph. 5:25-27; Rev. 21:1-2).

## THEOLOGY CONNECTION

### Bride of Christ

The church is described as the bride of Christ, faithfully waiting for the day when Christ will return and heaven and earth will be one. Made up of all believers from all languages and nations, the church is the bride that Christ redeemed. The picture of a bride also speaks to the permanence of Christ’s relationship with the church, for marriage was intended by God to be a lasting covenant between a man and a woman (Gen. 2:24; Matt. 19:5).

### LEADERS' PRAYER

**GOD, WE WANT TO BE FAITHFUL TO YOU. THOUGH WE’VE ALL STRAYED AWAY FROM YOU AT DIFFERENT TIMES, YOU’VE NEVER WAVERED IN YOUR FAITHFUL LOVE TOWARD US. HELP US TO RESPOND WITH A LOVE THAT IS FAITHFUL, CONSTANT, AND LOYAL.**



## KICK STARTER

### ♥ HEART CHECK

Last week, we talked about the difference our own obedience (and disobedience) can make in the lives of others. Did you walk in obedience to things God prompted you to do last week? If so, what did you see from it? If not, why?

These optional activities are designed to help your students interact. You'll find a Discussion Activity and a Cultural Connection, which touches on a relevant topic in today's teen culture. Each group is different, so adapt these activities to fit your group's needs. The goal is for students to connect more to the lesson as they connect to the topic and to one another.

# 1

## EXPECTATIONS

SUPPLIES LIST: NONE

Ask the following questions, allowing time for students to share responses:

- **WHAT KIND OF PERSON DO YOU WANT TO MARRY ONE DAY? HOW WOULD YOU DESCRIBE HIM OR HER (LET STUDENTS SHARE FUNNY AND SERIOUS ANSWERS)?**
- **WHY WOULDN'T WE WANT TO MARRY SOMEONE WHOSE LOVE FOR US FADES OR WHO WILL BE UNFAITHFUL TO US?**
- **SHOULD WE ALSO MEET THESE REQUIREMENTS FOR OUR FUTURE SPOUSES?**

It's not silly to think about the type of person you want to marry one day. And if we're being honest, none of us want to marry someone who is unfaithful. Marriage is a covenant—a serious commitment made between two people who agree to specific behaviors which help them keep this special promise. God designed marriage as a covenant in which both people promise to love and cherish one another forever. Similarly, believers commit to a covenant with the Lord. But much like an unfaithful spouse, we so often ignore our vow and live unfaithfully, as we'll see with Israel in today's passage.

# 2

## CULTURAL CONNECTION

Think about it: Would we really want to serve a God who didn't care if we're unfaithful to Him? What would it show about God's character if He was okay with us saying we love Him yet not living like it? What would it say about His own love for us? We wouldn't be okay with a spouse being unfaithful to us, yet we make excuses to justify our unfaithfulness to the Lord. It simply doesn't make sense that we hold a spouse to a high standard of faithfulness and then justify lowering expectations for our faithfulness to the Lord. The truth that God demands our faithfulness is proof of His own faithfulness. God is love (1 John 4:8). His very nature is to love us perfectly. And because of this, God wants us to love Him in the same way. Even though we can't ever be perfect, we can be faithful. God keeps all of His promises to us, and He desires for us to keep our vows to Him. This is only proof of God's absolute goodness.

# DISCUSSION

## MAIN POINT.

God pursues us even when we're unfaithful.

### GOD'S LOVE IS CONSTANT

READ HOSEA 1:1-3; 3:1-5

#### ARE YOU SHOCKED TO READ GOD'S COMMAND TO HOSEA (1:2)? WHAT COULD GOD'S PURPOSE BE IN THIS?

No lie—reading that God asked the prophet Hosea to go and marry a woman with a bad reputation can be shocking. We may think that surely Hosea misheard God's voice. But God had a purpose in having someone who was faithful and committed to Him marry a woman who didn't know how to be faithful at all. **God wouldn't break His covenant, though Israel had left Him for cheap, counterfeit "gods."** God would continue to love His people through their unfaithfulness, using eventual consequences to draw them back to His heart (3:4-5).



#### HOW HAS ISRAEL BEEN LIKE AN UNFAITHFUL WIFE? HOW ARE WE?

Leaders: Explain that the wife in 3:1 is Gomer. Consider sharing insight from commentary on this verse, and explain that she has once again been unfaithful to Hosea. Passages in the New Testament refer to believers as the bride of Christ. **Israel had been like an unfaithful bride, breaking her vow to the Lord and committing adultery of the heart through idol worship.** Israel chased security in other lands and ignored her identity as God's chosen people. **We often ignore our identity too: We chase love and security in worldly comforts and commit adultery of the heart when we love anything more than the Lord.** As Christ's metaphorical bride, we're called to be faithful.



#### HOW DOES HOSEA'S PURCHASING GOMER BACK (3:2) MIRROR WHAT CHRIST HAS DONE FOR US? WHAT WAS HER RESPONSIBILITY (3:3)—AND OURS?

Many scholars believe that Gomer left Hosea and entered into slavery and prostitution. We can only imagine the horrors of Gomer's circumstances. While we don't know the specific details, we do see Hosea pursue his wife in her unfaithfulness, and we see his willingness to purchase her out of the situation. But with her freedom came responsibility: Gomer was to be faithful to her husband and never return to her old lifestyle. In return, Hosea promised to remain constant and faithful, as he had already been. **Christ paid our debt with His precious blood. His blood purchased us from the slavery of sin; it freed us from death's shackles. God pursued us in our unfaithfulness—in our sin—before we could ever love Him in return. With that act of love comes a responsibility. In return, we are to love Him. We are to be faithful to Him. We are never to return to the sins which once held us captive—to our old sinful lifestyles and habits.** Make no mistake: God's love for us isn't conditional. But if we've confessed Christ as Lord and received His gift of salvation, we shouldn't desire lesser loves; we're committed to Him.



## GOD'S LOVE IS SURE

READ HOSEA 6:1-6; 14:1-4

### HOW DOES NOT BEING ABLE TO DEPEND ON SOMEONE YOU LOVE MAKE YOU FEEL?

Many of us have experienced disappointment from someone we love—or something we love—letting us down. It's crushing. Maybe you have a parent who didn't come through for you like parents should. Maybe a friend betrayed you. Maybe a sport you loved was ripped away from you because of an injury. **We want a love we can depend on—a love we know is sure. But this type of sure and perfect love is only found in God.** All other loves will let us down—people, sports, popularity, material possessions, friendships. They can't love us the way God loves us, and they can't take the place of God in our hearts.



### HOW IS GOD'S LOVE (6:3) CONTRASTED WITH ISRAEL'S LOVE (6:4)? HONESTLY EXAMINE YOUR LOVE FOR GOD. HOW WOULD YOU DESCRIBE IT?

God's appearance, or His coming, is as "sure as the dawn" and like the rain that comes every spring. It's dependable; we can count on His love. In contrast, God described Israel's love like mist and dew, which appears for a while in the morning and then vanishes. It changes; it comes and goes; it's utterly undependable. **If we honestly examine our love for God, many of us may admit that it's more like mist and dew. It's conditional; it changes with our circumstances; it's anything but sure.** Since God's love for us is constant and sure, then we must commit to love Him the same.



### BASED ON THESE PASSAGES, WHAT DID GOD WANT FROM ISRAEL? WHAT COULD ISRAEL BE SURE OF IN RETURN?

Hosea 6:6 gives us a clear idea of what God desired from His people, including us: Faithful love instead of empty sacrifices and knowing Him instead of meaningless offerings. **In other words, God wants a loving relationship with us, not our rituals.** More than us doing all the "right" things, God desires for His people to walk with Him, to know His character, to look to Him for salvation. Israel's history reflected her propensity to look elsewhere. She looked to earthly kings for security; she looked to Assyria for peace and safety; she looked to false "gods" for their so-called benefits. God desired for Israel to look to Him alone. **When we commit to love the Lord faithfully and to know Him intimately, we can be sure of His faithful love and His willingness to be known by us.**

## WRAP-UP



### WHY DO WE SOMETIMES FEEL LIKE WE CAN'T RETURN TO THE LORD WHEN WE STRAY? HOW CAN YOU TAKE STEPS TO RETURN TO HIM NOW?

The message of the prophets is essentially this: Return to the Lord. While we don't live in ancient Israel, we are prone to wandering away from the Lord, as Israel did so many times. We often forget, or ignore, our identity as His children, much like Gomer ignored her identity as Hosea's wife. We allow our identity to be wrapped up in the things of this world, much like Israel allowed her identity to shift and become more like the pagan nations which surrounded her. **Examine your own life—your actions, your words, your habits, your passions, your relationships. Are you reflecting your identity as God's child? Are you reflecting the truth that God's constant and faithful love are enough for you?** If not, return to Him. Jesus's blood has already paid the debt for your sin. You're free from the sin that once held you captive. If you've wandered, return to the Lord and reflect that you are His.

# WORTHLESS IDOLS

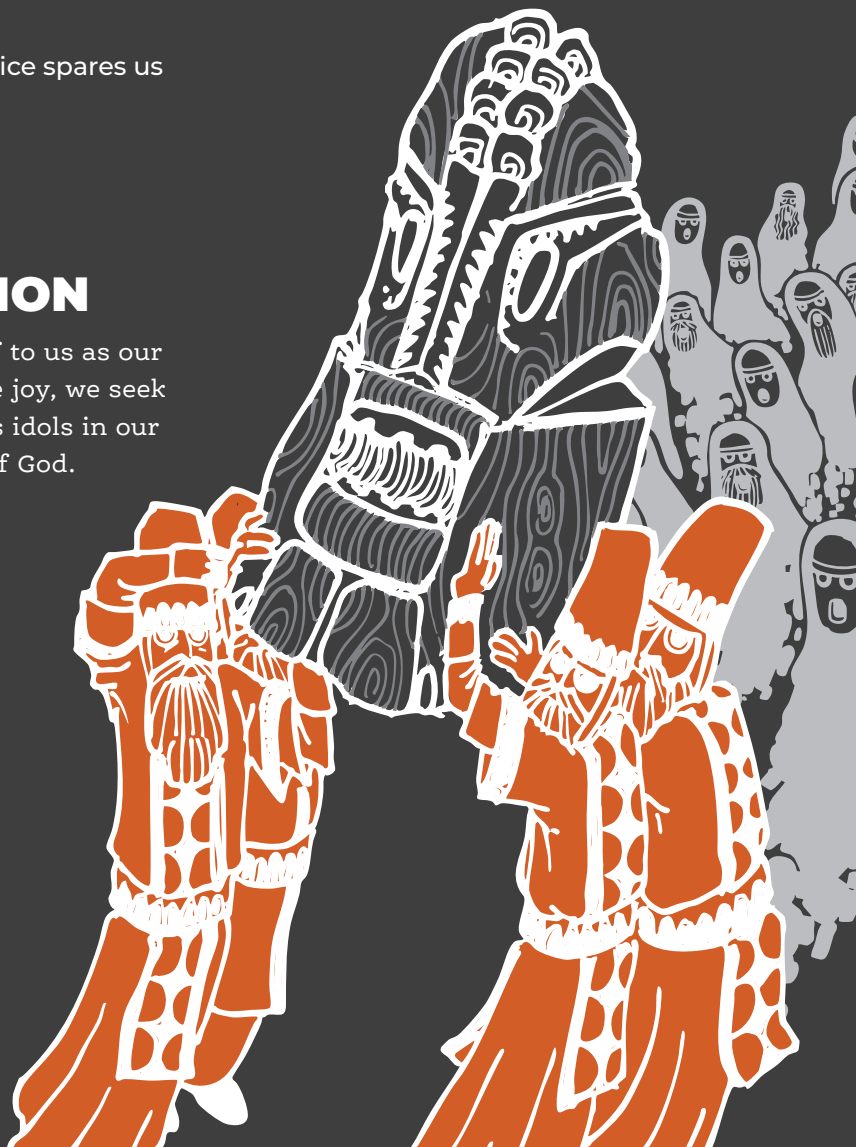
## MAIN POINT.

Hearing and responding to God's voice spares us from painful consequences.



## CHRIST CONNECTION

Because Jesus has revealed Himself to us as our greatest treasure and source of true joy, we seek to identify and put away the various idols in our lives to show others the goodness of God.



# IGNORING THE SIGNS

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

## 2 Kings 17

### IGNORING GOD'S VOICE LEADS TO SIN

#### 2 KINGS 17:6-17

6 In the ninth year of Hoshea, the king of Assyria captured Samaria, and he carried the Israelites away to Assyria and placed them in Halah, and on the Habor, the river of Gozan, and in the cities of the Medes. 7 And this occurred because the people of Israel had sinned against the LORD their God, who had brought them up out of the land of Egypt from under the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt, and had feared other gods 8 and walked in the customs of the nations whom the LORD drove out before the people of Israel, and in the customs that the kings of Israel had practiced. 9 And the people of Israel did secretly against the LORD their God things that were not right. They built for themselves high places in all their towns, from watchtower to fortified city. 10 They set up for themselves pillars and Asherim on every high hill and under every green tree, 11 and there they made offerings on all the high places, as the nations did whom the LORD carried away before them. And they did wicked things, provoking the LORD to anger, 12 and they served idols, of which the LORD had said to them, "You shall not do this." 13 Yet the LORD warned Israel and Judah by every prophet and every seer, saying, "Turn from your evil ways and keep my commandments and my statutes, in accordance with all the Law that I commanded your fathers, and that I sent to you by my servants the prophets." 14 But they would not listen, but were stubborn, as their fathers had been, who did not believe in the LORD their God. 15 They despised his statutes and his covenant that he made with their fathers and the warnings that he gave them. They went after false idols and became false, and they followed the nations that were around them, concerning whom the LORD had commanded them that they should not do like them. 16 And they abandoned all the commandments of the LORD their God, and made for themselves metal images of two calves; and they made an Asherah and worshiped all the host of heaven and served Baal. 17 And they burned their sons and their daughters as offerings and used divination and omens and sold themselves to do evil in the sight of the LORD, provoking him to anger.

### IGNORING GOD'S VOICE LEADS TO CONSEQUENCES

#### 2 KINGS 17:18-20

18 Therefore the LORD was very angry with Israel and removed them out of his sight. None was left but the tribe of Judah only. 19 Judah also did not keep the commandments of the LORD their God, but walked in the customs that Israel had introduced. 20 And the LORD rejected all the descendants of Israel and afflicted them and gave them into the hand of plunderers, until he had cast them out of his sight.

# BEFORE YOU TEACH

## MAIN POINT.

Hearing and responding to God's voice spares us from painful consequences.

Leaders: This week, dwell on the truth that justice and mercy intersected on the cross of Christ, where He was Judge and Justifier (Rom. 3:26).

## BIBLICAL COMMENTARY

### IGNORING GOD'S VOICE LEADS TO SIN

#### 2 KINGS 17:7

"We need to realize that idolatry isn't confined to shrines and pagan temples; it resides in the hearts of people who look to other things to give them what only God can give. These can be things like money, sexual pleasure, power, or success. All sin problems are essentially worship problems. The wrong god equals the wrong lifestyle. . . . Here's another truth about idolatry: we become like whatever we worship. The psalmist says, 'Those who make [idols] are just like them' (Ps. 115:8). In contrast, those who behold the glory of God are 'being transformed into the same image from glory to glory' (2 Cor. 3:18). If you don't heed the warnings of God, then you will become like your idols: 'false' (ESV) or 'worthless' (HCSB)."<sup>13</sup>

#### 2 KINGS 17:17

"It is believed that giant metal statues were made of a man with a bull's head, either with a hole in his abdomen or outstretched forearms that made a kind of ramp to a hole in his torso. A fire was lit in or around the statue. Babies were placed in the statue's arms or in the hole. If a couple sacrificed their first born, they believed that Molech would ensure financial prosperity for the family and future children."<sup>14</sup>

### IGNORING GOD'S VOICE LEADS TO CONSEQUENCES

#### 2 KINGS 17:18

"The language is accommodated to human ideas. God's eye was regarded as specially directed to the land of Canaan, where He had chosen to place His Name. So to be taken away from that land is a removal from His special oversight."<sup>15</sup>

#### 2 KINGS 17:20

"Israel's most fundamental error all along has been covenant breaking, the most obvious manifestation of which is idolatry. The people forgot the exodus and all it stood for: God's power and grace, God's acts on their behalf, and their responsibility to reciprocate God's goodness with faith, undivided allegiance, and pure worship. Instead, they worshiped local deities, adopted corrupt ethical practices, and ignored the Lord's prophets who were sent to warn them. By the time God's patience was exhausted and judgment fell, the rebellion was two hundred years old, thus fully mature."<sup>16</sup>

# CONTEXT



Sadly, much of the Old Testament led up to this moment in the biblical narrative. Soon after the exodus, the first wave of Israelites committed idolatry in the wilderness, and that propensity to wander away from the Lord continued down through the generations. God repeatedly warned His people through the prophets: If they continued to worship false gods, He would send consequences. And that's what we finally see happen in this passage. God extended abundant patience to His people for hundreds of years, but because they wouldn't repent, God allowed Assyria to invade Israel. To prevent any rebellion, conquering kings commonly exiled those who were conquered and resettled the land with new people. Israel's promised land was stolen from them, and outsiders were brought in to settle there among a remnant of God's people. This led to God's people mingling among pagan nations for the next several hundred years—spiritually, culturally, and politically. And this atmosphere would set the stage for our coming Messiah. God's redemptive work never ceased, even when His people were exiled from home.

## THEOLOGY CONNECTION



### God Is Just

God establishes standards for us that are in accordance with His righteousness, and we will be judged according to those righteous standards (Lev. 11:44-45; Rom. 2:5-11; 2 Cor. 5:10). It would be an injustice if God were not to uphold His righteousness, for such a failure would require God to violate His own righteous character. Since humanity has sinned by failing to live up to God's righteous standards, God has taken it upon Himself to make provision by being both the Judge and the Justifier of those who place their faith in Christ (Rom. 3:25-26).

### LEADERS' PRAYER

**LORD, REMIND US OF THE DANGER IN IGNORING YOUR VOICE. HELP US TO RESPOND IN OBEDIENCE WHEN YOU CALL US TO REPENT. HELP US TO REMEMBER THAT OUR OWN WANDERING AFFECTS THE PEOPLE WHO COME AFTER US, AS DOES OUR OBEDIENCE. WE WANT TO HEAR YOU AND FOLLOW YOU.**





## KICK STARTER

### DID YOU KNOW?

Stop signs haven't always been red. The first stop sign was white with black writing, and it appeared in Detroit, Michigan, in 1915. In 1924, the stop sign color changed to a yellow background. It wasn't until 1954 that the stop sign changed to red.<sup>17</sup>



These optional activities are designed to help your students interact. You'll find a Discussion Activity and a Cultural Connection, which touches on a relevant topic in today's teen culture. Each group is different, so adapt these activities to fit your group's needs. The goal is for students to connect more to the lesson as they connect to the topic and to one another.

# 1

## WARNING SIGNS

SUPPLIES LIST: NONE

Ask the following questions, allowing time for students to share responses:

- **CAN YOU THINK OF WARNINGS THAT SEEM SILLY OR OBVIOUS (EX. WARNINGS ON COFFEE CUPS THAT SAY "HOT")?**
- **WHAT ARE SOME WARNINGS YOU REMEMBER HEARING AS A KID THAT STUCK WITH YOU (EX. LOOK BOTH WAYS BEFORE CROSSING A STREET; DON'T RUN WITH SCISSORS)?**
- **WHEN HAVE YOU IGNORED OR MISSED A WARNING SIGN? HOW DID IT TURN OUT?**

We can probably think of some warnings that seem so obvious that they shouldn't have to be stated. Many of us can probably think of times when we simply ignored warning signs, and it got us in trouble. Warnings are for our good, and today, we'll see that they're part of God's great kindness toward us.

# 2

## CULTURAL CONNECTION

Why do we often roll our eyes when others try to warn us? Maybe a family member, teacher, or mentor cautions us to go another way—to make a different choice—because they see us headed toward a harmful path. We hear them out; we nod and acknowledge their words. But we often think the consequences won't happen to us; we believe we are the exception. Those warnings are for other people. When it comes to sin, we often react the same way to the warnings in God's Word and from His Spirit living within us. We read them; we hear them. We nod and acknowledge the truth in them, but we think we're stronger than we really are. We tell ourselves that we can handle the pressure and the temptation better than other people who failed before us. The truth is that God's warnings and instructions are for every one of us. We're weaker than we think, and to stay strong, we must cling to Christ. God's warnings flow from His great love and care. Ignoring them will only harm us.

# DISCUSSION

## MAIN POINT.

Hearing and responding to God's voice spares us from painful consequences.

### IGNORING GOD'S VOICE LEADS TO SIN

READ 2 KINGS 17:6-17



**HOW DOES KNOWING ISRAEL'S DISOBEDIENCE CONTINUED FOR HUNDREDS OF YEARS AFFECT THE WAY YOU SEE THEIR CONSEQUENCES?**

When we read about the consequences for God's people, our first reaction—if we're honest—might be to view God as harsh or mean. But we must remember that God had been calling His people to repentance for hundreds of years. God spoke through the prophets to warn them and to remind them of His love and compassion and of the ways He had saved them in the past. **He gave them time to turn from their wickedness, but they ignored His voice.** Knowing this helps us to see that God is anything but harsh or mean. No, He is patient, kind, and faithful, while remaining perfectly just.

**WHAT SURPRISES YOU THE MOST ABOUT ISRAEL'S ACTIONS (VV. 7-17)? HOW COULD THEY FALL SO FAR?**

In the Old Testament, God's people bowed to idols, imitated pagan nations, and forgot their covenant with God. Maybe the most shocking action was Israel's choice to sacrifice their children in the fires to false gods (v. 17). How did they justify this evil act yet still claim to belong to the Lord? **It happened slowly, surely. It happened with every decision to ignore God's standards; it happened every time they placed their trust in what they could see rather than in God.** We fall a little more each time we choose something other than God too, and it eventually takes us to places we never thought we'd go.



**WHY DO WE IGNORE GOD'S VOICE? WHAT HAPPENS THE LONGER WE DO?**

We often ignore God's voice because it isn't what we want to hear when we're pursuing sinful desires. At times, worldly voices are louder, drowning out God's warnings. A battle rages within us between our sinful desires and God's Spirit. We face real attacks from our enemy—Satan, the father of lies (John 8:44). We face the urge to turn to idols and worldly comforts to meet our needs, when God alone is all we need. We face the temptation to make worldly treasure our greatest treasure. But idols and worldly treasures can't save us. They only enslave us. We see this played out in Israel. God repeatedly warned His people to turn away from worthless idols; instead, they ran to them and became like them—worthless (v. 15). They eventually experienced physical slavery and exile as the consequence. **We desperately need God's voice of truth each day. The longer we ignore it, the farther we wander and the weaker we become in battling sin and idolatry.** Here's the truth: We are transformed by the object of our worship. When we worship anything or anyone but God, we trade freedom for slavery. But as we worship Christ, He transforms us into His image through the renewing of our minds (Rom. 12:1-2). It matters greatly that we position ourselves to hear God's voice and then follow it.

## IGNORING GOD'S VOICE LEADS TO CONSEQUENCES

READ 2 KINGS 17:18-20

### WHY DO WE VIEW CONSEQUENCES AS UNFAIR OR CRUEL?

Many of us try to avoid negative consequences; we justify why we should be exempt from them. But God isn't unkind when He allows us to feel the effects of our sinful decisions. It's actually His kindness drawing us to repentance and reminding us of this truth: Sin destroys us. **We can view consequences as reminders of how desperately we need Jesus and of how wandering away from the Lord only leads us to bondage.**



### WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE JUST? HOW IS GOD JUST?

To be just means to do what is morally right or fair. **God always does what is right and good because it's His nature. He doesn't follow a moral standard because He is the standard.** He can't overlook sin and remain righteous (Ps. 89:14). God alone is worthy of judging our hearts. But here is what's amazing: God is both Judge and Justifier (Rom. 3:26). He judges our sin, but Christ—God in human flesh—stepped down from His throne to take our judgment. We're justified by Him! **In a beautiful way that our finite minds can't comprehend, God both judges and justifies us through the giving of Himself.**



### WHAT WAS ISRAEL'S PUNISHMENT? CAN IT HAPPEN TO US?

As believers, we must wrestle with these verses and interpret Scripture with Scripture; if not, we may come away from this passage fearing that God will banish us from His presence if we mess up badly enough. **Israel's consequence for refusing to repent was losing the land God had promised Abraham (Gen. 12:1-3)—a land associated with God's presence. God's temple was located there, where God commanded the people to worship and make sacrifices. There, they drew near to God because His presence dwelled behind a heavy curtain in the holy of holies! Israel's greatest consequence was a devastating distance between them and God. That's always the outcome of sin—separation.** The Word shows us that God's presence is everywhere, though; we can't escape it (Ps. 139:7-12). But Israel lost God's favorable presence; the relationship was fractured. When the Israelites were exiled, they lost protection, blessings, and privileges that were rooted in the promised land, but even in Assyria—even in exile—they weren't out of God's reach. As believers, our sin also creates distance between us and God in a relational sense, but our salvation is sealed with His Spirit, who will never, ever leave us.

## WRAP-UP



**ONE OF ISRAEL'S GREATEST SINS WAS DESIRING TO BE LIKE THE NATIONS AROUND THEM. WHY DO WE FALL INTO THIS TRAP? HOW CAN WE CHOOSE DIFFERENTLY?**

After being freed from Egypt and wandering in the wilderness for roughly forty years, the Israelites finally arrived in Canaan—the land God had promised to Abraham and His descendants. But along the way and after they arrived, Israel looked at the other nations to the right and to the left of them. They noticed worldly benefits; they craved military safety; they coveted earthly treasures. **Instead of walking in their identity as God's people, Israel imitated pagan nations and worshiped their gods. Eventually, much of Israel didn't look like God's people at all. They had blended completely.** How often do we follow in their steps? We look to the right and to the left instead of keeping our eyes fixed on our greatest treasure—Christ. We long for the things we see around us—popularity, money, comfort. We trade our identity as God's children for worldly identity. We may be living thousands of years later, but our story is so often the same as Israel's. **When we repent, we get to tell a better story, and we get to point to a better way.**

# FAITHFUL TO THE LORD

## MAIN POINT.

We don't have to walk in the sinful paths of those who walked before us.



## CHRIST CONNECTION

God used Hezekiah and Josiah to lead the people back to Him, but they were not perfect kings.

Jesus is the righteous King of kings who brings us to God by paying our sin penalty and giving us His righteousness.



## **BREAKING** PATTERNS

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

### **2 Kings 18–24**

#### **RETURN TO WORSHIP**

##### **2 KINGS 18:1-6**

1 In the third year of Hoshea son of Elah, king of Israel, Hezekiah the son of Ahaz, king of Judah, began to reign. 2 He was twenty-five years old when he began to reign, and he reigned twenty-nine years in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Abi the daughter of Zechariah. 3 And he did what was right in the eyes of the LORD, according to all that David his father had done. 4 He removed the high places and broke the pillars and cut down the Asherah. And he broke in pieces the bronze serpent that Moses had made, for until those days the people of Israel had made offerings to it (it was called Nehushtan). 5 He trusted in the LORD, the God of Israel, so that there was none like him among all the kings of Judah after him, nor among those who were before him. 6 For he held fast to the LORD. He did not depart from following him, but kept the commandments that the LORD commanded Moses.

#### **RETURN TO TRUTH**

##### **2 KINGS 22:1-2,8-11**

1 Josiah was eight years old when he began to reign, and he reigned thirty-one years in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Jedidah the daughter of Adaiah of Bozkath. 2 And he did what was right in the eyes of the LORD and walked in all the way of David his father, and he did not turn aside to the right or to the left. . . . 8 And Hilkiah the high priest said to Shaphan the secretary, "I have found the Book of the Law in the house of the LORD." And Hilkiah gave the book to Shaphan, and he read it. 9 And Shaphan the secretary came to the king, and reported to the king, "Your servants have emptied out the money that was found in the house and have delivered it into the hand of the workmen who have the oversight of the house of the LORD." 10 Then Shaphan the secretary told the king, "Hilkiah the priest has given me a book." And Shaphan read it before the king. 11 When the king heard the words of the Book of the Law, he tore his clothes.

##### **2 KINGS 23:1-3,21-23**

1 Then the king sent, and all the elders of Judah and Jerusalem were gathered to him. 2 And the king went up to the house of the LORD, and with him all the men of Judah and all the inhabitants of Jerusalem and the priests and the prophets, all the people, both small and great. And he read in their hearing all the words of the Book of the Covenant that had been found in the house of the LORD. 3 And the king stood by the pillar and made a covenant before the LORD, to walk after the LORD and to keep his commandments and his testimonies and his statutes with all his heart and all his soul, to perform the words of this covenant that were written in this book. And all the people joined in the covenant. . . . 21 And the king commanded all the people, "Keep the Passover to the LORD your God, as it is written in this Book of the Covenant." 22 For no such Passover had been kept since the days of the judges who judged Israel, or during all the days of the kings of Israel or of the kings of Judah. 23 But in the eighteenth year of King Josiah this Passover was kept to the LORD in Jerusalem.

# BEFORE YOU TEACH

## MAIN POINT.

We don't have to walk in the sinful paths of those who walked before us.

Leaders: We aren't trapped by the generational patterns that came before us. Walking with the Lord offers freedom. This week, may you be encouraged and motivated to depart from any sinful cycles that were modeled before you.

## BIBLICAL COMMENTARY

### RETURN TO WORSHIP

#### 2 KINGS 18:4-6

“Religious reforms of this magnitude could hardly be calculated to bring unity and coherence. . . . They would cause upheaval at a time in which Hezekiah could least afford it. Therefore, the text properly states that the king acts from personal conviction and confidence in the Lord.”<sup>1</sup>

### RETURN TO TRUTH

#### 2 KINGS 22:1-2

“Judgment is coming to Judah, but it's delayed due to the stellar leadership of King Josiah. He is like a ‘second Moses,’ similar to Hezekiah, ‘a second David.’ Josiah is pictured as the ideal king as described in Deuteronomy, where we read that the king must not ‘turn from this command’ (Deut. 17:20). . . . Despite reigning after the dark spiritual days of Manasseh, Josiah leads the people into a time of reformation, much like Hezekiah led a reformation after the wicked leadership of Ahaz. Once again we see how God often uses unlikely people (the grandson of Manasseh in this case), in an unlikely time, to lead a time of reformation.”<sup>2</sup>

#### 2 KINGS 23:1-3

“Two questions emerge: What book was found? And how long had it been missing? The answer to the first is probably Deuteronomy. Provan notes that the phrase ‘book of the law’ is used in the Pentateuch only of Deuteronomy (Deut. 28:61; 29:21; 30:10; 31:26; Josh. 1:8; 8:30–35; 23:6; 24:26) (Provan, 1 and 2 Kings, 271). As previously pointed out, Deuteronomy is the key book for the kings of Israel. What about question number two? We know that previous kings had access to it, so it must have disappeared under the long reign of Manasseh. It was apparently removed from its place beside the ark (Deut. 31:26) in this period. That Manasseh wanted nothing to do with God's Word shouldn't surprise us.”<sup>3</sup>





# CONTEXT

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The period of the kings can get a little confusing, but the basic truth is this: More kings were evil than righteous. Today's passages feature two bright spots in a dark line of Judah's kings. Hezekiah was the 15th king in the line of David and the son of Ahaz, a very wicked king who reigned from 735–715 BC. Though Judah wouldn't fall to Babylon until 586 BC, Ahaz's actions directly contributed to it; he even closed God's temple! But Hezekiah walked another way and brought reform and revival to the Southern Kingdom. Assyria conquered Israel and then turned to Judah in 701 BC. But because Hezekiah trusted in the Lord, Judah didn't fall. You can read another account detailing Hezekiah's reform in 2 Chronicles 29–32, written after the Israelites returned home from exile. After Hezekiah, other evil kings led Judah, until Josiah—Hezekiah's great-grandson, who began his reign at only eight years old! He worked to reform Judah, and "there was no king like him, who turned to the LORD with all his heart and with all his soul and with all his might, according to all the Law of Moses, nor did any like him arise after him." (2 Kings 23:25). You can read another account of Josiah's reform in 2 Chronicles 34–35. Hezekiah and Josiah chose a better path than the kings before them, and though Judah still eventually fell to Babylon, their faithfulness marked Israel forever.

## THEOLOGY CONNECTION

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### Authority of Scripture

Since the Bible is the inspired Word from God, God's special revelation to humanity, the Bible is the ultimate standard of authority for the Christian. Because it is truthful in everything that it teaches, Scripture is humanity's source for wisdom, instructing us on how to live life well to the glory of God. Submitting to the authority of Scripture means that we are to believe and obey God by believing and obeying His Word.

### LEADERS' PRAYER

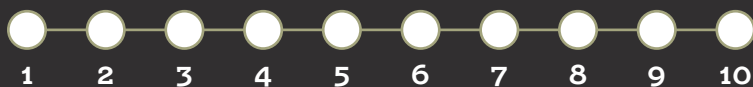
**LORD, SHOW US THE AREAS IN OUR OWN LIVES WHICH NEED REFORMATION AND REVIVAL. WE WANT TO WALK BEFORE YOU AND LEAD OTHERS TO DO THE SAME. REMIND OUR HEARTS THAT WE'RE NEVER STUCK IN SINFUL PATTERNS BECAUSE CHRIST CAME TO FREE US FROM THE POWER OF SIN.**



## KICK STARTER

### RATE IT!

On a scale of 1-10, how strong is your memory (1=I forget everything, 10=I remember everything)?



These optional activities are designed to help your students interact. You'll find a Discussion Activity and a Cultural Connection, which touches on a relevant topic in today's teen culture. Each group is different, so adapt these activities to fit your group's needs. The goal is for students to connect more to the lesson as they connect to the topic and to one another.

# 1

## WHO ARE YOU FOLLOWING?

SUPPLIES LIST: NONE

Ask the following questions, allowing time for students to share responses:

- **YOU PROBABLY GO TO CERTAIN PEOPLE WHEN YOU'RE LOOKING FOR CERTAIN THINGS. WHO ARE YOU FOLLOWING FOR THE BEST MUSIC?**
- **WHO ARE YOU FOLLOWING FOR THE LATEST TRENDS?**
- **WHO ARE YOU FOLLOWING FOR THE MOST FUN?**

We know who to follow when we're looking for the best music, the latest shoes, or the most fun. While family members or older people in our groups may not be godly examples, we do have a choice in whether or not we follow their lead, as we'll see today.

# 2

## CULTURAL CONNECTION

It can be difficult to break free from the bad examples you've watched in your family or in your friend group. Sometimes, culture feeds this idea that we're simply products of our environments. To some degree, this is true. Our environments do help shape a lot about us, like our personalities and our passions. They can even shape how we view the world. But they don't define us. We aren't stuck in them. Many people use their background as a crutch. Instead of trying to make a change, they settle for what they've seen displayed in front of them, even leading to a type of victim mentality—a feeling that they're helpless. But really, God's power living within you transforms you and makes you an entirely new creation (2 Cor. 5:17). So, if you've ever felt hopeless because of how you've grown up, rest in that truth. God has a purpose for you. He can use your background, whether it has been good or bad. He isn't limited by it one bit.

# DISCUSSION

## MAIN POINT.

We don't have to walk in the sinful paths of those who walked before us.

### RETURN TO WORSHIP

#### READ 2 KINGS 18:1-6

#### DO YOU THINK WE HAVE A RIGHT TO BLAME SOME OF OUR MISTAKES ON THE BAD EXAMPLES WHO CAME BEFORE US?

Here's the deal: The decisions of those who came before us do affect us. Their consequences can spill over onto us. But, the difference lies in their decisions affecting us and defining us. **We don't have to walk in the same paths as those who walked before us; their sin isn't an excuse for us to sin too.** Hezekiah didn't have a good example to follow in his father; he was an evil king. But Hezekiah chose another way; he took an entirely different path, and it made a difference in his present! No matter what examples came before you, you're responsible for your choices now, and this truth is a gift!



#### WHY DO YOU THINK HEZEKIAH DESTROYED EVERYTHING CONNECTED TO IDOLATRY? WHEN DO WE NEED TO DO THIS TOO?

Hezekiah destroyed the altars, pillars, and poles, making them unusable. The paths to idol worship—the opportunity—had to be cut off so the people could walk a new path. Many of us turn to things of this world and elevate them above the Lord. **We must sometimes completely destroy the objects of our worship because leaving them in place gives us the opportunity to return to them.** Maybe it's an app you need to remove or a relationship you need to end. Maybe it's a specific place you need to avoid. If possible, we often need to cut off the path to anything that distracts us from worshiping God wholeheartedly.

#### HOW DO WE GIVE OUR WORSHIP TO THE WRONG THINGS (V.4)—EVEN GOOD THINGS?

The people took an object the Lord once used to heal them and made it an idol. After sending poisonous snakes as punishment for their complaining in the wilderness, God commanded Moses to make a bronze snake. When people looked at it in faith—faith was always the catalyst—God healed them of the poisonous bites (Num. 21:8-9). But over the years, the people elevated, named, and worshiped this serpent—or some replica of it—in place of God Himself, similar to the snake cults of pagan tribes. How does this sometimes happen in our lives? Well, we often elevate good things—maybe even godly things—and make them our priority. They become the objects of our worship. Maybe we turn our worship to church activities; we seek the praise that comes with doing all the “right things.” Maybe we worship the feeling we get in a worship service; instead of worship being about giving God glory for who He is, we take part in it for the way it makes us feel. Maybe we give our worship to worship itself instead of to God. **When anything other than the Lord becomes the object of our worship, then that thing—even if it's good—becomes our idol.**

## RETURN TO TRUTH

READ 2 KINGS 22:1-2,8-11; 23:1-3,21-23

Leaders: Explain that Hezekiah's son, Manasseh, unraveled all of his father's efforts to restore pure worship in Judah. He was quite possibly the most evil king in Judah's history (2 Kings 21). This is why reform was needed yet again under Josiah. Bad examples don't define us, but neither do good examples ensure our own goodness or faith. If time allows, read 2 Kings 21.



### WHAT WAS JOSIAH'S REACTION TO HEARING THE WORD? HOW DID IT SPARK CHANGE?

Hearing God's Word affected Josiah dramatically. He tore his clothes—an act of deep grief and repentance—and then ordered the reading of the Word in front of the people. This initiated a covenant renewal. The way it affected Josiah spilled over onto the people as well. **God's Word is living and active (Heb. 4:12). It reminds us of God's character and His promises, and reading it should motivate us to remain faithful to Him.**



### WHY DO YOU THINK WE'RE ABLE TO READ AND HEAR GOD'S WORD AND NOT BE CHANGED?

The people in this passage had been separated from God's Word and deeply embedded in idolatry. Hearing the law read aloud sparked a renewal. It reminded the people of God's promises to them if they'd only walk with Him; it held them accountable. **We often take for granted that we have God's Word to hold in our hands. We have this incredible, life-changing gift, yet we often neglect it.** We read it occasionally or when we're at church, but we don't experience change because we don't allow its truth to sink into our hearts and transform our minds. **We avoid the accountability, or we claim the Bible is too difficult to understand. Sure, it will take work, but if we will devote the same discipline to understanding God's Word that we give other things, we'll be astounded at how it changes us.**



### READ JOHN 1:1-4. WHAT CONNECTIONS CAN YOU MAKE BETWEEN JOHN CALLING JESUS "THE WORD" AND THE PASSAGE IN 2 KINGS?

The people of Judah were restored to a right relationship with God after hearing the law. It's no coincidence that John calls Jesus "the Word." **Encountering Him shows us our sin and changes us; He restores us to right relationship with the Father.** He is the very Word of God—a living, breathing promise! He lived the Word perfectly and showed us how to live too.

## WRAP-UP



### BOTH KINGS STOPPED A GENERATIONAL CYCLE OF EVIL DISOBEDIENCE. IS THERE A CYCLE YOU NEED TO STOP? HOW CAN YOU?

You may have had some pretty bad examples in your life. In a perfect world, our parents and grandparents—even our teachers and coaches—would make decisions we could follow. But in our fallen world, they're sinners just like us. They make mistakes, and sometimes, their mistakes harm us too. Maybe you've watched those before you get caught in addiction. Maybe you've watched marriages fall apart because of sinful decisions. Maybe you've watched as those before you didn't know God at all. Here's what you need to know: **You aren't them. You aren't defined by anyone else's choices. Like Hezekiah and Josiah, your life can tell a new story. Instead of using someone else's mistakes as an excuse, walk another way. Choose today who you'll serve, and make it Jesus.** You'll never regret breaking a sinful pattern.

# THE DEPTHS OF THE SEA

## MAIN POINT.

Judgment is certain, but repentance brings restoration.



## CHRIST CONNECTION

Christ's birth, death, and resurrection fulfilled prophecy, but we wait for the day when He will return and fulfill God's promise of a King who will reign over the new heaven and new earth forever.





# AND DELIVERANCE

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

Micah 1-7

## **GOD DESIRES AUTHENTICITY FROM HIS PEOPLE**

### **MICAH 3:9-12**

9 Hear this, you heads of the house of Jacob and rulers of the house of Israel, who detest justice and make crooked all that is straight, 10 who build Zion with blood and Jerusalem with iniquity. 11 Its heads give judgment for a bribe; its priests teach for a price; its prophets practice divination for money; yet they lean on the LORD and say, "Is not the LORD in the midst of us? No disaster shall come upon us." 12 Therefore because of you Zion shall be plowed as a field; Jerusalem shall become a heap of ruins, and the mountain of the house a wooded height.

## **GOD PROMISES TO RESTORE HIS PEOPLE**

### **MICAH 5:1-4**

1 Now muster your troops, O daughter of troops; siege is laid against us; with a rod they strike the judge of Israel on the cheek. 2 But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, who are too little to be among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel, whose coming forth is from of old, from ancient days. 3 Therefore he shall give them up until the time when she who is in labor has given birth; then the rest of his brothers shall return to the people of Israel. 4 And he shall stand and shepherd his flock in the strength of the LORD, in the majesty of the name of the LORD his God. And they shall dwell secure, for now he shall be great to the ends of the earth.

### **MICAH 7:18-20**

18 Who is a God like you, pardoning iniquity and passing over transgression for the remnant of his inheritance? He does not retain his anger forever, because he delights in steadfast love. 19 He will again have compassion on us; he will tread our iniquities underfoot. You will cast all our sins into the depths of the sea. 20 You will show faithfulness to Jacob and steadfast love to Abraham, as you have sworn to our fathers from the days of old.

# BEFORE YOU TEACH

## MAIN POINT.

Judgment is certain, but repentance brings restoration.

Leaders: The prophets' words can feel full of doom. May you see all the ways God shared glimpses of the hope we now experience in Christ, and may it strengthen your faith.

## BIBLICAL COMMENTARY

### GOD DESIRES AUTHENTICITY FROM HIS PEOPLE

#### MICAH 3:11

"For the right price these official hacks did not prize truth but compromised it; moreover, they lean upon the Lord, that is, they justified their lives of lies with the half-truth that the Lord's presence guaranteed the nation's security (Ex. 17:7; 33:14–16; 34:9; Num. 14:42; Deut. 7:21; Josh. 3:10; Pss. 46–48; 84; 87; Joel 2:27; Zeph. 3:5, 15), forgetting that God made his presence contingent on ethical behaviour (Ex. 33:3, 5; Num. 14:14; Lev. 26:1–39, esp. v. 11; Deut. 28; 1 Kings 9:1–9)."<sup>4</sup>

### GOD PROMISES TO RESTORE HIS PEOPLE

#### MICAH 5:2

"The writers of the New Testament found Micah to be important enough to cite. Matthew 2:6 quotes Micah 5:2 as fulfilled in Jesus, the Messianic Ruler and royal Shepherd from Bethlehem. Since the verse is applied to the Messiah by the chief priests and teachers of the law, it demonstrates that the Jewish religious leaders of Jesus's day understood Micah 5:2 as a Messianic prophecy, though they did not agree that it was fulfilled in Jesus."<sup>5</sup>

#### MICAH 5:3

"God prepared centuries in advance for his people to understand Jesus as the Messiah fulfilling the promises to Israel. God is the Lord of restoration and reunion. He does not punish his people to dissolve them but to prepare them for renewal and reunion. God's plan focuses on all his people from all the nations of the earth because he remains Lord of all the earth."<sup>6</sup>

#### MICAH 7:18-20

"One emphasis is clearly stated in 3:8 and is closely related to one of Micah's chief purposes: Israel's and Judah's sin and transgression. But the same God who must punish such sin also promises to deliver, restore, and bless his people again. He hates idolatry, injustice, rebellion, breach of covenant, empty ritualism, and sin of any kind; yet he delights to pardon the penitent."<sup>7</sup>



## CONTEXT

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The book of Micah was named after the prophet by that name, who prophesied in Judah during the reigns of Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah. Micah's prophesies overlapped those of Isaiah and Hosea. In this period, false prophets arose who desired popularity at the expense of truth. These prophets took bribes and promised safety instead of calling out hypocrisy. Micah's words promised something else: Judgment. His message was difficult, not only to hear but to speak. Micah's purpose was threefold: He presented God's complaint against His people; he called attention to a coming punishment; and he pointed to the hope of a sure salvation in a future Deliverer—their Messiah, who would come through David's line (5:2). God fulfilled Micah's words, both in that period of history and in the future with the birth of Christ—the One promised through the prophet. He will fulfill Micah's words again when Christ returns to gather all believers and reign as our forever King!

## THEOLOGY CONNECTION

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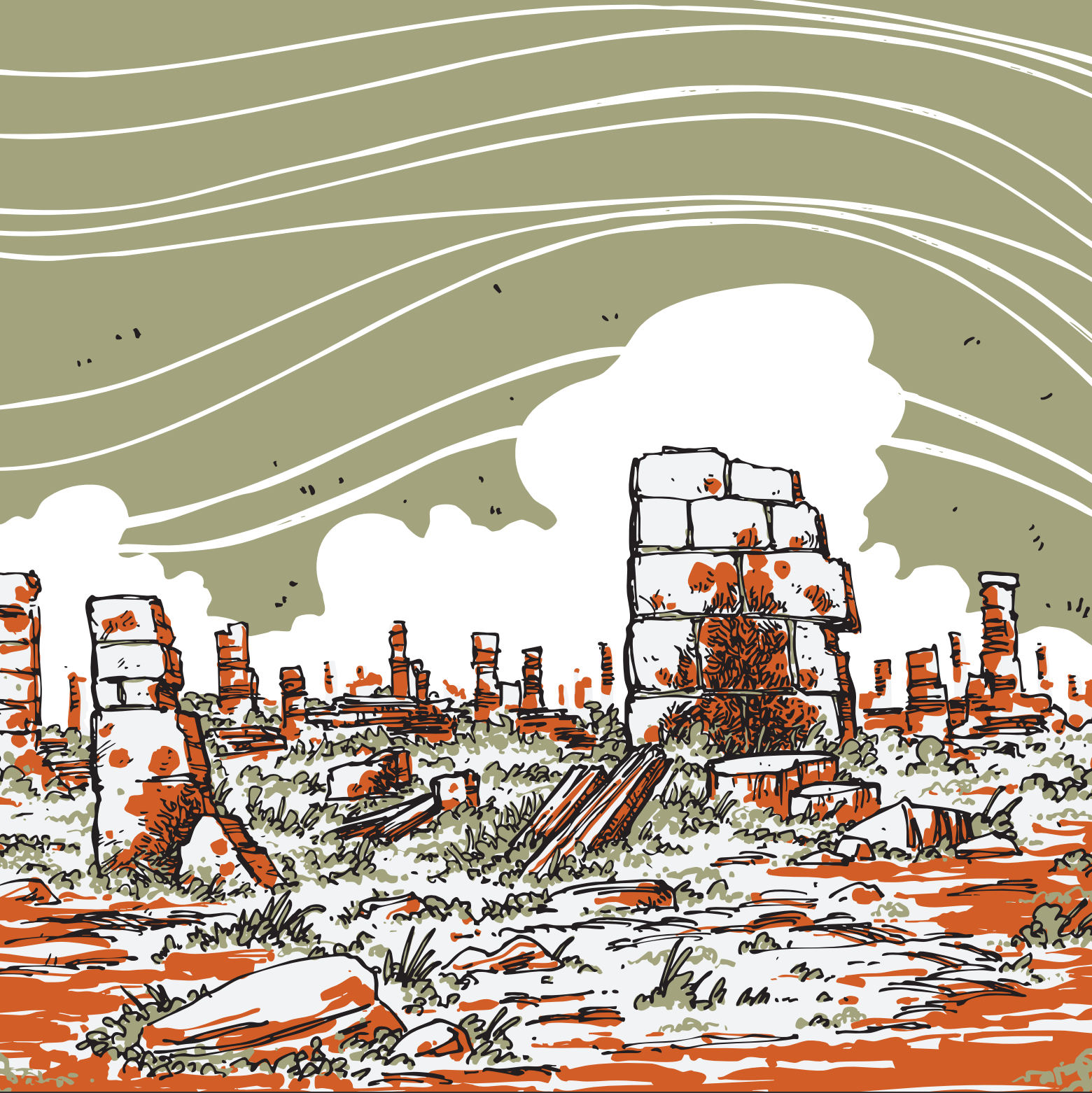


### The Christian and Social Order

In the spirit of Christ, Christians should oppose racism, every form of greed, selfishness, and corruption, and all forms of sexual immorality, including adultery, homosexuality, and pornography. We should work to provide for the orphaned, the needy, the abused, the aged, the helpless, and the sick. We should speak on behalf of the unborn and fight for the worth of all human life from conception to death.

## LEADERS' PRAYER

**GOD, WE HAVE THE GIFT OF TRUTH IN YOUR WORD AND THROUGH THE HOLY SPIRIT DWELLING WITHIN US. HELP US TO SPEAK TRUTH AND TO LIVE ACCORDING TO YOUR TRUTH. HELP US TO SPEAK LOVINGLY AND BOLDLY EVEN WHEN THE WORDS YOU GIVE US ARE DIFFICULT.**



## KICK STARTER

### ♥ HEART CHECK

Last week, we saw how reading and hearing God's Word drastically changed people's hearts. Did you spend time in God's Word last week? Did you pause long enough to let His Word sink in and change your heart? What's something God showed you last week?

These optional activities are designed to help your students interact. You'll find a Discussion Activity and a Cultural Connection, which touches on a relevant topic in today's teen culture. Each group is different, so adapt these activities to fit your group's needs. The goal is for students to connect more to the lesson as they connect to the topic and to one another.

# 1

## BACK TO THE FUTURE

SUPPLIES LIST: NONE

Ask the following questions, allowing time for students to share responses:

- **IF YOU HAD THE POWER TO SEE THE FUTURE, WOULD YOU WANT TO? EXPLAIN.**
- **WHAT BENEFITS COULD COME WITH KNOWING THE FUTURE?**
- **WHAT WOULD BE DIFFICULT ABOUT HAVING THIS ABILITY?**

Many of us would love to know the future! But what about the difficult things that wait for us there? It might be extremely difficult to see those events before they come. God gave prophets glimpses into the future, and in many ways, Israel's future wasn't good. They faithfully shared the truth, pointing to the judgment and the hope just over the horizon.

# 2

## CULTURAL CONNECTION

It's funny—many of us say that we don't like fakeness. Some of us might even feel like the church is made up of frauds or hypocrites. In fact, many of us may have leaned on this idea as an excuse for not going to church or for not consistently and actively participating. Here's the truth: Many of us pose as something we're not. We put on a good face to hide what's in our hearts. Israel's leaders did this too; they looked the part, but they didn't look anything like the God they were supposed to be imitating. God had given them the Ten Commandments (and the rest of the law), which is basically split between two ideas—love God and love people. The law showed them (and us) how to do that. But the evidence revealed that the leaders in Israel weren't loving God or people. God calls us to authenticity. He calls us to really follow Him, to really love Him, to really love others. He calls us and equips us for so much more than simply pretending and posing.

# DISCUSSION

## MAIN POINT.

Judgment is certain, but repentance brings restoration.

### GOD DESIRES AUTHENTICITY FROM HIS PEOPLE

READ MICAH 3:9-12



#### HOW DID THE LEADERS JUSTIFY NOT REFLECTING GOD'S CHARACTER?

God has always been clear about how He desires for us to live. His Word is a guide for how to love God and others. Leaders of Israel had the entire law as their guide. They were tasked with imitating God's character—with acting justly, with loving people and caring for them, and with walking faithfully with God. Through Micah, God called out all the ways they did the opposite of these things. **They justified their behavior in a similar way we do—by leaning on the Lord (v. 11), meaning they thought they could use their position as God's chosen people to avoid disaster.** But God must hold His people to a standard.



#### DO YOU THINK LEADERS HAVE A HIGHER RESPONSIBILITY? WHY OR WHY NOT?

God gave Micah a very difficult message to speak against all the leaders of Israel. And he didn't hold back; he didn't water down the truth out of a fear of being hated or attacked. As a prophet, Micah recognized his responsibility to God and to Israel. Sadly, the leaders in Israel sacrificed truth for their own gain. They were tasked with leading fairly, taking care of the poor, and most importantly, with loving God and leading the people to love Him. **They were responsible for these things and more, and God was going to hold them accountable for years and years of neglecting these responsibilities.**



#### WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN *IGNORANCE* AND *REBELLION*? COULD ISRAEL CLAIM IGNORANCE? CAN WE?

Ignorance is lacking knowledge; in other words, it's not knowing any better, right? Rebellion is knowing better but refusing to do it. Israel simply couldn't claim ignorance. God had revealed Himself to them in such tangible ways. He spoke through Moses and delivered the law. His presence dwelled among them in the tabernacle and in the temple. He spoke through prophets. The people of Israel knew God's holy standards, but they chose rebellion. **As believers—as God's people—we simply can't claim ignorance. God dwells within us in a very real way through the gift of the Holy Spirit. We have the gift of God's written Word to us! No, we can't sin and claim ignorance. It's simply rebellion against God's commands.** We rebel to chase our sinful desires. When we do this and claim ignorance, we're made out to be liars. Because we have truth. And we're accountable for it. The truth we have is so much more than simply knowing about Jesus; it's knowing Him, the One who claimed to be truth (John 14:6)!



## GOD PROMISES TO RESTORE HIS PEOPLE

READ MICAH 5:1-4; 7:18-20



### WHAT PROMISES DO YOU SEE IN MICAH 5:2-4? HOW ARE THEY ALREADY AND NOT YET FULFILLED?

We live between promises that have been fulfilled already and some not yet fulfilled. Many people describe this as living between the first and second advents—in other words, between Christ's first and second appearing. **Verse 2 directly points to the Messiah's birthplace and to Him descending from the line of David, and we've seen God fulfill this promise so beautifully.** In verse 4, we see our reigning Messiah return as our Shepherd to rule over all the earth forever. **Micah's words held a double-promise: the Messiah was coming to save, and He would return to rule.**

### WHAT IS A REMNANT? IN WHAT WAYS ARE BELIEVERS TODAY LIKE A REMNANT?

A remnant is like a piece of scrap fabric that's leftover from a sewing project—a piece of a whole. God's people in Israel had already been exiled; the same fate awaited Judah. And though they'd return home, God's people would be scattered again after 70 AD, with the destruction of the temple—a time called the Diaspora. **In a sense, we're all exiles here. Our home, our citizenship, isn't here (Phil. 3:20). We're scattered for now, but God won't leave us here. We'll be with Him and with the entire body of Christ in the new heaven and new earth!** What was once only remnants will come together as a whole family.

### WHAT DOES GOD DO WITH OUR SIN WHEN WE REPENT (7:19)? HOW DOES THIS SHAPE YOUR VIEW OF GOD?

God doesn't take our sin and tuck it away somewhere to use against us one day. Sometimes we have this idea that God is building a case against us and waiting to blast us for our sin. Now, He certainly built a case against Israel. And we will be accountable for how we chose to live (Matt. 12:36). But the case for our sin has already been made. It's done. We have all sinned and fallen short of God's standards (Rom. 3:23). **What Christ did on the cross hurled our sins into the depths of the sea. Christ clothes us with His righteousness when we call on Him for salvation, confess our sin, and repent. Notice that God "delights in steadfast love," not in punishment (7:18)!** Rather than leaning on the fact that we know God as an excuse to sin and avoid disaster—like Israel's leaders did—let us be motivated to love Him in return and to live our lives as an offering to Him.

## WRAP-UP



### MICAH'S MESSAGE WAS WILDLY UNPOPULAR. HOW CAN WE BE COURAGEOUS WHEN GOD CALLS US TO TAKE AN UNPOPULAR STAND?

God gave Micah a message of judgment. He basically called out all types of leaders in Israel as hypocrites who had led the nation away from the Lord. That message wasn't popular by any means! People often hated prophets for their messages; people were offended by them, not too dissimilar to the way we're offended when people call us out. But the prophets obeyed God's voice, even when it must've been difficult and even when doing so sometimes put them at great risk. Why? Because they were **compelled** by God to speak. It isn't our job to go around pointing out everyone's sin; it's not our job to convict people. We have to leave that to the Holy Spirit. But sometimes, God may give us an unpopular message to share. He will likely urge us to take an uncomfortable stand. Jesus actually promised we'd be misunderstood or even hated by the world (John 15:18-19). **So, what motivated the prophets and what can motivate us? God's Spirit, who lives within us. He empowers us to do difficult things.**

# WRITE IT ON THEIR HEARTS

## MAIN POINT.

God transforms us from the inside out.



## CHRIST CONNECTION

Jeremiah prophesied about a coming day when God would write His law on His people's hearts and provide lasting forgiveness of sin. This prophecy points to God's provision of Jesus. Through Jesus, God offers us forgiveness, and through the Holy Spirit, God enables us to obey His commands.



# WRITTEN ON YOUR HEART

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

Jeremiah 29–31

## GOD IS WORTHY OF OUR TRUST

### JEREMIAH 17:5-8

5 Thus says the LORD: “Cursed is the man who trusts in man and makes flesh his strength, whose heart turns away from the LORD. 6 He is like a shrub in the desert, and shall not see any good come. He shall dwell in the parched places of the wilderness, in an uninhabited salt land. 7 “Blessed is the man who trusts in the LORD, whose trust is the LORD. 8 He is like a tree planted by water, that sends out its roots by the stream, and does not fear when heat comes, for its leaves remain green, and is not anxious in the year of drought, for it does not cease to bear fruit.”

## GOD PUTS HIS WORD WITHIN US

### JEREMIAH 31:31-34

31 “Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, 32 not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, declares the LORD. 33 For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the LORD: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people. 34 And no longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, ‘Know the LORD,’ for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the LORD. For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.”

# BEFORE YOU TEACH

## MAIN POINT.

God transforms us from the inside out.

Leaders: These passages are beautiful glimpses into God's plan for our redemption. May His Word written on your heart prompt a life of obedience (Jer. 31:33).

## BIBLICAL COMMENTARY

### GOD IS WORTHY OF OUR TRUST

#### JEREMIAH 17:5-8

"The shrub (mt 'ar'ār) refers to the tamarisk, a dwarf juniper of a particularly stark and naked appearance which has no prospect of improvement, since its stunted roots do not penetrate to the water-levels beneath the surface. The implications of the allusion would not be lost on the people, who had they lived in a faith-relationship with God could have been flourishing like the green bay tree."<sup>8</sup>

#### JEREMIAH 17:5-8

"The stunted shrub on salty flats is a picture of one who trusts solely in human resources, including his own. The key trait is autonomy. By contrast, the person whose support system is initially and primarily the Lord is a flourishing tree perpetually producing fruit. The key trait is dependence on God. To trust in God is to rely on, lean on, and place one's confidence in God (Ps. 62:8 [9]; Isa. 7:4–9). The background agenda for the comparison may be Judah's overtures for military help from Egypt, against which Jeremiah protested (2:18)."<sup>9</sup>

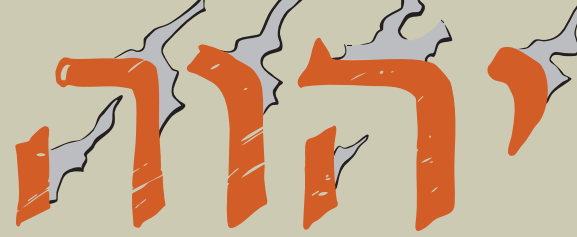
### GOD PUTS HIS WORD WITHIN US

#### JEREMIAH 31:31-34

"The five 'I wills' in the passage, together with references to 'my covenant,' 'my [teaching],' and 'my people,' demonstrate clearly that as in the other major theological covenants, it would be God taking the initiative. Human history since the garden of Eden (Gen. 3:8–10) has been the story of humankind's flight from God and his pursuit of us. The God who speaks in these verses is a pursuing God, who refuses to leave his people alone to follow their own self-destructive paths. He is a God of new beginnings (v. 22; Isa. 42:9; 43:18–19; 48:6) who will never give up but will always do whatever is necessary to work out his best in our lives (Rom. 8:28)."<sup>10</sup>

#### JEREMIAH 31:33-34

"Having the law written on one's heart is not so much a matter of immediate knowledge as transformed attitudes and behavior (22:16). The result is said to be not just the knowledge of the law but the knowledge of the Lord, i.e., a relationship with the Lord of the covenant by faith, the goal of all the earlier covenants."<sup>11</sup>



## CONTEXT

**Background:** The book of Jeremiah is attributed to the prophet Jeremiah, who spoke on behalf of God during Judah's final days. Jeremiah was Judah's final prophet before the Babylonian captivity and Judah's exile. Though Jeremiah witnessed reform under Josiah, his message was exceptionally gloomy and often centered on the heart. He lamented Judah's rebellion after Josiah's death; for this reason, many scholars refer to him as "the weeping prophet." God called Jeremiah at a young age, and he attempted to resist the call (Jer. 1:6). But God had chosen Jeremiah for this specific purpose before he was born (Jer. 1:5), and He promised to go with him (Jer. 1:7-8). Jeremiah's obedience was costly. His own people ignored his warnings; they hated him and imprisoned him. Jeremiah was tormented by their rebellion. He witnessed the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple. But Jeremiah's conviction never wavered. He faithfully proclaimed God's words for forty years before being carried away to Egypt and never heard from again.

## THEOLOGY CONNECTION



### Illumination of Scripture

Because of the vast difference between God's wisdom and ours and because of humanity's sinful state, human beings are incapable, on our own, of fully grasping spiritual truth without being aided by the Holy Spirit through the process of illumination. When it comes to understanding the meaning of God's Word, Christians do not rely ultimately on human reason in the process of interpretation, nor do we rely solely on organizations' or scholars' interpretations. Instead, a Christian's ultimate reliance is upon the work of the Spirit of God, who illuminates the Scriptures in the heart and mind (John 14:15-18; 16:7-15).

## LEADERS' PRAYER

**GOD, WE CONFESS THAT WE'VE OFTEN TRUSTED IN WHAT IS TANGIBLE INSTEAD OF DEPENDING ON YOU. HELP US TO ROOT OURSELVES IN YOU AND IN YOUR WORD SO THAT WE CAN THRIVE AND PRODUCE FRUIT. WE PRAY THAT OUR LIVES REFLECT YOUR WORD IN OUR HEARTS.**



## KICK STARTER

### DID YOU KNOW?

The first heart transplant was performed in South Africa in 1967. The patient survived for 18 days.<sup>12</sup>



These optional activities are designed to help your students interact. You'll find a Discussion Activity and a Cultural Connection, which touches on a relevant topic in today's teen culture. Each group is different, so adapt these activities to fit your group's needs. The goal is for students to connect more to the lesson as they connect to the topic and to one another.

# 1

## BAD HABITS

SUPPLIES LIST: NONE

Ask the following questions, allowing time for students to share responses:

- **WHAT IS A BAD HABIT YOU'VE STRUGGLED TO BREAK (EX. BITING NAILS)?**
- **WHAT HAVE YOU DONE TO HELP YOU BREAK THE HABIT?**
- **HOW DO HABITS BEGIN? WHY ARE THEY SO DIFFICULT TO BREAK?**

Many of us have bad habits like biting our nails, saying “like” way too many times in conversation, or even using profanity. We may not know how the habit started, but we struggle to stop it on our own. Even in our walk with the Lord, we can't change on our own. We need His help to transform, and it starts in our heart.

# 2

## CULTURAL CONNECTION

Have you ever needed a fresh start with someone, like a friend, a parent, or a teacher? Maybe you lost trust with one another because one of you didn't keep your word. Maybe one of you betrayed the other person. If you've ever been through something like this, then you know that a fresh start feels good—like a weight lifting off of you. You can simply start over and try to do better. We often need a fresh start in our walk with the Lord, don't we? Like Israel, we sometimes fail to keep our word; we fall into sin; we fall into idolatry; we wander away and seek worldly pleasures. God gives us mercy every morning (Lam. 3:22-23). When we repent of our sin, God forgives us. He writes His Word on our heart so that we can change and grow. But it's hard to be changed by the Word if we don't commit to knowing it. You want a fresh start with the Lord? Get into His Word. Seek Him in prayer. Deepen your relationship with Him. He'll change you from the inside out.

# DISCUSSION

## MAIN POINT.

God transforms us from the inside out.

### GOD IS WORTHY OF OUR TRUST

READ JEREMIAH 17:5-8

#### WHICH IS EASIER: DEPENDING ON PEOPLE OR ON GOD? EXPLAIN.

We may say that we trust God, but a lot of us find it easier to trust in people. They're tangible, meaning we can physically see them and touch them. **We sometimes struggle to trust in God because we don't always see or understand His plan.** But, even those people we trust the very most can let us down because they're human. **We were never meant to trust in people the way we're designed to trust in God.** When we trust in people, we're like trees with shallow roots. They don't grow deep enough, and the wind topples them over. If we're rooted in anyone other than the Lord, we'll wind up "parched" and malnourished.



#### WHAT THREATENS THE TREE (V. 8)? HOW IS THIS LIKE LIFE FOR US?

A tree is exposed to nature's elements, no matter where it's planted. Though it's planted near a stream, the tree in this passage still faces heat and drought. **No matter how close we remain to Jesus, we'll still face hard seasons because they're a natural part of life here on earth.** But remaining close to Him—the Living Water—is the only way to thrive in those seasons (John 4:14). It's the only way to experience peace when life hands us chaos and pain. **We can face heat and droughts yet still remain green and fruitful if we draw from the only source who can sustain us in those times: Jesus.**

#### WHAT IS THE RESULT OF THE TREE BEING PLANTED BY THE WATER? WHERE ARE YOU PLANTED?

In this metaphor, the Lord explained that our hearts are like trees. A tree planted in the parched wilderness can't thrive, but one planted by streams of water remains green and produces fruit, even through scorching heat and droughts. Where we plant ourselves matters; in other words, what we trust in—what we depend on—determines whether we live or die spiritually. Where you plant yourself—the people you're around and the places you go—could determine whether you thrive or wilt spiritually. Here's the deal: trouble will come. Our lives will intersect with heat and drought, but what we depend on for life will help us either to thrive or to wilt during these seasons. **If we plant ourselves in the wilderness of trusting in people or worldly comforts, then we'll become malnourished spiritually; those things can't sustain us. Like roots that spread deep into the dirt and toward a water source, our roots must reach for Christ. We stretch toward Him and draw sustenance from God's Word.** When we reach toward anything else, we'll come away starved and wilted.

## GOD PUTS HIS WORD WITHIN US

READ JEREMIAH 31:31-34



### WHAT DO YOU THINK IT LOOKS LIKE FOR GOD'S WORD TO BE WRITTEN ON YOUR HEART?

In the old covenant, God's law was written on tablets of stone and on scrolls. It was external. But God desired for His Word to be embedded deeply in our hearts. **When God announced a new covenant, He wasn't throwing out the law. He was planting it closer to us—within us.** Not only does the Holy Spirit live within us, but He speaks truth to us; He helps us discern God's will through discerning God's Word. **Obedience is the evidence of God's Word being written on our hearts.**



### WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE IN HEART CHANGE AND BEHAVIOR CHANGE? WHAT DOES THIS PASSAGE REVEAL ABOUT WHAT GOD WANTS FOR US?

A lot of us have tried to change our behavior before. Maybe we messed up and wanted someone to forgive us or trust us again. Maybe we wanted to change our behavior to impress someone or to gain respect. Rarely do these changes stick. Why? We changed our behaviors, but our hearts remained the same. Before Christ, Jews were externally marked as God's people through circumcision; they made external, physical sacrifices. **But with the new covenant, which took effect with Christ's death, resurrection, and ascension, we're changed from the inside out. Behavior modification is only a sign of the transformation that has taken place in our hearts—not the other way around.**



### HOW DO THESE VERSES POINT TO THE GOSPEL? HOW HAS GOD KEPT HIS WORD?

These verses point to the gospel in a profound way. In one of his sermons, Charles Spurgeon said, "Things required by the law are bestowed by the gospel. God demands obedience under the law: God works obedience under the gospel. Holiness is asked of us by the law: holiness is wrought in us by the gospel."<sup>13</sup> **The good news of the gospel is that because of Christ, we have permanent forgiveness for our sins. Here's the other amazing part about the new covenant: It can never be broken because it doesn't depend on us. It's a gift in which Christ fulfilled our end of the agreement by dying for our sin.** The covenant is sealed, and the Holy Spirit living within us is proof (Eph. 1:13-14). We have real relationship with God!

## WRAP-UP



### WHAT "HEAT" OR "DROUGHT" ARE YOU FACING NOW? HOW CAN GOD'S WORD WRITTEN ON YOUR HEART HELP YOU TO ENDURE?

Right now, you may be walking through a season of heat or drought. Maybe you're facing physical difficulties, like illness or injury. It could be emotional struggles, like depression or anxiety. It could even be a season of spiritual dryness, where you feel apathetic and distant from the Lord. Maybe you're navigating a season of death and grief. In these seasons, we tend to wilt spiritually. We may even blame God and lose trust in Him because we can't understand why He allowed these difficulties to come. **If God's Word is written on our heart, then we're empowered by truth even when life is painful.** Though we may feel doubt, confusion, or distrust, God's Word in our heart reminds us that God is faithful, He is kind, He is good, and He is with us (Heb. 10:23; Titus 3:4-5; Ps. 145:9; Matt. 1:23). Here's the key though: **We can't wait until painful seasons to commit God's Word to our mind and heart. We must spend time in it daily so that we're equipped with truth when the heat or the drought comes.**

# TO BABYLON

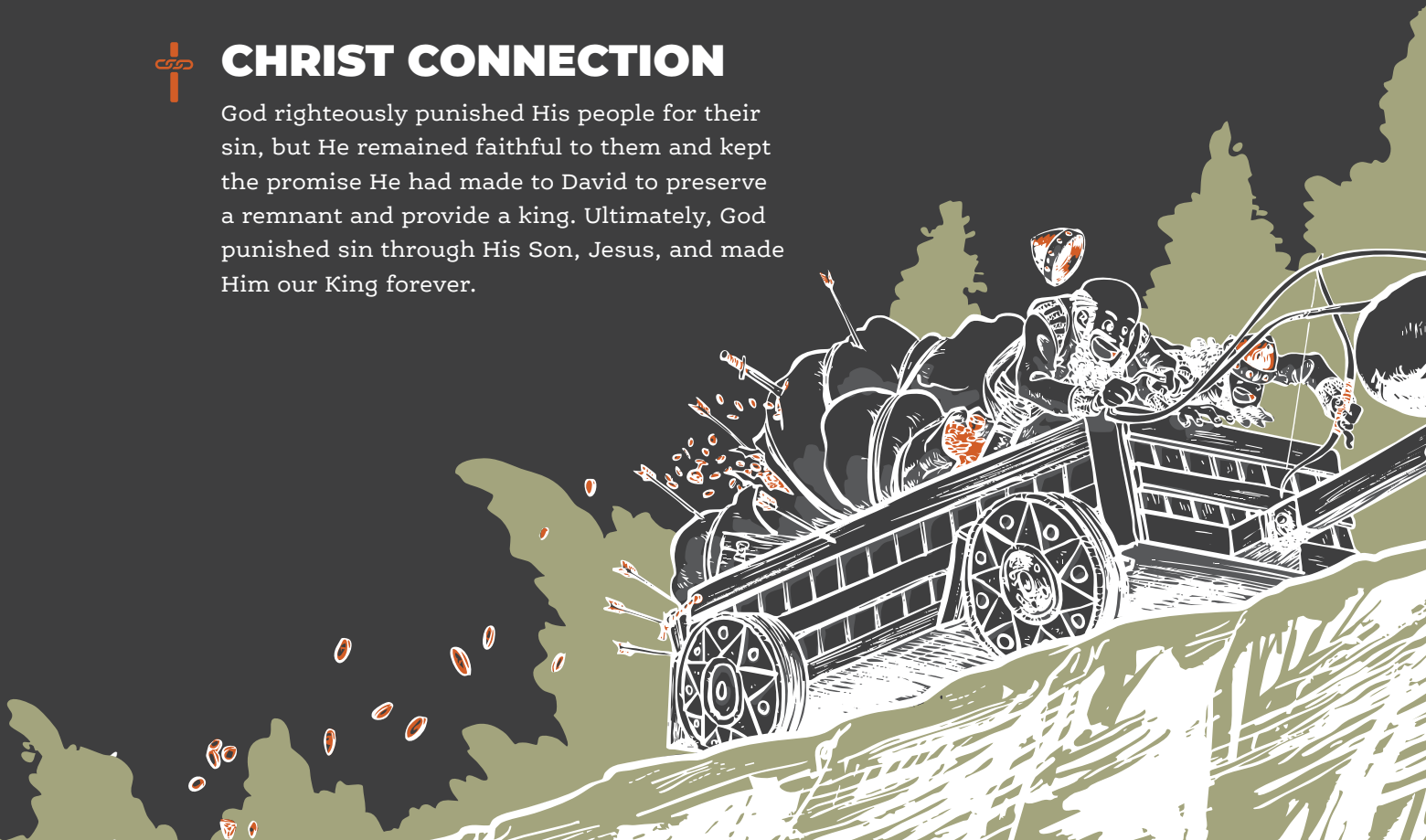
## MAIN POINT.

Rebellion will carry us to places we never wanted to go.



## CHRIST CONNECTION

God righteously punished His people for their sin, but He remained faithful to them and kept the promise He had made to David to preserve a remnant and provide a king. Ultimately, God punished sin through His Son, Jesus, and made Him our King forever.



# **STUBBORN HEART**

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

## **2 Chronicles 36**

### **A STUBBORN HEART IGNORES GOD'S WARNINGS**

#### **2 CHRONICLES 36:11-14**

11 Zedekiah was twenty-one years old when he began to reign, and he reigned eleven years in Jerusalem. 12 He did what was evil in the sight of the LORD his God. He did not humble himself before Jeremiah the prophet, who spoke from the mouth of the LORD. 13 He also rebelled against King Nebuchadnezzar, who had made him swear by God. He stiffened his neck and hardened his heart against turning to the LORD, the God of Israel. 14 All the officers of the priests and the people likewise were exceedingly unfaithful, following all the abominations of the nations. And they polluted the house of the LORD that he had made holy in Jerusalem.

### **GOD LOVES US EVEN IN OUR REBELLION**

#### **2 CHRONICLES 36:15-23**

15 The LORD, the God of their fathers, sent persistently to them by his messengers, because he had compassion on his people and on his dwelling place. 16 But they kept mocking the messengers of God, despising his words and scoffing at his prophets, until the wrath of the LORD rose against his people, until there was no remedy. 17 Therefore he brought up against them the king of the Chaldeans, who killed their young men with the sword in the house of their sanctuary and had no compassion on young man or virgin, old man or aged. He gave them all into his hand. 18 And all the vessels of the house of God, great and small, and the treasures of the house of the LORD, and the treasures of the king and of his princes, all these he brought to Babylon. 19 And they burned the house of God and broke down the wall of Jerusalem and burned all its palaces with fire and destroyed all its precious vessels. 20 He took into exile in Babylon those who had escaped from the sword, and they became servants to him and to his sons until the establishment of the kingdom of Persia, 21 to fulfill the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah, until the land had enjoyed its Sabbaths. All the days that it lay desolate it kept Sabbath, to fulfill seventy years. 22 Now 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: 23 "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. Whoever is among you of all his people, may the LORD his God be with him. Let him go up.'"

# BEFORE YOU TEACH

## MAIN POINT.

Rebellion will carry us to places we never wanted to go.

Leaders: So much of the Old Testament builds up to this moment, when Israel's rebellion meets God's justice. May we remember God's justice when we're tempted to harden our hearts.

## BIBLICAL COMMENTARY

### A STUBBORN HEART IGNORES GOD'S WARNINGS

#### 2 CHRONICLES 36:12-13

"The king is condemned not for any specific actions (events in his reign are dealt with at length in Jer. 27:1–28:17; 32:1–34:22; 37:1–38:28) but for his overall rebelliousness towards God and man. This is illustrated by negative versions of two expressions from 2 Chron. 7:14 (did not humble himself; also 2 Chron. 33:23; would not turn, and by other typical phrases which indicate his similarity with the generation which died in the wilderness (stiff-necked; Ex. 32:9; 33:3,5; Deut. 9:6; 2 Chron. 30:8) and with the Pharaoh who opposed Moses (hardened his heart; Ex. 8:15,32). These same attitudes are identified in the New Testament as the cause of unbelief towards Jesus and the gospel (Acts 7:51; Mark 6:52; 8:17; Heb. 3:13)."<sup>14</sup>

### GOD LOVES US EVEN IN OUR REBELLION

#### 2 CHRONICLES 36:15-16

"The root cause of the exile is summarized in these verses. In the parable of the 'wicked tenants,' Jesus spoke of the owner of the vineyard sending slave after slave in vain to collect his due share. Perhaps Jesus had this or similar verses in mind."<sup>15</sup>

#### 2 CHRONICLES 36:21

"The Chronicler probably has a precise 70 years in mind. The Chronicler identifies the death of Josiah as the key transition in the late history of Judah, an event that marks a permanent loss of independence, thus movement from kingdom to exilic status. Using the death of Josiah (in 609 BC) as the beginning of exile . . . the Chronicler's 70 years end precisely in 539 BC in the first year of Cyrus, king of Persia. The Chronicler also links the 70 years to priestly legislation (see Lev. 25; Ex. 23:11; Deut. 15:2–18; Neh. 10:31; Jer. 34:14–22). The exile of the people from the land allowed the land to remain fallow and finally enjoy the Sabbaths that had been commanded through Moses. In this way the Exile cleansed the land through careful observance of Sabbath practice and prepared it for the new day of restoration in which the Chronicler's audience presently lived."<sup>16</sup>



# CONTEXT



**Background:** In a way, 1 and 2 Chronicles serves as a sweeping priestly history of God's people, beginning with Adam's descendants (1 Chron. 1:1) and ending with the announcement of the people's return from Babylonian captivity (2 Chron. 36:23), and it likely existed as a single scroll. In Hebrew tradition, the title is a phrase meaning "events of the days."<sup>17</sup> Second Chronicles specifically focuses on Judah and the kings who followed David up to exile and restoration. Though the author is technically unknown, Hebrew tradition points to Ezra. He likely wrote it sometime after the return from exile to the Jews who were returning and rebuilding, drawing from 1 and 2 Samuel and 1 and 2 Kings as source material. The aim of 1 and 2 Chronicles (along with Ezra and Nehemiah) was to remind the people of their identity as God's people. Though the Jews would return to Israel, they would need guidance in restoring worship and rebuilding the temple.

## THEOLOGY CONNECTION



### Sin as Rebellion

Because the Bible portrays people as responsible beings, called to respond in faith and obedience to God's revelation, the Bible often portrays sin in terms of defiance and rebellion toward God the King. Isaiah 1:2 is one of many passages that describes sin in terms of rebellion against God: "Children have I reared and brought up, but they have rebelled against me." Seen in this light, sin is personal and willful disobedience, the raising of a clenched fist toward the One who made us.

## LEADERS' PRAYER

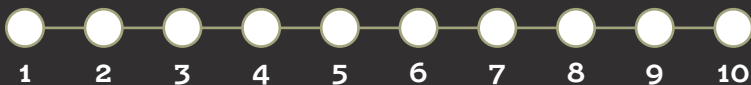
**LORD, WE HAVE ALL HARDENED OUR HEARTS TOWARD YOUR WORD AND YOUR VOICE AT TIMES. IN THE MOMENT, IT'S EASY TO FORGET THAT SEEKING OUR OWN WAY IS ANOTHER STEP AWAY FROM YOU. MAY WE ALWAYS MOVE TOWARD YOU INSTEAD OF STUBBORNLY HARDENING OUR HEARTS. FORGIVE US FOR THE TIMES WE'VE NEGLECTED YOUR VOICE AND LISTENED TO OUR OWN INSTEAD.**



## KICK STARTER

### RATE IT!

How easy is it for you to submit to authority (1=I hate being told what to do, 10=It's easy for me)?



These optional activities are designed to help your students interact. You'll find a Discussion Activity and a Cultural Connection, which touches on a relevant topic in today's teen culture. Each group is different, so adapt these activities to fit your group's needs. The goal is for students to connect more to the lesson as they connect to the topic and to one another.

# 1

## FOLLOWERS OR BREAKERS

SUPPLIES LIST: NONE

Ask the following questions, allowing time for students to share responses:

- **TAKE A POLL: HOW MANY OF YOU ARE RULE-FOLLOWERS VERSUS RULE-BREAKERS?**
- **WHAT MAKES US SOMETIMES WANT TO GO AGAINST THE RULES?**
- **ARE THERE DIFFERENT TYPES OF REBELLION? EXPLAIN.**

Some of us are rule-followers; rules make us feel safe, and we like the structure. Some of us are rule-breakers; we like to bend the rules to fit our own wants and needs, and we don't like feeling restricted. We've all rebelled before, and maybe sometimes, rebellion is called for when it's standing against injustice. But rebellion against God and His commands only leads to heartache.

# 2

## CULTURAL CONNECTION

Movements in our culture often paint God as only a God of love. Honestly, at the core, this isn't wrong because what God does is rooted in His love for us. But when people say things like, "The God I follow is a God of love," they're typically resisting the truth that He is also a God of justice. He is also holy and righteous, and He hates sin because it separates us from Him. In fact, God hates it so much that He took it on Himself to defeat sin and death through sending His Son. So, somehow God's love and all His other attributes intertwine and are not at war with one another. God's justice is rooted in His love for His creation—in His desire to care for us and to save us from sin and its effects. Many times, people are willing to accept only that God is loving, but He can't be truly loving if He allows sin to go unchecked. Sin, when it grows and matures, leads to death (James 1:15). Because God is loving, He doesn't sit back and do nothing; instead, He warns us—over and over—and He convicts us of our sin, allowing us to feel the guilt of it so that we'll return to Him.

# DISCUSSION

## MAIN POINT.

Rebellion will carry us to places we never wanted to go.

### A STUBBORN HEART IGNORES GOD'S WARNINGS

READ 2 CHRONICLES 36:11-14



#### WHY DO WE HARDEN OUR HEARTS TOWARD PEOPLE? WHAT DOES THIS LOOK LIKE SPIRITUALLY?

Sometimes, we might harden our heart in response to pain. If someone hurts us, we harden our heart so it doesn't sting as much. In other words, we do what we can to numb out and not feel anything. If we're the one who hurt someone else, hardening our heart may look like stubbornly refusing to admit we were wrong. We don't want to feel wrong. **Spiritually, we can harden our heart toward God. We ignore His voice; we numb out so that we don't have to face our sin and the way conviction makes us feel; and we stubbornly refuse to admit we were wrong or that we strayed.**



#### WHEN HAVE YOU BEEN THANKFUL FOR SOMEONE WARNING YOU? HOW CAN YOU TELL WHEN GOD IS WARNING YOU?

Maybe you had toilet paper stuck to your shoe, but someone stopped you before you left the bathroom. Maybe you almost walked in front of a car, but someone yelled to get your attention. Sometimes warnings can save our lives. God repeatedly warned Israel, and He warns us too. He gives us wisdom to live for Him through His Word. He also speaks to us through the Holy Spirit, but loud worldly voices often drown out His voice. **We have to draw near to the Lord and position ourselves to hear Him. His warnings are for our good, giving us life and saving us from harm.**

#### CAN YOU REMEMBER THE FIRST TIME YOU REBELLED AGAINST SOMEONE? HOW DO YOU THINK SPIRITUAL REBELLION BEGINS?

Many of us can probably remember a time when we rebelled against a parent, a grandparent, or a teacher at a young age. It may have been over something silly, like not eating a cookie before supper or not brushing our teeth before bed. Because we're born into a broken, sinful world, we gravitate toward rebellion from the start. In our fallen state, we rebel against authority, specifically against the Lord. Even after we've called on the Lord for salvation and committed our lives to Him, we're still inclined to rebel at times. How? Well, it happens a lot like it did for Israel—with some small steps and some big steps over time. **Our own sinful desires tempt us and lure us away from the Lord when we stop surrendering them to Him—when we stop spending time with Him and stop following His voice, when we harden our hearts because we don't want to feel the guilt that accompanies our sin.** If you find yourself in a season of rebellion, look back and trace your steps. Where did you stop listening to God's voice and begin to ignore His warnings? When did you create distance in your relationship with Him? Those moments mark the choice to rebel.

## GOD LOVES US EVEN IN OUR REBELLION

READ 2 CHRONICLES 36:15-23



### WHAT DO YOU NOTICE ABOUT THE EXILE (V. 21)? HOW DO WE SEE THAT GOD HADN'T FORGOTTEN HIS PROMISES TO ISRAEL?

Leaders: Explain that the order of the Hebrew Bible is slightly different than the Christian Bible, placing 1 and 2 Chronicles at the end of the Old Testament. The temple was destroyed and burned. God's people were carried away. Jerusalem was leveled. But there were limits on the exile—70 years, just as Jeremiah prophesied (Jer. 25:11-12). **Though it may have seemed like God was permanently leaving His people because of the temple's destruction, this wasn't true. He would be present with them in the exile and use it as a way to draw them back to His heart; His promises remained.** This moment in history ended on a tone of hope. In verses 22-23, the writer flashes forward, showing the Lord releasing His people back home. Even the end of the Hebrew Bible pointed forward to rebuilding the temple and restoring David's line through a coming Messiah King.



### WHAT DOES JUDAH'S FALL SHOW YOU ABOUT REBELLION?

As a culture, we're often bent toward rebellion; we struggle against authority. This bleeds into our spiritual lives, affecting the way we view and relate to God. God isn't just an authority figure. He alone has authority over all things. And though we may not always want to follow His commands, rebelling against Him will never end well. **God loves us through our rebellion, and He will use judgment and consequences to lead us to repentance.** God's aim is always to restore our broken relationship with Him. The cross is evidence of this!

### WHAT MOTIVATED GOD'S WARNINGS (V. 15)? WHY DON'T WE RECOGNIZE THIS IN GOD'S WARNINGS FOR US TOO?

Israel's rebellion didn't begin with the kings or the judges; it began in the wilderness, almost immediately following the release from Egypt. It's clear from Scripture that God is patient and kind. **God's warnings come from the compassion He feels for His creation (v. 15), not from His desire to control us with a list of rules.** We so often interpret God's warnings—from His Word, from the Holy Spirit, and from people God uses—as this. **When we sense God warning us and when we read warnings in Scripture, we can trust that it is God's compassion at work.**

## WRAP-UP



### WHO DO YOU HAVE TO WARN YOU WHEN YOU'RE MOVING AWAY FROM THE LORD? WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?

You can't always see your own faults. You have blind spots, so it's critical to your walk with God to have people who are looking out for your spiritual wellbeing. These are the people who know you well enough to see when you're slipping, and they love you enough to speak up. **But here's the difficult part: You have to be close enough to these people that they see the real you. Many of us hide the bad parts of our lives from others. We only let them see the highlights, and we leave out what's dark and ugly.** Now, we don't need to display everything about our lives to the world. We must use wisdom in determining who gets this type of access to us. **But it's important to give someone that access—someone who is godly, who is walking faithfully with the Lord, and who won't lead us astray.** This could be a mentor, minister, friend, or parent. If you have people like this, remain open to their warnings. If you don't have someone to hold you accountable, begin praying for God to send someone into your life.



# CAN THESE BONES LIVE?

## MAIN POINT.

We are evidence of God's power to bring life from death and restoration from destruction.



## CHRIST CONNECTION

God gave Ezekiel a vision of the power of God to bring life out of death and to restore a broken and scattered people. Ezekiel's vision was fulfilled ultimately in the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Jesus is Immanuel—God with us—the King who gives life and rules over a unified people from every nation, tribe, people, and language (Rev. 7:9).





# DEATH TO LIFE

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

## Ezekiel 37

### GOD'S SPIRIT GIVES LIFE

#### EZEKIEL 37:1-10

1 The hand of the LORD was upon me, and he brought me out in the Spirit of the LORD and set me down in the middle of the valley; it was full of bones. 2 And he led me around among them, and behold, there were very many on the surface of the valley, and behold, they were very dry. 3 And he said to me, "Son of man, can these bones live?" And I answered, "O LORD God, you know." 4 Then he said to me, "Prophesy over these bones, and say to them, O dry bones, hear the word of the LORD. 5 Thus says the LORD God to these bones: Behold, I will cause breath to enter you, and you shall live. 6 And I will lay sinews upon you, and will cause flesh to come upon you, and cover you with skin, and put breath in you, and you shall live, and you shall know that I am the LORD." 7 So I prophesied as I was commanded. And as I prophesied, there was a sound, and behold, a rattling, and the bones came together, bone to its bone. 8 And I looked, and behold, there were sinews on them, and flesh had come upon them, and skin had covered them. But there was no breath in them. 9 Then he said to me, "Prophesy to the breath; prophesy, son of man, and say to the breath, Thus says the LORD God: Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe on these slain, that they may live." 10 So I prophesied as he commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they lived and stood on their feet, an exceedingly great army.

### OUR HOPE IS SECURE

#### EZEKIEL 37:11-14

11 Then he said to me, "Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel. Behold, they say, 'Our bones are dried up, and our hope is lost; we are indeed cut off.' 12 Therefore prophesy, and say to them, Thus says the LORD God: Behold, I will open your graves and raise you from your graves, O my people. And I will bring you into the land of Israel. 13 And you shall know that I am the LORD, when I open your graves, and raise you from your graves, O my people. 14 And I will put my Spirit within you, and you shall live, and I will place you in your own land. Then you shall know that I am the LORD; I have spoken, and I will do it, declares the LORD."

# BEFORE YOU TEACH

## MAIN POINT.

We are evidence of God's power to bring life from death and restoration from destruction.

Leaders: Rejoice because God has restored you and transformed you! May it prompt your obedience to Him so that others may share in the hope of the gospel.

## BIBLICAL COMMENTARY

### GOD'S SPIRIT GIVES LIFE

#### EZEKIEL 37:1-10

"R. H. Alexander has defined biblical apocalyptic literature as 'symbolic visionary prophetic literature, composed during oppressive conditions, consisting of visions whose events are recorded exactly as they were seen by the author and explained through a divine interpreter, and whose theological content is primarily eschatological.' Ezekiel, he says, employed the apocalyptic form as a literary device, for example, in 37:1-14 and chaps. 40-48. He also used 'dream-visions,' a device common in apocalyptic."<sup>18</sup>

#### EZEKIEL 37:1-10

"Only Yahweh could replace the hopelessness of the death of the nation with new life and a new nation. While clearly the prophet had a national resurrection for Israel in mind, it also is but a small step from what he saw concerning Israel to the realization that the same God who could resurrect a dead nation also had the power to conquer humanity's great enemy, death."<sup>19</sup>

### OUR HOPE IS SECURE

#### EZEKIEL 37:11-14

"We should always remember that at one time we were Christless, stateless, friendless, hopeless, and godless. We should also remember that God did not leave us this way. While we once were hopeless, we are not anymore. We can actually rejoice in hope because we know, 'This hope will not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured out in our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us' (Rom. 5:5). Ezekiel's generation should have been full of hope as well. They were told, ' "For I know the plans I have for you"—this is the Lord's declaration—"plans for your welfare, not for disaster, to give you a future and a hope" '(Jer. 29:11). They had either forgotten this word or chosen not to believe it. God, however, would not just restore their hope but resurrect His people and reestablish them in their land."<sup>20</sup>



## CONTEXT

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**Background:** In the book of Ezekiel, the prophet chronicles the years surrounding the Babylonian captivity. Ezekiel, whose name means “strengthened by God,” was a priest and a son of a priest (1:1). He was taken captive in 597 BC, during Babylon’s second attack on Jerusalem. God called him to prophetic ministry while exiled in Babylon. God positioned Ezekiel “in their midst”—a phrase appearing often in the text—of other exiles to announce not only judgment but also hope for the nation’s eventual restoration.<sup>21</sup> Some scholars argue that Ezekiel’s ministry covered the darkest, most critical years in Judah’s history. The book’s ancient eastern apocalyptic features, like symbols and visions, often intimidate modern readers, but it’s rich with hope and truth. God showed Ezekiel a distant future, not to lay down an exact blueprint, but to strengthen and communicate hope to His people in the midst of their exile and pain—to meet them in their present state. Through Ezekiel, God communicated that He was with His people in their exile; He had not abandoned them. Though some of Ezekiel’s prophecies have been fulfilled, many won’t be fulfilled until Christ returns.

## THEOLOGY CONNECTION

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### God is Omnipotent

God is all-powerful: God can do anything so long as it does not contradict His own nature or law. God has power and authority over the universe He created, from the largest solar system to the smallest particle. Affirming that God is all-powerful does not mean that God can sin—since that would go against His perfect moral nature. As Christians, we rest in the belief that the God who has all power is good, and we gain great comfort by knowing that an all-powerful God is working for our good and joy.

## LEADERS' PRAYER

**LORD, YOU RESCUED US FROM DEATH THROUGH THE DEATH OF YOUR SON. WE WERE DEAD IN OUR SIN BEFORE CHRIST, BUT YOU BREATHED LIFE INTO US AND GAVE US YOUR SPIRIT. MAY THIS PROMPT OUR LOVING OBEDIENCE SO OTHERS MAY KNOW YOUR GREAT NAME.**



## KICK STARTER

### ♥ HEART CHECK

Last week, we talked about the ways God warns us. Did you sense God warning you last week? Did God use someone else to show you areas where you're weak spiritually or areas where you're compromising? Did God use you to help someone else see?

These optional activities are designed to help your students interact. You'll find a Discussion Activity and a Cultural Connection, which touches on a relevant topic in today's teen culture. Each group is different, so adapt these activities to fit your group's needs. The goal is for students to connect more to the lesson as they connect to the topic and to one another.

# 1

## GIVING UP

SUPPLIES LIST: NONE

Ask the following questions, allowing time for students to share responses:

- **WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO GIVE UP ON SOMETHING OR SOMEONE?**
- **WHAT'S SOMETHING YOU ATTEMPTED BUT GAVE UP ON? WHY DID YOU GIVE UP?**
- **IS GIVING UP EVER JUSTIFIABLE? IF SO, WHEN?**

A lot of us have started something and later given up on it. Maybe we weren't good at it, or maybe it was just too difficult. Sometimes, we give up on people too. After trying to make peace or help someone, we give up after not seeing change. The good news is that God never gives up on us. We'll see how God communicated this truth to His people when they felt hopeless and forgotten.

# 2

## CULTURAL CONNECTION

Does God's presence have limitations? For instance, could we mess up so badly that God would leave us? Does He have a boundary concerning how far He will go before He gives up on us? These are questions God's people probably asked in their exile. Had God left them? Sure, their own rebellion landed them in exile. Israel was destroyed, and the temple was obliterated because the people repeatedly ignored God's warnings. They were exiled and scattered by their own doing. So, surely God was done with them? Since the temple was gone, surely God's presence was gone too? The short answer is this: God never left them. He was never confined to the temple. He was with them even in their consequences, even in their exile. If we have called on Jesus for salvation, then as God's children, we have assurance that He is always with us and working in us (Phil. 1:6). God can cross any boundary. We can't wander far enough that we're out of His reach. Even in our own consequences for sin, the Lord is with us. We may suffer from relational distance when we sin, but God will never leave us. We can't mistake consequences for abandonment.

# DISCUSSION

## MAIN POINT.

We are evidence of God's power to bring life from death and restoration from destruction.

### GOD'S SPIRIT GIVES LIFE

READ EZEKIEL 37:1-10



#### DO YOU BELIEVE ANYTHING IS POSSIBLE FOR GOD? WHY DO WE DOUBT THIS?

We may easily say that anything is possible for God but struggle to believe it when we face pain and devastation of our own. Instead of trusting in God's power, we sink under waves of hopelessness. Some of us find it easier to trust in God's power for other people's problems but think our own problems are too big for Him. **God is omnipotent, meaning He has the power to do absolutely anything. But here is the best part: God is also absolute goodness. So, we have a perfectly good and all-powerful God caring for us and working for our good!** We can rest in this truth when we walk through devastating seasons.



#### WHY DO YOU THINK GOD SHOWED EZEKIEL THESE BONES? WHAT MIGHT GOD WANT HIM (AND US) TO REALIZE?

Hebrew people had strict rules for handling corpses, and leaving them in a field to be eaten by birds was an unimaginable disgrace. The bones in this vision were exposed for so long that they had been bleached by the sun. In other words, this scene offered no hope at all for possible revival—for life. Like these bones, Israel had been spiritually dead for a long time, and their situation seemed hopeless. **But we see here that God breathes life into what appears hopelessly dead and abandoned—into us, even when we were hopeless and dead in our sin.**

#### WHEN DID THE BONES ACTUALLY COME ALIVE? WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR US?

God first commanded Ezekiel to speak the Word of the Lord to the bones, and when Ezekiel did this, the bones rattled and moved into formation. The skeletons were connected with tendon, strengthened with muscle, and wrapped in skin. They had the appearance of being alive, but they weren't living yet. Next, God commanded Ezekiel to speak to the breath. The Hebrew word for "breath," ruakh, also meant "wind" and "spirit." And it is only when this breath—God's Spirit—entered their lungs that the dry bones came alive.<sup>22</sup> **Both the Word and the Spirit were necessary for the transformation from death to life.** The same is true for us. It takes both hearing and believing the Word of truth (1 Pet. 1:23) and God's Spirit working within us to transform us. Every one of us was once dead in our sin. And like the dry bones, we can operate like dead men walking; we look alive on the outside but are dead spiritually. What's the difference in looking alive and being alive spiritually? The Spirit of God living within us. **Head knowledge of the Word won't give us life; we can't know enough about God and His Word to save us. We're made spiritually alive when we accept Christ's gift of salvation and the Holy Spirit comes to live within us!**



## OUR HOPE IS SECURE

READ EZEKIEL 37:11-14



### IF GOD CAN REVIVE A DESTROYED NATION, WHAT HOPE CAN WE HAVE?

No situation is so hopeless that it's outside of God's reach. We are never out of His reach. **God's redemptive plan couldn't be stopped, even when the nation He formed and chose to bring about the birth of the Messiah appeared to be cut off and forgotten because of their sin.** God was faithful to His people, and His promises were true. They're still true, and some will be fulfilled perfectly when Christ returns. **God wasn't just aiming for Israel's physical restoration; more importantly, He desired to restore them spiritually—relationally, to Himself. Christ sacrificed His life to make this possible for them and for us (Eph. 2:1-7).** We have lasting hope because we've been raised from death to life in Christ!



### WHAT DID THE PEOPLE FEEL (V. 11)? ARE OUR FEELINGS ALWAYS TRUE?

Not only had God's people been carried into captivity, but their beloved city and temple had been utterly decimated and leveled to the ground. They lost hope for restoration and felt returning home was impossible. To what would they even return? But the truth was that God intended to bring His people home to rebuild. Better than that, He intended to live among them and within them. **Sometimes what we feel isn't necessarily in line with truth.** For instance, we may feel like God has forgotten us when we lose someone we love, or we may feel like God doesn't love us when we mess up. But neither of these is true because God's Word says that He'll never leave us (Heb. 13:5) and that He loves us (John 3:16). **We can't let our feelings distort truth. We have to take our feelings and our thoughts to God's Word. The Holy Spirit will guide us and help us to discern truth.**

### WHY WOULD GOD WANT TO REVIVE ISRAEL EVEN AFTER ALL THEY HAD DONE AGAINST HIM?

God's people had profaned His name among the nations. **It wasn't because of Israel's faithfulness that God revived them. It was because of His.** God desired to make Himself known to His people (vv. 6,13-14) and to the world. One way God would accomplish this was through Israel's renewed obedience. **Notice that Ezekiel called the dry bones "a great army;" armies are under a leader's command. Our own revival will always lead to obedience, and our obedience makes God known to others.**

## WRAP-UP



### HOW DOES THIS PASSAGE GIVE YOU HOPE EVEN WHEN WHAT YOU'RE FACING FEELS HOPELESS?

The exiles in Babylon experienced hopelessness. What they hoped would be only a short exile would actually be 70 years, and some of them would never return home. The valley of dead bones represented the state of their nation. It was decimated. Gone. Dead. How were the people supposed to feel hopeful when all they could see was dry bones? Ezekiel reminded them of a better future. A time was coming when Israel would be united again and reunited with the land, a land which in so many ways was connected to God's presence. **God had not abandoned them, and their future would be far better than anything they had left behind. Ours will be too.** Maybe your life looks a lot like a valley of dry bones. Maybe you don't feel alive because, in a sense, you're surrounded by death. **Hold on. God hasn't abandoned you. Your future with Him in heaven will be far better than anything else you're longing for here on earth.** He will wipe every tear from your eyes, and God Himself will be with you like never before (Rev. 21:1-4). **This is the great hope we can have now as we wait.**

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